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GEORGE SAND'S IMPACT ON TWO CZECH  
WOMEN WRITERS, THE ROTOVÁ SISTERS

**George Sand gained** a controversial renown all over Europe, including Bohemia, as early as the 1830s, with the publication of *Indiana* (1832) and *Lélia* (1833 and 1839). As elsewhere, but particularly in Central Europe, official literary criticism was from the outset harsh towards this French woman of letters, preferring to confuse what people knew or supposed they knew about her private life with her literary production rather than undertaking a substantive analysis of her novels. From 1845 onwards, however, Bohemian sentiment towards her quickly shifted in favor of a more positive reception. This change corresponded with the appearance between 1842 and 1844 of four new works by Sand: two historical narratives on the Bohemian Hussite wars, *Jean Ziska* (1843) and *Procope le Grand* (1844), as well as two novels with Czech themes and background, *Consuelo* and its sequel *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* (1842–1844). Suddenly critics had permission to unreservedly praise her.

**Czech male recognition of Sand after *Consuelo***

Three influential Czech intellectuals and men of letters, in particular, did not hesitate to express their admiration for Sand; they were, on the contrary, grateful to her for her interest in their little nation, and impressed by her acute understanding of Czech history, characters, and landscapes.

Joseph Vaclav Frič (1829–1890), journalist and romantic writer, famous for having led students in his youth to the barricades of Paris in 1848, tells in his memoirs *Paměti* of the pleasure he had in a brief meeting with Sand in Paris in 1846 during a course at the Collège de France given by Cyprien Robert, Mickiewicz's successor to the chair of Slavic literature:

It was the author of *Consuelo* and the *Countess of Rudolstadt*, the famous George Sand, to whom I stammered some thanks for having identified with the unhappy destiny and glorious past of our nation [...]. Later on [...], her far-seeing thoughts were a consolation as well as a spiritual nourishment for me during the five years

of my imprisonment, and I couldn't stop wondering about her brilliant understanding of the male temperament and her deep knowledge of the human heart.<sup>1</sup>

Josef Rodomil Čejka (1812–1862), physician by profession but also a translator, and one of the most important representatives of Czech cultural life of the 1840s, flattered himself, if we are to believe Karolina Světlá's memoirs, *Upomínky a literární paměti*, (1873), to have served as a guide for Sand during her incognito stay in Bohemia<sup>2</sup> and described her as

...the first woman of the past and coming centuries, the most famous author of the present time who overshadows with her spirit the laurels of all her contemporaries [...]. No man until now has managed to reach such depths in his works as she, to touch so boldly such delicate moral questions [...], to hold with such a strong and heroic hand the banner of truth as this wonderful woman did, even if the world splatters her with the mud of its dirtiest gossip.<sup>3</sup>

And later, Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912), literary critic, essayist and certainly the most prolific Czech writer of the 19th century, wrote regularly in his correspondence with his future mother-in-law Sofie Podlipská about his respect for Sand's genius, including in a letter dated August 8, 1875:

I read George Sand and it gives me great pleasure. People should pray to her

<sup>1</sup> Cf. V Frič, *Paměti*, vol. 2, Praha 1891, p. 96: "Byla to spisovatelka Consuely a Hraběnky z Rudolstadt, slavná *George Sandová*, již vykoktal jsem několik díků za to, že vmyslila se v nešťastný osud a slavnou minulost' našeho národa [...]. Později [...] dalékosáhle její myšlenky byly mi zvláště za dob pětileté mé vazby útěchou i duchovním pokrmem zároveň, při čemž bylo se mi především geniálnímu jejímu pojetí mužských povah a hluboké znalosti lidského srdce vůbec podiviti." All translations from the Czech and from the French into English are mine – C.F.K.

<sup>2</sup> If P.M. Haškovec tries to demonstrate in his essay "Byla *George Sand* v Čechách?" (Brno 1925) that *George Sand* really spent some time in Bohemia, G. Lubin, on the contrary, convincingly showed in his article "*George Sand est-elle vraiment allée en Bohême*" (*Philologica Pragensia* 1964, vol. 4, pp. 336–45) that this stay is a myth. Why did Karolina Světlá report this myth as if she believed in it (whereas it is obvious that she knew Sand's letter of February 14, 1865 to her sister, letter quoted later in this article, where we can read Sand's own denial that she had ever been in Bohemia)? This is a mystery.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by K. Světlá (*Z literárního soukromí*, Praha 1959, vol. 1, p. 288): "Tot' *George Sandová*, první žena všech věků minulých i budoucích, nejpověstnější to autor naší přítomnosti, jenž zastíňuje svým duchem lesk všech vavřínů souvěkých [...]. Žádný dosud muž nevníkal pracemi svými do takových hloubek, nedotýkal se tak směle nejchoulostivějších mravních otázek [...], netřímával rukou tak pevnou a hrdinskou prapor pravdy jako ona zázračná žena, jíž svět za to blátem nejspínavějších svých pomluv potřísňuje."

as they pray to Balzac, but exactly the contrary happens. I wonder and I cannot understand why only we see correctly. After all, it is so easy to let oneself be carried away by beauty.<sup>4</sup>

### Božena Němcová, the Czech George Sand?

While Sand's studies on Hussitism and her 'Czech' novels led some male intellectuals to look more seriously at her work, despite the scandals that always encircled her, the educated women of the bourgeoisie, for their part, did not wait for the "Dame de Nohant" to write about Bohemia to read her, but had already done so in French for years, often in secret. Nevertheless, once the male critics and admirers had given their endorsement, they too were able to express their admiration openly.

This was so with the writer Božena Němcová (1820–1862), pioneer of the Czech national and literary renaissance, and whose first poem written in Czech addressed the Czech women, "Ženám českým" (1843); Němcová's work is frequently the subject of comparative analyses or allusions with that of Sand.<sup>5</sup> The correspondence of Němcová, now easily accessible thanks to its quite recent publication<sup>6</sup>, regularly mentions her and it confirms that this Czech female author paid great attention to her French contemporary, and considered her as a model—even if she regretted that she was not able to read her books in their original French version and had to read them in German.<sup>7</sup> As one of the first in Bohemia to fight for the emancipation of

<sup>4</sup> See letter from J. Vrchliský to S. Podlipská, 8. 08. 1875 (*Dopisy Jaroslava Vrchliského se Sofií Podlipskou z let 1875–1876*, Praha 1917): "Čtu paní G. Sand a dělá mi veliké potěšení. K ní by se měli modlit lidi, zrovna jako k Balzacovi, ono to jde ale právě pozpátku. Divím se a nemohu pochopit, proč jen my tak dobře vidíme, vždyť přec to je tak snadné dát se unesti krásou."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Kopal, *George Sandová a Božena Němcová*, Praha 1937; A. Haman, "Božena Němcová v evropském kontextu" in *Božena Němcová – Život-dílo-doba*. Česká Skalice 2006, pp. 66–71; S. Van Dijk, M. Walle, "Les George Sand étrangères: auto-appellation et possibilité de s'identifier. A partir du cas de Božena Němcová" in *George Sand, la réception hors de France au XIXe siècle*, eds. S. van Dijk, K. Wiedemann, *Oeuvres & Critiques* 2003, pp. 76–101; C. Gauthier, "La 'langue maternelle' des grands-mères et des nourrices: mise à l'épreuve d'un mythe romantique chez George Sand et Božena Němcová, *Ve congrès de la Société des études romantiques et dix-neuviémiste: Le XIXe siècle et ses langues*, Paris 2012.

<sup>6</sup> B. Němcová, *Korespondence I–IV*, Praha 2003–2007.

<sup>7</sup> See for example letter of 3.10.1852 (*ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 263): "My ideal is that woman. I regret very much that I cannot read her writings in the original, and she would have given me the most desire to learn French" ("Mým ideálem je ta žena. Lituju velice, že nemohu číst spisy její v originálu, a ona nejvíce by mi chuti dodávala učit se francouzské řeči"); or letter of 24.06.1853 (*ibidem*, vol. 2,

women, she stood up as well for Sand's conception of free love, considered so scandalous by most of the population. She explained, for example, the end of her passion for a lover by relying on words spoken by Sand, which she quotes in German: "Love is nothing more than the idea of the superiority of the being one possesses and, once this idea is destroyed, there is nothing more than friendship" ("Die Liebe ist nichts anders als die Idee der Überlegenheit des Wesens, das man besitzt, und ist diese Idee einmal zerstört, so ist nur noch die Freundschaft vorhanden").<sup>8</sup> Sand's name also appears in Němcová's prose. When mentioning the castle of Riesenberg in *Obrazy z okolí domažlického* (*Pictures from the Surroundings of Domažlice*, 1846), a kind of anthropological essay on the folklore and habits of the people of that region, she remembers that Sand used this castle as the main setting for her "Czech" novel *Consuelo*.<sup>9</sup>

Other Czech women writers refer to Sand in their correspondence and works, and if the comparison of Sand with Němcová seems more obvious than may be the case with these writers, it is probably because it is part of a tradition already established in the nineteenth century. Němcová, indeed, seems to have been officially chosen by her countrymen to play the role of the George Sand of Bohemia, as evidenced in particular by the memoirs of Karolina Světlá, the elder Rottová sister. In *Z literárního soukromí* (*From my Private Literary Life*), Světlá reports on her visit with Němcová to Dr Čejka and the conversation that took place. Čejka was complaining about the spiritual stagnation of his nation, and in particular about the literary stagnation. Suddenly, he turned to Němcová and asked her to try to write something other than just descriptions, portraits, or details of everyday life, as she had done until then, and to produce a novel with ideas! He then showed her a portrait of George Sand and urged her to follow the example of this writer: books written in the same vein as those of Sand but in Czech would help, he believed, to resurrect hundreds of what he saw as numb and dor-

p. 45): "Rereading for the hundredth time the fruit of the spirit of our saint Aurora Sand? I envy your knowledge of the language in which she writes, and I would love to learn it just because of her" ("Tedy sté čtety opět plod ducha naší svěťice Aurory Sandové? Závídím Vám známost jazyka, v němž ona píše, a ráda bych se mu učila jen už kvůli ní.")

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 75. Němcová does not specify from which book by Sand she borrows this quotation, but it is clearly a sentence drawn from *Gabriel* (1839) in a German translation, and whose original is the following: "L'amour n'est pas autre chose que l'idée de la supériorité de l'être qu'on possède, et, cette idée détruite, il n'y a plus que l'amitié."

<sup>9</sup> B. Němcová, *Obrazy z okolí domažlického* in *Dílo Boženy Němcové VIII. Z Chodská a odjinud z Čech*, Praha 1929, p. 18.

mant minds. "If only you would become our George Sand and surprise me [...] with a book, in which I could find these hundred burning questions that leaped out at me from Sand's eyes." Němcová promised that she would do her best.<sup>10</sup>

*Z literárního soukromí* is a collection of Karolina's reflections and letters dating back to different moments of her life: the lines quoted were written in the 1880s, but the author does not say exactly when this conversation took place. Some hints from Čejka allow us to guess that it was around 1850–1852. In any event, it was clearly before the writing of Němcová's *Babička* (*The Grandmother*, 1855), a novel that may well be one of the concrete results of Němcová's efforts to fulfill Čejka's expectations. Be that as it may, critics who tried to show Sand's influence on Němcová consistently emphasized the resemblances between Sand's pastoral novels and *Babička*--not only in terms of landscape descriptions or characters of the protagonists, but also in terms of "ideas" or moral messages these works convey. In *Babička*, as in Sand's rustic novels, the peasant class is far from being presented as a "dangerous class" (as it is by Balzac in his *Peasants*, for example) or as a class solely defined by its suffering and rude manners (as portrayed in Holbein's engraving *The Simulacra of Death*, which was referenced by Sand in her introduction to her novel *La Mare au Diable*). It is described rather as an embodiment of health, wisdom and generosity--characteristics incarnated in female figures often deemed insignificant or even harmful in the history of literature, such as grandmothers, shepherds, 'witches', or midwives.

### George Sand and the Rottová sisters

In addition to Němcová, Sand had other Czech female literary admirers at the time; indeed, there were women writers who would take up Sand's mantle with even greater insight. This is the case of the Rottová sisters, two women deeply involved in the fight for women's rights and known from 1860 under the pen names of Sofie Podlipská (1833–1897) and Karolina Světlá (1830–1899). The Rottová sisters were at a certain period in their lives very good friends with Němcová. They were introduced to her in 1850 by Petr Mužák, music teacher of the sisters and future husband of Karolina, and one of the main reasons for their friendship was a common admiration of Sand. They all had a portrait of her hanging above their desks and, according to their correspondence, they would talk for hours about her. The Rottová sis-

<sup>10</sup> K. Světlá, *op. cit.*, vol 1, p. 289: "Kéž byste se chtěla státi naší George Sandovou a mne překvapiti [...] knihou, v níž bych shledal ono sto palčivých otázek, které na mne šlehaly z očí Sandové."

ters, though, had a huge advantage over Němcová in that they were fluent in French, whereas Němcová knew Sand only through German translations.

### 1. *Sofie Podlipská: translations, and sociopolitical solidarity with Sand*

The younger of the Rottová sisters, Sofie Podlipská, made use of her knowledge of French not only to read Sand's original texts, but also to translate her work into Czech. Between 1860 and 1867 she translated *La Petite Fadette*, *Consuelo*, *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt* and *Le Marquis de Villemer*.

The translation of *Consuelo* was published in 1865 with a five-page introduction ending with these words: "I give this book to Czech readers with a fervent heart and I wish that it will kindle a holy fire in favor of national and human rights in Czech hearts as well. Be indulgent if I have not expressed the grandeur of the original work in spite of all my constant attentions."<sup>11</sup> Through the intermediary of the French Slavist Louis Léger, she sent a copy of the book to Sand, who answered with the following letter:

It is a pleasure for me to have my works translated by you, and at the same time it is a sweetness to be loved with such delicacy and generosity. M. Léger was good enough to send me the French translation of your interesting preface. It reminded me of that remote time when I imagined the adventure of *Consuelo* and where, because of a lot of missing information, I tried to learn by interpretation and divination about the genius of Bohemia, the beauty of its places and the spirit hidden behind the symbol of the cup. I had neither the means nor the freedom to go to Bohemia, but I thought that if I made some mistakes, one would forgive me because of my sincere purposes and my earnest sympathy. I remain convinced that the people who have such a dramatic and such an enthusiastic past are and will always be a great people.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. V. Brett, "George Sand a Čechy", *Sborník národního muzea v Praze* 1965, vol. 10, no. 219, pp. 65–6: "Podávám knihu tuto čtenářům českým s vroucím srdcem, s přáním, aby se roznítíl svatý ohněn pro práva člověčenstva a národů z ní též v srdcích jejich, a aby mi laskavě poshověno bylo, nedostihla-li jsem při vši péli velkolepého originálu své práce."

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. Sand, *Correspondance. Janvier 1865 - Mai 1866*, vol. 19, Paris 2013, p. 93: "C'est un bonheur pour moi d'être traduite par vous et c'est une douceur que d'être aimée en même temps avec tant de délicatesse et de générosité. M. Léger a bien voulu m'envoyer la traduction en français de votre intéressante préface. Elle m'a reportée au temps déjà éloigné où je rêvais les aventures de *Consuelo* et où, manquant de beaucoup de renseignements, j'essayais de m'initier par interprétation et par divination au génie de la Bohême, à la beauté de ses sites et à l'esprit profond caché sous le symbole de la coupe. Je n'avais ni la liberté ni le moyen d'aller en Bohême, et je me disais que si je commettais quelques erreurs, la Bohême me les pardonnerait à cause de l'intention sincère et de la

In 1867 the translation of the sequel to *Consuelo*, *Hraběnka z Rudolstadtu* (*La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*) appeared. Podlipská again forwarded the translation to Sand, who in turn thanks her on April 10, 1867:

I can only blame myself, Madame, for the fact that I don't know your language. I'm sure your translation is better than the original [...]. You have in your heart youth, enthusiasm and faith. May God listen to your desires, which are at the same time those of your noble nation! Reverence to nationality is a principle that Europe is trying willy-nilly to carry through. The day when France fails in this respect, it will be guilty, because it always felt the sanctity of this principle, and was punished when it forgot it. Let us hope that enlightened self-interest will inform those nations who do not understand the issues of emotion. The future will certainly restore the people to themselves. Is it necessary to fight hard and for a long time? It is possible, but you have to keep the faith and the will. Believe me, my heart is with you, and all the testimonies of sympathy you express to me and, you say, are shared by your readers, touch and honour me in the extreme.<sup>13</sup>

Podlipská's answer was not long in coming, and is full of gratitude and enthusiasm:

You tell us "my heart is with you." Oh, I do not know if you can imagine the good these words have done us at a time when the pains of our nation are growing, when the hatred of our German compatriots mingles so to say with our daily bread. Your words came to us as a message from a better world [...]. Oh, how right you are, Madame, in all you say about our affairs and about those of all nations. Yes, we must fight and hope, believe and still fight [...]. As for your kindness and indulgence towards me, Madame, I recognize George Sand, whose inexhaustible, large, modest, as well as gentle kindness spoke to my heart long before I was able to grasp the scope of her genius.<sup>14</sup>

sympathie fervente. Je reste convaincue que le peuple qui a eu un passé si dramatique et si enthousiaste est et sera toujours un grand peuple."

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 20, p. 390: "Je m'en veux beaucoup, Madame, de ne pas savoir votre langue. Je suis sûre que votre traduction vaut beaucoup mieux que l'original. [...] Vous avez au cœur la jeunesse, de l'enthousiasme et de la foi. Dieu entend vos vœux qui sont ceux de votre noble patrie ! Le respect des nationalités est un principe que l'Europe tend bon gré mal gré à consacrer et le jour où la France y manquera elle sera bien coupable, car elle a senti la sainteté de ce principe, et elle a été punie quand elle l'a oublié. Espérons que l'intérêt bien entendu éclairera les nations qui ne comprennent pas les questions de sentiment. L'avenir doit certainement restituer les peuples à eux-mêmes. Faudra-t-il lutter longtemps et beaucoup ? Peut-être, mais il faut croire et vouloir toujours, n'est-ce pas ? Croyez bien que mon cœur est avec vous, et que les témoignages de sympathie que vous m'exprimez et que vous dites partagés par vos lecteurs me touchent autant qu'ils m'honorent."

<sup>14</sup> Sofie Podlipská to George Sand, original in the historical library of the city of

This correspondence, made up of mutual apologies and praise, is well known by Sand connoisseurs—yet still justifies being set forth at some length because it underlines, in the context of female solidarity, that it is not the feminist component which takes a primary role in this exchange, but the political one. Podlipská does not congratulate Sand, as we might expect, for having succeeded in imposing with Consuelo a feminine character and genius, but, like her male predecessors mentioned above, she is first and foremost grateful to her for having understood and empathized with Bohemian history and suffering. Sand's very subtle way of linking her nation's data to that of her translator, suggesting that what Bohemia is currently experiencing, France has also experienced in some way, functions as an echo to much bolder relations of resemblance posited in her historical studies. Sand had no hesitation, for example, in claiming in *Jean Ziska* that at the time of the Hussites, “nothing resembled France more than Bohemia. The first was governed by a lazy, cowardly, drunken and half-witted king, the second by a poor, insane, less odious, but as helpless, king,”<sup>15</sup>; and she asserted in *Procope le Grand* that “the Hussite wars are not only in their details, but at their foundation, very similar to the French Revolution”<sup>16</sup>, because their aims were the same: to establish an egalitarian, free and fraternal society.

This parallel drawn by Sand between Bohemia and France, and identified throughout the centuries, from the Middle Ages to the present day, clearly struck a chord with Podlipská who, in turn, makes use of it in a lengthy

Paris (Fonds Sand), facsimile in: V. Brett (*op. cit.*, pp. 75–6): “Vous nous dites, madame: ‘Mon cœur est avec vous’. Oh, je ne sais pas si vous imaginez quel bien nous font ces paroles dans un temps où les maux de notre nation vont toujours croissant, où la haine de nos compatriotes allemands se mêle pour ainsi dire à notre pain quotidien. Elles nous sont venues comme un message d’un monde meilleur [...] Oh, que vous avez raison, madame, en tout ce que vous dites quant à nos affaires et les affaires de toutes les nations. Oui, il faut lutter et espérer, croire et lutter toujours [...]. Quant à votre bonté et votre grande indulgence pour ma personne, madame, j’y reconnais George Sand, dont la bonté aussi grande et inépuisable que modeste et douce a parlé à mon cœur bien avant que j’ai été capable de m’élancer dans l’étendue de son génie.”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. Sand, *Jean Ziska épisode de la guerre des Hussites*, Brussels 1843, pp. 12–3: “Rien ne ressemblait plus à la France que la Bohême. À l’une un roi fainéant, poltron, ivrogne et abruti; à l’autre un pauvre aliéné, moins odieux et aussi impuissant.”

<sup>16</sup> Cf. G. Sand, *Jeanne suivie de Procope le Grand*, Brussels 1844, p. 198: “La guerre des hussites est non seulement dans ses détails, mais dans son essence, très semblable à la révolution française.”



article she devoted to the French writer in the journal *Květy* (*Flowers*), entitled “George Sandová o minulé válce”, “George Sand about the Last War” (1872).<sup>17</sup> This essay refers to Sand’s diary written during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, the *Journal d’un voyageur pendant la guerre* (*Diary of a Traveller During the War*, 1872), and takes as its starting point the controversy that this diary aroused in the German review *Blätter für die Literatur des Auslandes*. In an article in the *Blätter*, written in French (presumably so that Sand could easily read it), Sand is portrayed by “a German critic” (whose name is not given by Podlipská) as an uninformed observer of the war and accused of perpetrating lies about the Prussians. If, in the correspondence, it was Sand who showed empathy for Podlipská and her nation, in this essay, though, Podlipská pays her back: she shows great sensitivity to what Sand describes in the *Journal d’un voyageur pendant la guerre*, because she had just undergone similar events a few years earlier during the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 (Austria’s decisive defeat took place in Bohemia, in Königgrätz-Sadová). France and Bohemia, she observed, had both a common recent experience of war and, moreover, with a common Prussian adversary. Like Sand, Podlipská does not blame all Prussians, and echoes Sand’s notion that the Prussian wars were not peoples’ wars but arose rather out of their leaders’ ambition and miscalculation, hate and greed. In this sense, and as George Sand said in her *Journal d’un voyageur pendant la guerre*, the Kaiser and Bismarck are just following Napoleon’s European politics, and just as Napoleon I reaped the whirlwind for France, so too will the German leaders of her own day, as they refuse to learn anything from France’s experiences. A reading of Sand’s diary indeed confirms Podlipská’s view that Sand had taken a far more nuanced and enlightened view of national hatreds than suggested in the *Blätter*. Let’s take Sand’s text in support:

Germany too will be born again [...]. There are still in Germany great hearts and great minds that know that this is to be so, and yet who are waiting and moaning about our disasters; these will engender, thanks to their thoughts, the revolution which will hurl down the oppressors and conquerors. Let us wait too, not for a war of complete destruction [...] [but] for a republican and fraternal alliance with the great nations of Europe.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Podlipská, “George Sandová o minulé válce”, *Květy* 1872, vol. 7/19, pp. 147–8; vol. 7/20, pp. 155–8; vol. 7/21, pp. 163–6; vol. 7/22, pp. 171–4.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. G. Sand, *Journal d’un voyageur pendant la guerre*, Bordeaux 2004, p. 204: “L’Allemagne aussi renaîtra [...]. Il y a encore en Allemagne de grands cœurs et de grands esprits qui le savent et qui attendent, tout en gémissant sur nos désastres; ceux-là engendreront par la pensée la révolution qui précipitera les oppres-

In her article, Podlipská goes beyond commenting only on the *Journal d'un voyageur pendant la guerre* itself, and gives a general overview of the whole of Sand's life and work, though always through the lens of the diary, from a political, national and social point of view. She continuously underlines Sand's humanistic way of thinking, love for her nation and hope for a France devoid of social inequalities – all character traits that are clearly expressed in the diary as in other Sand's works, and which Podlipská seeks to emulate as her own. Indeed, her understanding of Sand's works as a general cry against all forms of oppression convinces her of the urgency of changing the present social order: "It is time to begin to think about social conditions in which a real decency would govern the relationships between men and women from all classes and all conditions." And she adds, with a touch of irony directed at Sand's detractors: "[I]t is by going in that direction that Sand gains that famous reproach of immorality."<sup>19</sup>

## **2. Karolina Světlá: Sand as a moral reference and as a spur to write**

For Karolina Světlá, the eldest of the Rottová sisters, Sand's name is above all associated with her writing career: in her memoirs mentioned above, *Z literárního soukromí* (*From my Private Literary Life*), it appears at every step of her literary development.

Her first recollection of Sand's name is from her childhood. Světlá says that school did not play a positive role in her life but, on the contrary, stifled her spontaneity and childish joys. The best example is given by a teacher's reaction when he discovered that Světlá wrote tales and stories in her free time, and which he thought showed genuine talent. Not only did he confiscate all of these writings, but he insisted that she stop writing altogether. He paid a visit to Světlá's mother and explained that if her daughter had been a boy, he would have been the first to congratulate him and would have encouraged the development of his abilities; such propensities in girls, however, had to be suppressed as inconsistent with female development into the proper role to be adopted by a grown woman. The teacher then added the *coup de grâce*:

seurs et les conquérants. Sachons attendre aussi, non une guerre d'extermination [...] [mais] au contraire une alliance républicaine et fraternelle avec les grandes nations de l'Europe."

<sup>19</sup> Cf. S. Podlipská, *op. cit.*, vol. 7/22, p. 174: "Jest čas, aby se začalo přemýšlet o poměrech společenských, v jakých by byla konečně možná opravdová mravnost mužů i ženštin všech tříd a poměrů [...]. Z tohoto směru činí se Sandové známá ta výčitka nemorálnosti."

I would not have taken this too seriously [...] if recently I hadn't come across the writings of a French woman, Madame Dudevant, who writes under the pseudonym of George Sand [...]. She incites women to make war against men, she adopts not only men's clothes but also men's manners, she smokes, she goes into cafes, can be found in the company of students, and so on... This pitiful example should urge every educator of young girls to the utmost circumspection; his task is to preserve young women from deviating from the path traced for them down the course of the centuries by human society, and to show that the consequences can be irreversible if she adheres to an occupation other than housework.<sup>20</sup>

To drive home his point, he displayed a portrait of Sand. The reference to the infamous Sand was enough to frighten Světlá's mother: Světlá was taken out of school and had to stay at home and devote herself only to household tasks, so that the danger of raising a new George Sand could (at least momentarily) be avoided. Her younger sister Sophie, on the other hand, was allowed to continue to attend school until she reached Karolina's age<sup>21</sup>.

As a result of this episode, Světlá did not write for a long time. She married her music teacher, Petr Mužák, and gave birth to a little girl (whose name was Božena, to honour Božena Němcová), but the baby died a few months after her birth. This was a terrible shock for Světlá, who became ill and was depressed for years. To help her recover, her future brother-in-law, Dr Podlipský, advised her to engage in an intellectual activity, such as translating something from the French. Světlá followed his suggestion and began to look over the French books in her husband's library, trying to find one suitable for translation. The first name she saw was the one of George Sand, and her first idea was to translate *Spiridion*, a book born of discussions between George Sand and the Abbot Félicité Robert de Lamennais. But the name of Lamennais led her further, and reminded her of the story of his unlucky love with one of his pupils, that her sister had recently told her. From this story she imagined and then wrote an epistolary novel that took as its theme an analysis of the character of this woman who was able to

<sup>20</sup> Cf. K. Světlá, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 219: "Snad bych věc tu mnohem lhostejněji pojímal [...] avšak dostaly se mi před nedávnem do rukou spisy jisté Francouzky, paní Dudevantové jmenem, kteráž píše pod pseudonymem George Sand [...]. Káže ženám válku proti mužům, přijala nejen mužský šat, ale i mužský mrav, jezdí, kouří, chodí do kaváren, prochází se se studenty atd. Napomíná každého vychovatele dívčí mládeže k největší obezřetnosti příklad ten truchlivý, kam žena jest s to zablouditi, v čem si libovati a jakých výstředností se dopustiti, vybočí-li z dráhy společností lidskou od pravěku jí vykázanou, přilne-li k zaměstnání jinému než domácímu."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, p. 222.

awaken such a deep love in such an otherwise severe man.<sup>22</sup> She wrote a first version of that novel in French, *Le Roman involontaire*, which was then rewritten in Czech with the title of *Dvojí probuzení* (*Double Awakening*, 1858). Světlá was now born to her vocation as a writer – a birth to which, as we can see, Sand was no stranger...

Světlá's correspondence shows that, from then on, she followed Sand's literary production with great care. In 1869, for example, she confessed to her friend Eliška Krásnohorská that she was angry with the French writer because of her novel *Le dernier amour* – a book that, for whatever reason, she found disappointing<sup>23</sup>. In a letter to her sister in 1877, she claimed that she had fallen in love with Sand's novel *Marianne*.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most interesting references to Sand in her correspondence are to be found in two letters addressed to her sister. The first was written during the Franco-Prussian War, and expresses her deep concern about French morale in general, and Sand's in particular: "I always have in mind the nobly bleeding France and I remember every day poor Sand. How does she support the disaster endured by her nation?"<sup>25</sup> But as with her sister's article on George Sand, discussed above, Karolina also uses the topic of the Franco-Prussian War as a pretext to speak about Bohemia's relationship with the Germans:

I would be very happy if the Republic were to be proclaimed there [in France]. But what is the point in having the freest form of state if temperaments are not mature enough to be able to appreciate it? It seems that France, exactly like us, has a lack of character, heart and brains [...]. The surrounding Germans are acting in a very provocative way with our people, for them the Czechs are already incorporated into Germany, they practically do not want to speak Czech [...] it will not be very long before they forbid him [the Czech] his own language.<sup>26</sup>

After acting as a revelation of her vocation, Sand's name functions here, as in the case of Podlipská herself inspired by Sand, as a call to highlight the similarities between Bohemia's political situation and that of France.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, pp. 247-8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, vol 2, p. 325 (letter to E. Krásnohorská, 25.04.1969.)

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 230 (letter to S. Podlipská, 2.04.1877).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 215 (letter to S. Podlipská, 19.08.1870): "Mámť pořád na mysli ušlechtilou tu Francii krvácející a každý den si připomenu nebohou Sandovou. Jak asi snáší neštěstí na vlast se hrnoucí?"

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 215 (same letter): "Těšila bych se, kdyby tam byla prohlášena republika, ale co je nejsvobodnější státní forma platna, když nejsou povahy tak dalece dospělé, aby si jí vážít dovedly? Zdá se, že schází Francii charakterů, srdcí a mozků zrovna jako nám [...]. Okolní Němci naši velice vyzývavě si počínají, u nich jsou Čechy již k Německu přivtěleny, nechtějí s Čechem téměř ani mluvit [...], nebude dlouho trvat a zapovědí mu i jeho řeč."

The second letter of particular interest for research into Sand's reception is the one Karolina writes to Sofie after learning that she is to make contact with the French writer:

I was very excited by the thought that you were going to write to Sand. How your letter will delight her! To whom are we indebted so much pleasure, so much consolation? She was the benefactor of our youth. Please do not forget to tell her that she enlightened us with her morality; it will surely give her more pleasure than any other compliment. That she is a genius, she already knows, and that nobody else in the world can be compared to her, she also knows already.<sup>27</sup>

Like her sister Sofie, Karolina uses the term "morality" to refer to Sand, and like her sister, she does so in the full knowledge that this way of characterizing Sand is completely at odds with the language usually reserved for her – for wasn't it precisely because of what was considered her lack of morality that the French woman of letters was castigated throughout Europe? For the Rottová sisters, though, the term morality obviously does not bear its standard connotations, and what was so scandalous in the eyes of the European bourgeoisie, namely the private life of Sand, was absolutely of no interest or no importance to them, and they write as if they do not know anything about such matters. In the above-quoted article "George Sandová o minulé valce" ("George Sand about the Last War") by Podlipská, for example, Sand's biography unfolds without being in the least influenced by the fatality of passions: the reason why Sand left Nohant and her husband is said to be her desire to dedicate herself to a literary career in Paris (her desire to live with her lover Sandeau is not mentioned); Sand's travels to Italy and Venice and her terrible illness there are reported without a mention of Alfred de Musset, who was her lover at that time and with whom she had undertaken this journey; as far as Chopin is concerned, Podlipská explains that Sand had a great "friendship" with him that lasted eight years, but again she does not make clear that it was anything more.

As a result, if the two sisters see Sand as a person who can edify through her morality, it is not in the sense of sexual morality that this is to be understood, but of Christian morality in the broadest sense (her rejection of any form of violence, her very human view of people and circumstances) and of what they believed was the wisdom and open-mindedness of her judgments. The love Sand expressed in her works for her people and coun-

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 197 (letter to Sofie Podlipská, 9.09.1864): "Nadšena jsem byla myšlenkou, že budeš Sandové psáti. Jak ji potěší ten Tvůj dopis! Komu děkujeme tolik radosti, tolik potěchy? Ona byla dobroditelkou naší mladosti. Nezapomeň jí říci, že nás povznášela morálkou svou, to ji potěší zajisté více než vše jiné, neb že je génius, to ví beztoho, a že se jí nikdo více na světě nevyrovná, taktéž."

try, and for liberty and truth, can only “enrich the heart and the life of each individual,” to use Podlipská’s words to her future son-in-law Jaroslav Vrchlický,<sup>28</sup> and in no way corrupt them.

### Conclusion: the Rottová sisters’ understanding of Sand

This last-quoted letter from Světlá to her sister perhaps holds the key to the real impact of Sand on the two sisters: she is viewed less as a writer whose work they wish to imitate (though the literary influence in their work is nonetheless clear, but without achieving Sand’s greater psychological character analysis), than as a person whom they admire for her genius, humanity, and empathy, and who therefore played the role of an ethical reference on many issues—female, political, social—central to their lives.

As staunch patriots, Podlipská and Světlá were touched by the accuracy, benevolence and clear-sightedness of the French author on the matter of Czech destiny as described in *Jean Ziska*, *Procope le Grand*, *Consuelo* and *La Comtesse de Rudolstadt*. As democrats who suffered under the yoke of a foreign power, they could subscribe to the republican visions Sand expressed in her *Journal d’un voyageur pendant la guerre*. Moreover, the affinity between the Czech and French mentalities and destinies, systematically emphasized by Sand, confirmed and flattered them in their national identity. That a nation always on the defensive and always on the verge of extinction, such as the Czech nation, should be put on the same footing as a great nation whose existence is not threatened, such as France, could only reassure them, and they themselves ended up using this process of comparison to encourage themselves in their struggle for the survival (at least cultural) of their nation. For all these reasons, the Rottová sisters never ceased to harbour a sincere admiration and deep sympathy for the work and personality of George Sand.



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#### ABSTRACT

George Sand is the author of two historical studies on the Bohemian (Hussite) Wars, and two novels set largely in Bohemia, all four works written between 1842-1844. Czech intellectuals of that time reacted quickly and positively to Sand’s attention to Czech history, characters and landscapes. Two women writers, in particular, did

<sup>28</sup> See letter from S. Podlipská to J. Vrchlický (*op. cit.*), 27.8.1875: “Není-li pravda, že obohacuje srdce a celé žití člověka?”

## G. SAND'S IMPACT ON TWO CZECH WOMEN WRITERS, THE ROTTOVÁ SISTERS

not spare their praise for Sand's genius: the Rottová sisters, known under the pen names Karolina Světlá (1830–1899) and Sofie Podlipská (1833–1897). Podlipská's admiration culminated in her translation into Czech of Sand's two 'Czech' novels, as well as in a long essay devoted to her. Her sister, meanwhile, referred several times to Sand in her memoirs. It was Světlá who was the source of the apocryphal story that Sand made an incognito visit to Bohemia shortly before writing her 'Czech' novels. This article examines the impact exerted by the French novelist on the Rottová sisters' literary production.

### KEY WORDS

George Sand, Karolina Světlá, Sofie Podlipská, reception, Bohemia

