



## Karolina Světlá: First literary attempts [První literární pokusy]

*Read by Lily Ann Chu Fencík*

In her notebooks, Karolina Světlá reminisced about her literary maturation. Not only was she unable to study in her native language of Czech, but also her literary talents were judged as unfortunate.

Finally the whole family was persuaded that to any Czech question nothing other than a German answer would be given, and around me suddenly the foreign lands rolled all the way to the home hearth, all the way into the hearts of my parents. [...] In time I completely broke the habit of speaking Czech, until finally I could not speak a single sentence without making a mistake, nor could I make myself coherent. [...] I'm a Bohemian in every beat of my heart, in every drop of my blood; even though I was, I was not a Bohemian by my speech, nor was I raised nor educated in Czech, everything that was offered to me was foreign to me, but I could not refuse it, to fight against it if I wanted to be and live intellectually. [...]

For days it kept rattling in my head that I actually belong nowhere, that I am a pariah in the world, not having a place to cuddle in my heart, not having my own country. [...]

By reading I extended my place of mystery, my garden, from behind a certain wall almost to the infinite, landscapes full of charm yet undreamt of, extending the garden, enlivened with personalities, more interesting than anything, so my mind filled gradually with such a power of new ideas and images that it started to torment and bother me. Without books there was no life for me, no joy in it, no not even any world, books for me became a necessity, like water, like air and light. [...]

[Later] I took pen in hand and scribbled something on a piece of paper [...] [This] secret literary effort of mine, [this Almanac I titled] "Sounds of the Lute" and I forgot... I was writing in German, I could not write any other way, perhaps I would not learn to write in any other way. [...] [My teacher found the almanac among my school notebooks, he paid a visit to my parents and said]: If your daughter was a boy, I would be the first to congratulate you and I myself would urge you not to spare any expense so that her talent be allowed to prosper, mature and develop; but with girls it is a different matter, just the opposite, you must stifle such tendencies, restrict them in every possible way, otherwise later they will never manage to apply themselves properly to their duties and never find true happiness, true satisfaction. I believe that your daughter should immediately cease learning literary subjects; to read and to write is enough for her career, she also has a smattering of history and geography, nothing more is required for her future duty. At the same time however, she must be deprived of any sort of reading whatsoever. Employ her only in a household. If she craves entertainment, well, let her knit something or sew on beads or embroider silk.

*Translated by Matthew Sweney*

*Karolina Světlá: Z literárního soukromí I. Upomínky z roku 1874. [From her private literary papers I. Memories from the year 1874.] Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, Prague 1959. p. 186, 194, 199, 212, 213, 219-20. Edited text.*