

Czech Literary Anarchism in the Context of Socialism and the Women's Movement (1890–1914)

Abstract

The thesis focuses on Czech pre-WWI anarchism. It analyses it as a modernist movement comprising various activities spanning political propaganda, proposals of social organisation and thinking about moral values as well as views on the arts and literary production. The aim is to present literary texts written by anarchists against a backdrop of other types of expression. At the same time, the thesis assesses anarchism in the historical context of other political, social, artistic and philosophical movements. We study the interweaving of ideological and aesthetic schemes of Czech anarchism, especially with socialism and feminism, but also concerning decadence, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy and writings of the German Friedrichshagen poets' and anarchists' circle. The thesis focuses on how anarchism understands human beings and their relationship to the world and society. Given the anarchists' focus on the free individual, we present strategies of emancipation from traditional conventions and institutions such as marriage, family and the state. We also concentrate on reforms concerning morals and similarities with the feminist turn to one's own bodily and psychological experiences as starting points for setting individual values. We offer a comparison of the feminist emphasis on the intensive experience of one's own sensuality and emotionality with how anarchist texts specifically use these themes of sexuality and desire. Czech anarchists also focused on solving the national social question and we therefore also concentrate on the anarchist ideal of a new society based on cohesion and work for the benefit of the community. This, in turn, forced us to deal with how one's accountability to the community corresponds with the anarchist emphasis on an individual's complete freedom. Our key approach to these issues is to study bodily representations as they appear across various types of texts. The goal is to compare the meanings assigned to corporeality in literature with meanings that appear in non-literary anarchist texts. The aim here is not to look for ideological proclamations and social formulas in literature, but to identify anarchist attitudes toward reality, humans and the world expressed in both literary and non-literary texts. We strive to show that bodily representations in anarchist texts have both emancipatory and totalizing meanings. Intensively experiencing one's corporeality is the foundation of values and human actions. Irrational, sensual experiences mean freeing oneself from the bourgeois world with its logic and conventions and thus making creative freedom possible. In some cases, such experiences mean experiencing the whole of the world in oneself. There is

also a specific representation of the body as a machine made up of parts; this approach enables anarchists to include human beings in new social structures and assign them a place in the system with duties they should have. The thesis shows the literary dimension of Czech anarchism as an important part of the whole movement and a source of meaning identical with those presented in other anarchist texts. At the same time, we present Czech anarchism as a modernist movement that is not completely separable from other movements of the time. Our comparison with other modernist movements shows similar methods by which anarchism addressed the crisis of traditional values as well as similarities in how individuality and its position in society is defined.