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ABSTRACT

Czech novels and short stories dealing with life in the 19th century were reviewed for information about how adults in rural areas of Czechoslovakia learned and the topics that interested them. The literature review confirmed that adults living in rural areas of Czechoslovakia in the 19th century generally had a great desire for education, including self-education, and faced many obstacles to gaining the knowledge they desired. Village schoolteachers and parsons played a crucial role. Schoolteachers not only disseminated books and periodicals but also strove to improve agriculture, gardening, and beekeeping. Enlightened parish priests of the time spread education among the common folk, often in cooperation with schoolteachers. The rural clergy loaned and distributed books to the common folk. Often, village schoolteachers and parsons continued their own education together. The story "The Village in the Foothills" provides a picture of lifelong learning in rural Czechoslovakia. The Czech literature also demonstrates that although some burghers and gentry actively fostered education of the common folk, some actively opposed it. Several novels and short stories document the existence of innovators among farmers, merchants, and others in rural Czechoslovakia. Numerous literary works describe the physical and other hardships faced by those undertaking educational work in rural Czechoslovakia. (Contains 23 references.) (MN)

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Adult Learning in the Nineteenth Century in the Mirror of Novels and Short Stories: Czech Literature

ED 475 693

This study consists of searching novels and short stories, dealing with life in the nineteenth century, for information about how adults in the rural areas learned and what were their interests. Central and East European, and Scandinavian literature is part of this study which, due to its scope and extent, is a long-term project. The idea for this project occurred to me when I have retired and have found time again to start reading (and often re-reading what I have read in my youth) old novels. I was struck by how well, and often in depth and with considerable insight, the novelists of the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century were informed about life, especially in the villages, and how this knowledge has found its way into their creative work. Very often, in preparation for writing, they have explored life in the villages in a way similar to ethnographers and anthropologists. This article in an abreviated translation of an original Czech manuscript.

I was obviously not the first or only one to have noticed this. Let me just cite a few examples from Czech literature, given by the literary historian Arne Novák when he writes about specific authors:

> He gained his life experience from his native provincial district where he worked...He [Alois Vojtěch Šmilovský] made careful observations of old-fashioned people in well-preserved small towns, rural manors and parsonages... She [Karolina Světlá] studied the picturesque, time-honoured customs and forms of life, many of them still well preserved, of these rural people... The work [of Anatol Stašek] was written out of a depth of careful observation and a sympathetic attitude towards the region and its inhabitants...In both these works [by Alois Jirásek] it is evident that contact with his native soil gave the author and historian a sense of strength and security...She [Tereza Nováková] studied the people with the precision of a scholarly ethnographer, and with patient, empirical observation ascertained how the rural people of Eastern Bohemia participated in the final phases of the old Reformation tradition and how they involved themselves in the new current disseminated by the intelligentsia... (Novák 1976:181-205)

And finally Novák has this to say about the Czech literary group RUCH:

> In the writings of many members of the RUCH group, folk elements grew into independent literature units, so that portrayals of rural folk life began to constitute a sizable branch of Czech narrative prose...Nevertheless, the people—romantical-

> ly conceived and idealistically celebrated—were generally studies in a realistic manner; the ethnographic movement...propagated the precise, scholarly and reliable study of folk life." (Novák 1976:201-202)

Other Czech literary historians and critics corroborate these observations, which are also supported by testimony by the authors themselves.

The literature studied documents very well not only the desire for knowledge among the rural adult population, but also the difficulties they have faced and the obstacles which have laid in their way to knowledge. It also shows the importance of 'early adopters' as we know then from the literature on dissemination and adoption of innovations.

The crucial role played by the village school teachers and parsons is clearly shown in the novels and short stories. The common village folk turned to the teachers in its desire for reading. This is shown, among other, by Karel Nový in *The Iron Circle*: *Lonely Krešín:*

> In the room with the teacher was a tall, shabby man [shoemaker Ambrož]. He was kneeling on the floor and was packing in a kerchief the books he had borrowed... "I have yearned for these books a long time. But when one is subscribing to the newspapers, it is hard to scrape together also the money for books. However, in spite of this I already do have quite a library, but the books are gone to other readers. Oh well, a book should not be idle, a good book should all the time circu late among people." (Nový 1975:304-305)

Earlier in the novel Ambrož confessed to his love of reading:

> "Without newspapers and books the world would remain closed to me...I cannot get it that the people here around me can live and not know what is happening in the world and how much beauty there is in books which describe for us the lives of other people and bring to us great thoughts," said Ambrož in a quiet but clear voice. (Nový 1975:131)

The village teachers did not only disseminate books and periodicals. They also strove to improve agriculture, gardening and bee keeping. This work is mirrored well by Božena Němcová in a short story "The Teacher" when she lets a character in the story relate the following:

> "On Sunday afternoons after the church service we used to go with our bellowed teacher for a walk in the countryside, and he was all the time talking to us...Once we walked on a bad trail past a dry knoll raising from a swamp. Our leader stopped there and said: 'You see, if the farmers would dry out this swamp, they would have another piece of good land; if on this bare knoll they would plant cherry trees, the village would have in a few years several thousand guilders

> profit; and if they would repair this trail, they would not need to ill-treat their horses, would not break their wagons, and would arrive fifteen minutes earlier where they were going. Remember once, when you yourselves will take their place, what your old teacher told you!' " (Němcová 1974:20)

For a long time the mulish farmers did not pay any heed to the teacher, but after six years the original story teller returned to the village and was pleasantly surprised:

> "When we came to that old dry knoll under which used to be the swamp, I could hardly recognise the place. The entire knoll was a cherry tree orchard, the swamp has been dried out, all the trails have been repaired and also lined with fruit trees...I asked the cart driver and he said: 'Now it is all different than it had been under the old farmers—they did not care about anything and rather wasted their money on drinking, but now that the younger ones have taken over, they are quite different fellows. And all that because they have such a good school teacher here.' " (Němcová 1974:28)

Next to the village school teachers, the enlightened parish priests spread education among the common folk, often in cooperation and support for each other's work, as Karel Václav Rais depicts in *Sundown*:

> "And the library—I have seen it, I have seen it. For the village school as well as the one for adults that you have established."
> "But Pondělíček [the school teacher] did very well, very well in building it up," responded the parson. (Rais 1966:220)

The rural clergy not only disseminated good reading by lending books to the common folk but also distributed books in the villages as is depicted very well by Alois Jirásek in the monumental work *F.L. Věk*:

> Every year in the spring, sometimes also after the harvest, Father Matouš Vrba picked up his dark blue coat out of the old oak wardrobe, and his large red umbrella with a shiny yellow metal handle...and took of to the countryside. Every time somewhere else.
> His coat was large, had a long collar, and underneath a labyrinth of pockets. It was like a small branch of the *Česká expedice* [a patriotic Czech publishing house].
> From these hiding places Father Vrba during his rambles pulled out one book after the other, older ones as well as new—these thin books printed on corse paper ...and sold them or gave them away according to need and place...
> He met with all kinds of reception. In the offices of the burghers they pushed him out of the door, in the towns he was laughed at or people pointed to him as if he was not quite right in his mind. On the other hand, the brothers in the parsonages met him as a welcome guest, and the scribes and lovers of literature in the little

> towns and villages were eagerly awaiting him and were looking forward what new books he will bring for them...
> He liked to talk with these common folk, laughed good-heartedly about their ideas, listened to their thoughts, their earthy language, and answered their questions...However, in the courtyards of the manor houses, in the stairwells of the offices, he quite often grumbled, quietly to himself and aloud, about the upstart clerks, the dumb know-it-alls, who blindly venerate the German fashion and make faces at and sneer at their own maternal language. (Jirásek 1976:9-10)

Together the school teachers and village parsons often also continued their own education:

> The chaplain used to sit with the parson entire evenings, especially in the winter. They played chess, and when teacher Pondělíček visited, the parson or he read aloud...they read the newspapers, books on history, travel books, and novels. (Rais 1966:46)

Božena Němcová also gives a picture of their lifelong learning in *The Village in the Foothills*:

> The new parson was a great lover of bee keeping and tree grafting, which was in good harmony with the school teacher's love of music and flowers...The count and the countess had a great regard for the parson; he used to be a frequent guest. The teacher also used to visit; his greatest delight was to walk around in the garden. The count had a skilled gardener and used a great deal of money on flowers...the teacher learned something new about gardening each time he visited. (Němcová 1962:34)

Not all burghers and gentry were-ill disposed to the education of the common folk. There were those among them who were actively fostering it, as did Count Březenský in Němcová's *The Village in the Foothills:*

> The count himself was supervising the work of the local tradesmen, gave them not only the plans but also explained how he wished the work to be carried out, did not scrimp on money or time, until the work has been delivered the way he wanted to have it...
> When the count found a handy tradesman, who because of shortage of funds was not able to come further, he lend him money so that the tradesman had 'a free hand', and thus became the founder of the happiness of many a family. He himself was learning to work on the lathe...and when he was on his travels, which happened every year, he traveled often large tracts with a packsack on his back as a traveling journeyman.
> The count devoted no less attention to agriculture, which he desired to improve as much as possible. (Němcová 1962:20-21)

The seed Count Březenský broadcast among the people did fall on a fertile soil:

> "Even if our Count did not do anything else for us than what he did until now, he deserves our gratitude...He gave us a base of security...With his help we are also establishing a library, so that we have not only for our body, but also for our spirit nourishment..." said the cabinetmaker.
> "You have it now well organized here, and everyone likes it," said the locksmith. "You used to have very uneven ground in front of your houses, and when the rains came you used to bog down in all the mud, but now the ground is nicely level, and when the trees you have planted along the roads mature it will be beatiful, like a garden, not to mention all the fruit you will get."
> "There you have it, how one does oneself no good; we could have repaired the roads, paved our street, planted trees, but nobody started to do it and so for years nothing has been done. Then our Count came here among us, and immediately told us: 'I would think that it would be better if we repaired the roads; that way we would stop maltreating our cattle and save time as we use the roads.' We did embark on all this work without any great gusto, but our Count has always been at the head of us and we had to follow. But now we are very glad we have done this." (Němcová 1962:65-67)

Count Březenský had a good ally in the parish parson:

> "...our parson himself teaches the young peasants how to graft trees and about bee keeping, and to those who show promise he gives free saplings. Before now they had in their orchards only scrawny trees, but now we harvest every year more and more fruit; our young men now look themselves after improving the orchards. Our girls have good gardens—the parson teaches them what to plant for use in the kitchen." (Němcová 1962:67)

Innovators have been found also among the farmers, merchants and others. This is documented in several novels and short stories. Thus for example Jan Vrba writes in *The Hollow* about a rich farmer Gruber:

> Every year his neighbours learned something new from him—no wonder that their respect for him continued to grow. He succeeded in introducing a new, better way of breeding cattle, through good example rather then incessant preaching about the importance of various neglected and underestimated matters such as logical arrangement of the barns, keeping them clean and meticulousness in feeding the cattle— seen by the old-timers as "trifles". On the whole, his innovations took root among his neighbours and, thanks to their success, they have been regarded as usefully instructive...(Vrba 1926:88-89)

Another such quiet innovator is the farmer Kužel in Josef Holeček's extensive family chronicle *Our People*:

> When it was a question of some agricultural innovation which was rumoured to have been successful somewhere else, and about which the inhabitants of Kbelnice were undecided, they would patiently wait not for what Kužel will say, but what he will do. Kužel never did express his ideas, at least not clearly and definitely; never fully agreed with something and never fully resisted. With him it was always action that decided, and the action was always practical, rational and complete. Nobody could gain anything from his talk, but from his action he could learn. Kužel's talking was neither here nor there, but his deeds were a testimony to his sincerity. If they have tried to pry out of him with a crowbar what he thinks about an agricultural innovation that appeared on the scene, they would not have learned anything. With him they had to wait for his action. And when Kužel introduced an innovation, they all could boldly follow suit. (Holeček 1917:158)

In her *A Village Romance* Karolína Světlá created the character of the autodidact Antoš, an inquisitive farm hand thirsting for education, who marries onto a farm:

> He found pleasure in agriculture already when he was a farm hand; now that he was a farmer he came to like it even more. He worked hard as before and all the time he paid close attention to everything...Wherever there was something new, Antoš went to have a look and when he found out that it is useful he immediately introduced it at home, sparing no work and effort. All the time he thought about something, dabbled in something, changed and improved...Before long it came to be known in the environs that Antoš has the most beautiful horses, best cattle and poultry, and best kept fields...
> Whoever came to him for advice and help did not go away empty...Antoš acquired overview and experience not only in agriculture; he was finding out in depth about things and conditions of which his neighbours only had superficial knowledge. His knowledge of the Bible was in all of this of considerable help. (Světlá 1981:46-48)

One of the most engaging characters of this literature is the farmer Kvapil in Teréza Nováková's novel *The Children of the Pure Life*:

> "Oh no, neighbour," shook head the pale wife of Kvapil, "my does not pay any attention to foreign ideas, he figures out everything in his own head—and then from the books and newspapers. You should see what he has at home—it is full of papers, full of chronicles—you wouldn't believe it! Entire evenings, after work, he is reading, even at night, and doesn't go to bed. And then he is going to the meetings in the villages, takes along these books and newspapers and reads them there aloud and talks and explains them..."
> "Your meetings must be very lively," said with a smile Volák.
> "Oh, that's true [said Kvapil]. The village was afraid to make me a member of the council, but the neighbours come all the time to me for advice...I read the newspapers very carefully, get informed about new procedures and gladly give advice..."

> "Mate, you are owed thanks for contributing to national progress," praised him the furrier. "Your Honour, he also introduced chemical fertilizer, plants grafted fruit and nut trees, uses new seeds and tries out everything new on his farm. It didn't used to be thus in our village before he took it up." (Nováková 1957:20, 124-125, 165-166)

It is interesting how well the writers have been aware of effective methods of dissemination of agricultural innovations and of community development as we know and use them today. This is evident in some of the earlier used excerpts as well as from the following passage from Jan Herben's *To the Third and Fourth Generation*, in which a young son of a farmer, who has decided after secondary school graduation to return to the family farm and devote himself to agriculture and its improvement, muses about his intended inspiring work among the common folk:

> To love the common folk means to seek them out in their cottages and houses, not at the political rallies and folk meetings. Young hero, enter the poor and moldy cottage room! Sit down on the black and dirty bench. And talk with them. Don't think about the bad air—talk to the people where they are. Their hands are rough, cracked like the bark of old trees, and their clothes smell. Yes, everything in the cottage gives of a pungent smell and bothers the eyes as acid. However, give them your white, soft hand and talk with them. At first they will not because of you air their room, wash and put on perfume.
> Because they don't believe that they could live in plenty if they wouldn't be deshonest, my hero, work, toil, manage, show them that it can be done!
> Because they don't believe that next to plough and reins they could also hold book and newspaper in their hands, show them...
> They will believe an example. For the first time they will stand firmly on their own ground. And when they will stand firmly on their own ground, they will further their own education, so that they can become free people and stand proudly in front of the authorities and the throne. (Herben 1908:486-487)

Innovators and educators of the common folk existed also among merchants, intelligentsia, village doctors, tradesmen and others. Thus for example Jan Herben in his novel also has created the character of young František Bezděk, son of a successful mer chant, who became educator, founder of educational associations and credit unions:

> This barely twenty year old young man sought out among the young farmers and farm hands adherents of more noble ideas and started to set up in the village educational meetings so that he could turn them away from crude entertainment at village dances, and could combat superstition and lack of enlightenment. But above all he did awaken in them noble feeling for improvement of the village and common weal. It was this young man who disseminated good periodicals among the young people in the village. (Herben 1980:325)

In her novel *Wolf Hole*, Jarmila Glazarová sketched the educational work of a small town veterinarian:

> Father is a veterinarian. However, his office as a mayor and the many tasks he took on for the awakening and education of the common people already long ago pushed his praxis into the background. For many years now he tirelessly spreads the word in the villages. He lectures and teaches the farmers and sharecroppers about the hygiene in the barns, selective breeding, and care for foals and calves; about animal accidents, especially horse accidents, and first aid; about animal illnesses and infections and how to deal with them. He is trying to establish a cooperative for the sale of cattle, so that the farmers would get assured prices and will not be dependent on the time of the year, business ups and downs, and be exploited by the middlemen. He is honoured in the whole county as a dependable counselor and helper. (Glazarová 1957:21)

There is also the story of a national revivalist, a bookkeeper in a textile mill in a little mountain town, in Karel Václav Rais's *On the Lost Shoemaker*:

> On quiet evenings he sat and read newspapers and books. He followed closely the entire Czech public life and it was part of him; he continued his general and professional education...
> After some time, he started to pay attention to the life in the small town. He accepted his election as voluntary librarian of the reading club and with devotion used his spare time to work at it.
> The library was a motley collection of what has been donated, as well as what could be cheaply bought. There was a lot of translated foreign novels, serialised in the newspapers, donated by neighbours who thus made a patriotic gesture, while they at the same time got rid of the old newspapers. He started at the beginning. He strove to ensure that profit from public entertainment performances went to the library, and ordered books and periodicals that he himself knew well. He paid attention to the opinion of the readers, both from among the common folk and better educated ones. When a reader said: "This book really made an impression on me, it keeps on milling around in my head!" it really made him happy. He loved books to which the reader keeps on returning, not the ones which he finishes only with dislike, or those which he races through and never returns to again. He gladly recommended also instructive books: from natural sciences, travel books, books about the economy...
> He started also to pay attention to villages and little towns in the neighbourhood, communities with mixed Czech and German population, Czech minorities. He started to visit there, observe, keep finding out about life there. In Hrádek he established a local branch of the tourist association which organised tours, marked the trails, published maps and a good guide book. He found out that in the communities where the Czechs were a minority it was most important that there was a devoted national revivalist, even if he was the only one, who was a true friend of the common folk, a good organiser, a tolerant human being who did not command

> people, a friendly counselor and leader, who was not striving for his title but rather was working quietly, genuinely, with forethought. That such an individual could be the salvation, could save much, and could provide for his beloved people a firm ground under their feet much better then mere shouting by people distant from the actual community, who admitedly make a lot of noise, but most often do more harm than good. He got convinced that many a community could remain Czech, if only it had before it is too late at least one such individual. (Rais 1963:167-174)

The country parsons were not the only ones who spread books, periodicals and newspapers in the villages and small towns. The farmer Mlejnek, as portrayed by Teréza Nováková in *Children of the Pure Life*, was a devoted distributor of Czech literature among the village population:

> ...the books and pamphlets, which he more and more often and in steadily increasing quantities brought along, provided a constant matter for discussion... Today's Sunday meeting has been just a continuation of frequent short get togethers...The talk turned again to the books which Mlejnek brought out from a nook in the room and placed on the big table in the corner, and there started to unpack them from the coarse gray paper in which they were wrapped. Košnár carefully put the pipe he was smoking on the window sill and, having put his gray head into his hands, with great anticipation observed the slowly emerging treasure.
> "Here we have *The Slavonic Conversations* published by Mr. Kobr—in them you will find a wealth of beautiful reading; here are the writings of our saintly Jan Hus which were brought out again by Mr. Erben; and here is some French author, I don't even know how to correctly pronounce his name, *The Holy Scriptures of Mankind*...I have spread around and sold also other writings," explained Mlejnek as he was picking up one parcel of books and pamphlets after another to show to his fellow-discussants.
> "I only worry whether you will be able to sell them all!" said Košnár with concern, as he was taking the parcels into his hand, looking at the books, and laying them down again. "If they remained on your hands you would incur a great financial loss. And there are not many of us here in Paseky who live in the light; many more are going around in the darkness and the curse of ignorance."
> "Don't worry neighbour," answered the young farmer lively. "I sell enough books even here. Brothers here let the established Church frighten them away from believing in the Truth of the Highest One, but they still gladly reach for a book—as whoever reads such a book will feel neither hunger nor thirst." (Nováková 1957: 148-149)

As was shown in the many preceding quotations and excerpts from the literature, the awakening and educational work of enlightened village teachers, parsons, landed gentry, merchants, tradesmen and farmers among the village and small town population has been on the whole quite successful. However, there were also problems and barriers to their work, like the mulishness of the older farmers who often resisted any change, as

well as the active opposition amongst many of the landed gentry and some of the clergy, and even among some of the teachers, all of whom have seen in the awakening and educational activity a threat to their own position of power over the common folk. Thus the revivalists and educators of the people very often had to work in difficult conditions and in great adversity.

This is very aptly mirrored in *Drašar, a Novel of a Patriotic Parson* by Teréza Nováková. In the following passage the young student Drašar defends patriotic clergymen and expounds about their task, which later on becomes his own task:

> "You, Tušl, always laugh at Father Král—but be assured that I don't know any more hard working and noble-minded man than him," turned Michl vehemently on his schoolmate.
> "And a greater fool," nodded with his head Tušl.
> "I don't know why he would be a fool," argued Michl and stopped in the middle of the hallway. "A wise man is he, not a fool! He never ventures into the fields without a book; he is now forty years old and he is still learning new languages, he already knows Russian and Polish; he travels in the countryside, searches through old castles, and writes about them..."
> "Well, as I say, a fool," mocked stubbornly Tušl...
> "You are a brute, Tušl, if you laugh at what is sacred to somebody else! Yes, for Father Král the books you condemn are the most beloved things in the world! And he taught also me to appreciate them. He has shown me that it is our duty to promote them..."
> "And how about Father Hájek, our chaplain?...who not only talks Czech everywhere—but also keeps buying books and—I know that for sure—also secretly is writing the history of our town?"
> "But how people laugh at him and what troubles he has," chimed in Kopecký.
> "They even wanted to charge him under the law--"
> [Michl got red in his face and flared up] "Talk as you wish, boys, you will never expunge my regard for Father Král and our chaplain Hájek! A priest can and should contribute much to the improvement of the citizens, the hearts of the common folk are open to him." (Nováková 1910:80-82)

A few years later Drašar has the following conversation with Father Hájek:

> "The people love you, reverend," said Michl...
> "I love them too," replied Father Hájek..."I would like to help them, but believe me, I am often afraid that I will rather harm them!...my work often brings about only trouble. They say that I am spoiling the common folk, that I am fraternising with them." (Nováková 1910:145)

Inspector Hýbr in J.S. Baar's *The Customs Commissioner's Wife* threatens the newly appointed village magistrate:

> "Your duty is not to write, just to sign and to control, especially to control...The former village magistrate, Mr. Johánes was too much worried not to anger the farmers and therefore allowed all kinds of mischief at the town hall. That must stop. We know that in Klenčí there are growing national feelings. People here are reading Czech books and newspapers, which Father Faster lends them. To the farmer the pitchfork and to the priest the Bible, do you understand? Education is for us and hard work is for the farmers. The farmers read what some spoiled student, an ultra-Czech, who was expelled from school and who found a place with the newspapers writes, and immediately think that if it is written it must be the truth. And immediately they defiantly raise their heads, start to spread themselves and would like to order us around. Therefore we have today clipped their wings and entrusted the administration to the tradesmen—well, we will see how you will acquit yourself. If I will hear even a little bit that you are joining the farmers' side...I will depose you and appoint as village magistrate a cruel German, maybe Zippner." (Baar 1958b:256)

How difficult the awakening and educational work among the common folk was is shown in another passage from *The Customs Commissioner's Wife*:

> Postmaster Worlitschek expounds that it is very necessary to extinguish the little flame in the beginning, before it blazes up. He complaints that Customs Commissioner Němec usually is accompanied by his wife on his official visits, and that she bring along books—Czech books—which she distributes among the people. "The Customs Commissioner Němec, as an official deserves all respect. He is death to the smugglers, in his work sharp as a razor...but he should not allow his wife to consort with the farmers, visit them—as a wife of an official surely she ought to know what is correct and proper: to visit the wives of the officials here and to keep company with them."
> "She is writing in the newspapers," jumped in the tax assessor to show that he agrees, "in the *Květy* [*The Blooms*] and also the *Česká včela* [*The Czech Bee*], and than nothing but vulgar things which she collects from the farmers. The burghers she only criticises and slanders..."
> "A woman should keep to the kitchen," decided seriously Director Melichar, "and not meddle in politics and literature. Where would it end if the women would interfere in our official matters."
> "We have to watch her," stated Inspector Hýbr after he listened to it all, "on our estate she likes to go especially to Mrákov, where she has so confused both old and young Konopa, that they are fantasising about what freedoms the farmers used to have and how they have lost them. I have already hauled them in, together with their uncle the village magistrate. As I say, we must not let [the Czech] patriotism get out of hand." (Baar 1958b:257)

In another volume of Baar's trilogy, *The Forests*, the work of the Customs Commissioner's wife is being made more difficult:

> "And for you, all of your enlightenment work will become more difficult," turned to his wife the Customs Commissioner. "Your book lending, visits with the farmers, relations with the farmer's wives, all of that has been a thorn in the side of the watchful authorities and I don't know, I don't know, whether they will not forbid you to keep engaging in your activities, or if they even will not push us out of here." (Baar 1958a:380-381)

The Customs Commissioner's wife, in real life the writer Božena Němcová, was a model of the awakening and educational work carried out by women. But in the creative literature she did not remain the only one. We have pictures of women who yearn after good reading, who take part in the meetings alongside their fathers or husbands, read aloud for their families and for the neighbours, and continue their own education.

Thus for example the heroine of Karel Klostermann's novel *The Glassblowers*, Lucílie Chabléová, is talking to her husband:

> "I wanted to tell it to you only once; I hope you will understand that I will learn arithmetic. Believe me, I will learn everything, without a teacher..." (Klostermann:1957b:435)

And Božena Němcová in *The Village in the Foothills* describes what the young women were reading:

> They all knew how to read, but not how to write and count...During the long evenings they would read Czech history books, which were not missing in any home...or books about religion. (Němcová 1962:97)

However, not all women were inclined to reading and self-education. For example in Karel Klostermann's *Where the Children are Heading to* we find the following exchange between the worker Francek and his sweetheart Fanny:

> [Francek]: "...one cannot do today without education. Knowledge is light, lack of it is darkness. But I will make sure that we correct that in which you have been neglected. I will teach you, I will bring you books so that you will read..."
> [To which Fanny replies]: "Leave me alone with that stuff—I cannot gets these things into my head, you will try in vain. And to read? I?! Go away! For me the letters are jumping up and down in front of my eyes as if you empty a whole sack of flees on a white sheet of paper." She finished speaking, laughed, and instinctively started to turn the wheel of the lathe. (Klostermann 1957a:61-62)

The desire for reading, for self-education among the village and small town population in the nineteenth century is very well mirrored in the novels and short stories of Czech writers. Some of this treasure we have already seen above. Let us now look at some additional pictures of enlightenment and self-education of the common people.

Václav Beneš Třebízký in the novel *Wandering Souls* describes the yearning for reading as follows:

> The farmer got up suddenly, stepped up to the window and listened. Somebody was coming to the house..."So late, friend? It is already past ten o'clock." "They have delayed me; I have already thought that I will not make it." "I am glad you did come. Do you have them?" "I do"...he opened his coat and from under his left arm he took out a pouch which was carefully tied with leather thongs. He put the pouch on the table, carefully unpacked it and took out some books..." "This will be quite some reading for the winter months!" folded her hands the farmer's wife. "As it is, we know all the ones we own now by heart," added the farmer. (Třebízký 1969:kniha první 15-16)

And later on in the same novel:

> In the evening several neighbours met at the house of the village magistrate, all of them good friends, all true residents of Podlesí, for an evening chat. And when in the fireplace the flames started to dance gaily, Květ smiled, went to the cupboard, took out a book which he handed to Světluška, and seating himself among the guests said: "I have brought for you from Prague some new reading stuff. It is said that these books are just being snapped up. Begin, Světluško!" And the young girl started to read the one about Zdeněk from Zásmuky, that is, about the knights from Mount Blaník [a legend of ancient knights sleeping in the mountain, destined to emerge and to save the Czech nation in its worst hour].
> No sound was heard from among the farmers, the farm hands this time did not have any thought to tease the girls, and night watchman Adamec nearly forgot that the grandfather clock next to the door is chiming nine o'clock and it is time for him to start his rounds, and maybe for the first time unwillingly picked up his gleaming watchman's horn and when he started to call out the hour people in the village could not for their life figure out what hour he was announcing. And in a few moments Adamec was back in the living room at Květ's. (Třebízký 1969: kniha první, 26)

In the short story "For a Newspaper" by Karel Václav Rais we find out about a cottager tailor Sejkora, an eager reader:

> He entered the hallway, stamped his feet, ran up a few steps and knocked on the door. He opened them without waiting and entered with a greeting.
> In the small room, lit up by the faint glow of the setting sun, was a low made up bed standing by the wall, next to it a book case, opposite to it a trunk, a table full of papers, at the table three chairs.
> "What are you doing here today?" came the teacher's voice from the table.
> "Excuse me, I am coming for a newspaper."...

> Sejkora was eyeing longingly the periodicals laid out on the table. "Lord, here is a lot of good reading!" he said wistfully and like a gourmand took in the titles of the periodicals...
> "Well, here is a newspaper for you! But only one issue, the trains did not run," said the teacher.
> "Thank God," thanked Sejkora, putting the newspaper in a deep pocket in his coat. "But please, if I can be so bold, what were you reading in the book when I came in?"
> "That wouldn't interest you, it is a book about the stars."
> "Oh, wouldn't interest me, if you please—it would interest me! I am interested in everything, in every book. I would read everything, but there is not enough time. I am thinking, if I didn't have children, I would hide on the loft in the quiet, sit down in the hay and only read!" and Sejkora's eyes were full of vain longing. (Rais 1967:9)

In the novel *Jiří Šmatlán* Teréza Nováková created a credible character of an autodidact cottager and weaver:

> They used to argue with him—but it was all for naught! Šmatlán always won the argument and talked so well informed that he shamed the big farmers. No wonder, he had it all from books, of which he has read a lot...—he was able to argue successfully with Protestants and Catholics alike. From the chronicles he learned about the old times in Bohemia, who ruled over whom, and how many forts were destroyed by Žižka [the Hussite general]; he also bought every year the almanac, and when he brought work or shopping from town wrapped in printed paper, if it was in Czech he read it until the last word, whether it had a beginning or end. And he did not only read through the books; he thought about everything he read in them, whether it agrees with his own ideas or what he would say against it if he could talk with the author. He used to read usually on Sundays and holidays, and only sometimes on the long days in the evening in the garden. When he then the next day sat down at a loom...he was mulling over everything what he read previously in the books, talked to himself, shook or nodded his head, completely forgetting his surroundings. (Nováková 1972:14-15)

In a short story "The Courting" Karolina Světlá writes about a successful cabinetmaker Havel:

> Havel understands all newspapers, rides on a horse to all meetings, of course secretly so that his father would not know. He would only grumble that it is a matter for the masters, which is not suitable for a tradesman and only causes him envy among people. But Havel considers himself a citizen and is of the opinion that it does suit him well. He says that in the village all are equal, whether gentry or cottagers. (Světlá 1961:161)

That the awakening and educational work was not easy can be seen from the fol-

lowing passage from Baar's *The Customs Commissioner's Wife*:

> [The Customs Commissioner's wife in conversation with the patriotic priest Faster]: "What are they doing at Král's" asked lively Němcová, "do they read in their evening meetings?" "They used to read, the circle of listeners was comfortably growing bigger, and I have almost started to believe that the plan to establish here like in Prague and elsewhere a 'Besedu', at first a reader's get together, a focus of patriotic feeling and thinking, established to work against the casino at the Johánes inn, where they only Germanise, spin intrigues and collect scandals about everyone who does not want to dance to their tune, will succeed."
> "Well, yes, a club aiming not only at entertainment but also at enlightenment, where everyone, farmer, tradesman, labourer and cottager would be welcome."
> "It will hardly happen now," waved his hand hopelessly Faster.
> "Why? What has happened?"
> "Recently the authorities have thrown out all the farmers from the town hall and have put there nothing but tradesmen, mostly Germans."
> "Then it is even more important to establish the 'Besedu'" jumped in vehemently the Customs Commissioner's wife...
> "Milady, you don't know our people," smiled bitterly the priest...
> "Maybe you are right, but it is not much better in other places; that is where our awakening and educational work has to be, to shake up the spiritual and intellectual sleepy-heads." (Baar 1958b:167)

Karel Václav Rais in *Lost Patriots* details the problems with the establishing and the success of a village get together:

> In the school they had many worries about the get together. The teacher himself went to Milov to apply for the permit to hold it, because he knew how to deal with the head clerk...
> "What are you coming with from Pozdětín? The school will now receive a grant, so what else do you want?" asked in a thin, cutting voice the head clerk.
> "Your Honour, I beg your pardon, I am coming to ask for a permit to hold a get together," smiled the teacher Čížek.
> The head clerk again peered at him and then laughed with a wheeze: "So now they have gone crazy even in the Godforsaken Pozdětín?"
> "Your Honour, I hear that even the Germans in Rokytnice are organising get to gethers, we want to give some pleasure also to our neighbours!"
> "Your fuss over the pleasures! You are forever finding that things are not good enoughand ever want to improve things. You should have been a priest, not a teacher. And what do you intend to do?"
> "We have put it together nicely, Your Honour, the neighbours will laugh aplenty, and next day at the statute labour they will work as young ones," answered shrewdly the teacher.
> "Just you leave the statute labour alone! Well, show me what all you want to do!"
> The teacher opened up the papers and presented the program...

"I beg you, tell me, who will carry all of this out in Pozdětín?" said acidly the head clerk and through his little eyes blinked at the teacher.
"The parson, Adam Hernů who is a musician, my helper and I will sing."
"So now even the parson will sing for the neighbours?"
"Your Honour, we have nice songs, nothing bad."
"Hm—and who else?"
"The students and Albinka Podzimkova from Větrov will recite."
"See, see, a get together in Pozdětín! But I am telling you, don't tell the people some foolish things, or you will get it. What do you need in Pozdětín "The Tears of the Patriotic Women" for, you have patriots there anyway, the Corps of Czech Fighters—and some ballads," growled the head clerk as he was looking through the program, "what do they know in Pozdětín about ballads?"
"Oh, Your Honour, our neighbours understand many things, they are Bible readers!"
"I have noticed, but it would be better if they would not needlessly get confused."
"It is good, Your Honour, in our inn they don't play cards and don't fight as they do other places," said, still smiling, the teacher...
"And what will you do with the proceeds?"
"We will use it for books for poor children."
"Well—" hummed the head clerk and, walking back and forth so that the tips of his swallowtail bounced around, he was pulling at his graying mutton chop hair. "But I tell you once more, don't do anything mischievous, you tend to do that; you would almost do better if you would care only about the church and the school, because these get togethers don't lead anywhere, and the countess also does not like them...Well, you can go now with God, and give my greetings to the parson!" (Rais 1970:181-183)

But all the difficulties were forgotten on the day of the get together:

Right after the first song sung by Jelen the audience broke out in enthusiastic clapping; the office supervisor and the gamekeeper were shouting "bravo!" and the parson from Větrov and the amateur players "excellent!"
Having performed his song, the parson went over to the parson from Větrov and smilingly said: "Like in Prague! Like in Prague! Even 'bravo' we shout!" Adam Hejnů paced up and down in front of the benches and furiously pulled at his moustache. He was happy that the singing quartet did so well.
When he recited "Vilém from Kounice", the clapping was even louder, even the farm hands standing below the windows shouted and clapped...
The recitation of "I am a Czech", delivered boldly and enthusiastically by young Václav Čížek, fired up young and old...When then the teacher's assistant sang, it was again quiet as in the church, and on the faces of the listeners spread a sweet mood...
The ending of the get together was a song, thus far not heard in Pozdětín—"Where is my home?" While everybody was gay before, now a sober mood returned to the listeners.

"What a song, what a song!"
"That young man knows how to grab one at one's heart!"
"That's the most beautiful one of them all!" and they were raising from the benches. Already when the teacher's assistant finished the first verse they were clapping wildly.
The parson, standing in the door, was vehemently snuffing tobacco and tears were running down his cheeks.
"František, you have crowned it!" he called as soon as the teacher's assistant finished singing, and in front of all the people he hugged him and three times kissed him on the cheek. Also parson Chvála from Větrov shook his hand and said to the parson from Pozdětín and the singer: "You have done an excellent job friends, a you have organised a beautiful get together here, no town would need to be ashamed of it!"
"Thank God that it succeeded; we have a good beginning, now we must carry on!" stated the parson and was wiping his sweaty brows with a blue handkerchief. (Rais 1970:189-191)

This content analysis of the Czech fiction documents the yearning and the striving of the village and small town population, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, for self-education. It shows well the awakening and enlightenment work carried out by many village teachers and parsons. It also points out the importance of innovators and early adopters among them and among the farmers. It was they who were introducing new methods of gardening, fruit growing, bee keeping, land cultivation and cattle breeding and have been to their neighbours an example worth following. It shows also the barriers and difficulties which the rural population and its educators had to face before they were able to overcome the despotism of the authorities, and the backwardness and mulishness of the villagers. But throughout the literature one can see the devotion and self-sacrifice of all those working on the awakening and enlightenment of the common folk. This work, and the self-education engaged in by the common folk in the nineteenth century, as it is mirrored in the Czech novels and short stories, has been an indispensable foundation on which to build a socially, culturally, economically and politically well developed nation in the twentieth century.

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