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The Image of Women in Saki's Short Prose

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Zásady pro vypracování:

The Image of Women in Saki's Short Prose Práce se zaměří na vybranou povídkovou tvorbu britského autora Hectora Hugh Munro(1870-1916) známého spíše pod pseudonymem Saki. Kromě velmi překvapivých a děsivých dějových zápletek je jeho próza pozoruhodná pro svou tematizaci ženství. Z tohoto důvodu autorka v úvodní kapitole nastíní širší kontext problému: bude se věnovat otázkám společenského postavení žen na počátku 20. století. Na tomto základě provede analýzu vybraných povídek. Pokusí se definovat Sakiho zobrazení ženství, zejména převládající povahové rysy ženských postav, jejich účast na vytváření děje a vztah k mužům a dětem. Práci uzavře kapitola shrnující předchozí zjištění. Autorka pro svou analýzu využije relevantní (níže specifikované) zdroje.

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis deals with the image of women in the short prose of hector Hugh Munro writing under the pseudonym ‘Saki’. The critical and strongly negative portrayal of female characters in Saki’s short stories is analyzed through the comparison with the Edwardian ideals and stereotypical conception of women. Also, the author’s experiences influencing the portrayal are dealt with.

The thesis is divided into two main parts. The theoretical part is focused on the historical background, woman idol and essential information about Saki’s life and literary style is provided. The analytical part is aimed on the image of women in selected short stories in relation to other characters in the stories, such as men and children.

Key words: Saki; Munro; Edwardian society; women; image

Souhrn

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením žen v krátké próze Hectora Hugha Munroa píšícím pod pseudonymem ‘Saki’. Kritický a silně negativní obraz ženských postav v jeho povídkách je rozebrán skrze porovnání s ideály a stereotypní pojetí žen v edwardovské době. Zhodnocen je také vliv autorových osobních zkušeností na jeho tvorbu.

Bakalářská práce je rozdělena do dvou hlavních částí. Teoretická část poskytuje základní historické informace, popisuje edwardovskou představou o ideální ženě a uvádí základní informace o Sakiho životě a díle. Analytická část se soustředí na zobrazení žen ve vybraných povídkách a na jejich vztahy s ostatními postavami v povídkách, na vztahy s muži a dětmi.

Klíčová slova: Saki; Munro; edwardovská společnost; ženy; obraz

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Introduction

Female characters are frequently used in Saki's short stories and their portrayal significantly contributes to the satirical and sarcastic tone of the tales. In most of these characters the author challenges Edwardian stereotypical and idealized conception of women as mothers as well as yielded wives. Instead, he presents them as cruel and abusive creatures oppressing both men and children. The aim of this thesis is to explore the image of women in Saki's short prose with help of selected stories.

Since the analysed works are written as a social satire, the knowledge of their historical and social background is essential. Therefore the first part of the thesis in its subchapters provides the reader with a brief theoretical background. The main events forming Edwardian society are depicted as well as the idea of a woman idol. Because Saki specializes in the criticism of the middle and upper class, information concerning the working class is not included in this thesis as it is not relevant. Main features of Saki's short prose are depicted in the last subchapter together with core events and influences of his career.

Two following analytical chapters are aimed at the relations among women and other characters in Saki's stories. The first of them attempts to analyse the image of females as wives in "The Seven Cream Jugs", "The Reticence of Lady Anne" and "Tea". The first two stories introduce women considerably remote from the Edwardian ideal, women independent, dominant and abusive; the third story focuses on a passive wife ostensibly meeting the society's requirements.

As females have traditionally been perceived as mothers or at least as naturally suited for the role of governesses, a chapter examining the child-woman relation is incorporated as well. This chapter explores especially ineffective educational methods practised by the guardians, and their influences on children's psyche. For the analysis short stories "Sredni Vashtar" and "The Lumber Room" are used.

The analysis of the stories is supported by references focused especially on the position of women in Edwardian society. At the end the bachelor thesis is concluded and the analysis results are summarized.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1 Edwardian England and Society

In spite of its short duration, the Edwardian Era ranks among the most interesting periods in the history of modern England. Due to the amount of social changes it started, it represents the transitional period between traditional Victorian England with strong imperialistic features, class division and strict morals, and modern twentieth century state. Moreover, as Samuel Hynes points out, it is often spoken about as the Golden Age:

> It is easy to feel nostalgia for that leisurely time, when women wore picture hats and did not vote, when the rich were not ashamed to live conspicuously, and the sun really never set on the British flag. Writers on Edwardian England are inclined to call the time 'golden' – 'a golden afternoon' [...] or a 'long garden party.' (Hynes, c1968, 4)

The idea of the Golden Age is abundantly used throughout the literature focused on the era; however, as can be seen in the works of Hynes, Delgado, Priestley or Read, it is very often questioned. Particularly Donald Read points out that the golden qualities are usually retrospective and neither the Edwardians pictured themselves as living in a golden age:

> Thus the Times of 19 January 1909 emphasised how contemporary Edwardians "place the golden age behind them, and assume that no generation had to deal with evils so great and perplexing as those of the present day." (Read, c1982, 14)

Furthermore, according to Hynes and Priestley, the pertinacious adherence to conventional rules and traditions led to the rise of decadent society, where "the forms of values had become the values; institutions had become more important than the ideas they embodied" (Hynes, c1968, 5). This decadence affected primarily the upper and upper-middle class where the absence of the real duties led to the creation of new ones and where pleasure became duty:

> To keep in, to keep going, members of Edwardian high society toiled harder than overworked clerks or warehousemen [...] A fellow would have to go down to Cowes for the first week in August, then go up North to shoot the grouse or stalk the deer. A woman invited for a weekend at one of the great houses would have to take several large trunks, and then would have to be changing clothes [...] half-a-dozen times a day. A free-and-easy life in theory, in practice it was more highly disciplined and more wearing than the life of a recruit in the Life Guards. (Priestley, c1970, 58)

Unlike the growing power and wealth of the upper class, the miserable situation of the lower classes was deteriorating and a huge social gap appeared. The situation became so serious that, as Priestley mentions, "the West End was already establishing "missions" in the East End, just as the Victorians had sent their missionaries to India, China, Darkest Africa" (Priestley, c1970, 73). In order to improve the desperate situation, the Education Act was brought into effect in 1902 providing better free of charge education and thus better job opportunities (Delgado, c1967, 57).

The problematic social situation led to the rising popularity of socialism and in 1906 the Historical Association, with strong Marxist body, was launched and the Independent Labour Party became the "most important socialist movement of the day" (Morgan, c1982, 101). However, this movement emphasized the "peaceful evolution towards the socialist commonwealth" and rejected the Marxist message of class war (Morgan, c1982, 101-102). The ubiquitous tension was also supported by the 'Peers versus People' crisis that lasted from 1906 to 1911 between the House of Lords and the Parliament and culminated in the '*People's Budget*' in 1909. After the clash, the power of the House of Lords was limited, which led to the growing strength of liberalism.

1.2 The Edwardian Woman Idol

Since the Edwardian Era was too short to produce real Edwardians (all adult Edwardians were raised up in Victorian families), generally accepted requirements on ideal women were marked by Victorian expectations. The female personality was limited in all aspects of life from her appearance through her public behaviour and interests to her sexual life.

The persistent ideal of woman was so called ‘angel woman’ fragile in appearance and submissive and obedient in action. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe the ideal of the physical beauty in details:

> The aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty [...]: slim, pale, passive beings whose “charms” eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead. Tight-lacing, fasting, vinegar-drinking and simile cosmetic or dietary excesses were all parts of a physical regimen that helped women either to feign morbid weakness or actually to “decline” into real illness. (Gilbert; Gubar, c1984, 25)

This vulnerability and selflessness supported men’s feeling of importance. Women were supposed to keep the house and to serve their husband. In other words, they were viewed up on as a piece of property or a man’s accessory, either in the high society or the lower ones. As Robert Cecil states:

> A woman ran a man’s home and reared his children. In the upper reaches of society, she received his guests and hired and fired his servants; in the lower strata she cooked his meals and darned his socks. Her liberation would be an infringement of his rights. (Cecil, c1969, 158)

This inequality was rooted in the traditional conception of labour division, in the theory of separated domestic and public spheres. According to this philosophy, both men and women should focus only on the matters incorporated to their sphere, women to the domestic and men to the public. This exclusion from the public life made wives dependent and inferior; it was their husband who was the juridical person (Abrams, 2005, 9, 28; Fraisse, c1993, 51; Arnaud-Duc, c1993, 81-82; Mayeur, c1993, 236). The female role was to be a home-maker. A Victorian poet Coventry Patmore epitomizes demands on women in *The Angel in the House:*

> [...]
> Man must be pleased; but him to please
> Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
> Of his condoled necessities
> She casts her best, she flings herself [...]
>
> She loves with love that cannot tire;

> And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
> Through passionate duty love springs higher,
> As grass grows taller round a stone.
> (Patmore, 1863, 109)

Suitable sources of amusement were seen in amateur painting and music, the skills that "were considered accomplishments that cultivated girl's sensibilities and made her socially attractive" (Higonnet, c1993, 250). Physical exercise was not regarded as necessary; on the contrary, girls were not allowed to run or swim or even to hurry in order not to endanger their future role of child-bearers (Cecil, c1969, 162-164; Knibiehler, c1993, 335). That role was actually one of the few ways how they could earn respect in male-driven society.

Motherhood was seen as the logical fulfilment of woman's life (Michaud, c1993, 123; Abrams, 2005, 104). In Edwardians' opinion, women were naturally predestined to this function both physically and mentally. They were believed to find self-satisfaction in educating children and in scarifying their lives for others (Abrams, 2005, 56, 102-107; De Giorgio, c1993, 172). An emancipated working woman was being accused of neglecting her family duties (Scott, c1993, 401, 412). Surprisingly, the mothering responsibilities were being emphasized even by many feminists and suffragettes even though their conception was carefully considered and supported the idea of birth control and contraceptive devices (Käppeli, c1993, 496-499; Delap, 2004, 121).

Considering the restrictions and requirements mentioned above, it is logical that "the idea of a divinely sanctioned lifetime of subjection and inferiority began to be questioned and discussed, by men as well as by women" (Hynes, c1968, 174). As the peaceful feminist movements did not succeed, the Women's Social and Political Union was formed and despite initial general objections the right to vote gradually became the most important goal. According to Hynes, the goals of the movement clearly implied a radical change in the men-women relations and the ways of fight became very aggressive from public strikes through burning and destroying public property to hurting themselves. Nevertheless, the World War I interrupted the procedure and the women question was not solved until the end of the war (Hynes, c1968, 200-211).

1.3 Short Stories of Hector Hugh Munro alias Saki

Hector Hugh Munro (1870 – 1916) writing under the pen name 'Saki' was a British journalist and writer nowadays known especially for his satirical short stories. The pseudonym 'Saki' refers to Fitzgerald's translation of Persian poetry *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, The Astronomer-Poet of Persia*:

> And when like her, oh Sákí, you shall pass
> Among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass,
> And in your joyous errand reach the spot
> Where I made One – turn down an empty Glass!
> (Fitzgerald, 1900, stanza 51)

By the choice of this pessimistically tuned poem as the source of his pen name, Saki is believed to avow to the decadent vision of Edwardian society present also in his work (Byrne, c2007, 5, 102-103; Hornát, 2001, 246-247).

In his short prose Saki challenges and criticizes stiff conventions and stereotypes by the means of black humour and cynicism:

> Having suffered from the convention which dictates that art can turn something too horrible to contemplate into something acceptably comedic, Saki exploited it, and constantly tested, and transgressed, the boundaries of acceptability and taste. (Byrne, c2007, 4-5)

Thus women are demonized and oppress their husbands ("Luis", "The Seven Cream Jugs"), children are given to cruel practical jokes ("The Penance") or being murdered by werewolves ("Gabriel Earnest"), hyenas ("Esmé") or other vicious animals and the gloriously good are punished for their hypocrisy ("The Story-Teller") and suffer even more than the atrocious ("Sredni Vashtar"). S. Hynes summarizes the typical features of Munro's stories and designates them as "Saki's most unattractive qualities". Among them he ranks:

> [...] his inhumanity, his bitter contempt for human affections, his pleasure in degradation, his preference for predatory animals and predatory people, his sick sentimentality. (Hynes, c1968, 50)

However, there is one group of characters in his macabre tales that is privileged. Children, especially boys, often triumph over the conventional and cruel educative

methods of adult abusers, usually represented by governesses or aunts. "Meanness and cruelty to children are both deplored and punished. [...] The Saki youths take on themselves the role of Nemesis, meting out poetic justice", states Byrne (c2007, 9).

This exception is probably connected with Munro's early childhood, when at the age of two, together with his two older siblings, he was sent to his relatives in England (Byrne, c2007, 3-5). This decision seems to be crucial in Munro's future career; purely women family consisting of two aunts and a grandmother created a strong background for inspiration for his stories with children and women characters. S. Byrne describes the household in *Unbearable Saki:*

> The real rulers of the house were The Aunts, Aunt Tom and Aunt Augusta [...] domineering, imposed a regime of seclusion, restraint, and arbitrary rules enforced [...] by corporal punishment and [...] by coldness, removal of privileges and guilt. (Byrne, c2007, 17)

Saki's first book of short stories *Reginald* was published in 1904 and five more followed: *Reginald in Russia* (1910), *The Chronicles of Clovis* (1911), *Beasts and Super-Beasts* (1914), *The Toys of Peace* (1919) and *The Square Egg and Other Sketches* (1924). The last two collections were published posthumously because Hector Hugh Munro died in November 1916 in the battle on Somme in France (Byrne, c2007).

2. Man-Woman Relation

A frequent theme in Saki's short stories is the relation of men and women. It is usually very complicated and often does not follow Victorian opinions on subjection and dependency that reached into the Edwardian times. The phenomenon of women exceeding men in the field of powers of intellect and mental faculties is present in many of his stories. Since the most common discourse of man-woman dealings in the Edwardian period was marriage, this institution offers itself as an ideal opportunity for describing the unusual and ironical image of this coexistence.

The traditional opinion on marriage in the Edwardian era, also endorsed by the Church, was "that marriage was a holy sacrament" (Hynes, c1968, 187), the union of spirits where women were dependent on men. Female inferiority was also supported by a long line of philosophers from Aristotle to James Mill and August Comte. For example, Georg Hegel claimed that "marriage is the constitution of one person out of two consenting partners, where the head of the family is the man" (Fraisse, c1993, 51). However, as suggested above, women in Saki's short stories are not the typical Edwardian ladies or heroines. Wives in his short prose range from elegant and secret manipulators at best to abusers and shrews at worst.

2.1 Dominant Woman and Husband Abuser

A good example of the strange relationship between a man and woman can be found in "The Seven Cream Jugs" where Mrs. Peter Pigeoncote and her husband are visited by their wealthy relative, Baronet Wilfrid Pigeoncote. Substituting him for a kleptomaniac kinsman, the couple suspects him of stealing one of their silver cream jugs and steals the jug back from him. When the substitution becomes apparent, Mrs. Pigeoncote solves the situation by claiming her husband kleptomaniac and hereby she ruins his social life and status. Moreover, her ignorant husband thanks her for saving their reputation.

The first signs of female supremacy are indicated at the very first paragraph of the story. It is the woman character that starts the conversation and actually opens the whole story with setting the topic and tone not only of the dialogue but also of the plot:

> "I suppose we shall never see Wilfred Pigeoncote here now that he has become heir to the baronetcy and to a lot of money," observed Mrs. Peter Pigeoncote regretfully to her husband.
> "Well, we can hardly expect to," he replied, "seeing that we always choked him off from coming to see us when he was a prospective nobody. I don't think I've set eyes on him since he was a boy of twelve."
> "There was a reason for not wanting to encourage his acquaintanceship," said Mrs. Peter. "With that notorious failing of his he was not the sort of person one wanted in one's house." (Saki, 1982, 500)

Taking into account the inconsistence of Mrs. Pigeoncote's speech, it seems that she is experiencing a clash between worries of being robbed and her desire for progress on the social ladder. That is further elaborated in the following part of the conversation:

> "Well, the failing still exists, doesn't it?" said her husband; "or do you suppose a reform of character is entailed along with the estate?"
> "Oh, of course, there is still that drawback," admitted the wife, "but one would like to make the acquaintance of the future head of the family, if only out of mere curiosity. Besides, cynicism apart, his being rich will make a difference in the way people will look at his failing. When a man is absolutely wealthy, not merely well-to- do, all suspicion of sordid motive naturally disappears; the thing becomes merely a tiresome malady." (Saki, 1982, 500)

It is evident that Mrs. Pigeoncote's character is burdened with unflattering and strongly negative characteristic traits such as envy and hypocrisy. Her attitude to kleptomania radically alters when it is not a condition of an unimportant child but of a wealthy person. In that case she does not insist on her opinion and not only is she willing to tolerate the kleptomaniac person in her house, but she also uses euphemistic expressions to trivialize the serious problem. Such a negative image was not common in Edwardian society since it was still believed that women should be admired as adorable goddesses, man's dream and perfection in imperfection (Fraisse, c1993, 59). The ideal woman according to Johann Jacob Bachofen quoted by Joan Bamberger in "The Myth of Matriarchy" is such "whose unblemished beauty, whose chastity and high-mindedness inspired men to deeds of chivalry and bravery for her sake". (Bamberger, c1974, 265) This romantic portrayal of womanhood can be found in Scott's Lady Rowena, "the Queen of Love and Beauty" (Scott, 1819, 176-189); however, Saki's female protagonist seems to be far from the ideal. Moreover, the deed to which she

inspires her husband is strongly contrasting with chivalry and bravery as it is the act of larceny.

Nevertheless, the theft itself is preceded by a gradual submission of Mr. Pigeoncote to his wife. At the beginning of the story their roles are traditionally divided; Mr. Pigeoncote is a rational man while his wife is emotive and irrational and affectionate in her worries of being robbed. Nonetheless, as Michelle Rosaldo claims,

> [...] women themselves are far from helpless, and whether or not their influence is acknowledged, they exert important pressures on the social life of the group. [...] in various circumstances male authority might be mitigated, and, perhaps rendered almost trivial, by the fact that women [...] may have a good deal of informal influence and power.
> (Rosaldo, c1974, 21)

Beyond any doubt, Mrs. Pigeoncote abuses these female powers and under the pressure of her arguments her husband is unable to maintain his own opinion. Thus the generally recognized Pauline doctrine “the man is the head of the woman” (Cecil, c1969, 157) is inverted and a rational man becomes a man on a straw entirely controlled by his wife:

> After they had said "Good-night" to their visitor, Mrs. Peter expressed her conviction that he had taken something. [...]
> "Do you miss anything?" [...]
> "I can only make it thirty-four, and I think it should be thirty- five," she announced; "I can't remember [...]
> "How on earth are we to know?" [...]
> "To-morrow, when's he having his bath [...] we can go through his portmanteau. It's the only thing to do."
> On the morrow [...] Mrs. Peter kept guard outside, while her husband first made a hurried and successful search for the keys, and then plunged at the portmanteau with the air of a disagreeably conscientious Customs official.
> (Saki, 1982, 502-503)

Apparently, Mrs. Pigeoncote has gained a certain power and authority over her husband. According to M. G. Smith quoted in “Female Status in the Public Domain”, power is defined as “the ability to act effectively on persons or things, to take or secure favourable decisions which are not right allocated to the individuals or their roles.” (Sanday, c1974, 190) The fact that Mr. Pigeoncote does not need any proofs of

Wilfrid's guilt to fulfil his wife's will is astonishing. Even though Sandie Byrne in *The Unbearable Saki* argues that males in Saki's works cannot be unattractive or be "weak-willed or cowardly" (Byrne, c2007, 11), Mrs. Pigeoncote's husband's behaviour strongly contrasts with this opinion.

The cause of his decline, together with his usurper wife, is the lack of resoluteness. In the question of determination, Mrs. Pigeoncote extensively exceeds her husband and therefore assumes the power and subjugates him. It is important to realize that requirements on both sexes period were very demanding in the Edwardian and when not met, the offender was punished in the best case by the loss of reliability. According to "Suggestions Concerning Courtship" in *Hill's Manual of Social and Business Forms: A Guide to Correct Writing* published in 1888, a husband

> [...] should be so strong as to be a natural protector to his family. He should be brave, that he may defend his companion. [...] The wife, confident in the husband's strength and wisdom, will thus implicitly yield to his protective care. (Hill, 1888)

Evidently, Mrs. Pigeoncote is not yielded to her husband nor her husband is brave and protective. When Mr. Pigeoncote abandons even his last attempts for any individual action and consciously flees from the predicament, his wife finally entirely succeeds to his place. Hence, he is punished for passivity and cowardice and excluded not only from the domestic sphere of home where the wife is in power, but also from the public sphere that should have been his domain.

> The Pigeoncotes had turned paler than ever. Mrs. Peter had a final inspiration.
> "Get me my smelling-salts, dear," she said to her husband; "I think they're in the dressing-room."
> Peter dashed out of the room with glad relief [...]
> Mrs. Peter turned to her guest with confidential coyness.
> "A diplomat like you will know how to treat this as if it hadn't happened. Peter's little weakness; it runs in the family."
> "Good Lord! Do you mean to say he's a kleptomaniac, like Cousin Snatcher?"[...]
> Mrs. Peter broke off in some confusion, and tripped out to meet her husband in the hall.
> "It's all right," she whispered to him; "I've explained everything. Don't say anything more about it."

> "Brave little woman," said Peter, with a gasp of relief; "I could never have done it." (Saki, 1982, 504)

Apart from the plot and characters, it is also Saki's way of addressing his protagonists that reveals the female predominance. Throughout the story he is strictly observant of the British etiquette of addressing a married woman. According to this principle, a married woman should use her husband's surname as well as his first name (www.emilypost.com). The historical origin of this stereotype can be found in the superior role of men in public and legal matters and also in the fact that a man was considered to be the juridical person in marriage (Fraisse, c1993, 51). Blackstone's interpretation of the common law, quoted in "The Law's Contradictions", that "the husband and wife are one and that one is the husband" also contributes to this hypothesis (Arnaud-Duc, c1993, 107).

Thus at the opening of the story both characters are introduced separately and mostly operating under their full names, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Pigeoncote. However, while Mrs. Pigeoncote is gradually gaining the power, the way of addressing the couple changes. At the climax of the story, the revelation of the blunder, the designation "Pigeoncotes" is used for the first time (Saki, 1982, 503). This change seems to signal a certain sort of fusion where the couple starts to cooperate. Surprisingly, even though this melange results in 'one-person' existence, it is not that of the husband. After this shift the female character is being referred to as Mrs. Peter and for the man only his first name is used. The loss of the formal salutation indicates the decline of the husband's authority as well as does the female dominance in the subsequent text. Actually, only two lines are devoted to the character of Mr. Pigeoncote in more than two following pages and on top of that, one of them is the appreciation of his wife.

Another type of marriage with switched roles and defeated man appears in "The Reticence of Lady Anne". This story features one of the most common forms of female protest and its effect on man. The marriage of Lady Anne and her husband Egbert is described through one simple incident concerning an awkward situation after a quarrel when Lady Anne is expressing her disagreement and pique by long reticence and hours spent in isolation.

The reticence has always been recognized as powerful coercive means because after a while it becomes unbearable and its breaking is unavoidable. In other words, the

reticence belongs to the most favourite ways of expressing disagreement or disappointment; it wins attention for the protestor and has the power of influencing. Michelle Z. Rosaldo describes position of women in different cultures and also in different social roles in her introduction to *Women, Culture and Society*. When she focuses on the ways how women can gain power, she mentions that

> [...] in a culture, where domestic and public spheres are firmly differentiated, women can manipulate man and influence their decisions by strategies as diverse as refusing to cook [...] or instigating what the rest of society may recognize as a "tragedy" in the home. (Rosaldo, c1974, 37)

By these tragedies are meant domestic quarrels and disputes causing unhappy marriages (Collier, c1974, 93 -95) as well as diminished husband's authority. To the scale of the manipulative behaviour, the reticence of Lady Anne definitely can be incorporated.

The way Egbert enters the room after a quarrel: "[...] with the air of a man who is not certain whether he is entering a dovecote or a bomb factory, and is prepared for either eventuality"(Saki, 1982, 46), reveals a lot not only about Lady Anne's character qualities but also about the disposition of their marriage. Initially, it seems that the marriage follows the Edwardian family role rules of an emotional woman and a rational and wise man. However, this point of view was distorted by the twentieth and twenty-first century social changes and by present, more equal, norms. The woman idol was burdened with a remarkable amount of expectations and one of them was her tolerance and loyalty to her husband. The *Hill's Manual of Social and Business Forms: A Guide to Correct Writing*, which was considered to be a useful guide for Edwardian young people, in the matter of quarrels incorporated in the chapter "How the Wedding Is Conducted. Conduct during the Engagement" states that:

> Should a misunderstanding or quarrel happen, it should be removed by the lady making the first advances towards reconciliation. She thus shows a magnanimity, which can but win admiration from her lover. (Hill, 1888)

Therefore Edward, who, instead of commanding respect, practises the policy of appeasement and makes the first attempts for reconciliation, places himself on the inferior position below his wife.

Moreover, Lady Anne is described as the one who actually sets the rules for the household. The narrator comments the cautious entering of her husband with these words: "[...] the question was how far Lady Anne was in a mood to renew or forgo hostilities" (Saki, 1982, 46). This superiority over her husband is noteworthy for similarly as in "the Seven Cream Jugs" Lady Anne is not a paragon of virtue. Furthermore, her personality is portrayed as a selfish and cantankerous woman requiring all the attention. She is depicted as the one whose "[...] displeasure became articulate and markedly voluble after four minutes of introductory muteness" (Saki, 1982, 47). This image is further strengthened by Egbert's stream of consciousness and associations activated by the idea that his wife might be feeling unwell when being silent more than usual couple of hours and not trying to start any quarrel:

> But when Lady Anne felt unwell she was not wont to be reticent on the subject. "No one knows what I suffer from indigestion" was one of her favourite statements; but the lack of knowledge can only have been caused by defective listening; the amount of information available on the subject would have supplied material for a monograph. (Saki, 1982, 47-48)

The tremendous impact of the years of exploitation becomes apparent when a mere reticence leads Egbert to plead guilty and he blames himself even though he is not aware of any demerit (Saki, 1982, 48). Losing the last piece of his manliness, Egbert leaves the room as a broken man who has discovered a new level of humiliation:

> Egbert looked at her nervously through his glasses. To get the worst of an argument with her was no new experience. To get the worst of a monologue was a humiliating novelty. (Saki, 1982, 49)

In his subservience he even does not notice his wife died.

In both "Seven Cream Jugs" and "The Reticence of Lady Anne" the depiction of womanhood is strongly negative for both wives are pictured as the main evil in their husbands' life. They both deviate from the dream-lady who would "enlarge her partner's ego" (Michaud, c1993, 124) and who would "sacrifice herself for marriage" (Fraisse, c1993, 51). Both women correspond much more to the description of J. F. Collier in *Women in Politics:*

> The model woman of my argument [...] is not the affectionate daughter, hard-working wife, or loving mother [...] but the cold, calculating female who uses all available resources to control the world around he. My model woman seeks power. (Collier, c1974, 90)

The result of such a negative conception is the image of a "monster woman" (Gilbert; Gubar, c1984). This term is closely related with Anne Higonnet's contribution to the theory according to which the female images in art strictly follow fixed archetypes. The bi-polar appearances of women rank among these archetypes, "one normal, orderly, and reassuring, the other deviant, dangerous, and seductive", where the women of the first kind are "admirable, virtuous, happy and rewarded" for their behaviour whilst the second type women are "ludicrous, depraved, miserable, or punished" (Higonnet, c1993, 247). Likewise, M. Z. Rosaldo refers to the women violating a society's sense of order as being seen as "threatening, nasty, disorderly and anomalous" (Rosaldo, c1993, 31). In British literature this deviant heroine occurs for instance in Brontë's Jane Eyre, who is throughout her life being punished for every attempt for independence. As a child she is being oppressed for her resistance against submission and her ardently desired marriage to Mr. Rochester is rather a mere surrender and return to the limits of normality than a reward (Brontë, 1994).

Obviously, both Lady Anne and Mrs. Pigeoncote go beyond the scope of order and therefore make an impression of the monstrous abusers. Nevertheless, unlike common anomalous characters, Saki's females are not punished for their abnormality. One of the reasons is that their husbands are neither bold nor stern enough to procure obedience; another is a satirical interpretation of Edwardian society that has romanticized and exalted women presupposing that they are submissive, servile, true and loyal to their husbands. Since the heroines violate these expectations, the man's world is cast in chaos from which their personal tragedy stems.

2.2 Passive wife

Considering the condemnation of the powerful women from the "Seven Cream Jugs" and "The Reticence of Lady Anne", an obedient and yielded girl suggests herself to be regarded as an ideal partner for a happy marriage. Startlingly, in Saki's stories even the immaculate Edwardian woman is the cause of distress. This curiosity is

delineated in the short story "Tea" which protrudes among Saki's marriage-focused works, aiming at the excruciating female passivity in marriage.

In "Tea" two main themes focused on the women issue appear. One is the wife-husband relation itself; the other is the tremendous influence of falsely kind-hearted pertinacious female matchmakers.

The hero of this story, James Cushat-Prinkly, is a young, single upper-middle class man whose attitude to marriage is depicted by his explanation that he likes the women "[...] just as one might admire the Alps without feeling that one wanted any particular peak as one's own private property" (Saki, 1982, 402). Such a disapproving approach is at variance not only with the opinion of his female relatives and matronly friends, but also with the widespread view in the whole society. Early twentieth century England tussled with the falling birth rate which during forty years dropped by thirty percent. Since the infant mortality decreased as well, the situation was not endangering the United Kingdom; nevertheless, the birth rates statistics were disturbing and "most Englishmen regarded this decline as clear and present threat to the country" (Hynes, c1968, 197). The institution of marriage was seen as the solution, as St. Loe Strachey argued in the *Spectator* quoted by S. Hynes: "One man and one woman is the law of fecundity" (Hynes, c1968, 198). Therefore the marriage and procreation of offspring was considered the young people's duty.

Though the pressure of the public opinion is unquestionable, the coercion produced by James's feminine relatives is fatal. Their stance to marriage is distorted by the positive propaganda according to which the marriage was a guarantee of an idyllic life. Additionally, to become a Missis was often the only aspiration of unwed girls. Vera Brittain cited by Robert Cecil in *The Edwardian England* explains:

> [...] almost every girl left school with only two ambitions – to return at the first possible moment to impress her school fellows with the glory of her grown-up toilet, and to be engaged before everybody else.
> (Cecil, c1969, 166)

This marriage enthusiasm prevails among James's friends as well as in his family, therefore James gradually surrenders and acquiesces with the idea that

> when his Uncle Jules departed this life and bequeathed him a comfortable little legacy it really seemed the correct thing to do to set about discovering some one to share it with him. (Saki, 1982, 402)

A young upper-class girl Joan is chosen for him as suitable and the only thing he has to do to win his peace back is to propose.

Unexpectedly, on his way to Joan, James is warned by a church bell that he will come at tea-time. He detests the whole tea ceremony with "women sitting behind dainty porcelain and silver fittings, with their voices tinkling pleasantly in a cascade of solicitous little questions" (Saki, 1982, 403) and the providence intervention inspires him to deviate from his intention. The tea-serving ceremony obviously represents the whole stereotypical life of the Edwardian middle class frustrating in its omnipresent monotony and restrictions. The uselessness and false essentiality of these manners is also illustrated in Priestley's *The Edwardians* where he comments on it:

> If they [Edwardians] have no useful work, then they invent useless work. If they have no ordinary duties and responsibilities, then collectively and very solemnly they make up duties and responsibilities. [...] It was a dreadful nuisance. (Priestley, c1970, 57)

James endeavours to escape this irritating convention and marries his cousin Rhoda in Joan stead, a working girl who lacks the mannerism of the upper class. Unfortunately, his expectations for a happy married life are not fulfilled and he finds himself imprisoned in the type of marriage he was trying to avoid:

> On a September afternoon of the same year, after the honeymoon in Minorca had ended, Cushat-Prinkly came into the drawing-room of his new house in Granchester Square. Rhoda was seated at a low table, behind a service of dainty porcelain and gleaming silver. There was a pleasant tinkling note in her voice as she handed him a cup.
> "You like it weaker than that, don't you? Shall I put some more hot water to it? No?" (Saki, 1982, 405)

Evidently, the ubiquitous female surveillance and intervention into the young man's life contributed to his blight. Thus the theories of the female power by Rosaldo and Collier that were quoted in relation to "The Seven Cream Jugs" and "The Reticence

of Lady Anne" are relevant likewise. The extent of the extortion is compared to the behaviour of a pack of dogs:

> His most innocent flirtations were watched with the straining eagerness which a group of unexercised terriers concentrates on the slightest movements of a human being who may be reasonably considered likely to take them for a walk. No decent- souled mortal can long resist the pleading of several pairs of walk- beseeching dog-eyes. (Saki, 1982, 402)

The ruthless assertion of the private interests significantly contradicts the universal belief that women feel guilty for the unhappiness of their surroundings even if the situation could not be avoided (Chodorow, c1974, 59). James's relatives apparently follow only their own idea of a fulfilled and happy life disregarding his personal yearnings and defiance.

On the other hand, women in the described period were viewed upon as their husband's property, an inferior being. Proudhorn quoted by G. Fraisse depicts them as "a middle term between man and animal" (Fraisse, c1993, 68). A. Mauge mentions that, according to theorists, a woman was a "man's child" and every husband "was competent to teach his wife the fine points of cooking, ethics, household economics and metaphysics" (Maugue, c1993, 523-524). According to this philosophy, James Cushat-Prinkly offers himself as the culprit of his own bane. He is not able to extricate himself from the women's and society's authority and he himself acts in accord with the convention when he spends his honeymoon on Minorca and buys a house on a renowned address. Therefore also Rhoda is exposed to the same influence and merely adapts herself to her new environment.

Nonetheless, the overall impression of the story differs greatly from the standard philosophical theories of the era. Even though Cushat-Prinkley's struggle against conformity is partly stultified, Rhoda is the tormentor and the source of her husband's woe, yet her instruments of torture are apathy and lethargy. Moreover, she is guilty for deception of her husband when not retaining her customs and her behaviour patterns after the wedding. The change from the emancipated working girl who is "having a picnic meal" and who makes "no other allusion to food, but talks amusingly and makes her visitor talk amusingly too" (Saki, 1982, 404) to the upper-class lady complying the boring habit with "drawn-out chatter about cream and sugar and hot water" (Saki, 1982,

405) is overwhelming. She is orderly, satisfied in her domestic sphere and a homemaker who is ready to leave all decisions to her husband.

On the account of man-woman relation in Saki's work, S. Byrne declares that any woman in marriage "commits him [husband] to a life sentence of dullness and routine" (Byrne, c2007, 174) and that is, undoubtedly, also the case of Mrs. Cushat-Prinkley. Verily, the young wife meets most of the requirements on a perfect partner. She exactly implements the advice given to young brides in "The Wife's Duty" in *Hill's Manual of Social and Business Forms: A Guide to Correct Writing*:

> What matters it where a picture hangs, or a flower-vase may sit. Make the home so charming and so wisely-ordered that your husband will gladly be relieved of its care, and will willingly yield up its entire management to yourself. (Hill, 1888)

Prevalent literature picture of an emancipated woman endangering domestic happiness is, in Maugue's estimation, that: "She who stole a few moments of her time and claimed a piece of her self, who did not give fully of herself, was already dangerous, already guilty" (Maugue, c1993, 523). According to Saki's short stories, a man should beware not only of the masterful woman but also the excessively yielded one as both will cause his decadence.

3. Child-Woman Relation

Besides the satirical portrait of marriage, Saki is in his short stories sceptical also about the possibility of harmonic co-existence of women and children. The role of women as mothers in the Edwardian period was strongly emphasised, often seen as the fulfilment of their life and in this relation women were considered as naturally and biologically suitable for taking care of children and educating them (Fraisse; Perrot, c1993, 4; Mayeur, c1993, 236; Knibiehler, c1993, 340; De Beauvoir, c1949, 29-33; Chodorow, c1974, 45; Wilson, c1991, 13). However, this suitability is impugned in his stories not only in the relation to the child custody represented by unmerciful governesses and aunts but also on the basic level of the child-woman rapport in stories where children and infants play only incidental roles.

3.1 Women and Infants or Unknown Children

In many Saki's tales infants and children appear in cameo roles and serve as story intensifiers with fates marked by black humour of their author. In Ruth Maxey's words, "often they are blithely and humorously sacrificed in Nature's survival of the fittest" (Maxey, 2005, 6). Regardless their short-term appearances in the narratives, they play a substantial role in Saki's satiric portrayal of hidebound upper-middle class women. The lost toddler in "The Quest" or the murdered boy in "Esmé" offer themselves as representative samples.

Even though the lost toddler boy in "The Quest" serves as the story background, the actual plot is built up on his absence and the exalted situation provides opportunities for Saki's social satire. The mother, Mrs. Momeby, seems to be more interested in herself than in the lost son and instead of taking part in the quest, she enjoys the unexpected attention when repeating the story as someone who "finds as much joy in the ninetieth time of telling as in the first":

> "He was toddling about quite happily on the lawn," said Mrs. Momeby tearfully, "and Arnold had just come in, and I was asking him what sort of sauce he would like with the asparagus--" [...]
> "And all of a sudden I missed Baby," continued Mrs. Momeby in a shriller tone. [...]

> Mrs. Momeby turned away hastily to seek comfort and counsel in some other direction. [...]
> "Arnold had just come in; he was complaining of rheumatism--"[...]
> (Saki, 1982, 148-149)

Furthermore, her love to the baby turns out to be extremely affective when it appears again. It makes the impression of insincerity when crooning on him and "pouncing on him and nearly smothering him with kisses" and asking irrational questions: "[..D]id he hide in the roly-poly to give us all a big fright?" (Saki, 1982, 150)

The imperfection of Mrs. Momeby pronouncedly contrasts with the idealized Edwardian image of motherhood. As mentioned above, women in the Edwardian times were seen as predetermined to mothering and, surprisingly, even suffragists emphasized their important and irreplaceable responsibilities. (Delap, 2004, 121, Abrams, c2005, 104-105, Fraisse; Perrot, c1993, 4; Knibiehler, c1993, 340; De Beauvoir, c1949, 29-33). S. De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* even expresses an idea that since the advancement of Christianity the woman has been viewed upon as "the incarnation of the Good", "a figure of reassurance and holiness" (De Beauvoir, 1949, 180-182). The inability to guard an infant, not to mention the absurd excuses concerning its sudden disappearing, and ostentatious love hiding the less pleasant reality apparently cannot be considered as divine virtues.

In the character of Miss Gilpet, a young neighbour of the family, the author touches the issues of the "woman's quintessential role" (Knibiehler, c1993, 353) even more directly. The girl, in her effort to help, brings a baby that is confused with Eric, the lost infant. When the substitution is disclosed, the inevitable question of its future arises and as the finder, Miss Gilpet is assumed to adopt the baby. Notwithstanding her reaction is brave, it cannot be considered happy:

> "Must I keep him always?" asked Rose-Marie dolefully.
> "Not always," said Clovis consolingly; "he can go into the Navy when he's thirteen." Rose-Marie wept afresh. (Saki, 1982, 151)

Fortunately, the infant is saved from the unhappy fate as he proves to be neighbours' son.

Apart from uncovering macabre possibilities of unwanted or dispossessed Edwardian children, the dialogue raises a question of the verity of women's ultimate

mothering role. In the era when the only possible feminine genius was seen in love and nursing (Delap, 2004, 105) and when women were believed to be endowed with a natural "sense of giving" and ability to sacrifice for others (De Giorgio, c1993, 197), to introduce a literary female character contradictory to these expectations was atypical. Especially when this phenomenon is not in Saki's work sporadic.

The character of Miss Gilpet is accompanied by a heartless Baroness in "Esmé" who, while telling a hunting story, mentions in passing that she witnessed a violent death of a child. She comments on this experience without any intensive feelings: "This part of the story I always hurry over, because it is really rather horrible." (Saki, 1982, 104) Actually, the child is eaten by a hyena the Baroness finds. She describes the incident in very disinterested way:

> Personally I was doing everything that occurred to me at the moment. I stormed and scolded and coaxed in English and French and gamekeeper language; I made absurd, ineffectual cuts in the air with my thongless hunting-crop; I hurled my sandwich case at the brute; in fact, I really don't know what more I could have done. (Saki, 1982, 104)

Designations of the child as "a small half-naked gipsy brat" (Saki, 1982, 103) and "the poor little thing" (Saki, 1982, 104) together with the depiction of the incident as a mere trifle equally contribute to the Baroness' demonization. The terrific pitilessness of the woman is crowned by a cynical remark warranting her attitude: "The gipsies were equally unobtrusive over their missing offspring; I don't suppose in large encampments they really know to a child or two how many they've got" (Saki, 1982, 105).

3.2 Aunts and Governesses

Saki and his siblings were brought up by two spinster aunts, Charlotte and Augusta, who, according to Saki's sister Ethel Munro quoted in *The Unbearable Saki*,

> [...] imposed a regime of seclusion, restraint, and arbitrary rules enforced in the case of Charlie [brother] by corporal punishment and in the case of Hector [Saki] and Ethel by coldness, removal of privileges, and guilt. (Byrne, c2007, 17)

Moreover, the latter of the aunts was by Ethel described as a woman of "ungovernable temper, of fierce likes and dislikes, imperious, a moral coward, possessing no brains worth speaking of, and a primitive disposition" (Byrne, c2007, 18). The unhappy model of Saki's childhood family also pervades into the short stories populated by grudging aunts and governesses bullying their foster children. This phenomenon is also described by S. Byrne in his analysis where he mentions that "the worst of the female villains are the older relations and guardians who trammel the boys' freedom of movement and attempt to trammel their imaginations" (Byrne, c2007, 180).

In "Sredni Vashtar" Saki externalizes the extreme impact of intentional maltreatment on a child's psyche, resulting in intense hatred and aggressiveness (Hornát, 2001, 250). Conradin, a ten years old boy, lives with his cousin, Mrs. De Ropp, who

> would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin, though she might have been dimly aware that thwarting him "for his good" was a duty which she did not find particularly irksome. (Saki, 1982, 136)

Not only does she thwart him for his good but she also welcomes a doctor's opinion "that the boy would not live another five years" (Saki, 1982, 136). To meet this prognosis, she purposefully refuses every pleasure from fruits through friends and fun to pets, sentencing Conradin to life in dullness due to that, but for his imagination, "he would have succumbed long ago" (Saki, 1982, 136).

Following the domestic sphere of competence available to women, it is obvious that Mrs. De Ropp adopted the boy only in order to ameliorate her social status. The act of philanthropy, such as taking care of a forlorn child, was of a great value in the eyes of the early twentieth century society:

> Charity, the ancient Christian duty, [...] provided substantial experience that altered women's perception of the world, their sense of themselves, and, to a certain extent, their public role. [...] Great philanthropists were honoured, decorated and commemorated with statues. (Perrot, c1993, 451)

Moreover, as M. De Giorgio announces, "the wife and mother overshadowed the unmarried woman" (De Giorgio, c1993, 174) and throughout the nineteenth and

twentieth century women were cherished and respected primarily as mothers. In comparison with them, childless females were assumed as pitiable and inferior. The only possibility how to approximate to the social status of mothers was by guardianship or nursing (Abrams, c2005, 102; De Beauvoir, 1949, 181).

The Edwardian England, under the Boer War impression, sacred life and the attitude to mothering and nursing was deeply sentimental; therefore any mother or governess was regarded to be "the Angel in the house [...] who rescues the fallen" (Perrot, c1993, 451). Childcare and childrearing became the subjects of crucial importance. Based on the new psychological and medical knowledge, such as psychoanalysis or pasteurization, motherhood was no longer the matter of maternal instinct. From very young age, girls were taught how to become good mothers and young mothers were encouraged to establish an intimate relationship with their children (Abrams, c2005, 107; Knibiehler, c1993, 353). The image of Mrs. De Ropp as an irksome and cruel individual who finds pleasure in a little child oppression discloses the disturbing truth in the idealized relationship.

In his loneliness, Conradin seeks love and pleasure at least among animals. He has a Houdan hen he loves and tender and a large polecat-ferret in a locked hutch he worships and in his troubled mind endows with a power to resist and hurt his cousin:

> Conradin was dreadfully afraid of the lithe, sharp-fanged beast, but it was his most treasured possession. Its very presence in the tool-shed was a secret and fearful joy, to be kept scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman, as he privately dubbed his cousin. And one day, out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name [Sredni Vashtar], and from that moment it grew into a god and a religion.
> [...]
> On one occasion, when Mrs. de Ropp suffered from acute toothache for three days, Conradin kept up the festival [of worshiping] during the entire three days, and almost succeeded in persuading himself that Sredni Vashtar was personally responsible for the toothache. (Saki, 1982, 137)

When the hen is found and sold, the boy is deprived of the last source of pleasure in his life and his hate takes a terrific concrete shape. He asks his god for help every night and his prayers are formed into a simple litany: "Do one thing for me, Sredni Vashtar" (Saki, 1982, 138). Ascertaining that the hen was not the only reason for

her ward's tool-shed visits, the governess acquires the key of the hutch. In his last vain and desperate effort, the boy forms a hymn for his endangered idol:

> Sredni Vashtar went forth,
> His thoughts were red thoughts and his teeth were white.
> His enemies called for peace, but he brought them death.
> Sredni Vashtar the Beautiful.
> (Saki, 1982, 139)

By this canticle Saki compares a child's revolt against tyranny to political uprisings of social movements, understood as an inalienable right. This hymn Ruth Maxey describes as an "obsessive, quasi-religious call to arms, which recalls the language of political manifestos" (Maxey, 2005, 16). Furthermore, it carries features of a revolutionary song and can be compared with the most famous song of revolution at that time, French La Marseillaise. Its version, published at the official websites of France, provides a nice opportunity for the comparison:

> Arise you children of our Motherland!
> Oh now is here our glorious day!
> Over us the bloodstained banner,
> Of tyranny holds sway!
> (Rouget, verse 1)

The child's prayers for freedom are eventually answered. The executor of Conradin's long hidden hostility, the ferret, attacks Mrs. De Ropp and brings the long desired liberty. While shocked people pity the boy for the loss of his guardian, Conradin prepares two pieces of toast with butter for himself, a forbidden luxury, in order to celebrate his unexpected triumph.

The story is built up on the third person narrator who, even though omniscient and unlimited, is not objective. The point of view offered to the reader is the protagonist's, the perspective of a downtrodden child and that substantially contributes to the justifiableness of the governess's violent death celebration. Ruth Maxey describes the importance of the subjective perspective as: "[It] convinces the reader, at a visceral level, that bloody death is a justified punishment for the sustained cruelty of adult guardians" (Maxey, 2005, 16).

Unlike the majority of Saki's stories, "Sredni Vashtar" is not altogether satiric. It belongs to the most serious stories of his work and confronts the reader with a delicate theme of the presence of evil in children and the influence of education. Two most frequent ways of the perception of children and childhood were connected with the behaviourism originating in the philosophy of John Locke supplemented by the theory of evolution and the Puritan Christian theory of the Original Sin and the connatural evil in man (Sattaur, c2011). The first school of thought grasps a child as a "tabula rasa", an individual without "innate ideas or principles" (Sills, 1968), therefore it is completely and systematically formed through experiences and education. "Education tames the chaos of childhood and produces the rational adult" S. Byrne comments on the Edwardian child-rearing. (c2007, 13) The crucial element in this process was the woman because she was seen as "transforming animal-like infants into cultured beings" (Ortner, c1974, 84).

The Christian point of view was even more determining. Although Bible depicts children as a "heritage from the Lord" and a "reward from him" (c1973, psalm127), the Puritan vision shaping the Victorian and Edwardian parenting was rather disturbing. As Jennifer Stattaur quoted Christine Sutphin, "children were tainted by original sin and must be closely controlled in order to save their souls". She further specifies the citation that the child was considered "as an entity in preparation for adulthood, naturally corrupt and ripe for correction and instruction at the earliest opportunity" (Sattaur, c2011, 5).

Saki challenges these theories not only in "Sredni Vashatar". In "Reginald on Worries" a young man pronounces the thought accompanying all Saki's children-focused stories:

> To my mind, education is an absurdly over-rated affair. At least, one never took it very seriously at school, where everything was done to bring it prominently under one's notice. Anything that is worth knowing one practically teaches oneself, and the rest obtrudes itself sooner or later.
> (Saki, 1982, 20)

Apparently, Saki's upbringing philosophy is closer to the Rousseau's thought presented by Amal Barnerjee in *Rosseau's Concept of Theatre*: "man is born with an innate sense of morality, which civilization corrupts" (Barnerjee, 1977, 173). The sense of morality

is strongly connected with the sense of justice and the juvenile protagonists dispose with a very violent equity conception. The way of the fight against injustice is often wild and full of aggressiveness. Whereas in some stories it takes form of mere practical jokes with a comical effect, the retaliation in "Sredni Vashtar" is horrific. As an example of the humorous revenge can serve a conflict form "The Boar Pig" where a young girl deals with the unfair preference of her cousin:

> It seems they thought I ate too much raspberry trifle at lunch, and they said Claude never eats too much raspberry trifle. [...] I waited till he was asleep, and tied his hands and started forcible feeding with a whole bucketful of raspberry trifle that they were keeping for the garden-party. Lots of it went on to his sailor-suit and some of it on to the bed, but a good deal went down Claude's throat, and they can't say again that he has never been known to eat too much raspberry trifle. (Saki, 1982, 247-248)

It is important to realize that the presence of evil in children in Saki's stories is not connate; it is a consequence of the inconsiderate upbringing and education and the last agonized effort for the emancipation. Since the agent of the education and child-rearing is the woman, she is stigmatized as the source of the worst evil. As a result of her cruel teaching methods, the transformation of the animal into the human is inverted and the lowest instincts of the child are awaken. The anti-heroines are by S. Byrne limned as the "women In Charge" who

> [...] stand for domesticity, constraint, and repression; they are guardians of everything utilitarian, hide-bound, rule-bound, costive, and established; everything a Saki hero would want to rebel against. The matron of suburbs is demonized. (Byrne, c2007, 183)

In accordance with Byrne's quotation also "The Lumber Room" is written. It discusses a similar theme of the children's oppression as "Sredni Vashtar"; the story is, however, more humorous and satiric. "The Lumber Room" complies with the structure of the "Sredni Vashtar" narrative in the field of characters as well as in the conventional upbringing methods criticism, use of the subjective third person narrator and use of the expressive language. In contrast to the previous story, Saki focuses rather on seemingly less grave issues of everyday life. Nonetheless, by dint of the common situations

depicted in the short story the female selfishness and inability in child-rearing is even more apparent.

The protagonist, Nicholas, is excluded from a trip to Jagborough Cove with other children due to his misbehaviour at the breakfast-table. His punishment is invented by his cousins' aunt who spends all the afternoon pretending to work in the garden just to watch the boy and to prevent him from breaking the rules of penance. The child seizes the offered opportunity and enters the forbidden area of a lumber room, a place full of treasures stimulating his imagination. Moreover, he is offered revenge when the aunt falls into a rain-water tank. Invoking to the previous restriction, he abuses her own commands and leaves her there. The punishment falls entirely flat when in the evening Nicholas is the only satisfied person at the dinner.

The cause of Nicholas' fall from grace is a bowl of bread-and-milk he refuses to eat under a pretext that there is a frog in it. The fact, that he put the frog into the bowl himself is in the story characterized as a mere childish pun with a simple goal to avoid the hated meal. Much more attention is paid to the inappropriate reaction of the adults, represented by women. His act of "spoiling a bowl of wholesome bread-and-milk" is designated as a sin and "enlarged on at great length" (Saki, 1982, 372) and he himself is declared being in disgrace.

The special stress laid on the wholesomeness of the dish together with the frequent occurrence of the word in the text reveals a strong sarcasm of the statement. The extreme irony also discloses the perspective of the subjective narrator, the perspective of Nicholas. In the eyes of children "wholesome" is often a synonym for "atrocious" and that obviously is also the case of the "bread-and-milk". Besides, the designation of this particular meal as wholesome requires a lot of courage. Saki in his story "Filboid Studge, the Story of a Mouse That Helped" expresses an opinion on the feminine cooking more openly: "Once the womenfolk discovered that it was thoroughly unpalatable, their zeal in forcing it on their households knew no bounds" (Saki, 1982, 160). Based on these situations, diet in the hands of women is presented as a bullying device.

Saki's portrayal of the antagonists carries perspicuous sarcastic features as well. The duennas are named as "the older and wiser and better people" (Saki, 1982, 371-372)

unshakably convinced of their truth. Instead of devoted caregivers they are elucidated as inward-looking and absolutely deaf to children's pleas and needs:

> "[..I]t will be a glorious afternoon for racing about over those beautiful sands. How they will enjoy themselves!" [said the aunt]
> "Bobby won't enjoy himself much, and he won't race much either," said Nicholas [...] "his boots are hurting him. They're too tight."
> "Why didn't he tell me they were hurting?" asked the aunt with some asperity.
> "He told you twice, but you weren't listening. You often don't listen when we tell you important things." (Saki, 1982, 373)

The sense of superiority over children and their total underestimation roots in the traditional hierarchy of adults and their offspring. In this relation children served as the source of the secondary status for mothers and as a tool of self-realization.

> The feeling of self-satisfaction (so typical of the nineteenth-century feminine role) came from the knowing exercise of moral sovereignty over domestic life and the education of children. (De Giorgio, c1993, 172)

The unflattering conception of female adults is also intensified by expressions such as the "soi-disant aunt" or "alleged aunt" referring to Nicholas' punishment executor, "his cousins' aunt, who insisted, by an unwarranted stretch of imagination, in styling herself his aunt also" (Saki, 1982, 372). By this wilful conduct, the strange woman promotes herself to the post of a family member responsible for the boy's education and upbringing and thus vindicates her pleasure in giving orders and chastising children.

> [She] hastily invented the Jagborough expedition in order to impress on Nicholas the delights that he had justly forfeited by his disgraceful conduct at the breakfast-table. It was her habit, whenever one of the children fell from grace, to improvise something of a festival nature from which the offender would be rigorously debarred; if all the children sinned collectively they were suddenly informed of a circus in a neighbouring town, a circus of unrivalled merit and uncounted elephants, to which, but for their depravity, they would have been taken that very day. (Saki, 1982, 372)

The cruelty is apparent from the deliberate hurting of the children's feelings and when excluded from the trip, Nicholas is even demanded to cry and be sad: "A few decent

tears were looked for on the part of Nicholas when the moment for the departure of the expedition arrived" (Saki, 1982, 372).

The attribute of finding pleasure in suffering of children is not the domain only of the guardians in "Sredni Vashtar" or "The Lumber Room", in "The Jesting of Arlington Stringham" Saki provides a suggestion that the severity is peculiar to all women, both childless and parent:

> And the page-boy stood there, with his sleekly brushed and parted hair, and his air of chaste and callous indifference to the desires and passions of the world. Eleanor hated boys, and she would have liked to have whipped this one long and often. It was perhaps the yearning of a woman who had no children of her own. (Saki, 1982, 134)

Although the aunt from "the Lumber Room" does not dispose of any rational reason to use the title, according to the rules of Saki's tales, she definitely earns the right to be awarded the name. The title of the aunt is in Saki's work bestowed to the malicious power usurpers abusing and torturing children entrusted to their custody. The meaning of the denomination is strongly deteriorated and its carriers approximate to the image of the villain stepmothers in traditional fairy tales depicted, for example, in "Snow-white" or "Cinderella". Apart from Saki's own aunts, the fairy-tale stepmothers can be considered a source of inspiration for the images of the villain guardians.

The ruthlessness, notwithstanding its criticism in the short stories, is not the cardinal source of the boys' affliction. Sandie Byrne suggests that

> the crime of women is not that they beat or otherwise physically abuse the children [...]. The great crime is that they condemn the children [...] to lives of dullness, sameness, boredom, and futility, as the Munro Aunts did the children given to their care (Byrne, c2007, 190).

In "The Lumber Room" the boredom and futility is represented by tasteless bread-and-milk breakfast, hastily organized tours with the only purpose to punish and especially by the forbidden lumber room. The forbidden chamber belongs to frequent literature motifs and is associated with a room where "something uncanny and formidable is usually kept" (Von Franz, c1996, 124). The breaking of the interdiction carries "[...] not only an implied punishment but also the promise to reveal secret wonders and

knowledge" (Haase, c2008, 371). In Saki's narrative the primary interpretation is not different:

> Often and often Nicholas had pictured to himself what the lumber-room might be like, that region that was so carefully sealed from youthful eyes and concerning which no questions were ever answered. It came up to his expectations. [...I]t was a storehouse of unimagined treasures. The aunt-by-assertion was one of those people who think that things spoil by use and consign them to dust and damp by way of preserving them. Such parts of the house as Nicholas knew best were rather bare and cheerless, but here there were wonderful things for the eye to feast on. (Saki, 1982, 374)

Yet, surprisingly, the secrets divulged do not hurt Nicholas but offer him a chance to triumph over his governess simply by the awareness of the violation of the rules and the escape to an imaginative world that saves the boy from the dullness of the afternoon and evening tea "partaken of in a fearsome silence" (Saki, 1982, 376).

The conquest of the lumber room and detection of its treasures also reinforces the picture of the governess as the unmerciful enemy of all pleasures in children's life as well as the suggested idea of her inappropriateness to raise children. From the aunt's attempt to moralize, it is apparent that she is not Rousseau's ideology sympathizer; however, she does not follow the systematic educational system of John Locke either. According to his philosophy, the education was especially to be systematic, coherent and aimed on the child thirst of knowledge stimulation:

> Locke laid down general rules of education, chiefly applicable (as he wrote) to gentry sons whose duty was to undertake public service. [...] Rewards and punishments were to be systematic but moderate. [..T]he child must be allowed to learn whenever ready and can often be cozened into learning by means of games and toys. Children's questions must always be answered truthfully, and conversation with them must be free of condescension. (Sills, 1968)

Beyond any doubt, the aunt's educational system of apace organized trips, unanswered questions and purposely bare environment does not meet the requirements of the progressive theory. She is not able to substantiate the reasons of the punishment and the insufficient logic of a mere "Because you are in disgrace." vindication for not allowing to enter the gooseberry garden is seen as inappropriate even by the convict

himself who feels “perfectly capable of being in disgrace and in a gooseberry garden at the same moment” (Saki, 1982, 373). The forbidden room with “treasures” awakening Nicolas’ imagination even directly contravenes the recommended attempt of natural personality development and formation through plays and toys, especially when the anxiously guarded precious objects are represented by a roll of Indian hangings, candlesticks in the shape of snakes, a teapot fashioned like a china duck or a picture book (Saki, 1982, 374-375). Concerning the punitive excursions effects, they are proven unsuccessful by the result of the Jagborough Cove:

> The tide had been at its highest when the children had arrived at Jagborough Cove, so there had been no sands to play on - a circumstance that the aunt had overlooked in the haste of organising her punitive expedition. The tightness of Bobby's boots had had disastrous effect on his temper the whole of the afternoon, and altogether the children could not have been said to have enjoyed themselves. (Saki, 1982, 375)

The overall summary of the aunt’s rising techniques can be summed up as a systematic repression of children’s individuality and violation of the reputable education rules. For her selfishness and ineptness, she is punished by a humiliating experience of being left in the rain-water tank.

Conclusion

Women in the Edwardian period were considered to be inferior to men and their position in society was burdened by outlasting Victorian prejudices and conventions. The fulfilment of their lives was seen in the roles of mothers and yielded wives, the roles for that, according to the Edwardians, they were naturally suited. The idealized divine females were raised on pedestals and adored; however, their less obedient colleagues were deemed as deviant and anomalous.

The portrayal of women in Saki's short prose significantly differs. Not only are they described as not being subordinate but they are also presented as the main source of evil for both men and children. To analyse this phenomenon was the aim of this bachelor thesis. Following stories were chosen to demonstrate the image of women in Saki's short stories: "The Seven Cream Jugs", "The Reticence of Lady Anne", "Tea", "The Quest", "Esmé", "Sredni Vashtar" and "The Lumber Room".

The first chapter provided the reader with the theoretical background essential for the analysis. The crucial political events of the era were mentioned as well as the paradoxical situation of the upper classes, which Saki satirizes in his works. Special attention was paid to the overestimated value of conventions that caused the rise of decadence in society. Further, the idea of the angelic female idol was presented and the inferior position of women was described together with the theory of domestic and public spheres. The author of the analysed stories was briefly introduced as well.

The analytical part of the work was divided into two main chapters focused on the relation of women and other characters in Saki's short stories. In the chapter "Man-Woman Relation" the relation was described through the institution of marriage. Behaviour of the protagonists was analysed and the analysis revealed that in the female heroines, Mrs. Pigeoncote ("The Seven Cream Jugs") and Lady Anne ("The Reticence of Lady Anne"), Saki significantly violates the traditional way of portraying women. Both Mrs. Pigeoncote and Lady Anne are depicted as the abusers and manipulators seizing power over their husbands and thus humiliating them. The uncommon phenomenon of the unpunished anomalous women was also examined. Special attention was paid to the short story "Tea" where even the conception of the passive woman as the ideal wife is contested.

The second part of the analysis, "Child-Woman Relation", was aimed at the contrast of the promoted image of women as loving mothers and governesses, and on the grim illustration of the Sakian guardians. The Edwardian idea presenting females as naturally tender and considerate was found significantly distinct from their representation in the short stories. In "the Quest" Mrs. Momeby is portrayed as incapable to care of her son, in "Esmé" the heroine is unmoved by witnessing a murder of a child and presents it as a intensifier in her hunting tale and the governesses from "Sredni Vashtar" and "The Lumber Room" are verily demonized.

Apart from the behaviour towards the children, the impact of irrational educative methods and maltreatment was examined. The motifs of child adoption were put into the context of the possible ways of the female social status amelioration and also Saki's own childhood experiences were used to outline possible reasons for the extraordinary negativism present in his child-woman stories.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá analýzou ženských postav v povídkách H. H. Munroa píšícího pod pseudonymem ‘Saki’. Ženské hrdinky z vyšší společnosti jsou v jeho povídkách častým terčem satiry a kritiky, což není v literatuře edwardovské doby příliš častým jevem. Jejich zpodobnění ve vybraných povídkách je proto porovnáno s ideálem tehdejší doby, zejména s povahovými rysy ženského idolu. Vybranými povídkami jsou: „Sedm konviček“, „Mlčení Lady Anny“, „Tea“ [1], „Ztracené batole“, „Esmé“, „Sredni Vahtar“ a „Haraburďárna“.

Práce je rozdělena do tří základních kapitol. V úvodní části je čtenář stručně seznámen se základními teoretickými informacemi nezbytnými pro následný rozbor děl, jako je historické pozadí, ženský ideál na přelomu devatenáctého a dvacátého století, a základní informace o autorovi. Následující analytická kapitola je zaměřena na stereotypní vnímání ženy jako manželky a je rozdělena do dvou podkapitol zabývajících se konkrétní podobou této role v Sakiho povídkách. První se zabývá zobrazením manželky v podobě manipulativní a despotické uzurpátorky moci, druhá jejím pasivním protějškem. Třetí a poslední kapitola popisuje ženu ve vztahu k dětem, jenž je dalším stereotypem v oblasti ženských sociálních rolí. Je taktéž rozdělena do dvou podkapitol, první stručně pojednává o vztahu žen k malým nebo cizím dětem, druhá o pečovatelkách a opatrovnicích, které v Sakiho tvorbě zaujímají velice specifické postavení.

Edwardovským obdobím se označuje období vlády krále Edwarda VII. ve Spojeném království mezi lety 1901 a 1910, často však bývá prodlužována až do propuknutí první světové války v roce 1914. Přestože tato éra bývá často retrospektivně označována za zlatou, jedná se o období plné kontrastů a změn. Mnozí autoři zabývající se studiem této doby, včetně S. Hynese, D. Reada, J. B. Priestlyho a R. Cecila, domněnku o zlaté éře Anglie zpochybňují. S. Hynes a J. B. Priestly ji dokonce označují za období úpadku a dekadence, kdy přílišné lpění na konvencích a stereotypech vedlo ke vzniku paradoxních situací. Zatímco pro horní společenské vrstvy se nákladná zábava stala náročnou povinností, nižší vrstvy hrozivě strádaly. Výrazné rozdíly v životní úrovni privilegovaných a běžných obyvatel vedly k rostoucímu napětí ve

[1] Chybí český překlad

společnosti. Výsledkem byl vznik protestních hnutí, zejména socialistických a feministických.

Lpění na stereotypních řádech a pevně daných pravidlech je patrné i z ideálu ženství. Protože edwardovské období bylo příliš krátké pro vytvoření vlastních ideálů, přetrvávaly názory z dob viktoriánských. Za ideál krásy tak na počátku dvacátého století Angličané stále považovali subtilní a křehkou dívku, jejíž bledost a očividná slabost v nich vzbuzovala soucit a ochranitelské sklony. Její osobnost pak byla striktně omezena pravidly vhodného chování určenými, mimo jiné, i ideologií dvou oddělených sfér. Jedné veřejné, určené výhradně mužům, a jedné domácí, určené ženám. Hlavním úkolem ženy tak bylo plnit roli odevzdané a snaživé manželky, poskytující oporu svému muži. Jedinou další možností seberealizace bylo mateřství nebo pečovatelství, které, i když bylo od žen přímo vyžadováno, poskytovalo i možnost zvýšení sociálního statutu, neboť matka svou hodnotou výrazně převyšovala bezdětnou ženu. Pro tyto dvě role byla žena, podle filosofů, přímo předurčena. Oba výše zmíněné aspekty tehdejší společnosti, nadhodnocování stereotypů a extrémní idealizace ženství, použil Saki jako zdroj satiry ve svých povídkách.

Saki, vlastním jménem Hector Hugh Munro (1870-1916), je dnes v literárním světě známý především jako autor ostře satirických povídek prodchnutých typickým černým humorem a cynismem. Dekadentní pojetí jeho tvorby bylo předznamenáno už výběrem pseudonymu na základě Fitzgeraldova překladu pesimisticky laděné antické perské poezie *Čtyřverší Omara Chajjáma.* V jeho díle se tak čtenář setkává s degradací prakticky všech společenských hodnot a s téměř absolutní absencí kladných postav. Výjimku tvoří pouze děti, a to zejména chlapci ve věku okolo deseti let, u kterých je snadné vypozorovat inspiraci autorovým vlastním dětstvím. Ve věku pouhých dvou let byl spolu se sourozenci svěřen do péče dvou staropanenských tet, ve které, podle jeho sestry Ethel, děti trpěly nedostatkem pozornosti a citu. Naprostá averze vůči dospělým opatrovatelkám a jejich démonizace v celé Sakiho tvorbě tuto myšlenku podporuje.

První část analýzy se soustředí na instituci manželství, v době edwardovské nejběžnější prostředí s vlivem na vztahy mužů a žen. V povídce „Sedm konviček“ manželé Pigeoncotovi očekávají návštěvu bohatého rodinného příslušníka povýšeného do šlechtického stavu právě v době, kdy slaví stříbrnou svatbu. Protože ho považují za člověka trpícího kleptomanií, přesvědčí žena svého muže k prohledání návštěvníkových

věcí. Po zjištění, že došlo k záměně jmen a osob a Pigeoncotovi tedy svého hosta okradli, obviní manželka svého muže v jeho nepřítomnosti z kleptomanie. Vyřeší tak aktuální problém, svého manžela ale společensky znemožní.

Pozornost je zaměřena především na výraznou odlišnost literární manželky v podobě paní Pigeoncotové od edwardovského ideálu. Saki představuje svazek, ve kterém jsou oba aktéři pravými opaky tohoto ideálu. Hrdinka je obdařena negativními vlastnostmi, jako je pokrytectví a závist, a nabízí velice málo prostoru pro obdiv. Autor navíc upozorňuje na skrytou moc, kterou má nad svým mužem, neboť nejen že je žena iniciátorem všech aktivit, ale také jí její manžel dobrovolně přenechá starost o vyřešení vzniklého nedorozumění. Spoléhání na její loajálnost a poslušnost se ukáže býti bláhovým, protože paní Pigeoncotová svého muže poníží a zostudí jen proto, aby zachránila vlastní čest.

Povídka „Mlčení Lady Anny“ líčí rozdělení moci v manželství podobným způsobem. Muž, vcházející do místnosti za svou, pohádce trucující, ženou pod tíhou jejího mlčení klesne pod únosnou mezi edwardovské sebeúcty a snaží se o usmíření i za cenu neopodstatněného sebeobviňování.

Zásadním jevem obou děl je skutečnost, že obě ženy, jak paní Pigeoncotová, tak Lady Anna, výrazně vybočují z rámce chování považovaného v dané době za standardní a žádané. Nekonvenční ženy vystupující samostatně, nárokující si moc a celkově se odlišující od uznávaných stereotypů bývaly, nejen v literatuře, chápány jako deviantní a abnormální a za svou odlišnost byly odsuzovány a trestány. V literatuře proto na přelomu devatenáctého a dvacátého století sílila kritika této pozice žen a byly zobrazovány jako utiskované a trpící, vzorem může být například postava Jany Eyrové ve stejnojmenném románu Charlotte Bronteové. V Sakiho povídkách však Lady Anna ani paní Pigeoncotová potrestány nejsou, naopak, trpícími postavami jsou muži a ženy jsou pouze označeny za zdroj jejich strádání.

Výjimkou v Sakiho tvorbě je portrét ženy splňující veškeré požadavky společnosti, tedy zdánlivě ideální partnerky, která se objevuje v povídce „Tea“. V tomto díle je mladý a finančně velice dobře zaopatřený muž James přesvědčen ke sňatku s mladou dívkou z lepší společnosti. V poslední snaze vyhnout se nenáviděnému stereotypu a konvenčnímu způsobu života se rozhodne vzít si pracující dívku z nižší střední vrstvy, která ho získá neformálně podávaným čajem o páté. Ustálený ceremoniál

spojený s podáváním čaje je zřejmou alegorií pro celý frustrující a monotónní život anglické střední a vyšší třídy. Pod tíhou společenských konvencí a pod nově nabytým společenským postavením se však i tato dívka změní v konvenční a pasivní ženu.

Je zajímavým faktem, že i tato dívka je v Sakiho povídkách považována za zdroj mužského utrpení, přestože se svou oddaností a submisivitou je pravým opakem panovačných žen z předcházejících dvou povídek. Celkové vyznění povídek tedy odhaluje ženu jako zdroj veškerých strastí v mužských životech, bez ohledu na to, zda je panovačná nebo extrémně oddaná.

Druhá část analýzy je zaměřena na vztah žen a dětí, který byl v tehdejší době rovněž silně ovlivněn naivními představami. Podle těchto představ každá žena byla od přírody láskyplnou a pečující matkou, pokud tento svůj životní cíl nemohla naplnit, měla si alespoň najít povolání spojené s pečovatelstvím nebo opatrovnictvím. Saki tento názor zpochybňuje a v povídkách prezentuje ženy dětmi zcela nezaujaté.

První podkapitola pojednává o ženách ve vztahu ke kojencům a k dětem cizím. Mladá matka v povídce „Ztracené batole“ se, namísto hledání potomka, vyžívá v pozornosti získané jeho ztrátou. Zmizení nemluvněte navíc bylo zaviněno nedostatkem matčiny pozornosti a tedy její neschopností se o dítě postarat. V kapitole je také nastíněna problematika nechtěných dětí, jejichž osud je všem, včetně žen, lhostejný. V povídce „Esmé“ je hlavní hrdinkou žena, která z příběhu o dítěti sežraném hyenou vytvoří svou oblíbenou loveckou povídku a smrt dítěte přejde jen jako nepříjemnost.

Nejzávažnější téma Sakiho povídek je zpracováno v druhé podkapitole zaměřené na opatrovnice. V této oblasti je nejpatrnější vliv autorových zážitků z dětství, nepříliš šťastného období prožitého pod dozorem dvou nepříliš přátelských tet. V povídce „Sredni Vashtar“ autor zpracovává problematiku vlivu nepřátelského prostředí na psychiku dítěte a jeho morální hodnoty. Neustálá šikana ze strany opatrovnice dovede dětského protagonistu až k uctívání krvelačné šelmy a modlení se za smrt své příbuzné. Když zvíře ženu nakonec zabije, má chlapec pocit zadostiučinění. Tento postoj je v povídce ospravedlněn nárokem utiskovaných na vzpouru a absolutní démonizací ženy.

Téma pokrytectví a výchovných omylů pečovatelek je hlouběji rozvedeno v povídce „Haraburďárna“. V rámci rozboru této povídky je věnována pozornost i postavám tet v Sakiho tvorbě. Tety v ní obvykle nesou společné zlomyslné rysy a patří

mezi nejzápornější postavy celého díla, neboť i když děti netýrají fyzicky, vyžívají se v jejich psychologické šikaně. Zbavují je tak volnosti a odsuzují k neutěšenému konvenčnímu životu.

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