



UNIVERZITA  
PARDUBICE

University of Pardubice

Faculty of Arts and Philosophy

*„Mother, it's too bad, I don't like men...“*: Forms of Lesbian  
Love and Sexuality in the First Half of the 20th Century

A Summary of Doctoral Thesis

Author: Mgr. Denisa Vídeňská

Pardubice 2024

## **Introduction**

The presented dissertation examines forms of lesbian love and sexuality in the first half of the 20th century. The topic has previously been addressed by medical and judicial apparatuses. Both of these apparatuses produced knowledge about homosexual women, thereby shaping their image in society. In the field of medicine, it was possible to draw from medical textbooks, reports, and studies. The medical perspective on homosexuality was further examined through a case study of an individual referred to as A. H., and through medical certificates that were part of criminal files. In the Czech territory, homosexuality was a criminal offense until 1961, regardless of gender. The work examines 16 cases involving homosexual women in Bohemia and Moravia. Through these cases, it was possible to study not only the functioning of the judicial apparatus but also traces of women's daily lives. Some cases also included love correspondence, which provides an interesting insight into female intimacy. The work further focuses on literary discourse. The image of the lesbian woman in the first half of the 20th century was shaped not only by literary works

but also by plays and films that were presented to the Czech audience. Responses to this production are reflected in reports by critics and reviewers. The contemporary press is thus another source that shaped the image of lesbian women in society. Among literary productions, it is necessary to highlight the influence of the magazine *Hlas*,<sup>1</sup> which advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality and was the only Czech medium at the time that actively fought against the stigmatization of homosexuality through its texts. The work examines the writings of four authors who were centered around the magazine *Hlas* and who addressed the issue of romantic relationships between women in their texts.

## Historiography

From a historiographical perspective, Jiří Fanel published an extensive factual monograph on the history

---

<sup>1</sup> *Hlas sexuální menšiny: zájmy uznávané vědou a kulturními státy*. Praha: František Černý, 1931-1931. roč. 1, č. 1-16.; *Hlas: list sexuální menšiny*. Praha: Vojtěch Černý, 1932-1937. Roč. 2, č. 1-4 (1932), roč. 3, č. 1 (1936) - roč. 4, č. 1 (1937).; *Nový hlas: list pro sexuální reformu*. Hranice: Josef Hladký, 1932-1934. Roč. 1 (1932) - roč. 3 (1934).

of homosexuality titled *Gay historie* in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

The first monograph *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury* from 2011, on which historian Martin C. Putna and a team of authors worked, provides a comprehensive overview of homosexuality in the history of Czech culture and art.<sup>3</sup> The second monograph, titled *Od žaláře k oltáři: Emancipace homosexuality v českých zemích od roku 1867 do současnosti* was published in 2012, based on the work of historian Jan Seidl. In this work, the author mapped the process of the criminalization and decriminalization of homosexuality and connected it to the emancipation movement and activist efforts of men and women, extending into the 21st century.<sup>4</sup> The third publication, „*Miluji tvory svého pohlaví*“, released in 2013, is a collection of studies by a group of authors who presented the changing perspectives on same-sex behavior

---

<sup>2</sup> FANEL, Jíří. *Gay historie*. Praha: Dauphin, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> PUTNA, Martin C (a kol.). *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury*. Praha: Academia, 2011.; Vztah problematiky queer a české kultury taktéž viz: ZIKMUND-LENDER, Ladislav (ed.). *V!Z Texty o (queer) kultuře, reprezentaci, vizualitě*. Praha: Charlie o. s., 2011.

<sup>4</sup> SEIDL, Jan. *Od žaláře k oltáři: Emancipace homosexuality v českých zemích od roku 1867 do současnosti*. Brno: Host, 2012.

in the past.<sup>5</sup> During the second decade of the 21st century, a non-governmental and non-profit organization called the Společnost pro queer paměť was established in Prague. Its aim is to collect, preserve, research, and popularize the history of queer people in the Czech territory.<sup>6</sup> The most recent publication, which also takes readers into the second half of the 20th century, is the 2021 book *Queer Encounters with Communist Power* by Věra Sokolová.<sup>7</sup> Through oral and archival research, it examines the influence of medicine on queer individuals and the formation of their identities under the shadow of state-stigmatized sexuality, which was labeled and understood as an illness. In the near future, Czech-speaking readers can also look forward to a publication titled *Lidé bez dějin jsou prach: Queer touha a holocaust*, which is expected to be released in Czech translation in 2024 by Akropolis

---

<sup>5</sup> HIML, Pavel. SEIDL, Jan. SCHINDLER, Franz (edd.). „Miluji tvory svého pohlaví“: *Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*. Praha: Argo, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Společnost pro queer paměť. Dostupné z: <https://www.queerpamet.cz/>. [cit. 2022-09-12].

<sup>7</sup> SOKOLOVÁ, Věra. *Queer Encounters with Communist Power*. Praha: Karolinum, 2021.

Publishing. The book was written by historian Anna Hájková.<sup>8</sup>

## **Structure of dissertation and sources**

The Czech historiographical environment, which deals with the history of homosexuality with a focus on women, has so far agreed that sources for this research are difficult to find. The author of this dissertation has therefore decided to face this challenge, among other things, to find traces concerning female homosexuality in the first half of the 20th century.

In the past, the medical apparatus addressed the topic of homosexual people. Therefore, the dissertation draws from published professional and popular medical manuals, studies, and dictionaries.

The medical field coexisted with and influenced the legal apparatus. Finding individual criminal cases containing compromising paragraphs is quite challenging. Researchers have previously focused on searching for

---

<sup>8</sup> Publikace je nyní dostupná v německém originále, viz: HÁJKOVÁ, Anna. *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub: Queeres Verlangen im Holocaust*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2024.

these sources in several areas of the Czech Republic. Regional courts in Prague, Plzeň, and Hradec Králové, which had jurisdiction over not only regional cities but also associated areas, were investigated by Jan Seidl and Lukáš Nozar.<sup>9</sup> The Regional Court in Chrudim was examined by Jan Krčál.<sup>10</sup> Criminal files dealing with the criminalization of homosexuality from the Regional Court in Brno were used in a research study by Michal Mako.<sup>11</sup>

Researchers managed to find records of persecuted homosexuals, with one common finding: statistically, significantly fewer women were prosecuted for

---

<sup>9</sup> SEIDL, Jan. *Homosexualita v praxi a diskurzu trestního práva, medicíny a občanské společnosti od vydání trestního zákona z roku 1852 do přijetí trestního zákona z roku 1961*. Dizertační práce, Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 2012. s. 39-61.

<sup>10</sup> KRČÁL, Jan. *Nemiluj mě, tohle se nedělá: Homosexualita na Pardubicku*. Diplomová práce, Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> MAKO, Michal. Kritika trestných paragrafov smilstva proti prírode v Československu (1918-1938). In: KOBER, Jan (ed.) a kol. *Republika mezi rovností, růzností a jednotou*. Praha: Academia, 2023. s. 131-176.; Michal Mako also addressed changes and parallels in the criminalization of homosexuality in Czechoslovakia in another study, where he was likely one of the first researchers to include Slovak Košice in his research. MAKO, Michal. Kriminalizácia homosexuality v Československu (1918–1938) – nástupníckom štáte Rakúsko-Uhorska. Zmeny, vplyvy, paralely. In: *Studia historica Brunensia*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2019, roč. 65, č. 2, s. 71-83.

homosexuality compared to men. For example, in the Hradec Králové region, no case or record was found that related to female homosexuality, even if it only involved accused women, not charged or convicted ones. In Prague, in contrast to hundreds of cases of male homosexuality, only a few records related to female homosexuality were preserved. A similar situation was found in Plzeň. It should be noted that not all recorded accusations or charges have preserved sources in the archives. Additionally, Jan Krčál found 35 cases, of which he described 19 in detail, while the remaining were used only for statistical data. Only one of the total 35 cases involved two women from a rural environment who had a romantic relationship.<sup>12</sup> Michal Mako also discovered the case of two maids from Tišnov, which was adjudicated by the Regional Criminal Court in Brno.<sup>13</sup> The low frequency of cases involving women has so far been one of the reasons why researchers have not exclusively addressed this issue, or rather, could not address it. For this study, a total of 16 cases of women who maintained romantic, intimate

---

<sup>12</sup> KRČÁL, J., *Nemiluj mě*, s. 81-85.

<sup>13</sup> MAKO, M., *Kritika trestných paragrafov*, s. 166-167.

relationships were collected and analyzed. In only one case is this fact disputed, as it is possible that it resulted from a denunciation by a disgruntled neighbor. One case comes from České Budějovice, six cases occurred in the Olomouc region, two are from Brno, and seven cases are from Prague.

The author of this work received tips on the Brno and Prague cases from the aforementioned historian Jan Seidl, who discovered them during his own research and meticulously recorded their archival locations. This greatly facilitated the lengthy search for §129 in the criminal books and registers of the regional courts in these areas.

In the case of České Budějovice, the materials were found thanks to the digitized register of indictments of the State Prosecutor's Office in České Budějovice, stored in the State Regional Archives in Třeboň.<sup>14</sup> The author of this work was led to the Olomouc cases by an article about the so-called Prostějov affair, which was frequently mentioned in the contemporary press. Further

---

<sup>14</sup> SOA Třeboň, Třeboň, Krajský soud České Budějovice, Záznamy obžalob, bez záznamů obžalob pro lichvu. Rejstřík žalob (1922-1924).

investigation revealed that the Regional Court in Olomouc held, in addition to this case, several other files concerning the trials of homosexual women. This discovery was aided by a well-organized register, which was meticulously categorized by diligent archivists into various topics, one of which was homosexuality, significantly helping with the entire search process.<sup>15</sup>

The women discussed in this work came from different social strata – from wealthier urban families, from working-class or rural backgrounds, to the social periphery. These factors influenced their defense strategies and ways of expression. For instance, some women might not have been aware of the option of utilizing a medical examination if it was not ordered by the court. The oldest case in the studied collection was resolved in court in 1924, and the most recent in 1945. Therefore, the work will deal with cases resolved during the First Republic period as well as after the establishment of the Protectorate – in these instances, the cases were

---

<sup>15</sup> ZAO, Olomouc, Krajský soud v Olomouci, Katalog trestních spisů sg. Vr a TK. z let 1918-1938, svazek I. r. 1918-1932.; Katalog trestních spisů sg. Vr a TK z let 1918-1938. svazek II. r. 1933-1938.

handled by Protectorate authorities, not the Reich authorities. The arrangement of the individual cases was chosen both chronologically, from the oldest to the youngest, and by the respective regions. In seven out of the total 16 cases, the files include medical reports from district or court physicians, among other documents. Other sources include a smaller number of preserved photographs, postcards, and, not least, personal correspondence. For the police, these materials served as evidence, while for this work, they are considered personal written sources, expressions of feelings and intimacy of the individual women. Due to this diversity, criminal cases represent a conceptual space connecting medical and legal discourse and also provide an insight into the personal perspective and daily life of these women.

The third section focuses more on the area of culture. Here, it was possible to analyze plays and films that dealt with the theme of female homosexuality and helped shape its image. Other important sources in this work are works in the form of novels, shorter stories, and texts by four authors who advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality, thematized it, and

sought to normalize queer relationships. In this regard, the magazine *Hlas*, which was published in the 1930s and underwent several organizational and editorial changes, serves as an important platform for these texts.

In addition to the magazine *Hlas*, another supplementary source is the contemporary press. Newspapers provided their readers with information about scandals from the world of court trials. Additionally, critics and reviewers expressed their opinions on theatrical and film productions that thematized female homosexuality.

## **Methodology**

The work is based on Erving Goffman's philosophy of stigma.<sup>16</sup> The symbolically ubiquitous stigma existed for homosexuals in the form of criminality and was produced by conflicting opinions of physicians. The shadow of stigma represented (and still represents) a problem, an obstacle that affects an individual's life,

---

<sup>16</sup> GOFFMAN, Erving. *Stigma: Poznámky o způsobech narušené identity*. Praha: SLON, 2003.

identity formation, approach to their body, and intimacy in romantic relationships. The impact of this stigma depends on various conditions reflecting the strength of this symbolic pressure, such as religion, family background, or relationships with friends. For individuals with supportive environments, the law might often be just a formal inconvenience, while for others, it can have fatal consequences.

It was also important to define a stance against the approach of essentialism. People justify their behavior through their biological sex, both in the past and today, making it an inseparable part of their identity and perceiving this experience as natural. Judith Butler,<sup>17</sup> using the concept of performativity, shifts these discussions by asserting that it is the language of culture that helps create social categories into which the definition of a person and their body must fit and in which individuals understand themselves.

People perceive the offered groups as natural, even though they were formed long before their birth and

---

<sup>17</sup> BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 2006.

shaped over centuries into the form presented to them from childhood through upbringing. They become an essential part of their socialization. The development of gender categories and the principle under which they were formed was presented by Thomas Laqueur.<sup>18</sup> He points out that the system of dual body division was shaped and reinforced from the 17th century, eventually prevailing over the one-sex model. The impacts of essentialism on thinking about the body can then be observed in a range of counter-opinions and stereotypes about the female body, its form, ability to perceive, and experience desire, and so on.

Sexuality is also a part of human identity, and according to Michel Foucault,<sup>19</sup> it has been shaped and transformed. Through the approach of *scientia sexualis*, naming and categorizing means the possibility of control and definition. This approach does not necessarily have to be seen as negative, especially concerning safety issues. We can then discuss the extent to which it is appropriate

---

<sup>18</sup> LAQUEUR, Thomas. *Rozkoš mezi pohlavími: Sexuální diference od antiky po Freuda*. Praha: Karolinum, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> FOUCAULT, Michel. *Dějiny sexuality I. – Vůle k vědění*. Praha: Hermann & synové, 1999.

to define categories and when the freedom of intimacy should be left, following the example of ars erotica.

Within the topic, one can encounter the polemic of feminist theorists from the 1980s. Here, the main issue is the promotion of the category of lesbians as a separate group existing outside patriarchal society and culture. A supposed lesbian core protects a woman from the influence of her own habitus, thus again denying the influence of culture as such. The author of this work believes that it is indeed the culture that has the power to influence a person's thinking about their body and sexuality. The work then relies on the terms of Annemarie Jagose, who aptly calls such thinking a "*lesbian utopia*," something that simply cannot exist.<sup>20</sup>

Queer theory struggles with trying to include in its research all the differences that do not fit into the heteronormative. Queer is, in a way, a useful term for open thinking about people in the past, oscillating between gender categories and the two-sex biological model, seeking gaps behind these variable terms. There is a

---

<sup>20</sup> JAGOSE, Annemarie. *Lesbian Utopics*. London: Routledge, 1995.

paradox here: if a cultural situation arose where everything could exist under the term queer, such a term would no longer be needed. The result would be the idea of recognizing the indefinability of the body, sexuality as a variable spectrum, and redefining what it truly means to become a human being, not a man or a woman. It is not immediately necessary to discard, or as in radical thinking (see Adrienne Rich), to denounce all human actions and cultural heritage that both these categories carry. However, it is also not possible to cling to such prejudices that have the power to complicate human life, which is already a relatively (not always in a negative sense) challenging experience.<sup>21</sup>

## **Results**

The dissertation progresses in a conceptual direction from the top, starting with images of lesbian sexuality created by power apparatuses, institutions, and

---

<sup>21</sup> MCCANN, Hannah. MONAGHAN, Whitney. *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures*. UK: Red Globe Press, 2020.

platforms, down to the images produced by the women themselves.

Therefore, it was important to determine how the medical and judicial apparatuses viewed female homosexuality. In the case of medicine, the essentialist approach influenced doctors' thinking about female homosexuality. Medicine and law were interconnected, which was most evident in practice in individual criminal cases through medical reports. At the same time, the prevailing approaches of the time were evident, where homosexuality was considered acquired, thus gained from a negative environment, and strictly evaluated as a moral offense. On the other hand, there was homosexuality, which was, especially in the eyes of doctors, assessed as innate. This second version prevailed later in the second half of the 20th century. The homosexual individual lost the identity of a criminal but gained the identity of a sexually deviant person who, although not responsible for their illness because they were born with it, was still considered suspicious or potentially dangerous to society. On the other hand, medicine could practically help women in court proceedings. Women then cared less about being

perceived by the apparatus as hysterical or otherwise mentally unstable. What was important was that this strategy allowed them to avoid prison.

For the dissertation, 16 cases were found. However, these cases actually involved a much larger number of women who formed a complex network of social relationships. The sources were important not only for analyzing the practices of justice and forensic medicine but also as an insight into everyday life and lesbian sociability in the first half of the 20th century. Some files also contained love letters, which then became an interesting source for analyzing literary sources.

Another part of the work aimed to map the images of lesbian love and sexuality in literature, film, and theater. Here, attention was focused on the production of foreign works that were presented to the Czech audience and to which critics in the contemporary press responded. Another part then focused on the production of lesbian literature by authors who were centered around the magazine *Hlas*. The magazine advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality in society. In the work, it was possible to observe the change in narratives

and the adoption of pathologizing patterns that literature took over from the medical apparatus.

At the end of the work, various expressions of intimacy were selected in the form of quotes from the women themselves, which well captured their perception of sexuality and provided a deeper insight into their relationships and feelings. This work fills a gap in the field of Czech queer historiography and provides a portrayal of lesbian women from both sides: from the perspective of public apparatuses and culture, and from the women themselves.

## Bibliography

BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 2006.

FANEL, Jiří. *Gay historie*. Praha: Dauphin, 2000.

FOUCAULT, Michel. *Dějiny sexuality I. – Vůle k vědění*. Praha: Hermann & synové, 1999.

GOFFMAN, Erving. *Stigma: Poznámky o způsobech narušené identity*. Praha: SLON, 2003.

HÁJKOVÁ, Anna. *Menschen ohne Geschichte sind Staub: Queeres Verlangen im Holocaust*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2024.

*Hlas sexuální menšiny: zájmy uznávané vědou a kulturními státy*. Praha: František Černý, 1931-1931. roč. 1, č. 1-16.

*Hlas: list sexuální menšiny*. Praha: Vojtěch Černý, 1932-1937. Roč. 2, č. 1-4 (1932), roč. 3, č. 1 (1936) - roč. 4, č. 1 (1937).;

*Nový hlas: list pro sexuální reformu*. Hranice: Josef Hladký, 1932-1934. Roč. 1 (1932) - roč. 3 (1934).

HIML, Pavel. SEIDL, Jan. SCHINDLER, Franz (edd.). *„Miluji tvory svého pohlaví“: Homosexualita v dějinách a společnosti českých zemí*. Praha: Argo, 2013.

JAGOSE, Annamarie. *Lesbian Utopics*. London: Routledge, 1995.

KRČÁL, Jan. *Nemiluj mě, tohle se nedělá: Homosexualita na Pardubicku*. Diplomová práce, Pardubice: Univerzita Pardubice, 2019.

LAQUEUR, Thomas. *Rozkoš mezi pohlavími: Sexuální diference od antiky po Freuda*. Praha: Karolinum, 2017.

MAKO, Michal. Kritika trestných paragrafov smilstva proti přírode v Československu (1918-1938). In: KOBER, Jan (ed.) a kol. *Republika mezi rovností, růzností a jednotou*. Praha: Academia, 2023. s. 131-176.

MCCANN, Hannah. MONAGHAN, Whitney. *Queer Theory Now: From Foundations to Futures*. UK: Red Globe Press, 2020.

MAKO, Michal. Kriminalizácia homosexuality v Československu (1918–1938) – nástupníckom štáte Rakúsko-Uhorska. Zmeny, vplyvy, paralely. In: *Studia historica Brunensia*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2019, roč. 65, č. 2, s. 71-83.

PUTNA, Martin C (a kol.). *Homosexualita v dějinách české kultury*. Praha: Academia, 2011.

SEIDL, Jan. *Od žaláře k oltáři: Emancipace homosexuality v českých zemích od roku 1867 do současnosti*. Brno: Host, 2012.

SEIDL, Jan. *Homosexualita v praxi a diskurzu trestního práva, medicíny a občanské společnosti od vydání trestního zákona z roku 1852 do přijetí trestního zákona z roku 1961*. Dizertační práce, Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 2012. s. 39-61.

SOKOLOVÁ, Věra. *Queer Encounters with Communist Power*. Praha: Karolinum, 2021.

Společnost pro queer paměť. Dostupné z: <https://www.queerpamet.cz/>. [cit. 2022-09-12].

SOA Třeboň, Třeboň, Krajský soud České Budějovice, Záznamy obžalob, bez záznamů obžalob pro lichvu. Rejstřík žalob (1922-1924).

ZAO, Olomouc, Krajský soud v Olomouci, Katalog trestních spisů sg. Vr a TK. z let 1918-1938, svazek I. r. 1918-1932.; Katalog trestních spisů sg. Vr a TK z let 1918-1938. svazek II. r. 1933-1938.