

**MODERN
CZECH POETRY**

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Modern Czech poetry by Paul Selver

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PAUL SELVER

**MODERN
CZECH POETRY**

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CZECH POETRY

SELECTED TEXTS WITH TRANSLATIONS
AND AN INTRODUCTION BY

P. SELVER

LONDON

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

DR. JOSEF KARÁSEK (1868—1916)

AND

OTAKAR THEER (1880—1917)

PREFACE.

The general arrangement of this book is uniform with that of my "Modern Russian Poetry", and here, as there, an endeavour has been made to reconcile linguistic and literary interests. I should like to emphasise this, because the publication of the original texts might lead to the erroneous idea that this was intended mainly as a philological work.

As regards the choice of authors, Březina, Machar, Sova and Vrchlický (perhaps also Bezruč), by their undisputed position in Czech literature, claimed an immediate precedence. I was then left with the familiar problem of little space and much material, and as a result I regretfully had to omit a number of poets whom I should have included in a larger collection.

In choosing the single items, I aimed at as wide a variety as possible. Thus, where the work of the poets concerned covers a long period, I have taken examples which indicate something of their artistic development. Critics who are familiar with the material will understand that, for obvious reasons, this process could be carried out only in an imperfect manner. For example, Vrchlický's work covers so wide an area, that I have not even attempted to deal with its later phases. But even in that exceptional instance, I followed my principle as far as I went, and I think that this method will be an advantage to readers who seek literary information.

A few translations are reprinted from my "Anthology of Modern Slavonic Literature"; these are marked with an asterisk.

For several years a large amount of material for my work has been made accessible to me through the generosity of Czech authors and publishers. In this respect, I should here like to

mention with gratitude the names of Dr. Jaromír Borecký, Fr. Borový, Antonín Klášterský, J. S. Machar, Dr. Arne Novák, J. Otto, Fr. S. Procházka, Antonín Sova, F. Šimáček, Karel Toman and L. N. Zvěřina. Finally I have to thank Dr. Josef Baudiš, Mr. Aleš Brož and Dr. Vilém Forster for valuable help in matters of interpretation.

P. SELVER.

LONDON, DECEMBER 1919.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

As far as possible, the poems in the present collection have been derived from the separate volumes indicated in the body of the book. The following additional sources have been found useful where such editions were not accessible:

Nová Česká Poesie. (Prague, J. R. Vilímek, 1907). Contains an introduction by Dr. Arne Novák.

Česká Lyra. Edited by Fr. S. Procházka (Prague, "Unie" Publishing Company. 2nd. enlarged edition, 1913).

Otařar Březina. Výbor básní. Pestrá knihovna No. 26, (Prague, Alois Hynek). Contains an introduction by J. Karásek ze Lvovic.

Antonín Sova. Výbor básní. Pestrá knihovna, No. 41. (Prague, Alois Hynek). Contains an introduction by Dr. Arne Novák.

Anthologie z básní Jaroslava Vrchlického, 1875—1892. (Prague, J. Otto).

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INTRODUCTION.

The Czechs are Slavs, and their poetry has all the impulsiveness, the music and the melancholy which are a common heritage of their stock. But the historical vicissitudes through which they have passed, together with the special influences to which they have been subjected as a result, have modified their national characteristics, just as their language is phonetically differentiated from that of kindred races. Thus, while their poetry is rich in the dreamy cadences and elegiac moods which are, so to speak, Pan-Slavonic manifestations, it also frequently sounds the notes of satire, defiance and rebellion. Again, the local conditions of life in Prague, with its sombre atmosphere of bygone glory, have produced a curious element of artificial romanticism, which finds its inspiration in the faded, the sinister and the aristocratic. These latter ingredients are to be met with especially in the verses of the Czech decadents, in striking contrast to the typical Moravian poets, whose fondness for bright colouring and quaint phraseology is due to the regional peculiarities of their native district.

By its geographical situation Bohemia has been more directly exposed to Western European influences than any other Slav country. In literature, and especially in poetry, the Czechs have shown a preference for French or Italian sources, and they have deliberately ignored the more immediate German models. Thus Jaroslav Vrchlický, who was born in 1853 and died in 1912, the founder of modern Czech poetry in the stricter sense of the word, derived his main inspiration from Victor Hugo and Dante. He introduced every variety of metre into Czech literature, and thus established a valuable tradition of formal exactitude. Vrchlický's importance as an original poet