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Literary Echoes of the Haitian Revolution in the Czech Lands

Jana Kantořiková

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THE image of Africa in the Czech lands in the early 19th century is inseparable from the attention paid to displaced Africans and their descendants. At that time, the emerging Czech national society was seeking its own place in the coordinates of so-called civilized Europe, which was firmly anchored in the transatlantic colonial system, and Czech discourses concerning the conquest of the New World thus often take a direct position concerning the phenomenon of African slavery. As recent research points out, these discourses include reflections on the stance of the Czech nation within the multinational Habsburg monarchy. Concomitantly, parallels of different motivations and degrees of explicitness emerge between the situation of Czechs and that of enslaved Africans¹.

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** The concept of “race” is understood in this article in a critical sense, i.e. as a social construct that serves a power narrative, and as such includes semantic and pragmatic dimensions that are fluid and relative, both historically and geographically. Also the use of terms that are related to this socio-historical construct such as “racial mixing”, “mixed-race”, “mulatto”, “sacatra”, etc. must be considered in the light of this disclaimer.

¹ O. Kašpar, *Problematika otroctví černochů v české publicistice ve 30. a 40. letech 19. století*, “Český lid”, 1982, 69, pp. 199-201; Idem, *Střelecký terč s karibským motivem v Litomyšli: Jedna z podob exotiky v českém prostředí 19. století*, “Český lid”, 2004 (91), 4, pp. 387-393; E. Kalivodová, *Český liberalismus nebo české zápacnictví? Jak se Chaloupka strýčka Toma stala v Čechách dětskou literaturou, in 19. století v nás. Modely, instituce a reprezentace, které přetrvaly*, ed. by M. Řepa, Praha 2008, pp. 422-433; Idem, *19th-Century Czech Translations of Uncle Tom's Cabin: What Has Been Left Unspoken*, in *Hermēneus Revista de traducción e interpretación*, 2017 (19), pp. 96-120; M. Křížová, *Slavery and Liberation Observed from the Margins of the Atlantic: Reflections of Overseas Colonization in The Book of Joseph (1783–1784)*, “Litteraria pragensia”, 2021 (31), 61, pp. 100-126, https://litterariapragensia.ff.cuni.cz/wp-content/uploads/sites/62/2021/08/Marketa_Krizova_100-126.pdf (latest access: 13.10.2022).

At the turn of the 19th century, as in other parts of the world, the Czech intellectual elite observed with disturbance but also excitement the development of events in the Caribbean. The wave of slave insurrections against French colonial rule in Saint-Domingue, which resulted in the creation of the sovereign state of Haiti in 1804, was seen as an unprecedented event. In the aftermath of these happenings, depictions of self-liberated slaves appeared in art and literature. In this article I will focus more specifically on the way the topic of the Haitian Revolution resonated in the literature of the Czech lands. After introducing the range of interest in the Caribbean region, Haiti in particular, in different types of discourses, I will explore the field of translation, considered here as a textual space offering encounters between distant colonies and the European countries without colonial possessions. At the core of the analysis is Victor Hugo's early novel *Bug-Jargal* (1826). This story reflects the hierarchization of displaced Africans and their descendants by using a detailed racial classification that ‘scientifically’ structures colonial society. The Czech version of Hugo's Haitian novel, by Dalibor Kopecký (1839), is analysed as part of the knowledge ‘re-production’, allowing racial imagery to be adopted and adapted to the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic goals of the text in its new context. The aim is thus to shed light on the translator's creative interventions into key elements of colonial discourse, considering other literary echoes of the Haitian Revolution in the Czech lands and taking into account the context of local emancipatory efforts preceding the Springtime of Nations.

HAITI: ISLAND OF REVOLUTION

In November 1791 the first Czech newspaper presented explicitly as patriotic, “Krameriusovy

císařsko-královské vlastenecké noviny” [Kramerius’s Imperial-Royal Patriotic Newspaper], portrays Saint-Domingue as a picture of destruction: “From Paris, on the 27th of October, the French and the Moors are still killing each other. Everything is going to ruin. The trade, the reproduction of the people, and perhaps the island itself. If the Moors win, to whom will the colony belong?”². Regular news, based on the foreign press, focuses on listing the damages rather than analysing the causes. One report, however, designates a population group as the source of the trouble and feels the need to explain its denomination to the Czech audience:

[According to latest reports – J. K.] the Mulattoes (that is the name of those people who are descended from a Moor woman and a Frenchman, or from a Moor man and a French woman) [...] are the cause of the terrible uproar, for they wanted to enjoy the same rights as the white inhabitants, and to be like other townsmen, according to the decree of the National Assembly issued on the 15th of May of this year. However, since they were denied this, they provoked the Moors; but when they saw that this uproar was terrible and dangerous, they sided with the white inhabitants, and now they are fighting against the Moors³.

Economic problems, nevertheless, remain in the spotlight, especially the rising prices or even shortages of commodities such as sugar and coffee⁴. The way of presenting the conflict on Saint-Domingue in the Czech province reflects a volte-face of the House of Habsburg towards fractured France. Changes are visible only in 1792 after the account of the Minister of War Narbonne Lara to the Assemblée Nationale about the strength of the French army. In the reporting, the responsibility for the situation on the island is then extended to the “troublesome French”⁵. Any sign of empathy with the insurgents is not to

be found, though, and the attitude expressed remains vigilant and pragmatic. During the War of the Third Coalition, with the Caribbean again under scrutiny, the redaction of “Krameriusovy noviny”, ironically and with self-interest, reminds the English ally that it risks being weakened for the sake of its own Caribbean colony: “The rebellious Moors on the island of Saint-Domingue now publicly have all the help they can get from the English. But let the English take care that they do not dig themselves a hole; for a stormy spirit is already beginning to be heard among the Moors, who number about 300.000 on the island of Jamaica”⁶. At the end of February 1804, the same newspaper reports the establishment of the Moorish Republic [*Mouřeninská republika*] in Saint-Domingue on the 1st of January, adding with astonishment: “What comes of it may, in time, become memorable”⁷. Although the situation creates uncertainty, the fact that the newspaper describes the event as a “liberation of their island from the French”⁸ nevertheless represents a certain form of recognition: the semantics of the word *osvobození* [liberation] speak for themselves. It’s a liberation that the newspaper describes, and the island is considered “theirs”.

How memorable was the Haitian Revolution in Czech culture in the first half of the 19th century? After the above-mentioned early reports, the attention paid to this island seems to subside⁹. In the 1830s several articles emotionally condemning the slave system in the Americas appear in Czech magazines. Haitian events, however, are not explicitly

² Subsequently referred to as “Krameriusovy noviny”, 19.11.1791, 47, pp. 373-374. Due to the common etymology, I translate the Czech word *mouřenín* (in Polish *murzyn*, in Latin *Maurus*) as ‘Moor’. It seems that in the first half of the 19th century, the words *mouřenín* and *černoch* were understood in Czech as synonymous. Cf. J. Jungmann, *Slovník česko-německý*, Praha 1835-1839, pp. 278, 407. Unless otherwise stated, the author of the translations into English is the author of this paper.

³ “Krameriusovy noviny”, 10.12.1791, 50, pp. 395-396.

⁴ “Krameriusovy noviny” also brings the following news from the Free State of Fiume: “The unfortunate revolt of the Moors and Mulattoes on the island of Saint-Domingue is the cause that many must renounce this tasty and delicious drink”, “Krameriusovy noviny”, 17.12.1791, 50, p. 408.

⁵ “Krameriusovy noviny”, 04.02.1792, 5, pp. 43-44.

⁶ “Krameriusovy noviny”, 28.01.1804, 4, p. 14.

⁷ “Krameriusovy noviny”, 25.02.1804, 8, p. 30.

⁸ “Krameriusovy noviny”, p. 31.

⁹ In 1806 Václav Matěj Kramerius published *Přítel lidu. Knížka k poučení a vyražení. Krátké vypsání Afriky* [Friend of the People: A Book for Instruction and Entertainment. A Short Account of Africa], aimed at a wide Czech reading audience. Space is also given to the subject of the slave trade, including Christian slaves in North Africa, but nothing is mentioned about the colonies. The slave system is not rejected on the assumption that the slaveholder is good and caring. The inhabitants of black Africa are described as lazy, for they do not care for their land. Concerning Kramerius’s writings on otherness, see L. Storchová, “*Zemi i pracovitým lidem jsou za břemeno*”. *Alterita a biopolitika ve fikčních cestopisech Václava Matěje Krameria*, in *Fenomén cestopisu v literatuře a umění střední Evropy*, ed. by J. Hrabal, Olomouc 2015, pp. 119-147.

referred to in these abolitionist oriented discourses¹⁰. Detailed information about the Haitian Revolution and the post revolutionary period is provided only in 1857 by Jakub Malý in his treatise *Dějepis emancipace Ameriky* [History of the Emancipation of America]. In this book, he stresses the crucial role of different racial groups in the Haitian conflict: “To the same extent as the mixed-raced, the mulattoes, were turned against the unfortunate black people, the mixed-raced were in turn despised by the white people because of their dark skin, and these different elements, hostile to each other, contributed much to the multiplication of the confusion that occurred in Domingo as a result of the French Revolution”¹¹. The description by Malý suggests that skin colour implies social status, with a presumption of political orientation but also of certain morals and abilities: “the mulatto population felt all the more offended, because they were aware of their moral superiority not only over the black people, whom they far surpassed in mental abilities, but also over the white people themselves, who have become very languid in the delightful climate”¹². The author’s reaction to the slave uprising and its violent consequences is rather justificatory, taking into consideration the conditions in which they lived. At the same time, he expressed doubts about the ability of black people to handle freedom and to live in an orderly state-run society, crediting the mulattoes with much more capability in this regard (without providing further explanation). In these turbulent times, the question of how to implement the idea of liberty seems to be at the centre of attention, be it the emancipation of America from European tutelage and domination or, in Europe, the emancipation of the Czech nation within the Habsburg monarchy.

TAXONOMIC FEVER IN CZECH

Like the Germans, the Czechs also embraced the idea of national identity, and in the last third of the 19th century, they initiated the process of shaping the modern Czech nation. A partial goal of this national emancipation and its vehicle at the same time was the Czech language, which was meant to be ‘resurrected’ and expanded after the period of linguistic Germanization. These efforts are encapsulated in the following statement by Josef Jungmann, philologist, translator and key figure of the Czech National Revival: “In language [remains – J. K.] our nationality”¹³. The literary production in Czech and especially the translation into Czech as a means of enriching its expression and thoughts is thus coming to the fore, although the circle of readers is initially limited. As for academic texts, Vladimír Macura points out that it is difficult to imagine a target group that is unable to read German originals or translations into German¹⁴.

The National Revival was a primarily linguistic project with educational ambitions, aiming, among other things, to lay the foundations of Czech science in Czech, which presupposes the creation of nomenclature in all fields of knowledge, including the humanities. Until the early 1830s, colonial racial terminology in Czech texts appeared rather sporadically, whether in relation to Haiti or in other contexts. Some definitions can be found in political reports of the insurrections in the New World (Mexico as well as Haiti), and although intended to be infor-

¹⁰ Nevertheless, the following article from 1834 starts with the sentence: “The condition of slaves is atrocious everywhere, but especially in the West Indian settlements”, *Jímání otroků*, “Květy”, 26.06.1834 (1), 26, p. 214. Concerning other articles in the journals (“Květy české”, “Česká včela”), see O. Kašpar, *Problematika*, op. cit., pp. 199–201; Idem, *Střelecký terč*, op. cit., pp. 387–393.

¹¹ J. Malý, *Dějepis emancipace Ameriky*, Praha 1857, p. 233.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ J. Jungmann, *Slovesnost, aneb, Nauka o výmluvnosti prozaické, básnické i řečnické: se sbírkou příkladů nevázané i vázané řeči*, Praha 1845, p. 25.

¹⁴ V. Macura, *Znamení zrodu a české sny*, Praha 2015, p. 70. It was not until the 1840s that German was replaced by Czech as a means of communication by the Czech bourgeoisie. As for translation in the period of National Revival through translation, Macura speaks of the “translationality” [*překládovost*] of Czech culture; Ivi, pp. 69–89. This function of translation, however, is emphasized throughout the 19th century. As Primus Sobotka, ethnographer and translator, states in his study *O překladech v novočeské literatuře* [On Translations in Modern Czech Literature]: “By them [translations – J. K.] new ideas are introduced and implanted in the nation, by them the intellectual connection with the rest of the educated world is maintained and the path of progress and general enlightenment is forged, by them also the domestic language is enriched and educated”, P. Sobotka, *O překladech v novočeské literatuře*, “Osvěta”, 1877, 7, pp. 304–320.

mative, the mixed-race population in such a framework stands out as an untrustworthy, subversive element¹⁵. The topic of racial mixing was thereupon elaborated on in academic works, which, along with newspapers, form another discursive space that connects the Czech intelligence with the latest global ‘discoveries’ and reinforces the sense of national belonging. We can thus observe the effort to publish on current and ideologically useful issues in Czech, also involving subjects such as polygenism, monogenism and racial theories in general. Cultural appropriation of the latest scientific and social knowledge thus brings with it taxonomic excesses.

The elite journal “Krok. Veřejný spis vědnoučným pro vzdělance národu československého” [The Step: Public Educational Journal for the Scholars of the Czecho-Slavic Nation] carried in 1831 a study on anthropology by Jan Antonín Jungmann that provides a detailed classification of the descendants of “black people” [černoši], “white people” [běloši] and “Americans” [amerikáni]. Furthermore, Jungmann, who was a medical doctor by profession, suggests to scientific circles some purely Czech terms, such as *třetíak* instead of the international “terceron”¹⁶, and adds a judgement on “racial mixing” as “perversity” [zvrhlost]¹⁷. In the same vein, the natural scientist and co-founder of the journal “Krok”, Jan Svatopluk Presl, published in 1834 a treatise, *Savectvo* [The Mammals]. In the section *Člověk* [The Man], this adherent of modern craniology and physiognomy¹⁸ builds on J. A. Jungmann. Presl develops the topic and coins new racial terms¹⁹. As far as the idea of

strengthening national identity through science is concerned, it is, for example, already expressed in the subtitle of Presl’s book: *Rukověť saustavná k poučení vlastnímu* [Handbook for Self Education]. *The Mammals* targets Czechs who have no choice but to study natural sciences and medicine in German. Thus, the author speaks in the introduction as an engaged patriot to patriots: “the book is a monument which will prove the life of the nation, though repressed, its praiseworthy efforts, its longing for education, even if its language is excluded from the order of the living”²⁰. Subsequently, most of this terminology was fixed in Josef Jungmann’s monumental lexicon in five volumes, *Slovník česko-německý* [Czech-German Lexicon], released between 1835 and 1839.

Although the Czech National Revival placed great emphasis on the revival of the language, for its participants, who were mostly bilingual, language could not be sufficient as the only criterion of national belonging. One example is the essay *O rozličnosti národů, zvláště v Evropě a v Asii*²¹ [On the Diversity of Nations, Especially in Europe and Asia] by the historian František Palacký from 1832. This text, which refers to the classification of personalities such as Georges Cuvier, James C. Prichard, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach or William Frédéric Edwards and compares them, is the result of the taxonomic fever of the time. Palacký emphasizes a ‘holistic’ approach to the study of humanity – that is, in the biological, linguistic and historical dimensions – and seeks to establish the relationship between race [plemeno], language/linguistic family [kmen] and nation [národ]²². The fact that Palacký

¹⁵ *Císařské královské vlastenecké noviny*, 09.03.1811, 10, p. 1.

¹⁶ The ‘terceron’ was a designation of a person with one white and one mulatto parent. On this topic, see also C. Gauthier – J. Kantoříková, *Traduire la créolité métisse dans les Pays tchèques: l'exemple des Mystères de Paris d'Eugène Sue*, “Études romanes de Brno”, 2021 (42), 2, pp. 163–180, https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/_lssystem/fedora/pdf/144452.pdf (latest access: 12.10.2022).

¹⁷ A. J. Jungmann, *Člověkosloví čili antropologie*, “Krok: veřejný spis vědnoučným pro vzdělance národu česko-slovenského”, 1831, p. 551.

¹⁸ Presl does not hesitate to adopt pseudo-scientific theses such as “Also the deviation from the ideal shape of the human figure, especially the skull and face, more or less points to the prevailing animality. The race of negroes, which seems to have made the transition from man to ape, convinces us of this”, J. S. Presl, *Savectvo. Rukověť soustavná k poučení vlastnímu*, Praha 1834, p. 131.

¹⁹ Presl also modifies some of them without explaining his motivation

(e.g. *třetíak* in place of *třetíak*).

²⁰ J. S. Presl, *Savectvo*, op. cit., p. iii.

²¹ F. Palacký, *O rozličnosti národů, zvláště v Evropě a v Asii*, “Časopis českého Museum”, 1832 (6), 3, pp. 257–282.

²² Palacký’s biopolitical essay deserves a more in-depth analysis. For instance, the author states that “plémě kaukaské” [the Caucasian race], “našinské” [our race] is the most perfect one (p. 265); he also proposes the term “Araité” [Aryans] instead of terms such as “indogermánský” and “indoevropský kmen” [Indo-Germanic and Indo-European group] (p. 267). For Palacký, the Old Persian language is more ancient than Sanskrit, hence a reference to the Persian Empire, i.e. *Area*, *Areia* (and other language variants). He opts for this term because of its supposed impartiality and therefore safety: “being impartial [the term – J. K.], it can harm no one”, p. 268. It is

illustrates the supposed conflict from a biological and linguistic perspective by using the case of the black Haitian population (and Jews) indicates that distant Haiti resonated in the minds of Czech patriots. The use of the same language, he claims, by supposedly two different 'biological groups' excludes language as the only criterion of national belonging: "So, for example, the French and the Negroes on the island of Hayti use the same language: but no one will therefore consider them one and the same nation"²³. This statement serves as an argument for Palacký's quest to define the nation on historical grounds – a quest that has its own (bio)political goals²⁴. Palacký was not particularly interested in colonial racial terminology. Nevertheless, anecdotal as this example may seem, the fact that this comparison is used three times in an essay on Europe and Asia reveals a keen interest in the Haitian case²⁵.

LITERARY TRANSLATION: CARIBBEAN THEMATIC 'PORTHOLE'

The ideological basis of the Czech National Revival, seeking liberation through culture (Presl's "the life of the nation, though repressed" [*život národu, ač potlačěný*]), and the critical voices about colonial expansion and the oppression of enslaved Africans (whatever the reasoning behind them: see note 9), are thus far from precluding racial biases. Stereotypical images also enter the Czech cultural context via literary translation, which in the first half of the 19th century had a privileged position as a culture-making activity. The aim was to culturally 'own' the valuable works of European literature in Czech and thereby cultivate the language and the nation²⁶. Nevertheless, we can find rather 'minor'

texts as well, as they were conventional within the Romantic aesthetics coming to the Czech lands at that time. Although the number of Czech readers was not very large in the 1820s and 1830s, interest in the Caribbean region can be noted. While texts about life in the colonies generally address the racial differences between Europeans and the local population, we can see some forms of attempts to overcome racial barriers. For instance, in 1834 a short story entitled in Czech *Daddy Dary, Negr. Pravdivá příhoda* [Daddy Dary, the Negro. A True Tale]²⁷ was published, which condemns slavery through an appeal to the emotions against suffering. The story is based on the motif of mutual rescue, typical of colonial literature: Dary is a freed African slave from Trinidad. After years of hardship, being hated by the slaves and despised by the colonists, this "half-naked savage"²⁸ seeks refuge in London. The colonial metropolis is the homeland of the British officer who saved Dary's life and freed him from bondage. Scorned by Europeans, the black man regains the officer's trust when he finally recognizes in him the rescuer of his daughter. Dary thus finds his place within English society as an exemplary grateful and loyal friend to the captain's grandson. Although the story overcomes the stereotype of the uncivilized African, it strays into a new stereotype, that of the grateful black man [*vděčný černochoch*]²⁹.

Still in 1834, the patriotic magazine "Česká

Culture, ed. by S. Bassnett – A. Lefevere, London-New York 1990, pp. 64–70; Idem, *Znamení zrodu*, op. cit.

²⁷ The whole title is *Daddy Dary, Negr. Pravdivá příhoda, z Anglického: Forget me not: r. 1831* [Daddy Dary, the Negro. A True Tale, from English: Forget Me Not: 1831]. *Forget Me Not* was a popular British literary annual. The original title of the story is *Daddy Davy, the Negro. A True Tale*, and its author is just given as "The Old Sailor". The Czech version was published in the volume *Potřebné a zbytečné, anebo, Čím více kdo má, tím po více touží: pěkný příběh dle perského rukopisu od Sarrazina / překládka V. R. K-sem, V Táboře – V Jindřichovu Hradci 1834*, and re-edited in 1858. The translator of *Daddy Dary, Negr* is not indicated, but it was probably Václav Rodomil Kramerius, the son of V. M. Kramerius.

²⁸ Anon., *Daddy Dary, Negr. Pravdivá příhoda, z Anglického: Forget me not: r. 1831*, in *Potřebné a zbytečné, anebo, Čím více kdo má, tím po více touží: pěkný příběh dle perského rukopisu od Sarrazina, V Táboře – V Jindřichovu Hradci 1834*, p. 72.

²⁹ The story for children and youth, translated from German, is also based on this stereotypical character: *Vděčný černochoch: příběh z ostrova Haiti*, Praha 1879.

an irony of history that the opposite will happen.

²³ F. Palacký, *O rozličnosti národů*, op. cit., p. 263. As for the Jews, according to Palacký, they are an example of a nation whose members have common physical features but speak different national languages. The authority he refers to is "linguists".

²⁴ The next step of my research will be a study specializing in mixophobic motifs in Czech patriotic writings.

²⁵ Ivi, pp. 263, 264, 277.

²⁶ For instance, in 1805 Josef Jungmann published his Czech translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala*, in 1811 Milton's *Paradise Lost*. On this topic, see J. Levý, *České teorie překladu I*, Praha 1996; V. Macura, *Culture as Translation, in Translation, History and*

včela” [The Czech Bee] offers another view of the Caribbean in *Pohádky negrův na ostrově Jamaice* [Tales of the Negroes on the Island of Jamaica]³⁰. These two stories selected from Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *Journal of a West-India Proprietor*³¹ are prefaced by the Czech editor with a universalizing commentary:

Who does not recognize in the first fairy tale the fable of Cinderella, known perhaps throughout Europe? And in the second, what a similarity with our Czech tales and with the one translated from Russian that we placed in the *Czech Bee’s* March number! Strange, however, is this worldwide spread of fables based on one and the same idea. Who would like to decide where they originated?³²

The emphasis on the commonalities of European/Czech/Slav culture with Afro-Caribbean folklore in this commentary gives to Lewis’s original a completely new context. And it seems that the observed affinity – at a time of obsessive searching for a national spirit – surprised even the patriots themselves. A specific manifestation of the im/possibility of overcoming racial barriers is the narrativization of racial mixing. While scientific discourses publish ‘discoveries’ (with varying degrees of explicitness in the sense of negative judgments), literary discourses disseminate them, showing the pitfalls of these unequal relationships. Before analysing Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal* and its Czech translation, it is important to recall another story set against the backdrop of the Haitian Revolution – the colonial family romance *Die Verlobung in St. Domingo* [The Engagement in St. Domingo, 1811] by Heinrich von Kleist³³. This story is set in Saint-Domingue in 1803 on the eve of the founding of free Haiti. Let us resume the plot, based, as in *Daddy Dary*, on the motif of mutual rescue: Congo Hoango, from the Gold Coast of Africa, is freed from

slavery by his master, a French planter, as a gesture of gratitude for saving him from drowning. In addition to a farm, the planter ‘gives him’ an old mulatto woman named Babekan. Hoango’s only goal, however, is revenge; during the slaves’ uprising, he thus kills his former master with a bullet to the head. The prolonged instrument of his revenge is Toni, Babekan’s daughter with a white man. Raised by her mother to hate white people, the girl is used as bait: profiting from her pale skin, she lures to Hoango’s farm white men fleeing from the black troops³⁴. This tragic novella about the relationship between a white man and a mixed-race young girl served another German author, Theodor Körner, as the basis for his play *Toni* (1812). Although Czech readers could read the German original, a Czech version, *Tony*, was published in 1823 in a translation by František Bohumil Tomsa³⁵.

Toni, by her origin, embodies the transgression (crossing the so-called colour line) just as her mother does. Her existence based on destruction raises the question of whether a harmonious relationship between different races is even possible. Her very being suggests the problem of loyalty, since her skin colour makes her an untrustworthy subversive element and predisposes her to crime. Discourses about the hybrid split of the mixed-race people are made more complex by the figure of Gustav von der Ried, Toni’s lover. He is a white man, a soldier in the French army, originally from Switzerland, which was at that time a battlefield between the French and the Austrians. The ambiguity of identities is what connects these two characters – and continents – together. While in Kleist’s novel racial prejudice eventually leads to tragedy and both lovers die (Toni is murdered; Gustav commits suicide), Körner opts for a happy ending and the interracial relation-

³⁰ See O. Kašpar, *První překlady karibského folklóru do češtiny*, “Miscellanea oddělení rukopisů a vzácných tisků”, 1989, 5, pp. 259–264.

³¹ The whole title is *Journal of a West-India Proprietor, Kept During a Residence in the Island of Jamaica*. The book, from 1818, was released posthumously in 1834.

³² [Red.], *Pohádky negrův na ostrově Jamaice*, “Česká včela”, 16.12.1834, 50, p. 393.

³³ The novel was released as a serial between the 25th of March and the 5th of April 1811 in the magazine “Der Freimüthige”.

³⁴ White-looking characters form the basis of so-called passing (for white) stories. Cf. A. Bourse, *Le Métis, une identité hybride?*, Paris 2017.

³⁵ T. Körner, *Tony*, V Hradci Králové nad Labem a Orlicí 1823. *Tony* was the first Körner’s play translated into Czech (but not the first staged in Czech). After that, Tomsa translated three other plays by this author. Concerning the reception of Körner in the Czech lands, see V. Petrbock, *Theodor Körner in Böhmen*, in *Brücken. Neue Folge: Germanistisches Jahrbuch Tschechien – Slowakei*, 2014 (22), 1–2, pp. 103–128.

ship is presented as complicated but possible³⁶.

A substantial comparative analysis of these two literary works deserves more space³⁷. What is important for the purpose of this article, however, is that the topic of the Haitian Revolution was present in the Czech cultural context and its artistic representations had a certain continuity. Moreover, consider the fact that the Czech version of Körner's play was also staged in 1831 in the Stavovské divadlo in Prague³⁸. Given the small space for dramatic work in Czech at that time, this fact is not insignificant.

BUG-JARGAL BY VICTOR HUGO

The translation of *Bug-Jargal* in 1839 thus meets a readership with a certain knowledge, imagery and assumptions, forming a 'horizon of expectation'³⁹. While readers' responses – except those of critics – are not usually accessible, it is possible to turn one's attention to the translators, to their reading and (re)writing. Here I approach translation as a form of cultural transfer that contributes to the construction of a national identity. The stakes of this culture-making activity are observable both in the politics of translation and in the text itself, which, following Eva Kalivodová, I understand as the result of 'productive reception', since "the translator's interpretation of the original, which is based in the historical context, and the degree to which he or she adopts, or breaks, translation norms valid in that particular context show in the translated text and may help the researcher to recognize a translation

strategy"⁴⁰. The analysis therefore focuses on what has been added and what has been lost in translation, and this under the supervision of the Austrian censorship.

The French original of *Bug-Jargal*, brought out in 1826, is based on Hugo's earlier short story of the same name published in 1820 in the ultra-royalist magazine "Le Conservateur littéraire", co-founded with his brothers. The story is set in 1791 on the eve of the Haitian Revolution. The main character, Bug-Jargal, is a variation on the exceptional romantic hero with multiple identities: he is a black slave named Pierrot, deeply and unhappily in love with Marie, the daughter of his cruel master. In his African homeland, though, Pierrot is a noble, the Crown Prince of Kakongo. As he feels a sense of belonging with his suffering people, he becomes the leader of a faction of insurgents. Let us recall at least the main storyline, which unfolds again from the motif of mutual rescue: Bug-Jargal (as Pierrot) saves Marie, who is about to fall victim to a crocodile. Her fiancé, the French military officer Leopold D'Auverney – de facto Pierrot's rival and political enemy – becomes therefore his protector and friend. When the slave revolt breaks out, Bug-Jargal acts to protect his white friends Maria and Leopold from the escalating violence. What follows is a series of peripeteia articulating determinism, cruelty, treason, cowardliness and heroism, in which Leopold's progressive distrust of Bug-Jargal threatens the lives of all three, as well as ten black hostages. Eventually Bug-Jargal sacrifices himself for the sake of Maria and Leopold and his imprisoned black men. The historically significant role of the mixed-race population in revolutionary events finds in Hugo's novel a phantasmal form rooted in the hierarchies of specialized racial discourses. While Leopold, Maria and Bug-Jargal represent purity of character, figures who are neither black nor white, yet both⁴¹, they embody aberration and ex-

³⁶ In Körner's version, the tragic dimension is limited to the breakdown of Toni's relationship with her mother.

³⁷ While there is a considerable amount of literature on Kleist's novel, analysis of Körner's play (both in the original and the Czech translation) is missing. The comparative work from 1892 is limited to descriptions. Cf. G. Feierfeil, "Die Verlobung in St. Domingo" von Heinrich v. Kleist und Theodor Körner's "Toni", Braunau 1892.

³⁸ Josef Kajetán Tyl, an important literary figure of the National Revival, starred in the play's first production. See J. Vondráček, *Dějiny českého divadla. Doba předbřeznová 1824-1846*, Praha 1957, p. 316. For the second production, the play was staged in Nové české divadlo v Růžové ulici in 1842.

³⁹ The horizon of expectation is shaped by a so-called pre-understanding, which is modelled through the reader's experience with texts read in the past and in their everyday experience. On the notion of the 'Erwartungshorizont' with which Jauf followed H. G. Gadamer cf. H. R. Jauf: *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Berlin 2010, pp. 173-177.

⁴⁰ E. Kalivodová, *19th-Century Czech Translations*, op. cit. p. 98. See also Idem, *Browningová nebo Klášterský? Krásnohorská nebo Byron? O rodu v životě literatury*, Praha 2010, pp. 48-53.

⁴¹ Cf. the fundamental book on this topic by W. Sollers, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both*, Cambridge-London 1997. In addition to thorough literary analyses taking into account the historical and political

cess. Due to their in-between status, they correspond to the Romantic aesthetics of fragmentation, disguise and unclear identity, and they develop this aesthetic as they enrich the Romantic gallery of monsters. Kleist's/Körner's beautiful, pale-skinned Toni embodies the horror of invisible blackness. In *Bug-Jargal* we find the same type of (male) character, but the author gives more space – in line with Romanticism – to mixed-race characters whose appearance matches their deformed character. An extreme example is Habibrah, a slave of deformed body (resembling a dwarf), abused as a court jester and obsessed with revenge. When he appears for the first time, he is identified as a “griffe”, by pseudo-anthropological category by Moreau de Saint-Méry. In his influential treatise on Saint-Domingue, this deputy from Martinique conceives an arithmetic theory of epidermis colour, and he names and delimits the nine categories of racial mixing between black and white people⁴². Hugo provides the term in an encyclopaedic footnote that, metaphorically speaking, embodies the encounter of European interests with the displaced black Africa:

He [Moreau de Saint-Méry – J. K.] posits that men are made up of a total of one hundred and twenty-eight parts, the parts being white in the case of the whites and black in the case of the blacks. Starting from this principle, he establishes that how close to or far away from one or the other colour you are depends on your proximity to or distance from the sixty-fourth term, which serves as their proportional mean. According to this system, any man not in possession of eight full parts white is said to be black. Moving from this colour toward the white, nine principal stocks can be identified, which have even more varieties between them according to how many or how few parts they retain of one or the other colour. These nine species are the *sacatra*, the *griffe*, the *marabou*, the *mulatto*, the *quadroon*, the *metiff*, the *mameluco*, the *quarteronné*, the *sang-mêlé*. The *sang-mêlé*, if he keeps on uniting with the white, ends up in a way becoming confused with this colour. However, it is claimed that he always retains on a certain part of the body the ineffaceable trace of his origin. The *griffe* is the result of five combinations, and can have between twenty-four and thirty-two parts white and ninety-six or one hundred and four parts black⁴³.

context of each work, the book also offers a very useful bibliography (*A Chronology of Interracial Literature*), providing an overview of the motif from ancient times until 1996.

⁴² The author classifies the 128 possible combinations of black-white racial mixing into nine categories. L.-E. Moreau de Saint Méry, *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Île Saint-Domingue*, Paris [1797] 1875, pp. 83–99.

⁴³ V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, ed. and transl. by C. Bongie, Toronto 2004,

Biassou, another leader of an insurgent faction and Bug-Jargal's adversary, known for his extreme cruelty and cunning, is termed “sacatra”. His origins are thought to be the source of his diabolical nature, which consists of a tiny proportion of supposed white intelligence and black brutality. Romantic aesthetics thus work hand in hand with pseudo-science, fixing violent racial images and disseminating a particularly complex colonial nomenclature. It should be added that these terms also appear in the aforementioned Kleist's and Körner's works, targeting a middle-class German-speaking (or at least reading) audience. Given the absence of any footnotes or explanations, it can be assumed that both German authors expected their ideal – that is, informed – reader to understand the meaning of these words or to be willing to understand⁴⁴.

Hugo's novel has long been the subject of literary critical controversy and continues to provoke us to this day. One of the reasons is the overall mixophobic subtext of the novel. In addition to the negative image of characters coming from the unions of Africans, Amerindians and Europeans, we find here a contemptuous mockery of the mixing of languages, clothing, food and ceremonies – in a word, cultural heritage⁴⁵. Chris Bongie, analysing *Bug-Jargal* as part of discourses that mourn France's loss of Saint-Domingue as an imperial object, exposes the difficulties of literary scholars with this work, especially in terms of the protection of the ‘originality’ of one of the most important figures of the French pantheon. The fact that Hugo's novel is

p. 67.

⁴⁴ In Kleist, Babekan is designated as “Mulattin” and Toni as “Mestize”; in Körner, however, Babeckan is designated as “Mestize” and Toni appears without specification. Such a modification suggests her skin colour is even fairer. In some conceptions, such a degree of whiteness is considered equal to the whiteness of white people. It cannot be ruled out that this modification was related to the possibility of giving the play a happy ending.

⁴⁵ This motif is analysed, for instance, in L.-F. Hoffmann, *L'Idéologie de Bug-Jargal. Compte rendu de la communication au Groupe Hugo du 25 mai 1989. Université de Paris VII, équipe du XIXe siècle* http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/hoffmann_leon_francois/ideologie_bug_jargal/ideologie_bug_jargal.pdf (latest access: 14.10.2022); Idem, *Victor Hugo, les Noirs et l'esclavage*, “Francofonie”, 1996, 31, pp. 47–90; C. Bongie, *Victor Hugo and the Melancholy Novel: Reading the Haitian Revolution in Bug-Jargal*, “French Studies”, 2018 (72), 2, pp. 176–193.

full of passages derived from other (and problematic) sources⁴⁶ concerning the Haitian Revolution has led to the marginalization of this text and to the development of a discourse regarding the immaturity of the young author or, on the contrary, the experimental – that is, polyphonic – character of Hugo’s early work⁴⁷.

As far as the Czech reception of Hugo’s work is concerned, the first Czech version of *Bug-Jargal* also finds itself on the margins⁴⁸, as the text seems to have dropped out of literary history; neither Cvahoučková⁴⁹ nor Petrovská⁵⁰ mention it. The translation is indirectly referred to in Hrbata⁵¹, but no attention is paid to it. The introduction of Hugo’s work into Czech literature is thus traditionally associated only with the Revolution of 1848: the theatrical adaptation of *Sonneur de Notre-Dame* by Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer was staged in Czech translation that year; the first Czech translations of Hugo’s poetry were situated just slightly earlier⁵². As Zdeněk Hrbata points out, “[Hugo – J. K.] enters Czech lands primarily with the fame of a politician, a representative of the French Revolution of 1848, with the aura of democracy and humanism, a personality whose activity and public engagement the Czech political press will not cease to report from then on until Hugo’s death”⁵³.

Yet it was Dalibor Kopecský’s *Buk-Jargal. Pověst po Viktoru Hugo* [Buk-Jargal: Tale after Viktor Hugo] that introduced the French writer to Czech literature. The reasons for the invisibility of this text

can be found, at least partly, in the framing of the publication, since it was released as part of a book bearing the title *Pověsti z nové romantiky* [Tales from the New Romanticism] with the indication “Volně vzdělal Dalibor Kopecský” [Adapted by Dalibor Kopecský]⁵⁴. The name of the French author is thus hidden inside the book. The novel is followed by a second text entitled *Hrob věrných* [The Grave of the Faithful Lovers] by David Bartolotti, who is none other than Alexandre Dumas, even better hidden behind this invented Italian-sounding name⁵⁵.

Another reason for this overlooking of the Czech *Bug-Jargal* is that the role of the translators and cultural mediators – although they were often referred to as authors at the time – has long been outside of research interest. Moreover, Kopecský is not one of the ‘great men’ of the National Revival to whom attention is usually paid. The life path of this promoter of Romanticism is not well known⁵⁶. As we will see, his medical education and more than probable access to the latest ‘scientific’ knowledge on anthropology is not insignificant to the context of his *Bug-Jargal* translation.

TRANSLATION AS LIBERATION

Before 1848 the image of revolutionary France in the Czech lands was rather negative. According to Stéphane Reznikow, the fear of the French in the

⁴⁶ Besides Moreau de Saint Méry, is it especially Phillipe-Albert de Lattre and his book *Campagnes des Français à Saint-Domingue, et réfulations des reproches faits au capitaine-générale Rochambeau* from 1805. Cf. C. Bongie, *Victor Hugo*, op. cit., p. 178.

⁴⁷ Ivi, pp. 177–178.

⁴⁸ The translation is mentioned only in a short article in 1936 by Otomar Schiller, a literary scholar and high school teacher. O. Schiller, *Zaváté cestičky romantiky do Čech*, “Nové Čechy. Pokroková revue politická, sociální a kulturní”, 03.03.1936 (19), 1–2, pp. 12–13.

⁴⁹ J. Cvahoučková, *První ohlasy díla a činnosti Victora Huga u nás*, “Světová literatura”, 1971, 4, pp. 240–247.

⁵⁰ M. Petrovská, *Victor Hugo: l’écrivain engagé en Bohême*, Paris 1977.

⁵¹ Z. Hrbata, *Victor Hugo v Čechách 19. století*, “Česká literatura”, 1986 (34), 2, pp. 122–137.

⁵² S. Reznikow, *Francophilie et identité tchèque 1848–1914*, Paris 2002, p. 79; Z. Hrbata, *Victor Hugo v Čechách*, op. cit., p. 126.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ A verbatim translation would be “freely elaborated/edited”. The book was published by Martin Neureutt.

⁵⁵ This work by the mysterious Italian writer is probably the first work by Dumas published in Czech. It can almost certainly be argued that the original is the text *Laurette ou le Rendez-vous* [Laurette or the Rendez-vous] from 1826.

⁵⁶ Dalibor Kopecský was born in Polička, Eastern Bohemia, in 1815 to a middle-class family as Jan Nepomuk Kopecský. In the 1830s, as a student of philosophy and medicine, he participated in the Prague national movement by publishing fiction and essays under the patriotic name Dalibor (in magazines such as “Jindy a nyní”, “Česká včela”, “Květy” and “Ost und West”). Since French was not taught in the secondary schools where Kopecský studied, he must have started to learn it only in Prague. In 1841 he graduated as a medical doctor, but shortly afterwards he became mentally ill. His literary career came to a close, and he died in 1864 in an asylum. *Lexikon české literatury. Osobnosti, díla, instituce 2/II K–L*, ed. by V. Forst et al., Praha 1993, pp. 845–846. My great thanks go to these historians and archivists, who have been very helpful in tracking down and verifying information about Kopecský: Jan Košek, Radka Holendová, Vlastimil Kovář and, above all, Stanislav Konečný.

period 1789–1815 led to an increase in Austrophilia and Russophilia amid Czech intellectuals⁵⁷. Due to Austrian censorship ‘protecting’ the order in the empire and the morality of the population, and also because of the reticence of Czech patriots, in general loyal to the Habsburg monarchy, Czech–French cultural transfers were very limited. Between 1804 and 1848, continues Reznikow, only sixty-seven French literary works were translated into Czech, and one can speak of Francophilia in the Czech lands before 1848 only among the most radical personalities. In such a context, literary translation, especially from French, is hardly a politically neutral activity⁵⁸. As for the 1830s, interest in Hugo is documented amid Czech Romantics; in addition to the notes on poetry in Karel Hynek Mácha’s diaries (1834), this is especially the case with Karel Sabina’s poem *Ku vzdáleným* [To the Distant, 1836], in which “in [...] the array of ‘examples’, Hugo as a representative of French democratic thought stood at the forefront”⁵⁹.

Kopecný thus responds to Sabina’s call to turn to the French author, but with reservations. He presents the book with a poetological preface which, although formulated as a purely aesthetic matter, hints through metaphors at a political dimension. As he states, the aim of the new Romantic poetry is to move (in the sense of *emovere*) the audience, and its origin is found in France, seen as a “famous cradle of all noisy phenomena”⁶⁰. As for the translation strategy, Kopecný notes:

And professing the belief that to translate properly is, if not more precious, at least as praiseworthy as to adapt for foreign countries the original writing, I have, therefore, being conscientious of the truth, called my action as indicated (“educated freely”), that the kind reader, seeking the origin, may know on whom he may justly impose the faults which his discerning eye would find either in

the words or here and there in the arrangement itself⁶¹.

Without further argumentation, it is thus foreshadowed that Romantic literature will be mediated by a rather classicist approach⁶². Behind the translator’s ‘author’s modesty’ one can also read the need to rewrite the text of “famous”⁶³ Victor Hugo (presumably because Hugo’s attitudes at the time of *Bug-Jargal* were already very anti-revolutionary, i.e. against both the French and the Haitian Revolution, which is clearly evident in the original). However, the apolitical nature of the preface, which was a mainstream attitude among Czech patriots, and the choice of the classicist method of translation, allowing relative liberty, do not necessarily exclude the possibility that the author was unaware of the political dimension of his work⁶⁴. Indeed, the changes in the Czech version are substantial, observable on multiple levels such as story framing, plot, composition, characters, and interplay with specialized discourses. All of these modifications ultimately affect the ideological level of the novel, especially in terms of racial biases and attitudes towards slavery, and adapt it to an abolitionist and anti-imperialist discourse that is universalizing but, as I will try to show, at the same time offers a perspective responding to local cultural–political needs⁶⁵.

⁶¹ Ivi, p. viii.

⁶² Such an approach does not emphasize the author’s individuality but the translator’s appropriation. The fact that the literary work existed in Czech was sufficient. See V. Macura, *Znamení zrodu*, op. cit., p. 69.

⁶³ D. Kopecný, *Bug-Jargal*, op. cit., p. vi.

⁶⁴ It was the absence of a political dimension in the conception of New Romanticism that earned Kopecný the negative criticism of Jakub Malý. According to him, Kopecný mistakenly does not perceive New Romanticism as a manifestation of the French national spirit and thus fails to name the real cause of such writing – that is, the nature of the nation, its political conditions and its degree of education. J. Malý, *Pověsti z nové romantiky – review*, “Denice”, 1840, I, pp. 59–63.

⁶⁵ Kopecný’s consciousness of the political dimension of *Pověsti z nové romantiky* is also reflected in the rewriting of the second text of the book, which translates Dumas’s story. Since its topic is not directly related to the image of Africa, we cannot devote more attention to it for lack of space. Let us at least mention the essentials: it is a tragic love story between a French soldier and a German girl set against the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars – more precisely, the Russian campaign in 1812. While France is presented as a symbol of civilization, the Russians are seen as barbarians, standing in the way of a permanent universal peace. Kopecný rewrote the original as

⁵⁷ S. Reznikow, *Francophilie*, op. cit., p. 43. For the immediate reaction to the French Revolution in the Czech lands, see *Francouzský švindl svobody*, ed. by C. Madl – D. Tinková, Praha 2012.

⁵⁸ According to Jiří Levý, after 1848 there was a paradigm shift in translators’ interest in actual works that had ideological (i.e. political) goals, since the literary language had already been created. It is therefore questionable whether the timing of this shift should be reconsidered. The possibility of seeing the issues of language and ideology as permanently intertwined should also be taken into account. J. Levý, *České teorie překladu I*, op. cit, p. 146.

⁵⁹ Z. Hrbata, *Victor Hugo v Čechách*, op. cit., p. 124.

⁶⁰ D. Kopecný, *Bug-Jargal. Pověst po Viktoru Hugo*, in *Pověsti z nové romantiky*, Praha 1839, p. v.

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The translator frames the story with an added opening passage in which he outlines the history of the colonization of the Americas and illuminates the presence of Africans on this continent. Starting with the sentence “It is now the third century since the Europeans conquered America across the sea and rampaged on its soil. Ancient mines have exported their treasures without satiating the avarice of greedy multitudes”⁶⁶, the function of this introductory part is not only to inform the Czech audience about the distant reality, it is above all to establish a point of view. The story is not told by the figure of the French officer Leopold, as in the original, but (mostly) by an omniscient narrator who subsequently critically comments on the oppression of the Amerindians [*Indiáni*] and the displaced Africans turned into slaves. Stereotypes about the physical and psychological specificities of the African population, especially the endurance interpreted as insensitivity, supposedly caused by the African sun, are exposed in order to contest the slave system, not to defend it: “Because European landlords likened the slave race to unworthy beasts, they tortured the poor wretches in chains without conscience”⁶⁷. The slave trade is, however, condemned, along with all its participants:

Cunning and violence willingly contributed here to the success of such a damnable work; there a depraved father often brought his own child to sell; an unfortunate son sold his poor father in time: and so the traffic of men – the eternal shame of our human race – was carried on in honour and decency on the soil of two great worlds⁶⁸.

The narrator states the increasing cruelty of the colonizers, which, he notes, culminates at Saint-Domingue. His compassion for enslaved Africans is

a story of tragic love between a French soldier and a Russian girl. In contrast to Dumas’s text, the Russians are presented as good and kind people. Many factors could have influenced such a rewriting; the possibility cannot be excluded that the glorification of the French army in Dumas’s work may have seemed to the translator excessive (even risky due to Austrian censorship) and the motif of disdain for the Russians, who are also Slavs, unsuitable for the ideology of the Czech National Revival.

⁶⁶ D. Kopecký, *Buk-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 11.

⁶⁷ Ivi, pp. 12–13.

⁶⁸ Ivi, p. 12.

difficult to overlook, as is the perspective of justifying their rebellion. Unlike Hugo, Kopecký foregrounds the motif of Ogé’s revolt, which instigated the first slave uprising. This historic figure is granted a Slavic (and Slovak) sounding name, Jožek:

defiantly resisting his tormentors, and having beaten several guards, with a strong fist, he broke the slave chains; then his companions grouped themselves together and brought great destruction on the Europeans. [...] The beaten settlers now shrieked with furious vengeance; if formerly they had treated their servants cruelly, now, torturing the poor, they only kicked the accursed people inhumanly⁶⁹.

It is through the scene of Jožek’s execution that the reader of the Czech version is given a preface to the plot. Such an introduction highlights not only the problem of slavery but also the perspective that justifies rebellion against enslavement.

Bug-Jargal is not the first literary figure of a black man in Czech (translated) literature. In the period under review, we also find, besides the already-mentioned *Daddy Dary* (“Davy” in the original), the translation of *Paul et Virginie* [*Pavel a Virginie*, 1836] by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, with the figure of devoted slave Domingue, and an adaptation of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* for youth, *Mladší Robinzon* [The Younger Robinson, 1808], with his faithful Friday⁷⁰. However, Bug-Jargal introduces a new type of black male hero as a freedom fighter, following his predecessor Jožek, who is typologically close to the legendary romantic hero Jánošík, fighting for the Slovak nation against Hungarian oppression. In general, Kopecký’s Bug-Jargal recalls more of a medieval knight, devoted to his kingdom and people, than a prototype of a (noble) savage. His virility is presented as gentle and chaste: “The splendid build of his body and the glorious expression of his blazing eyes gave him a sort of personal dignity, for which not only his companions in the same misery honoured him with their esteem, but the brutal dragoons themselves treated him with great gentleness”⁷¹. How different from Hugo’s original, full of racial stereotypes. Bug-Jargal is here presented

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Between 1808 and 1853, this anonymous Czech adaptation was published four times.

⁷¹ D. Kopecký, *Buk-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 25.

through Leopold's eyes:

This negro, of an almost gigantic height and prodigiously strong, [...] the air of ruggedness and majesty stamped on his face in the midst of the characteristic signs of the African race; the gleam in his eyes; the whiteness of his teeth against the gleaming blackness of his skin; the width of his brow, especially surprising in a negro; the disdainful swelling that imparted something so lordly and so powerful to the thickness of his lips and nostrils; the nobleness of his bearing; the beauty of his form, still possessed of what one might call Herculean proportions⁷².

While the original version implicitly 'threatens' the possibility of a scandalous rape of a white woman by a black man, this motif is completely subdued in the Czech version. After all, such an element, as well as other descriptions eroticizing his body, would certainly not have passed muster with the Austrian censors who closely guarded the depiction of sexuality within the Empire⁷³. Thus, while in the original it is repeatedly emphasized that Bug-Jargal is big in stature, the motif appears less in the Czech version, where that particular attribute or an entire passage may be missing. For instance, in the scene with the crocodile, we read: "a young black man of colossal stature who with one arm was holding up the terrified girl"⁷⁴, which is translated as "[Leopold] saw his bride resting helplessly in the arms of a young black man"⁷⁵. His body is stereotypically associated with danger, temptation and sexual taboo. In the next rescue scene, there appears "a huge black man emerged from behind a burning palisade; he was carrying off a young woman"⁷⁶. The Czech translation is verbatim here, but the motif appears only once. In the original, this scene returns as "an infernal vision"⁷⁷ of Leopold, who subsequently also describes Bug-Jargal as "a big negro defending himself [...], like Beelzebub himself he was"⁷⁸.

Kopecný's Bug-Jargal accepts the fate of unfulfilled love for his beloved lady and sacrifices his feelings for the sake of her welfare, which is synonymous

with Leopold's safety. Unlike the original, this Bug-Jargal does not sacrifice his life in a suicidal action⁷⁹. The Czech version is shortened and simplified, but the main character stays in the heroic fight until the end and tries to preserve everyone – Maria, Leopold, the hostages and himself. Here it is Leopold who gives himself up to death, death for an ideal, returning to Biassou's camp to be executed, as he wants to keep his word of honour. Finally Bug-Jargal throws himself in front of Leopold to protect him with his body and his leader's authority, but the executioners, full of revenge against white people, shoot before Biassou's order, and Bug-Jargal dies. Rather than suicide, the scene suggests a missed opportunity for negotiation. While Hugo lets eventually all the main characters die, in Kopecný's version Maria and Leopold survive; in the final scene, they bow over the body of their friend, despite racial barriers and their official position on the war chessboard. Bug-Jargal's death thus becomes meaningful, as does the whole slave uprising. In this way, the image of the revolution is stripped of the absurdity present in the original.

Other modifications in the Czech version follow in a similar vein: Bug-Jargal's master, Maria's father, is represented as even more cruel than in the original; generalizing images of Africans as lazy, animal-like and hypersexual are erased, as well as excessive descriptions of their nudity. The two most perfidious characters – Habibrah (Abibrah) and Biassou (Biasov) – remain, however, perfidious, associated with the devil. The difference is that the Czech audience could not know that in Hugo's original they are identified as mixed-race and that this 'essential otherness', exactly classified, is supposed to shape their character unless the Czech reader reached for one of the German translations – there were at least two at that time, and both retain the racial mixing terminology⁸⁰. Did Kopecný hear the appeal of Biassou in his

⁷² V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 80.

⁷³ In the original also appear descriptions of half-naked black women (chapter 26). In the Czech version there is no mention of black women at all.

⁷⁴ V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, p. 78.

⁷⁵ D. Kopecný, *Buk-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 21.

⁷⁶ V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 100.

⁷⁷ Ivi, pp. 101, 102.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 108.

⁷⁹ Bongie points out the psychologically unmotivated ending in the original, which was in the first English version interpreted by the translator, at least, as a love-motivated suicide. C. Bongie, *Victor Hugo and "The Cause of Humanity": Translating Bug Jargal (1826) into The Slave-King (1833)*, "Translator", 2005 (11), 1, p. 8.

⁸⁰ Cf. V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, in *Victor Hugo's sämtliche Werke* 7,

disdain for terms invented by white people? In the original, the figure states, “*Negroes and mulattoes!* What do you mean by that? Have you come here to insult us with those odious names invented by the contempt of the whites? There are only men of colour and blacks here, do you understand that, my fine colonist?”⁸¹.

Given the magazines to which the Czech translator contributed, it is very likely that articles on slavery in the New World as well as literary texts on the Caribbean did not escape him. The same applies doubly to scientific literature: Kopecký’s university teacher was the aforementioned J. S. Presl, the author of the treatise *The Mammals*, where even the term *grif* was used and explained. In addition, Presl was also the author-translator of an article about Congo, *Krátká zpráva o zemi Kongo v Africe* [A Short Report on the Country of Congo in Africa, 1831], published in “Krok”⁸². Despite Kopecký’s scientific background – or maybe because of it – the interplay between specialized discourses is abolished in his version. All the terms for racial mixing are dismissed and the above-quoted explanatory footnote excised. With this edit, Bug-Jargal’s character is ‘purified’ as well, since his racist comment, which in the original denotes contempt for Biassou’s racial origins, is removed. Furthermore, the motif of the difference between the “*nègres congos*” (i.e. born in Congo and thus ‘directly’ African) and the “*noirs créoles*” (born in colonies and already partly ‘civilized’) and that of the disdain of the first for the second is also erased⁸³. How should the phenomenon

of the translator’s ‘active indifference’ to these taxonomic ‘refinements’ be interpreted?

It may be rooted in Kopecký’s disagreement with the nomenclature coming from ‘above’, which is, moreover, inappropriate in a Romantic work considered as an opportunity to give a voice to the genius of the people. After all, it is the language that is at stake: in the preface, Kopecký states that the writer should learn the language from the nation – that is, the people – and not the nation from the writer (“Učiti se hled spisovatel řeči od národa, a nikoli naopak od spisovatele národ!”)⁸⁴. On the other hand, the possibility cannot be ruled out that he simply found such technical details about the distant colonial world to be irrelevant to the Czech reader and the acquisition of such terms unnecessary for the literary language.

The issue, however, is not just the absence of colonial terms for racial mixing in the text. The mixed-race characters are probably introduced into Czech literature in connection with the Haitian Revolution – more specifically in the Czech version of Körner’s play *Toni*. Although the translator, F. B. Tomsa, does not render these terms, the idea remains present in the text through other means such as descriptions or metaphors. In Kopecký’s version, though, the characters are presented exclusively as white, black or without any specification. The structure of Saint-Domingue’s/Haitian colonial society is thus flattened, the complexity of racial hatred between different groups erased along with motifs of culinary and linguistic mixing and so on and disdain for that⁸⁵. The motif of extreme violence is maintained (except sexual violence), but it appears on both sides of the (racial) barricade. The result of these modifications is certainly an overall simplification but also the idea of de-hierarchization and equalization. The translator hence offers a version that is reductive but explicit: after Bug-Jargal appeals to Leopold as “brother”, the French officer responds, “Let me also call you brother – though our skin is different, day and night are also the race of one father”⁸⁶. This

Deutsch von H. Laube, Frankfurt 1835; Idem, *Bug-Jargal*, in *Victor Hugo’s ausgewählte Schriften*, 3, Stuttgart 1835. Although the explanatory footnote, taken from Saint-Méry, is missing in the Seyhold’s translation, the terms are explained directly in the text. However, the translator often does not stick to the original and treats the terms arbitrarily.

⁸¹ V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 136. This passage does not appear in the Czech version.

⁸² In this report, based on John Barrow’s observations, the Congolese population is characterized by goodness and musicality but also by low morality – compared to the inhabitants of other African countries – as well as by great laziness, which hinders their educability; we find there also a condemnation of the slave trade. J. S. Presl, *Krátká zpráva o zemi Kongo v Africe. Podle Barrowa*, in *Počátky české cizokrajné etnografie. Antologie textů*, ed. by O. Kašpar, Praha 1983, pp. 93–95.

⁸³ V. Hugo, *Bug-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 58.

⁸⁴ D. Kopecký, *Buk-Jargal*, op. cit., p. viii.

⁸⁵ Yet the motif of Leopold’s ironic smile at the dress of the black men (a mixture of French uniforms and priestly clothing) remains.

⁸⁶ D. Kopecký, *Buk-Jargal*, op. cit., p. 31. Except for this example, the word race, in Czech of this period *plémě* or *plemeno*, is used

message is confirmed in the final romantic scene, in which Maria and Leopold bow over Bug-Jargal's body like evangelists of this allegedly racially unequal friendship.

It can be assumed that there was also another motivation behind the translator's refusal to 'reproduce' the latest 'findings', as Hugo did in his text with references to Saint-Méry and so on. The topic of African slavery in the Americas was a sensitive one for several Czech patriots. What interested them was also the metaphorical dimension of this topic, applicable to their own local emancipatory efforts⁸⁷. Kopecký's text thus enters a context in which representations employing the image of enslavement in relation to the Habsburg monarchy have a certain continuity. As Markéta Křížová points out, the trope of the enslavement of the Bohemian kingdom by Habsburg's ascension to the throne appears already in Bohuslav Balbín, the defender of the Czech language in the Baroque period, who was followed by patriots of the National Revival⁸⁸. Even more important for our purpose is *Das Buch Joseph* [The Book of Joseph, 1783], which contains critical comments about overseas colonization and references to the uprisings there⁸⁹. Published in German under the alias "Franz Adam Ziegler" and translated by V. M. Kramerius into Czech one year later, *Kniha Josefova* became "one of the most widely read and influential Enlightenment texts among the lower classes in the Czech lands"⁹⁰. The core of the narrative is the rise of the subjects of an untitled kingdom, who were enslaved under the Habsburgs, but they are now liberated by the social and political reforms of the enlightened Emperor Joseph II. This relatively transparent allegory is formulated as a prophecy in which the liberation of slaves is intertwined with the emancipation of subjects claiming civil rights, and the view of the "kingdom" with the view of colonies overseas. Ultimately, the paternalistic and passive

granting of freedom is confronted by the winning of freedom and revenge, guaranteed by God's justice. For Křížová, this book is unique precisely because it praises the liberation efforts of the slaves themselves, as no similar motif is found in the context of European Enlightenment abolitionist literature⁹¹.

Does not Kopecký's praise of the liberation efforts of the slaves themselves refer to that "untitled kingdom" as well? Although the connection between the enslaved and rebellious Africans and the Czech subjects of the Austrian empire is not made explicit in *Bug-Jargal*, this parallel is present in the text as a possibility, supported not only by the tendency towards ahistoricity of the translation⁹² but also by similar links in previous texts that are culturally shared – beyond Balbín and *Das Buch Josef* is also, for instance, the famous Herder chapter about the rise of the Slavs⁹³. These prerequisites shape the 'horizon of expectations' of both the translator as reader and the translator as writer addressing a certain audience. In this light, the portrayal of the revolution's bearers as we find them in Hugo's original – that is, as monsters acting according to the lowest instincts – would not be very responsive to local cultural political aspirations. The image that undermines and sometimes ridicules the insurrection demanding human rights for all and the right to national self-determination was thus rewritten as a romantic call for justice.

It is actually surprising that the book was published, since literature in translation, especially from France and, moreover, with the topic of the revolution, was under the scrutiny of the censors⁹⁴. Be-

sporadically in Kopecký's version.

⁸⁷ It is also a question of what the Czech patriots were more (or really) interested in – i.e. in African slaves or their local problems – but we do not need to decide the answer to this question at this point.

⁸⁸ M. Křížová, *Slavery and Liberation*, op. cit., pp. 100-126.

⁸⁹ According to Křížová, *Kniha Josefova* reacts to one of the many uprisings in Jamaica (personal correspondence).

⁹⁰ M. Křížová, *Slavery and Liberation*, op. cit., p. 116.

⁹¹ Ivi, p. 122.

⁹² For instance, the day of the first upheaval is indicated but not the year; historical figures such as Ogé, Jean Biassou and Boukmann are, by lack of explanatory notes, anonymized.

⁹³ As Macura points out, in the Czech version of Herder's chapter, translated by J. Jungmann in 1813 for the journal "Prvotiny" (*O Slovanéch* [About the Slavs]), the passage about the liberation of the Slavs from the slave chains was not rendered. The reason for this omission could be Jungmann's disagreement with the passage, seen as undermining the image of Slavs loyal to Habsburg, but also Austrian censorship or Jungmann's self-censorship out of fear that it would turn into a political slogan. V. Macura, *Znamení zrodu*, op. cit., p. 77.

⁹⁴ Cf. especially the third chapter of the book *Quellen zur Rezeption des englischen und französischen Romans in Deutschland und Österreich im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by N. Bachleitner, Tübingen

sides, most of Hugo's and Dumas's works were on the banned books list. As far as I am aware, there are no available sources on the censorship proceedings regarding Kopecký's translation, and this final published version is the only known one. We have only Karel Sabina's statement, which is imprecise and therefore not very reliable. The reason may be that it dates twenty-five years after the publication of Kopecký's book: "not only the writings but also the names of some foreign writers were banned. [...] The names of Al. Dumas and Victor Hugo, which Dalibor Kopecký had inscribed on his translated stories, were erased"⁹⁵. In any case, it is impossible to determine the relationship between censorship and self-censorship, but in general the authors primarily wanted the book to be published and were thus prepared to make creative concessions; a cover referring only to Kopecký's romantic tales does not seem dangerous, and Haiti is far away, after all. The potential topicality of this already-historical event is thus covered up.

The echoes of the Haitian Revolution, carried through translation, reverberated in various discourses during the Czech National Revival. Czech culture as a translating culture built its relationship not only with the distant overseas reality but also with the mediating texts and cultures that – as understood at the time – were represented by these texts. Above all, however, the formation of one's own identity was at stake. Czech culture thus shares a growing anthropological interest in colonized but still relatively unknown populations; its scientific discourses want to seem terminologically 'accurate', which means that they are as racist as the discourses of the conquering powers. Yet, at least according to the examples analysed, the interplay between science and literature regarding racial imagery, which

we encounter in French and German literature, has not found a greater resonance in the Czech versions. In a language-oriented project like the Czech National Revival, the inconsistent adherence to colonial racial terminology in literary fiction (thus undermining its educational character) can appear as an emancipatory contradiction. On the other hand, such an approach, in combination with further modifications, provides a space for the extra-aesthetic goals of the translated text in its new context. In his *Buk-Jargal*, Dalibor Kopecký has considerably subdued the polyphony of the French original. His rejection of the re-production of the latest 'knowledge', his commitment to the abolitionist discourse and the tendency to ahistoricity, give the text an anti-hierarchical and anti-imperial undertone, responsive to local emancipatory efforts. The image of the liberated slave is dangerously intertwined with that of the emancipated citizen, and the overseas events mediated by this apolitical activity were echoed by local political issues. To speak of fraternal identification with the enslaved, revolting and victorious Africans may be an exaggeration, but the choice of the text and the manner of its rewriting reflect – to some extent – the problem of the Czechs, who were struggling for their right to self-determination through translating and writing.

www.esamizdat.it ◇ J. Kantořiková, *Literary Echoes of the Haitian Revolution in the Czech Lands*. ◇ eSamizdat 2022 (XV), pp. 193-208.

2012. See also Part 2 of *V obecném zájmu. Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749-2014*, 1, ed. by M. Wögerbauer, Praha 2015.

⁹⁵ K. Sabina, *Novelistika a romanopisectví české doby novější (z roku 1864)*, in *O literatuře*, Praha 1953, pp. 235-236. On the censorship of Dumas in Austria, see N. Bachleitner, *Der Dialog zwischen den Literaturen und seine Behinderung. Der französisch-österreichische Transfer im 19. Jahrhundert*, in *Dialogische Beziehungen und Kulturen des Dialogs: Analysen und Reflexionen aus komparatistischer Sicht*, ed. by B. Burtscher-Bechter – M. Sexl, Innsbruck 2011, pp. 147-186.

◇ *Literary Echoes of the Haitian Revolution in the Czech Lands* ◇

Jana Kantořiková

Abstract

The article examines how the topic of the Haitian Revolution resonated in the Czech literary scene in the first half of the 19th century. At the core of the study is Victor Hugo's early work *Bug-Jargal* (1826). Based on colonial discourses, the story reflects the hierarchization of displaced Africans and their descendants through a detailed racial classification that 'scientifically' structures colonial society. The Czech version of the novel by Dalibor Kopecký (1839) contains significant changes, allowing racial imagery to be adopted and adapted to the aesthetic and extra-aesthetic goals of the text in its new context. Considering other literary echoes of the Haitian Revolution in the Czech lands and the cultural and political context that preceded the Spring of Nations, the translator's rewriting emerges as a response to local emancipatory efforts.

Keywords

Haitian Revolution, Displaced Africans, Racial Imagery, Bug-Jargal, Victor Hugo, Dalibor Kopecký, Czech National Revival.

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