

ON THE IMAGOLOGICAL REFLECTION  
OF THE TINKER TOPOS IN THE  
LIBRETTOS OF J.K. CHMELENSKÝ AND  
K. ŽELENSKÝ  
("IMAGE OF THE NEIGHBOUR" IN THE  
19TH CENTURY'S CZECHO-SLOVAK  
CULTURAL RELATIONS)

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**Słowa kluczowe:** imagologia, topos naprawiacza garnków, inność, „obraz sąsiada”,

J.K. Chmelenský, K. Želenský, stosunki słowacko-czeskie, komparatystyka

**Key words:** imagology, tinker topos, otherness, “image of the neighbour”,

J.K. Chmelenský, K. Želenský, Czecho-Slovak relations, comparative literature

**Abstrakt:** Anna Zelenková, IMAGOLOGICZNA REFLEKSJA NA TEMAT TOPOSU NAPRAWIA-CZA GARNKÓW W LIBERETTACH J.K. CHMELENSKÉGO I K. ŽELENSKÉGO (“OBRAZ SĄ-SIADA” W CZECHO-SŁOWACKICH RELACJACH KULTURALNYCH). „PORÓWNANIA” 19, 2016. T. XIX. S. 32–40. ISSN 1733–165X. Artykuł wychodzi z poglądów jednego ze współzało-życieli imagologii H. Dyserincka, według którego „obraz sąsiada” musi mieć przewagę recepcji nad teorią wpływu, tj. przewagę dialogu międzykulturowego nad manifestowaniem przewagi poziomu rozwoju jednej literatury nad drugą. W stosunkach czesko-słowackich obraz “własnego” (autoobraz) i obraz „cudzego” (heteroobraz) w XIX wieku z powodów ideologicznych były ograniczane, gdy chodzi o wytworzenie takiego dyskursu kultury w formie narratywnej, w którym pojawiałyby się tematy i obrazy wspierające teorię wewnątrz kulturowej jedności. Poprzez wykorzystaną w artykule koncepcję intertekstualności dokonuje się analizy semantycznej i geneologicznej transformacji toposu naprawiacza garnków (druciarza), który był w XIX wieku naj-częstszym stereotypem związanym ze słowackim kontekstem, a zwłaszcza w operowych libret-

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tach J.K. Chmelenského *Dráteník* (chodzi o pierwszą czeską śpiewogrę z roku 1826 F. Škroupa) i K. Želenského *U Božích muk* (kompozytor S. Suda, praska premiera 1898). Genetyczną zależność obu tekstów podtrzymują analogiczne motywy, także eksponowane w pieśni *Kde domov můj*, późniejszym czeskim hymnie narodowym. Pomimo ponad półwieku odstępu popularność obu oper u widzów wskazuje na potencjalne konotacje tego toposu (egzotyczna odmienność, społeczna niższość, typ słowackiego patrioty itp.), które odpowiadały narastającej politycznej aktualizacji czesko-słowackiej solidarności w końcu XIX wieku

**Abstract:** Anna Zelenková, ON THE IMAGOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF THE TINKER TOPOS IN THE LIBRETTOS OF J.K. CHMELENSKÝ AND K. ŽELENSKÝ ("IMAGE OF THE NEIGHBOUR" IN THE 19th CENTURY'S CZECHO-SLOVAK CULTURAL RELATIONS). "PORÓWNANIA" 19, 2016. Vol. XIX. P. 33–40 ISSN 1733–165X. The paper draws on the ideas of one of the co-founders of imagology H. Dyserinck who claims that in the "image of the neighbour" there should be the prevalence of reception over the theory of influence, i.e. the prevalence of intercultural dialogue over the manifestation of the level of development of one literature over another. In Czecho-Slovak relations, the image of "one's own" (autoimage) and the image of the "other" (heteroimage) were in the 19th century limited, out of ideological reasons, to the creation of such cultural discourse in the narrative form which would include the themes and images supporting the theory of intra-cultural unity. Making use of intertextuality, the paper analyses semantic and generic transformations of the tinker topos which was in the 19th century the most frequent stereotype associated with the Slovak context, namely, in the opera librettos of J.K. Chmelenský *Dráteník* [*The Tinker*] (the first Czech singspiel from 1826 by F. Škroup) and K. Želenský *U Božích muk* [*At the Calvary*] (composed by S. Suda, Prague premiere in 1898). The genetic dependence of both texts is also supported by analogical motifs, especially a high profile acquired by the song *Kde domov můj* [*Where is my home*], which later became the Czech national anthem. In spite of the distance of more than half a century, the popularity of both operas points to the potential connotations of this topos (exotic otherness, social degradation, a type of Slovak patriot, etc.) which suited the growing political topicality of the Czecho-Slovak solidarity at the end of the 19th century.

The question of Czecho-Slovak relations in the 19th and 20th century has been discussed in many theoretical and literary historical studies which defined this mutual relation on the basis of a historical aspect as "an alliance and contradictions" and pointed to a semiotic field of "intersecting" intertextual and extra-textual transfers. One of the new methodological impulses in the research into Czecho-Slovak literary relations could be the innovated imagology, i.e. the comparative discipline focused on the interpretation of images ("les images") representing foreign countries and nations in a verbal text. These images are mostly in the form of myths and collectively spread stereotypes which operate in neighbourly relations as certain fictive and subjective concepts specifically interpreting the reality. According to one of the founders of comparative imagology Hugo Dyserinck, in the "image of the neighbour" reception should prevail over the theory of influence, i.e. intercultural dialogue over the attempts to prove the dominance of one literature over the other one or even to create intercultural unity (Dyserinck 125–133). The Spanish comparatist Claudio Guillén speaks in this sense about the inevitability to study relations between two close literary units as a communicative alteration of genres, forms and themes which have "changing phases and rhythms of development" (Guillén 14)

and which have to be cleared of ideological connotations. In the Czecho-Slovak relations the image of oneself ("autoimage") and the image of the other ("heteroimage") was often limited to the creation of such cultural discourse in a narrative form in which the themes and images supporting the theory as a model of mutuality would occur, based, however, on the dominance of the "more developed" Czech literature, and on the suppression of the "otherness" or "foreignness" of Slovak culture developing at the turn of the 19th and 20th century still under the conditions of the non-existence of their own state. One of the frequent Slovak themes in the Czech environment was the topos of the tinker (*dráteník*) which drew into itself a certain romantic element, motivic exclusivity, and, in addition to the social aspect of poverty, it also embodied, within patriotic ideology, an ideal type of common man of pure character with prevailing virtues and national feelings. This topos did not emerge only in imaginative literature and contemporaneous journalism, but it penetrated even to more popular musical genres with greater reception, such as the opera in the 19th century. In the paper I will try to use the imagological impulses and the theory of intertextuality to compare two Czech opera librettos associated with the ideologeme of the tinker – *Dráteník* [*The Tinker*] by Josef Krasoslav Chmelenský (the first Czech singspiel of 1826 composed by František Škroup) and Karel Želenský *U Božích muk* [*At the Calvary*] (composed by Stanislav Suda, Prague premiere in 1898). In spite of the fact that between the premieres there is a distance of more than a quarter century, they point to the ideological connotations of the topos which express the political topicality of Czecho-Slovak relations still before 1918. The genetic dependence as well as cultural connection of both texts is also supported by the analogical plot and motivic construction, especially the prominence of the song *Kde domov můj* [*Where is my home*] – the later Czech national anthem.

As is widely known, the tinkers, coming especially from the north-eastern Slovakia, were purchasing and then selling wires even outside the territory of Upper Hungary, especially in Moravia and Bohemia where they were, at the same time, mending metal and enamel cookware. In the neighbouring countries, mostly in Bohemia and Hungary, they were "commonly accepted as representatives of Slovak poverty" (Krčméry 104). According to Štefan Krčméry, "the tinker's grief,"<sup>2</sup> which "couples with orphanage" (Krčméry 104), resulted from an irresolvable contradiction between the effort and, at the same time, impossibility to improve one's social position – tinkers as "live pieces of Slovak body" (Krčméry 104) are "the birds rooted in earth ... a leaf carried by wind" (Krčméry 105). This social motif, connected with the exotic otherness, had been stressed as early as at the beginning of the 20th century in its metaphorical depiction of the Slovak tinker also by, for example, Rainer Maria Rilke in his poem *Der kleine „Dráteník“*. In the Czech literary context, to the social subtext of the tinker symbol was often added the national moment – the

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2 Quotations from Czech translated by A.P.

tinker was sentimentally perceived as a specific type of persecuted Slovak patriot whose wandering and specific tinker work did not have any analogy in Czech environment, and who, as a member of the “unified” Czechoslovak tribe, was an ideal expression and representation of national and social persecution. To a certain extent, one could associate it with the operation of Rousseauistic preromantic myth of the “natural man” living in harmony with the divine order of nature. The literary type of a socially low human being with moral principles was linked here with patriotic connotations – the tinker was not just a usual “outcast” wandering throughout foreign countries out of economic reasons, but a humiliated patriot, suffering for his unfree country, and especially for the Czechs, an ethnically close Slovak representing the Slavic element from the Upper Hungary. The so “thematized” ideogeme of Slovak tinker remained rooted in Czech culture during the entire 19th century as a metaphorical expression of the unhappy fate of the Slovak ethnic.

The character of the tinker first appeared in the Czech environment in the libretto of Chmelenský (1800–1839) which became a basis for the first Czech national opera (singspiel) *Dráteník* composed by Škroup (1801–1862). Škroup asked Chmelenský for a libretto, gave him a subject matter and probably also indicated a basic plot scheme. Škroup and Chmelenský wanted, in their own words, to create an original singspiel in Czech with a national subject matter. With his own work Škroup responded to the “patriots’ nostalgic longing” for an original Czech singspiel, and also Chmelenský as an advocate of the Czechoslovak tribal, literary and linguistic unity was influenced by the “love to the homeland and to the mother tongue” (Chmelenský 1826: 2–3). This may have been the reason why into the Czechoslovak whole he also included a Slovak character of the tinker who speaks (sings) “...in... a brotherly dialect” (Chmelenský 1826: 3), i.e. in Slovak, acts as a patriot and, at the same time, reflects a social aspect. A simple love story from a burgher’s environment brought a conventional motif of lovers whose happiness was opposed (through a misunderstanding) by their parents. Although the minor character of the Slovak tinker enters the main plot line somewhat statically, as a “deus ex machina” (the tinker gets a job in the house of the merchant Květenký who wants to marry his daughter Růženka against her will), this character, according to Felix Vodička, still reappears throughout the entire story “as an example of positive human values, as a bearer of patriotism and mutual Czecho-Slovak relations” (Vodička 231). The tinker refused to stop wearing the traditional costume of his predecessors and showed his willingness to help (facilitating the lovers’ meeting) as well as ironized, in words and acts, the burghers’ longing for wealth. He expressed his feelings towards his Slovak homeland in a song which can be considered an artistic culmination of the libretto. In this way the tinker spoke about his true form of love to his nation also with the Czech servant in the house of the merchant Květenký. Within the Jungmann’s programme, to feel patriotically means, especially, to love one’s language. The tinker in the Czech opera was defending his Slovak country which, even though not rich, is a country

of his childhood, games and, especially, his mother tongue through which “a heart to a heart can speak heartily” (Chmelenský 1872: 12). Slovakia acquires an idyllic form (“endearing land”, “golden Aurora,” and so on) in which “a small flower is smiling” and “nicely the wind blows”. The song (written in dactylic-trochaic prosody) is finished by a contrast in values between a foreign land and a homeland to which the tinker wanted to return and where he wanted to die as well (“for ever I will stay there”) (Chmelenský 1872: 12).

The Škroup’s singspiel reflected a boom of the Czech folk and patriotic song in the 1820s and 1830s, continuing a revivalist tradition to which a certain political subtext was also penetrating, i.e. the motifs of resistance, struggle and criticism of contemporary situation which got sharpened especially after the revolutionary year of 1830. The *Dráteník*’s singspiel structure, based on the alteration of the spoken word with prevailing songs, allowed for the linking of the didactic aspect with the entire entertaining culmination. The song was considered to be the most efficient means of forming social consciousness and resonated especially in folk and burghers’ strata, due to its simplicity and comprehensibility (suitable for mass reproduction), for its life optimism and emotionality. This is where one can look for a long lasting popularity of the Škroup’s text and of the Chmelenský’s *Dráteník* which opened in the Stavovské divadlo theatre in Prague on 2 February 1826. The tinker’s sensitive song about his home and love to his homeland anticipated the song *Kde domov můj* composed by Josef Kajetán Tyl probably as an allusion to Goethe’s *Mignon’s Song* sung by a blind musician in the singspiel by the same composer Škroup entitled *Fidlovačka aneb Žádný hněv a žádná rovačka* from 1834. Both the tinker and the blind musician are bearers of common positive values and they represent standardized characters who are socially and ethnically clearly determined and are characteristic for their analogical relations to the mother tongue and to the patriotic ideology. A certain similarity of the composition and ideological effect of both texts, whose origins were separated by the distance of almost ten years, is testified by the fact that the new edition of the *Dráteník*’s (1927) libretto included also the Tyl’s song *Kde domov můj* which ended the entire work as an excipit, and in this form it was played in later versions as well.

As stated above, the tinker topos was the most frequent Slovak motif in Czech texts throughout the entire 19th century. Since the origin of Chmelenský’s libretto it got fixed into the canonised image of a typified character who, due to its general features, did not succumb to larger interpretive changes. The absence of its individualised or psychological depiction (which was, on the other side, compensated for by the “exoticism” of origin resulting from social and folklore “otherness”) led to axiological constants which emphasised, for example, the aspect of the “outcast” (motif of poverty and alcoholism), archetype of “pure”, good man (a fairy tale, mythological or natural motif) or patriotic-educational subtext (motifs of compassion and morality). It was the end of the 19th century when the Slovakophil approach was being strengthened in the Czech view of Slovakia, within which there existed vari-

ous attitudes and opinions ranging between the romantic folklorism, exoticism and realistically-critical perception from which the tendency of “getting closer” was then formed (i.e. also the conception of the so-called Czechoslovak unity) referring to common historical roots.

This topicality of Czecho-Slovak mutuality [vzájemnost] was also reflected in Karel Želenský’s libretto (1865–1935) *U Božích muk* which was set to music by the Czech composer Stanislav Suda (1865–1931) (Hostomská 664–666). The opera was for the first time introduced under the title *Boží muka* on 13 March 1897 in the Pilsner drama theatre (i.e. over seventy years after the opera *Dráteník*) and penetrated also to the stage of the National Theatre in Prague where it was successfully opened on 19 January 1898. The libretto’s theme was not chosen accidentally. Želenský, a man with many interests who was an actor in dramas, sang in operettas, directed and authored several plays, small prose works and librettos (Šormová 815–817), was in 1894 hired by the famous theatrical director Vendelín Budil to the Municipal Theatre in Pilsen and here he met his contemporary, then a beginning blind composer Suda. Both artists agreed on cooperation, on the creation of an undemanding, lyrical-folklore opera “in the national spirit” which would return, in the period of the prevailing fashionable verism, to the tradition of Smetana’s singspiels and to the poetics of *Prodaná nevěsta* [*The Bartered Bride*] from the village setting (Janota, Kučera 278). In 1895 Želenský and Suda took part in the Ethnographic Exhibition in Prague which significantly influenced interest of the Czech side in Slovak folklore and Slovak village with its distinctive, characteristic types, i.e. also with the character of the tinker who in this case, in their opera (with respect to the home audience), has a positive relation to the Czech environment. The element of Czecho-Slovak mutuality with certain politicising subtext was strengthened especially in May 1896 by the foundation of the alliance Československá jednota [Czechoslovak Unity] which was focused on the strengthening of relations and cultural and economic cooperation with Slovakia (Zelenková 99–101).

The opera with libretto, even written in Slovak, was thus to be situated in a Slovak village, with a dominating positive tinker character and with a traditional love motif. Želenský worked on the libretto in 1895–1896 and created a simple one-act opera with five scenes set to an undetermined small Slovak village at the end of the 19th century (“happening in Slovakia”). The limited number of five persons, dominated by the tinker Berka as a “wise voice” of the village people, points to a simple basic story line<sup>3</sup> beginning by a choral song of the gathered village people, with the background of “the Calvary”. The old tinker Berka, “the wise daddy”, returns to the native village from his wanderings throughout Bohemia about which he excitedly speaks to his countrymen as about the “sacred” land with free people

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3 On purpose more attention is paid to the story, since the libretto *U božích muk* is not sufficiently familiar; the opera is almost forgotten.

to whom a foreign tinker is a brother. After his return home he helps Malka who is unhappily in love with a youth (a poacher) Samko. Berka advises her to pray at "the Calvary" as at the Christ's symbol of blessing and divine justice. But the overseer, for whom the following words hold true: "...the lord and the Slovak, a strange thing - / the lord likes castles, the Slovak a cage" (Želenský 11), hands over Samko to the hands of guards. The experienced Berka, however, reminds the overseer (again at a symbolical "Calvary") of his sin from the past - the overseer once seduced a young girl Katarína who committed suicide after the birth of her illegitimate child. It is Samko who is the overseer's son and because the overseer wants to atone for his sin he agrees to the wedding of Malka and Samko.

The opera achieved immediate popularity due to its simplicity and comprehensibility, despite the fact that it was the first work both for the libretto writer as well as the composer who, as far as composition is concerned, did not create a compact work. It was rather a free series of simple scenes and musical pieces without a real dramatic effect - but with an appealing melodicism. After the Pilsen and Prague staging it was done in 1899 by a Czech theatre in Brno. What added to the opera's success (despite its serious nature, but a happy ending though) was an emerging textual analogy of the Želenský's libretto with Sabin's libretto to Smetana's *Prodaná nevěsta*. Smetana's is also a village story with a love motif based on an enforced marriage, which is in contradiction with the feelings of the villagers and their morality. The typifying of characters, reflected in their "engagement" in the solution of the conflict (the lovers' wedding), points to an intention to exert an impression on common spectators, which is required by the principles of a genre, a realistically-sentimental picture. Such was a one-act, lyrical opera with folklore features, alternating comic and serious aspects. The Želenský's choice of Slovak with Czech features, which did not correspond to the standard form of the language, and was even enriched by lexical elements from the Moravian dialect, was to mark the "exoticism" of the Slovak village setting. It was, however, (according to the stage instructions of the librettist Želenský) rather a unique Czech copy reminiscent of a space of the Czech "small village square with a pub" where all significant events of the simple story take place. Similarly, the names of the tinker Berka and the overseer Váňa have certain Czech origin. The name of the young poacher Samko was again probably an echo of the contemporary popularity of an "ideal" type of an unhappy Slovak hero persecuted by Hungarian authorities, as, for example, in the legend *Samko pták* from the cycle of stories *Tři legendy o krucifixu* by Julius Zeyer (1895).

In Želenský's conception, the tinker topos loses romantic features or attributes of mythology, or fairy tale, and, on the other hand, social "otherness" with a certain almost politicising effect prevails. The tinker is no longer a symbol of poverty and backwardness; there is absence of the motifs of tolerated alcoholism or criminal behaviour of tinkers which were many times depicted in the Czech sentimental literary works or contemporary journalism. As far as the libretto *U Božích muk* is concerned,

in the image of the tinker Berka (in spite of the fact that his lower social status is preserved) are strengthened especially his moral qualities, such as pride, self-confidence, charity and enlightened mind, which are significantly projected to his position within a village community. The tinker's opinion here becomes a kind of unwritten law, corresponding to both the tradition as well as future development which already anticipates a connection with "close and friendly" Czechs. In the tinker's portrait by Želenský there is no longer the traditional folklore stylisation, and he is not (as in the Chmelenský's libretto *Dráteník*) primarily shown as a suffering "patriot" either – but one can still detect there a clear social and didactic subtext. In Berka's song Bohemia is presented as an ideal, free country "without guards"; one can see the tinker's monological praise of Bohemia already at the beginning, in the second scene, where even the musical motif of the song *Kde domov můj* was used – to evoke in the readers an allusion to a prototype of the Czech singspiel by Škroup and Chmelenský. One can look at it from both sides – with regard to the Czechs the libretto drew on the contemporary popularity of Slovak themes; as regards the Slovaks it was a signal of the existence of Czecho-Slovak cultural closeness which could anticipate future unity. Although in Želenský's work Slovakia was superficially stylised into the aspect of "otherness", through the ideas of the character of the tinker it was shown in Bohemia as something very close, as the theme acceptable from the aspect of values and culture, the theme whose differences and specificities can be transformed and adapted to the domestic needs.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that both Czech opera librettos *Dráteník* and *U Božích muk*, with the generically close tinker topos, remained (despite the time distance separating their premieres as well as their different reception effect) during the entire 19th century a kind of evidence of a growing Czech interest in Slovakia, an artistic expression as well as practical fulfilment of the strengthening Czecho-Slovak cultural mutuality. Naturally, this was also pragmatically adopted to serve certain political needs of the more developed Czech neighbours who shaped their cultural discourse by modifying the image of the close, the "foreign", to the image of "ours".

*Translated by Anton Pokrivčák*

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