

JITKA MALEČKOVÁ: “The Turk” in the Czech Imagination (1870s–1923)

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Much has been said about the relationship between the East and the West in regards to its cultural implications for political discourse as well as various issues such as international relations, nation-building and imagined communities. One of the stronger elements of this relationship is the image of the Oriental, one of the most highlighted “Others” for Western culture. As a widespread and easily reproduced concept that has evoked various perspectives and opinions, this image has been employed in a number of literary texts, artistic genres and cultural trends, showing its significance for many of the European nations. The “Turk”, one of the most common images regarding the Oriental, was and still is an important element of the cultures and countries where the Ottoman Empire once ruled, as well as those it bordered upon and with which it had cultural, political, economic ties (positive or negative). Contrary to the classical Saidian understanding of Orientalism, images regarding these Oriental Turks had a different effect on the ever-changing frontier between the East and the West, in other words, the westernmost border of the Ottoman Empire.

In her work *“The Turk” in the Czech Imagination*, Jitka Malečková from the Institute of Near Eastern and African Studies at Charles University (Prague) examines the image of the Turk reproduced by Czech authors, underlining the differences between the Czech society and their neighbors in regards to their perspective on the Orient between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the Czechs have never been directly ruled by the Turks, they were nonetheless affected by the political history of their region. The neighboring Slovaks and Hungarians having endured the “Turkish yoke” for

a substantial period, and the Czechs having been incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the arch-nemesis of the Turks in the West for a few centuries, the image of the Turk in the Czech imagination possesses both similarities and differences with its form elsewhere. It can be argued that the imagination of the Czechs, neither a colonial Western power nor a former Christian subject nation of the Ottoman Empire, signifies an important outlook for the field of imagology, and this monograph has been published in Brill/Rodopi’s long-running series “Studia Imagologica”.

Joep Leerssen suggests that such images are the result of the national and regional experiences of the people who create them and are in constant motion. In the classical sense of the term Orientalism, the Oriental is usually perceived as a weak, inferior and primitive culture that needs to be civilized and dominated by the superior European culture and hegemony. Said’s understanding of Orientalism in this regard usually refers to the relationship between the Arab nations and the Western powers, namely Britain and France. However, it is possible to observe that different dynamics, quite the opposite of those employed in the classical sense of Orientalism, are at play in specific geographies and regions of Europe. One of the most interesting of these regions is Central Europe in which the image of the Turk found itself a place in various political, literary and artistic narratives. Contrary to the classical understanding of Orientalism, images regarding these Oriental Turks had a different effect on the ever-changing frontier between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, as Andre Gingrich has analyzed in his concept of “frontier Orientalism”.

In Chapter 1 of her work, Malečková explores how the image of the “Terrible Turk” was reproduced in the Czech imagination, both in regards to their experiences in the Turkish Wars and as a part of their cultural and social structure. She argues that, even though Czechs were not subjected to Turkish rule, the implications of the bordering Turks were quite prominent among the population. The image of the Turk, perceived as an oppressor and alien threat to the sovereignty of the Christian world, is also employed by the Czechs for various political and social purposes. Malečková emphasizes the Turk’s role as a proxy in literature, painting and folk tales and their purposes as a whole for the Czech society. In accordance with the popular anthropological issues of the period, the race of the Turk was also brought into question by various European sources. Malečková underlines the importance of such discussions regarding the Turk in consideration of the scientific and political atmosphere of the era. Additionally, she further discusses the development of the image of the Turk by exemplifying its various purposes and how they were adapted to the political and social narratives of Czech society. Contrary to the popular narrative, Malečková also stresses the function of the image of the Turk in folk tales and ballads, as an element of entertainment.

Malečková comments on the relationship between the Czechs and other Slavic nations living under the rule of the Ottoman Empire in Chapter 2 of her work, which is especially important for the discussions regarding the multi-cultural status of the Ottoman Empire and how emerging nationalistic ideas shaped and influenced cultural perceptions. The opinion of Czech society regarding their Slavic brethren living under the Turkish yoke is examined thoroughly and the function of the image of the Turk in this regard is analyzed and exemplified. Accordingly, concerning Czech perceptions of the Turks, Malečková also comments on the concepts of exoticness and backwardness which are often associated with the Orientals by Western accounts. From

the writings of Czech travelers, she discusses how this exoticness can be observed from the opinions and experiences regarding Turkish women, as well as how the backwardness of Turkish society was perceived as a whole. However, she states that the opinions regarding the Turks were not always negative and in fact, they also received admiration and praise. She explains the differences of opinion of Czech society regarding the Turks by underlining the political concepts and social conditions of the period.

Another important aspect of Malečková’s work is that it also focuses on the opinions and images of Czech society regarding what Gingrich has called the “Good Muslims”, namely Bosnians, who were incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In Chapter 3, she also comments on what she calls the “colonial ambitions of the Czechs” (150), even though they were not a Western colonial power, especially regarding the relationship between Czech intellectuals and Bosnians, who were considered to be the Slavic brethren of the Czechs despite being Muslims. This important topic deals with the power dynamics of the region in a period of great change, nationalist ambitions and nation-building efforts. Furthermore, she comments on the function of these “Good Orientals” by serving as a gateway for Czech cultural interest and influence in the Orient, as well as on the cultures and countries of their Slavic brethren. She also strongly emphasizes the role of travelogues and guidebooks focusing on Bosnia-Herzegovina, underlining that some authors noticed and commented on the Oriental character of Bosnia-Herzegovina and perceived the region as being oppressed under the Turkish rule.

Malečková additionally comments on the historical development of Oriental studies in Czech academia as well as its current position and goals, in addition to many issues in the field of cultural studies such as translation. In Chapter 4, she explains the historical development of Czech Oriental studies and stresses that “the reliance on foreign scholarship that can be observed

in the early and some of the later writings of Czech Orientalists does not mean that the Czech field of Oriental studies emerged as a pure replica of Orientalist schools abroad” (176), underlining the differences in regards to their purpose, aims and subjects as well as providing examples from prominent Czech Orientalists. She highlights the struggles concerning the field of Orientalism in the Czech lands, such as the poor wages, demanding requirements, etc.

Malečková’s *“The Turk” in the Czech Imagination (1870s–1923)* is a valuable addition to the field of cultural studies as she explores the terra incognita between the frontier and the West in its relationship with the Orient while commenting on the crucial points

of the discourse as a whole, as well as providing examples for the differences between Oriental approaches of various regions and nations. This study of the Czech imagination regarding the Orient is an important addition to the imagological studies, as it presents how otherness differentiates between nations, how it was and is employed for various reasons, and how it was perceived differently throughout the time. Scholars and general readers alike will find that Malečková’s book is a pleasurable read, possessing great academic importance as well as providing valuable scholarly work on the topic.

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JOHN CORBETT – TING HUANG (eds.): The Translation and Transmission of Concrete Poetry

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Translation theory and practice as a rule takes into consideration the particulars of what facilitates the carrying over of meanings which are necessarily often inherently indeterminate and shrouded in mystery. Anyone who has ever tried their hand at translating poetry would probably agree that any serious attempt at doing so is complicated – sometimes almost to the point of impossibility – by the necessity of continually taking into consideration a host of often conflicting factors such as the semantic ambiguity of tropes, the intended versus accidental effects of the rhythm, and the graphical layout and play on words. As the recently-published volume *The Translation and Transmission of Concrete Poetry* edited by John Corbett and Ting Huang shows, the matter becomes even more complicated when it comes to the translation of concrete and experimental poetry. The volume, addressing such issues as the translation of Chinese characters and ideograms, playfulness or

transcreation, grew out of a seminar held by the Department of English at the University of Macau in late 2016 and from a grant aimed at mapping avant-garde movements in literature in the latter half of the 20th century.

The volume is comprised of twelve chapters covering a wide range of topics from early Western visual poetry (Juliana di Fiori Pondian) through the forms and varieties of Chinese experimental poetry and the problems of its translation (Li Li, Chen Li) and the reception of concrete poetry in North America (Odile Cisneros) to the problems addressing the translation of playfulness and metaphor (Susan Bassnett, Chris McCabe). All of the contributions address in one way or another the problem of “‘untranslatable’ concrete poetry [...] through the lens of ‘transcreation’, that is, the informed, creative response to the translation of playful, enigmatic, visual texts” (i). Probes into the topic look into