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ARTICLES

KAREL ČAPEK'S "PÁSMO" AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF LITERARY MODERNITY THROUGH THE ART OF TRANSLATION

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Každá dokonalá báseň jest jedno veliké vítězství;
každá sladká sloka je celé království míru
Karel Čapek (1920, 7)

Over the years since the publication of Karel Čapek's *Francouzská poesie nové doby* [*French Poetry of the New Age*] — first edition 1920, revised by Čapek in 1936 as *Francouzská poesie* — much has been written about the significance of these translations in the context of Czech modernity. Of all these works, writers and critics invariably point to "Pásmo," Čapek's rendering of Guillaume Apollinaire's modernist masterpiece "Zone," as the cornerstone upon which the Czech modern literary identity has been constructed. As Milan Kundera, the defender of testaments betrayed, mused in his previous manifestation as a Czech lyric poet: "Jak by asi vypadala česká poezie, nebýt tohoto celkem nahodilého faktu, že Čapek přeložil 'Pásmo?' [What would Czech poetry be like were it not for the completely fortuitous fact that Čapek translated 'Pásmo'?]" (Apollinaire, *Alkoholy života* 9).[1] Kundera's reverential attitude toward Čapek appears a contradiction given his later diatribes against translators. The attitude also belies the old cliché of the translator as traitor–translation as betrayal. However, Kundera made the comment at a time when he was still in Czechoslovakia, a poet who understood that in the Czech tradition translation offered a potent means for cultural expansion in a small nation, a way of constructing identity through assimilation when tradition had been disrupted. Given the evolutionary history of Czech literature, therefore, there is no contradiction when Zdeněk Pešat claims that "Na počátku bylo Apollinairovo Pásmo a jeho překlad Karlem Čapkem [In the beginning there was Apollinaire's 'Zone' and its translation by Karel Čapek]" (109) and that Czech modernity traces its roots back to what is essentially an adaptation, a copy. Yet, in this case, Apollinaire has not suffered at Čapek's hands at all. On

the contrary, in translation he gained a stature that he could never have achieved in the French tradition he belonged to. As Jan Rubeš observed, "Čapek's Apollinaire became for the Czechs not the intermediary figure between Symbolism and Surrealism that he was in France but the herald of a totally new literary sensibility" (Rubeš 64). In Paris, Apollinaire is one among many. In Prague, Čapek's Apollinaire reigns to this day as the one who started it all.

Whether the critics' claims have merit matters little. What counts in assessing Čapek's contribution to Czech modernity is not the truth but the perception that "Pásmo," as Vítězslav Nezval wrote, "se čte jako původní báseň [reads like an original poem]" (Nezval 16), that the original has achieved greater significance in its translated form. The persistent view that a secondary work can transcend the life of its original text challenges the very notion of what constitutes originality in art. The afterlife of "Zone" in Prague proves that the translation process signifies more than the systematic quest for linguistic equivalence or even dogged fidelity to an original. When the translator succeeds in maintaining the delicate balance between the author and the target language, translations can serve as powerful tools in the transmission and evolution of culture.

In order to understand how Čapek created what Rubeš calls the "cult of Apollinaire" (63) from a translation, one naturally has to go back to the original source. However, because Apollinaire published more than one version of "Zone" during his lifetime, the process of determining the source text becomes complicated. The poem first appeared in the journal *Les Soirées de Paris* in December 1912. The next year a revised version of the poem was included in Apollinaire's first book of poetry, *Alcools*. News of *Alcools* reached Bohemia and Czech readers of French with help from the glowing review of the collection that Čapek published in the journal *Přehled* [*Review*] in 1914. Instead of offering an evaluation of Apollinaire's work, Čapek was primarily concerned with Apollinaire as cultural figure, remarkable more for his distinctive "osobnost [personality]" than for his innovative aesthetics:

Bylo by možno ještě mnoho říci o samotných básních Apollinaireových; ale nejhlubším zájmem zůstává tu vždy sama *osobnost* [my emphasis] autorova, čistý lyrický hlas její subjektivity, její smutek, jejž sdílí jakási citlivka v nitru každého z nás. Tata osobnost sama stojí za poznání, i kdyby nebyla citlivým jádrem toho známého neúnavného kritika, anekdotáře a účastníka nového života uměleckého i literárního. (Čapek 1984, 358)

It would be possible to say a good deal more about Apollinaire's individual poems; but here the *personality* [my emphasis] of the author remains of the most profound interest, the pure lyric voice of its subjectivity, its sorrow that we all share a certain sensitive soul inside of us. This personality alone is worth getting to know even if it were not the sensitive quintessence of this well-known unflagging critic, storyteller and contributor to the new artistic and literary life.

Although Čapek used the better part of his commentary to praise Apollinaire as the quintessential spirit of the modern age, when he cited individual examples from the poems to prove his point, more often than not he turned to "Zone." From Čapek's remarks it is clear that early on he believed this particular poem best expressed the modernity that distinguished Apollinaire from the tradition of all the others who had preceded him. For Čapek, "Zone" symbolized Apollinaire's irrevocable break with tradition, which had changed the face of poetry forever.

"Pásmo," like "Zone," began its life in serial publication, first appearing in the journal *Červen* [*June*] in February 1919, with Josef Čapek's linocuts illustrating the text. In April 1919, Čapek published both the text and illustrations along with a brief afterword. Although the layout for this edition had been altered slightly (some verse breaks were not the same), the language of the second version remained essentially unchanged. In 1920 Čapek decided not to include "Pásmo" in the first edition of *Francouzská poesie* despite the fact he did publish two other translations from *Alcools*: "Rýnská podzimní" [Rhénane d'automne—Fall Rhenish] and "Zvony" [Les Cloches—The Bells]. However, the omission did not mean that Čapek was unaware of its potential, as Rubeš concluded in his article. The fact that Čapek drew primarily on "Zone" for his review and published the translation as an independent work complete with illustrations even before the collection shows that he felt that "Pásmo" was extremely significant, too significant to get lost within the pages of an anthology.

In his afterword for the 1919b edition, Čapek provided a brief summary of the significant details in Apollinaire's life and art (including an anecdote about Apollinaire's arrest in connection with the disappearance of the Mona Lisa in 1911). He reiterated many of the opinions he had expressed in his review of *Alcools*, but by 1919 the context had changed because of Apollinaire's death shortly after the Armistice. As a man, Apollinaire was no longer a cultural icon; he had become a patriot, a "pravý Francouz [true Frenchman]" ("Pásmo" 1919b, 16) who had been wounded defending the Republic and its democratic ideals, ideals that had finally liberated Bohemia from Austria. However, even a critic as capable as Čapek managed to either mix up or misinterpret one fact about the poet's life—Apollinaire's paternity. According to his account, Apollinaire was "po otci Polák [Polish on his father-side]" (16), yet critics to this day dispute the national origin of Apollinaire's father because Apollinaire's Polish mother never divulged his identity.

As a poet, Čapek credited Apollinaire with having "přejal tradici symbolismu [passed beyond the tradition of symbolism]" (16) by forging a new poetic language marked by its conflicting features of "hravost, dětský pláč, exotičnost, schválnost i melodická prostota [playfulness, child-like tears,

exoticism, willfulness and melodic simplicity]." In addition, as a commentator on art and cultural critic Apollinaire had been the key figure in "vývojem nejmladšího umění [the evolution in the art of the newest generation]." Thus, the Apollinaire Čapek introduced to the Czech public was far more than a talented poet whose work merited their attention. Čapek conceived of the dead poet as a symbol whose life, art and thinking had become synonymous with modernity itself.

As for his approach to the translation of "Zone," Čapek made no direct reference to it in the record. In his literary archive in Prague only drafts of some of the poems included in the first edition of *Francouzská poesie* are still extant. However, despite the fact that "Pásmo" had been left out, his commentary in that anthology's foreword sheds light on his process because all the French translations were produced during the course of the First World War. According to the foreword, these poems (which he movingly addresses as if they were living entities) were more than just pretty verse. For Čapek, the poems provided him with "nesmírná útěcha [enormous consolation]" (*Francouzská poesie* 1920, 7) for the war's despair because he believed that "každá dokonalá báseň jest jedno veliké vítězství; každá sladká sloka je celé království míru [each perfect poem is a great triumph; each sweet verse is a whole kingdom of peace]." By publishing his anthology, Čapek wanted to bring the peaceful kingdom to those who had been exiled by their linguistic limitations while at the same time securing for French writers an audience for whom their names "jež by jinak zůstalo českému čtenaři mrtvým zvukem [would otherwise remain a dead sound in the Czech reader's ear]." Čapek's characterization makes translation sound like a civic service rather than the aesthetic exercise it is commonly held to be.

In his essay, Čapek summed up his opinions regarding the fundamental nature of the translation process by concluding:

> Ať se říká o překladatelství cokoliv, je to práce skromná a v podstatě anonymní. Jejím cílem je, aby jí nebylo vidět, aby podala original tak, jakoby vůbec ne prošel dílnou cizí osobnosti a cizího přepracování. (7)

> Say what you will about translation; it is modest work and, in essence, anonymous. Its goal is not to be seen, so it [the work] yields to the original as if it had not come about through the labor of another individual's labor and revision.

According to Čapek, as a translator he had a thankless, yet essential task to fulfill. He had to faithfully serve both author and public as a medium who, by definition, had to remain unrecognized and unsung. He assured the reader that in the case of *Francouzská poesie* he had not failed in this purpose, because he had done everything possible to leave the integrity of his originals intact:

Nekrásňoval jsem nijak obraz této nejmladší poesie; nechal jsem její drsnost i abstraktnost, její poměrnou nebarvnost, její prosaickou povahu co možno neporušenu, plně přesvědčen, že jednotlivci mohou chybovat nebo bloudit, ale vývoj nikoliv. (9)

I did not embellish in any way the face of the poetry of the new generation; as much as possible, I left intact its coarseness and abstraction, its relative lack of color, its prosaic quality, fully convinced that individual instances may err or go astray, but never the development.

Yet, even though Čapek claimed not to have interfered, his comment concealed from the reader clear instances in which he had purposely strayed from the original to serve an agenda all his own.

The slippery slope of the contradiction between a translator's theory and practice is immediately evident in Čapek's handling of "Pásmo." Here even the question of what constituted Apollinaire's "original" merits examination, since Apollinaire published two versions of "Zone" in such a short period of time. Because Čapek had reviewed *Alcools*, one would naturally assume that he would use this later text as the basis for his translation. However, a careful analysis of the 1919 translation shows that the "original" was not one text but a hybrid of the 1912 and 1913 versions.

For the most part, the two texts do not differ much. Apollinaire removed words or changed line breaks to make the language more direct and rhythmic. Nevertheless, in a few rare instances Apollinaire radically altered his meaning in two ways: he either shifted the narrator's address from *toi* [you—familiar] to *vous* [you—formal] or from second person to first person, or he revised his language altogether to offer a completely new set of images. At first glance, it appears that Čapek used the revision as the basis for the translation. However, two key discrepancies reveal that he retained elements from the previous version despite the fact that Apollinaire had clearly discarded them. Lines 117 and 118 of the 1912 version of "Zone" (119 and 120 in the revision) read:

Tu n'oses plus regarder la croix et à tous moments tu voudrais sangloter
Sur moi sur celle que j'aime sur tout ce qui m'a epouvanté (336)

You don't dare look at the cross anymore and always you wanted to weep
for me for the one I love for everything that frightened me

In 1913 Apollinaire substituted *tes mains* [your hands] for the religiously charged *croix* [cross] and changed *tu voudrais* [you wanted] to *je voudrais* [I wanted] (14). In the next line, he then replaced *Sur moi* [for me] with *Sur toi* [for you] and *ce qui m'a épouvanté* [what frightened me] with *ce qui t'a épouvanté* [what frightened you] to keep the shift in address consistent:

Tu n'oses plus regarder *tes mains* et à tous moments *je voudrais* sangloter
Sur *toi* sur celle que j'aime sur tout ce qui *t'a épouvanté* (1913, 14; emphasis added)

You don't dare to look at *your hands* and always I wanted to weep
for *you* for the one I love for everything that frightened *you*

In the revision the suffering is more personal and human once the religious reference is removed. The "you" Apollinaire addressed is ashamed because of a feature of his own body rather than because of the impersonal religious symbol. Therefore, he is forced to bear the burden of this shame without respite. Furthermore, when Apollinaire changed person, he created an emotional counterpoint between the first and second person that was previously absent. The narrator no longer merely observes his subject's passion from a safe distance. He feels for him. Thus, the unity of Apollinaire's "I" and "you" is reinforced by their mutual ability to empathize with the suffering of others, as the "you" does in the next line:

Tu regardes les yeux pleins de larmes ces pauvres emigrants

Eyes filled with tears you see these poor emigrants

However, Čapek decided not to adhere to Apollinaire's revisions. He translated the lines as follows:

Na své ruce se už ne troufáš podívat a stále chce se *ti* zaplakat
Nad *sebou* nade vším ce zděšilo tě nad ní kterou mám rad (1919b, 12; emphasis added)

You don't dare to look anymore at your hands and always *you* feel like crying
For yourself for all that frightens you and for the one I love

He adopted the new imagery, yet, at the same time, he condemned the narrator's double to suffer alone. By not translating "Sur toi" as "nad tebou [for you]," Čapek missed the emotionally charged element that Apollinaire had added to make his work more complex and expressive.

Apart from not reproducing these small but significant changes, Čapek also kept in line 136 ("On chante on danse on boit du champagne") (337) of the *Soirées de Paris* version, which Apollinaire had removed. In this section, the protagonist sits alone at night in a Parisian restaurant. In Apollinaire's text, the line did not serve any thematic purpose except to add color to the scene. However, the word "champagne" stood in the way of his assonance in lines 135, 137 and 138: "restaurant," "cependant" and "amant." Although the line Apollinaire omitted had its internal assonance, the repeated and unusual use of the impersonal "on" and lack of terminal rhyme weakened the text lyrically and semantically. The champagne, in essence, had made the section go flat.

Čapek's decision to leave the line in is puzzling, because this is a rare instance where he did not try to preserve the lyricism in what became a

tercet. Instead, Čapek left the lines as two couplets, one with rhyme, the other without, the first of which reads:

> Jsi pozdě k ránu ve velikém restaurantu
> Zpívá se tančí pije se šampaňské (1919b, 13)
>
> Late at night you are in a large restaurant
> People are singing dancing and drinking champagne

These two instances show that Čapek did not see any contradiction in using both texts despite the fact Apollinaire's revision had made the *Soirées* version obsolete. The earlier text was no longer his authoritative version. Čapek's handling of the original belies his claim in *Francouzská poesie* that he had slavishly adhered to the author's original language. In truth, his approach to translating was far more complex than a rote search for linguistic equivalence where the author's original invariably ruled the day. To be faithful to "Zone" and to Apollinaire, he had to weigh factors in the original and the target language to strike a balance between the two. Only by taking Czech considerations into account could Čapek get beyond Apollinaire's French language to reproduce his spirit.

Despite the fact Čapek did not use only a single source to represent the original, transgression is the exception, not the rule. On the whole, the translation is remarkable for all the many instances where Čapek succeeded in finding equivalence when one would have considered it impossible. Over and over again, Čapek proved himself a master of the dual demands of image and lyric. In almost every instance, Čapek attempted to preserve Apollinaire's images because they were what conveyed his modernity in any context.

However, in regard to language, he gave himself a great deal more leeway when it came to departing from Apollinaire's original. Because literary traditions differed in France and Bohemia, Čapek had to come up with a prosody that took his native conventions into account. To be modern, Čapek could not doggedly imitate Apollinaire's prosody because, as Rubeš has noted, "the radical distortion of French syntax cannot be reproduced to similar effect in Czech" (63). Had Čapek attempted to approximate Apollinaire's strategy, the resulting meter would not have signaled a break with tradition to the Czech reader. It would have just sounded foreign, like a translation. Instead, Čapek replaced "Apollinaire's rhymes with assonance, making the translation closer to rhythmical prose" (63). By infusing Apollinaire's poetry with prose cadences, Čapek found the appropriate means to challenge the poetic conventions of the previous generation. That Čapek viewed his translation effort as a means of promoting cultural development in his own tradition is clear from his remark in the foreword to the 1920 edition of *Francouzská poesie* that "chystaná anthologie měla se začíti tam,

kde přestávalo překladatelský dílo Jaroslava Vrchlického z francouzské poesie [the following collection should begin where Jaroslav Vrchlický's translations from French poetry left off]" (8–9).

Although Čapek claimed to be following in Vrchlický's footsteps, *Francouzská poesie* actually serves as his critique of the style that had so greatly influenced the prosody of the late nineteenth century. Unlike Čapek, Vrchlický did not attempt to disguise the fact that a given text was a translation. Instead, he allowed the original's idiosyncrasies to shine through to make their mark on the Czech. Under Vrchlický's influence, the poetry of the fin-de-siècle generation was distinguished by its alien accent and the rarefied diction that functioned as refuge from the vulgarity of everyday life. However, the First World War made Vrchlický's academic exoticism an anachronism. In the Republic, poetry could no longer exist as art for art's sake, removed from life, an escape. When Čapek adapted the new French poets for a Czech audience by introducing his prose rhythms into their verse, he liberated Czech poetry from Vrchlický's ivory tower to give poetic expression new life and meaning. Čapek's poetry of egalitarian prose walked among the people to sing of their experience.

Because Čapek had departed from Apollinaire's prosody in order to break with tradition, whenever there was a question of compromising his own sound or Apollinaire's sense, Čapek invariably chose the former. His version of lines 140–41 is a case in point. He translated:

> Elle est la fille d'un sergent du ville de Jersey
> Ses main que je n'avais pas vues sont dures et gercées (1913, 16)
>
> She is the daughter of a police sergeant from the city of Jersey
> Her hands that I've never seen are hard and chapped

as:

> Je to dcera městského strážníka prý z Cannes
> Neznám její ruce jsou tvrdé a rozprýskané (1919b, 13)
>
> She is the daughter of a metropolitan policeman they say from Cannes
> I'm not familiar with her hands they are hard and chapped.

Even though Čapek's version and Apollinaire's seem more or less the same semantically, Čapek introduced some elements of his own. He changed "Jersey" to "Cannes," the final syllable of which Czechs would pronounce in order to rhyme with "rozprýskané." This substitution also explains the addition of "prý [they say]," even though the word colors the diction. In this instance, Čapek's solution is more complex than Apollinaire's "Jersey/gercées." Although one could read the suggestion of a compound rhyme in "de Jersey" and "dures et gercées," in "Zone" the possibility remained

unfulfilled. Yet, because Čapek's alternate did not significantly interfere with Apollinaire's theme, the changes did not betray his intentions. On the contrary, the contrast of high and low diction (the humor of Czechs mispronouncing Cannes to get the rhyme and the vernacular of "prý") typified the quality of the modernity Čapek had such a significant role in creating when he translated "Pásmo."

Although most of the major discrepancies between "Zone" and "Pásmo" can be attributed to Čapek's sense of prosody, there are some instances when he diverges for what seems to be no apparent reason. Because these instances are so rare, they stand out all the more. An obvious semantic departure occurs in the section of "Zone" where Apollinaire movingly describes the impoverished immigrants who have come to Paris to seek their fortunes (much in the way Apollinaire had done a long time before). In lines 127–28, Apollinaire refers to an "édredon rouge [a red eiderdown]," which Michel Décaudin describes as "akin to the one Madame de Kostrowitzky had given her son — for a Pole the symbol of family life" (89). Although the eiderdown represented a symbol of emotional significance for Apollinaire, Čapek decided to dispense with the eiderdown altogether. In both lines he translated "édredon" as "praporek [small flag]" (1919b, 12). That Čapek relieved the families of their only token of home and source of comfort in a strange land to replace it with a flag, an abstract political symbol, at first seems completely inexplicable. How could Čapek think such an impersonal object could be taken to one's heart? What immigrant would cart around a flag? Yet, the "praporek" was no mistake. Given his obvious virtuosity as a translator and the fact that the term is repeated, mistranslation is not a possible explanation. The substitution was deliberate. Although lyric considerations may have guided Čapek's choice, it seems implausible that a translator as gifted as Čapek could not find a better equivalent to symbolize Apollinaire's home and heart if he did not like the sound of *édredon*'s equivalent, "peřina." But here Čapek probably realized that in the Czech context an eiderdown would not carry the emotional weight it had in "Zone." After all, Čapek knew that Czechs at home had no experience of emigration. However, like Apollinaire (and his emigrants), they had just undergone a change in political status. He and his countrymen had been freed from Austria to become citizens of a Czech nation that had been paid for with their life's blood. Thus, the small flag was dearer to Čapek's Czech heart than any comforter could ever hope to be. The little flag flying was a memorable and worthy token of emigrants' dreams for a better future.

However, the most puzzling semantic discrepancy comes at the poem's crucial moment, the end. As day is about to break on Paris's horizon, suddenly Apollinaire's language begins to fall apart. As the protagonist wanders home to Auteuil where he will fall sleep among his "fétiches

d'Oceanie et de Guinée [fetishes from Oceania and Guinea]" (1913, 17), the raucous prose of the modern world intervenes. The clatter of milk trucks takes over the streets, announcing the advent of daylight. To stave off their dissonance, Apollinaire reverts to the sweet consolation of alexandrines. But the harmony cannot prevent the dawn of a new era. The old world of his protagonist's "Christs inférieurs des obscures espérances [inferior Christs of dim hopes]" (17) is about to come to an end. As the narrator gently bids his companion farewell, modernity explodes in an apocalyptic sunrise devoid of syntax:

> Adieu Adieu
> Soleil cou coupé
>
> Farewell Farewell
> Sun severed neck

In *Soirées de Paris* the last line had read: "Soleil levant cou tranché [Sunrise cut-off neck]" (337). However, when Apollinaire revised the text, he augmented the violent disjunction of image, form and sound by removing the modifier (*levant*) and adding the final burst of onomatopoeic cacophony. In the aftermath of his bloody sunrise, the world and poetry had changed forever.

The challenge for Čapek consisted in reproducing Apollinaire's apocalypse without compromising either form or content in order to do true justice to this theme. But in 1919 Čapek could not find a way to maintain the delicate balance between Apollinaire's layers and his lyric. Instead he sacrificed the originality of Apollinaire's image and syntax to approximate his novel use of sound. His version reads:

> S bohem s bohem spáči
> Slunce plá pláče (1919b, 15)
>
> Farewell Farewell sleeper [vocative]
> Sun burns cries

While still preserving something of the literal meaning, Čapek substituted verbs for Apollinaire's substantive and modifier to recreate the alliteration. Whereas Apollinaire created an image out of two seemingly incompatible fragments (a method that later became crucial to Surrealism), Čapek approximated the semantic dissonance by contrasting what a sun can and cannot do: burn and cry. However, this solution fails because the image he created was less visually striking, more grammatical and, therefore, less meaningful within the context of "Zone"'s theme. Worse, by anthropomorphizing the sun, Čapek imbued the line with a pathos completely incompati-

ble with the poem's brutally unromantic, and therefore thoroughly modern, conclusion.

Čapek's decision to remain true to his lyric structure even at Apollinaire's expense yielded an even more puzzling discrepancy between the translation and the original. In the penultimate line of "Pásmo," Čapek had inserted a new element (the sleeper addressed by the narrator) in order to construct a harmonious balance between assonance and dissonance in the couplet (the Czech long a's contrasted with the hard p's and soft č's) that Apollinaire leaves unresolved. However, this choice came at great cost to Apollinaire. Because the poem's emotional tension relied on his alternating first- and second-person forms of address, this addition marred the tightly woven fabric of the narrative by making Apollinaire's *you* concrete. Where Čapek's sleeper might escape the holocaust in dreams and rhyme, Apollinaire offered no protection for his alter ego at all. But as Čapek revealed in *Francouzská poesie*, poetry could not mean devastation. Poetry was the Kingdom, consolation for the chaos of the modern world.

For anyone familiar with "Zone," Čapek's ending sticks out like a loose thread waiting to be pulled by the first careful observer. Yet, after its publication, no one (not even those who had access to the original) seemed to notice the obvious discrepancies. The fact that Čapek's deviations escaped critical scrutiny, for a decade at least, attests to his having fulfilled his goal of erasing "i nejslabši otisk svých prstů [even the slightest of my fingerprints]" (*Francouzská poesie* 1920, 7), so that critics simply assumed Apollinaire's "Zone" and "Pásmo" were one and the same thing. The fact that Čapek had significantly altered Apollinaire's text did not seem to get in the way of Apollinaire's "Pásmo" being enshrined as the great symbol of the "new age." Čapek had covered up his presence behind the towering figure of the Apollinaire that he had built out of Czech tradition using, in some cases, images he himself had provided. However, Čapek understood that images could come and go; but without a language to express them, the Czechs would remain in the dark age of the Habsburgs.

Word of "Pásmo"'s significance spread quickly in the literary community. One critic to take notice was the young Karl Teige. In his essay from 1919, "Guillaume Apollinaire: Několik poznámek k českému překladu 'Pásma' [Guillaume Apollinaire: Some Notes On the Czech Translation of 'Zone']," he singled out the work as the first faithful rendering of the modernity of the newest generation of French poets in a field distinguished by its failures rather than its successes:

> Zatím co z velkonakladatelských apatyk vytéká nečistá a kalná řeka nejhoršího překladové arseniku, my nemáme řádně vydány překlady z Verhaerena a Paul Forta, a abychom nezapomněli nesplacených dluhů době starší, není definitivního překladu "Květu zla", příšerně a málo je přeložen. (51)

While a dirty and turbid river of the worst translational arsenic flows from the great quacks of publishing, we do not have any decent translations in print of Verhaeren and Paul Fort, and lest we forget our unpaid debts to the past era, there exists no definitive translation of *Les Fleurs du mal.* Little of the work has been translated and what has been is ghastly.[2]

Teige gratefully welcomed the poem he called a "hlučné globtrotterské rhapsodie [raucous globetrotting rhapsody]" as a remedy for the sorry condition of Czech translation. He viewed the work as the happy and fortuitous "první krok [first step]" in bringing Paris's new age to readers of Czech. For Teige, as for Čapek, translation above all served the aims of cultural development. However, these domestic considerations did not detract from Apollinaire in the least. As the "pietní česká panychida za zesnulého básníka [the pious Czech elegy for the departed poet]," Čapek's translation was also the fitting monument for the author of the work that had been the "majákem [beacon]" that lit up the darkness when the Czechs had been separated from the French during the dark times of the war. When he translated "Zone" so masterfully, Čapek picked up the torch that would have been extinguished at the moment of Apollinaire's death. Thus, Čapek's adaptation that became Apollinaire's "Pásmo" had for Czechs transcended aesthetics to become a cultural and social act. Although his essay was a review of the translation, Teige did not feel it was necessary to discuss the intricacies of Čapek's technique. As far as Teige was concerned there was no need to go into detail. All that mattered was that "Karel Čapek přeložil 'Pásmo' přímo vzorně. Toť téměř vše, co se dá říci. [Karel Čapek translated 'Pásmo' in a downright exemplary manner. That's all that needs to be said.]" (61).

Karel Teige was not the only one to take notice. If one is to believe Gustav Janouch in his *Conversations with Kafka*, news of the translation's significance had reached other literary circles in Prague. Although Janouch's veracity is suspect, the fact that the following commentary was included in his 1951 edition (considered less unreliable than the 1968 extended version) reveals that the work had at least made an impact on the seventeen-year-old poet. According to Janouch's account, when asked of his opinion regarding the *Červen* version of "Pásmo," Kafka replied:

He [Kafka] said: "I read the translation soon after it appeared. I also knew the French original. It appeared in the book of poems, *Alcools.* Those poems, and a cheap new edition of Flaubert's letters, were the first French books I held in my hand after the war."

I asked: "What impression did they make on you?"

"Which? Apollinaire's poem or Čapek's translation?"—Kafka clarified my question in his own sharp, decisive way.

"Both," I declared, and immediately gave my own opinion. "I was overcome by them."

"I can quite imagine it," said Kafka. "They're a verbal masterpiece. Both the poem and the translation." (Janouch 162)

Although he admired the poem and translation, Janouch reported that Kafka had his reservations about Apollinaire, that he was dubious about the visual and verbal displays of mastery that entertained readers instead of illuminating their experiences of life. Instead, Kafka offered Heinrich von Kleist as a true example of poetic virtue because he did not obscure his message in embellished phrases and flights of virtuosity. Kleist let art speak for itself.

Whether Kafka actually made these comments is of little importance. Once again perception is everything. Janouch's portrayals of Kafka, Apollinaire and "Pásmo" are what count in assessing the immediate reception of Čapek's translation. His uncritical enthusiasm for the Apollinaire of "Pásmo" stood in opposition to Kafka's censure and mirrored the reaction of his contemporary Teige. Not only did Janouch also conflate the original and translation (as Kafka, according to Janouch, clearly did not), he and Teige ignored the details of Apollinaire's aesthetics because they were only interested in discussing the poem as a cultural artifact. For Teige, "Pásmo" was a beacon. For Janouch, it symbolized "a great bridge cantilevered from the Eiffel Tower to St. Vitus and spans the whole multicolored phenomenal world of our time" (162). All that mattered was that to these young Czechs coming of age during the First Republic "Pásmo" represented the spiritual covenant between their nation and France. They recognized that Apollinaire's affinity for their capital could rescue them from the provincial obscurity they had suffered under the Habsburgs. They understood that Apollinaire had endowed them with a language to rival Kleist's German and a vision to overcome the past. What the interwar generation aspired to went beyond considerations of language. They sought foundations on which to construct new cultural myths to engender new traditions—whether Janouch's saintly Kafka or Čapek's Apollinaire. They were looking for a spiritual father they could claim as their own because the previous generation of writers had failed them.

Because no one questioned the authenticity of the translation, to this day Apollinaire still receives full credit for being the father of the modernity Čapek constructed. Čapek's interventions assured his Apollinaire of "Pásmo" a vital afterlife in Prague. While his star diminished in France in the wake of other avant-garde movements such as Dada and Surrealism, in Czechoslovakia Apollinaire's legacy inspired the great poets of the interwar avant-garde such as Nezval, Wolker and Biebl, for whom "Pásmo" symbolized the Holy Grail, and Apollinaire, the Father. In 1928, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of his death, Teige devoted an issue of *ReD* [*Revue Devětsilu—Devětsil revue*] to Apollinaire's memory. On the cover, Apollinaire appeared as Picasso had drawn him—in uniform, head swathed in bandages, a medal pinned to his chest, wearing an expression

of pathos as if the troubles of the world rested upon his shoulders. This was not Kafka's entertainer or the poet who joyfully exalted Paris and the terrible beauty of war. To represent Apollinaire, Teige had selected an image that corresponded to his Czech myth—the myth of the sleeper and the weeping sun—a pathetic fallacy.

In the same issue, Teige published a long and influential retrospective, "Apollinaire a jeho doba [Apollinaire and His Times]." Here he expanded upon the points he had only touched upon in his 1919 review. Yet again, Teige did not mention Čapek's name in reference to "Pásmo" or attempt to deconstruct the myth, because to do so would have been akin to pointing out that the Bible had been dreamed up by mortals and did not represent the true word of God. Since Apollinaire's "Zone" had been replaced by "Pásmo," there was no point in launching into a comparison of the translation with the original text. As for Čapek, he remained true to his role of unsung translator in *Francouzská poesie*. He continued to remain anonymous—that is, almost.

The following year an interesting development threatened to expose Čapek and the fact that Apollinaire and his "Pásmo" were an illusion. Because of Apollinaire's increasing prominence, by the end of the twenties several of his works in other genres had been translated into Czech (i.e. *Les Mamelles de Tiresias* and *L'Hérésiarque et Cie*). Although some poetic translations had appeared, no one had attempted to translate *Alcools*; anyone who tried would have had Čapek to contend with. However, in 1929 Miloš Hlávka tried to remedy the situation by publishing the first anthology, his *Básně G. Apollinairea* [The Poems of G. Apollinaire]. To get around the issue of "Pásmo," Hlávka included a version that he labeled as "překlad Karla Čapka přetištěný s malými změnami [a translation by Karel Čapek reprinted with minor changes]" (27). On analysis, the changes were not as minor as Hlávka wished the readers to believe. He revised over 50 of the poem's 150 lines, ostensibly to correct some of the discrepancies between Čapek's version and Apollinaire's. While Čapek had created a work that was weighted in favor of his rhyme, Hlávka's revision shifted the focus back to Apollinaire's sense.

Hlávka's preference for greater semantic fidelity to Apollinaire's original is evident in his handling of Čapek's "praporek," which he translated as "peřina" ("Pásmo" 1929, 32) because Hlávka knew that a "praporek" was not the semantic equivalent of "édredon." In the same lines, he also substituted "odváží [transport by vehicle]" for the general term "nést [to carry]" and traded "přízračné [phantasmagoric]" for "irréal." He also changed the number of "rodina" from plural to singular to correspond with the *Alcools* version. Later in the text, Hlávka cleared up the inconsistency of Čapek's having left in elements from the earlier version Apollinaire had discarded. He removed line 138 so that his version no longer represented a consolida-

tion of the original and its revision. Hlávka's "Pásmo" had only one source, Apollinaire's final version of the text in *Alcools*.

As might be expected, Hlávka also saw the need for some significant revisions to improve Čapek's ending. His version read:

> Sbohem sbohem
> Slunce hrdlo přeťaté (1929, 34)
>
> Farewell farewell
> Sun severed neck

He removed Čapek's sleeper and the alliteration to mirror Apollinaire's syntax and recover the power of the final image. Although Hlávka's changes were well-intentioned given his desire to be more accurate, what he failed to realize was that by achieving greater fidelity to Apollinaire, he had betrayed "Pásmo." Even though he tried to pass off his version as Čapek's, Hlávka's interventions stood out like a mustache on the Mona Lisa. Because he had taken the translation process so literally, he completely missed why "Pásmo," a translation, had reached the heights it had — because of the Czech effects that Čapek had married to Apollinaire's vision. Hlávka saw the tree but not the woods. His version proved that while he had some knowledge of French, he had no clue about the methods Čapek used to make the work so significant in translation. What he did not realize was that a simple cut-and-paste method could not improve on what had already been enshrined as a cultural icon.

And the critics let him know just that. While they had remained silent when Čapek took liberties, Hlávka was not spared for having transgressed. In his review of the collection in *ReD*, Teige expressed his utter contempt for Hlávka's having presumed that Čapek had need of his editorial corrections:

> Od výborného překlad Čapkova pan Hlávka měl zdržeti své neomalené prsty v uctivé vzdálenosti a nereformovat jej tak směšným způsobem [...]. Ostatně hrubým omylem je celá tato publikace, jejíhož výdaní jest litovati. ("Guillaume Apollinaire: Básně" 267)
>
> Mr. Hlávka should have kept his impertinent fingers at a respectful distance from Čapek's excellent translation and not have revised it in such a laughable fashion [...]. The whole edition is a gross mistake whose publication is to be regretted.

And Teige was not the only one to express his objections. In *Rozpravy Aventina* [*Aventine Discussions*], Hlávka defended himself against the attacks of a certain Mr. Mašek who, like Teige, had taken him to task for having tampered with the text. However, Hlávka defended himself by arguing that Čapek had authorized the text in *Básně*. He also pointed out that, to anyone who knew French, Čapek had let slip some small yet significant "mistakes" that marred the beauty of his exemplary piece of work.

Badatelský duch p. Maška rozrušený tím, že jsem se odvážil opravit proslulý Čapkův překlad "Pásma" [...]. Opravil jsem vlastně jedinou Čapkovu chybu (édredon = peřina, a ne prapor, jak překládá Č. v pasáži o emigrantech na Saint-Lazar) a některá místa, kde jsem nemohl souhlasit s jeho metodou (upozorňuji, že jsem zařadil Čapkův překlad do svého výboru se svolením autora), na příklad na konci Č. překládá: Soleil *coup* [a typo — should be *cou*] coupé: Slunce plá pláče. Mne byla milejší metafora originálu než melodické podobnění Čapkova překladu k originálu. (Hlávka, 395)

Mr. Mašek's scholarly soul was disturbed by the fact that I dared correct Čapek's famous translation of "Zone" [...]. In reality, I have corrected one of Čapek's mistakes (*édredon* = *peřina*, and not *prapor* as Čapek translated in the passage about the emigrants in Saint-Lazare) and a few places where I could not concur with his method (may I point out that I included Čapek's translation in my anthology with the author's permission); for example at the end, Čapek translates: Soleil coup [cou] coupé: Slunce plá plače. To my mind, the original's metaphor was nicer than the melodic semblance of the original in Čapek's translation.

Unfortunately, Hlávka's assumption that Čapek had not been able to distinguish a "praporek" from a "peřina" was as erroneous a notion as his belief that he was a fit judge of Čapek's technique.

What Čapek thought of Hlávka's amendments to his translation is anyone's guess. He stayed as silent as ever regarding the controversy. However, almost seven years after the Hlávka debacle, Čapek indirectly addressed the issue of the alleged "mistakes." When he published the second edition of *Francouzská poesie* (now minus the "new age"), he included his own revised version of the 1919 translation, which served as a form of rebuttal to Hlávka's criticisms. The appearance of the revision so long after the fact also reflected that Čapek himself thought there was room for improvement even when most critics had not.

In his final version, Čapek simplified the language and syntax to emphasize the prose that had distinguished "Pásmo"'s modern vernacular from Vrchlický's antiquated poesy. In line 131 he removed "zřel [beheld]" (1919b, 13) and replaced it with "viděl [saw]" (1936, 183). In line 142 he reworked the awkward-sounding "Neznám její ruce [I'm not familiar with her hands]" with "Nevím jaké má ruce [I don't know what her hands are like]" to emulate conversational Czech. In the next line (143) he switched the modifier and the noun so the poetic diction of "soustrast nesmírnou" became the unmarked "Mám nesmírnou soustrast se švy jejího břicha [I have endless sympathy for the sutures on her belly]."

Yet among these instances of Čapek's tinkering to improve his language, there are examples where, in the spirit of Hlávka, he revisited Apollinaire's original in order to achieve greater precision. In line 125 he removed a comma whose presence in the 1919 version belied one of the hallmarks of Apollinaire's modernity — his rejection of the conventions of punctuation. Also, in line 69 he changed "všichni orli [all eagles — plural]" (1919b, 8) to "všichni orel [every eagle]" (1936, 180) because he realized that in the original all the birds mentioned were in the singular and that "tous" modi-

fied them all: "Et tous aigle phénix et pihis de la Chine [And every eagle phoenix and pihi from China]" (1913, 11). Čapek also used the opportunity of the revision to update his original to correspond to the changes Apollinaire had made in *Alcools* much in the way Hlávka had done. In lines 119–20 he finally switched the person from "you" to "me" so that the discrepancy no longer existed. Despite this change and some other similar amendments, Čapek still refused to conform entirely to Apollinaire's final version of "Zone." His 1936 text still represented a composite. The champagne and dancing remained.

Čapek's most telling decisions, however, concern the two instances where Hlávka had called into question Čapek's skills as a translator. In the case of the emigrants, Čapek did decide to change the number from plural "ty rodiny" [the families] to singular "jedna ta rodina" [one family] (1936, 182) to correspond to Hlávka's version. However, all other elements he left as they had appeared in 1919. The revised version proved once and for all that Čapek had deliberately switched the image, that the "praporek" was no "mistake." In Čapek's mind, Apollinaire's featherbed just had no role in his "Pásmo."

His revised commentary in the second edition of *Francouzská poesie* also provided compelling evidence that a political motive was behind the substitution in the first place. In this revision, the theme of Franco-Czechoslovak solidarity took precedence over what had been his literary objectives:

> Tato hrst překladů z francouzské poesie vznikla z největší části v roce 1916, tedy unprostřed války; a vznikla opravdu pod tlakem války, jako literární projev solidarity a duchovního spojenectví s národem, jenž tehdy krvácel před Verdunem za věc, jež byla věcí našeho srdce a naší víry. (*Francouzská poesie* 1936, 241)

> This handful of translations of French poetry for the most part originated in 1916, that is in the midst of war; and, in truth, it originated under the pressure of war, as a literary expression of solidarity and spiritual allegiance with the nation which at the time shed its blood at Verdun for the cause that was also the cause of our hearts and faith.

In 1919 the war to end all wars had been won. However, the increasing military buildup in fascist Germany and the threat to European democracy were clearly the preeminent issues on Čapek's mind in 1936. All aesthetic references to invisibility, the "nejmladší poesie" and Vrchlický had, more or less, vanished. The major aim of Čapek's revised *Francouzská poesie* thus was to pay homage to what Janouch portrayed as the "bridge" between Paris and Prague. Because of his political concerns in 1919, Čapek's flag fluttered in celebration of the Republic which had been founded upon the democratic principles of the French Revolution. By 1936 it had taken on a more portentous aspect. It signaled the fact that those who loved liberty might once again be called upon to shed their blood in defense of democracy.

Yet Čapek's treatment of the poem's closing lines show him at his most puzzling and audacious. Like Hlávka, Čapek revised the ending to recreate Apollinaire's tour-de-force image. Although Čapek dispensed with the pathetic fallacy to provide a solution comparable to Hlávka's "Slunce hrdlo přeťaté" (1929, 34), he did not use the same language. Because Hlávka's literal rendering lacked the all-important aspect of Čapek's lyricism, the line had fallen flat. Instead, Čapek found a solution that reestablished the graceful balance between Apollinaire's demands and his own. His "Slunce uťatá hlava" [sun severed head] (1936, 184) preserved Apollinaire's deconstructed content. Although Čapek was forced to abandon the exact equivalent of "cou" ("hrdlo" as in Hlávka or, possibly, "krk") for assonance's sake, his "head," while a compromise, came close semantically to Apollinaire's "neck" without being the exact same thing.

But, just as Čapek seemed interested in accommodating Apollinaire, he did the unthinkable. He kept on going. To Apollinaire's final line, he added a whole new line of enjambment to create a completely new ending: "Se kuku kutáli" [is cuckoo call rolling — the verb's subject refers to the "sun cut-off head" in the previous line]. Once again, Čapek intervened in order to reassert the primacy of the Czech voice that had liberated the translation from its original. He could not use Apollinaire's technique of decomposing the lyric to break with tradition because Čapek's use of language had come to be understood as the primary element that distinguished the poem from all of its Czech predecessors. Thus, to achieve the closest equilibrium between his approach and Apollinaire's, Čapek was forced to use two lines to reproduce the image and sound that Apollinaire could achieve in just one. But the burlesque elements of the cuckoo cry and the rolling head hardly seem appropriate given the gravity of Apollinaire's theme. Yet, when Čapek's other revision is taken into account, his genius for using translation as a powerful means of building cultural identity is revealed.

Although Hlávka had clearly stated his objections to Čapek's handling of "Zone"'s last line, he made no mention of the sleeper in the penultimate line. Hlávka did, however, remove the element that clearly did not belong to Apollinaire. Čapek, too, revised the line. But he did not omit the sleeper. Instead, he altered the way the figure was expressed — "spáči" (1919b, 15) became "jsi ospalý" (1936, 184). The revision was fortuitous for solving the problem of Čapek's having disrupted Apollinaire's alternation of first- and second-person address that conveyed the crucial tension between narrator and protagonist, old world and new. In addition, it restored the lyricism Čapek lost when he tacked the extra line onto the ending. Čapek transformed the dissonant slant rhyme of "spáči"/"plače" into the sweet assonance of "jsi ospalý"/"kutálí." Yet, despite the fact that Čapek could have come up with any number of other alternatives that would have satisfied the requirements of sound and sense, as in the case of

the "praporek," he had inserted the figure of the sleepy *flâneur* for reasons that transcended aesthetics.

To understand why Čapek felt the image was vital to his translation, one has to examine considerations external to the poem's text. Here Čapek's affinity for the prose rhythms he had discovered in Apollinaire's poetry plays an important role. Čapek was well aware that Apollinaire did not begin his publishing career as a poet. In 1910 he published a collection of short stories, *L'Hérésiarque et Cie.* [*Heretic and Co.*]. Apollinaire had drawn extensively from the autobiographical content in the first story "Le Passant de Prague [The Prague Passerby]" to construct his passage on Prague in "Zone." In this section of the poem, the Apollinaire of 1902 sits at "une auberge aux environs de Prague [an inn on the outskirts of Prague]" (1913, 13) where he had been at work on a "conte en prose [short story]," undoubtedly "Le Passant." However, he has been distracted from his labors by the discovery of a beetle asleep in the calyx of the rose that has been placed on his table. By making reference to his short story, Apollinaire forged an important thematic link between his prosaic former self of "Le Passant" and the poet of "Zone." Thus, Prague represents the magical milieu where the prose of the old Apollinaire and the poetry of his narrator unite to create a hybrid, a completely new form of expression. Anyone Czech reading "Zone" with knowledge of Apollinaire's story would have made the connection because of the prominent role Apollinaire ascribed to Prague and its significance in his development as a writer. They would not have viewed "Zone" as an independent work, but as the poetic variation of Apollinaire's story about his travels in Prague. Here Prague towers over Paris as the spiritual capital of the poet's creative universe.

Teige's comments in "Guillaume Apollinaire a jeho doba" about "Le Passant" clearly attest to this "Prago-centric" reading of Apollinaire where the short-story and poem functioned as fraternal twins:

V Pražkém chodci, jímž je kniha zahájena, je podána legenda o Ahasverovi slohem cestovních zápisků: a co zaznamenává o Praze jiného než bizárnost, úděs před hradčanskou katedrálou, "unheimlich" dobrodružství s Věčným Židem, smutek ghetta a řev tamních hampejzů. Tak přece jste četli o Praze i v jeho Pásmu: 'V achátech svatovítských zříš zděšen své vlastní rysy'...Skutečně, Pražký chodec je skoro autobiografickým komentářem k veršům z Pásma. (95–96)

In "Le Passant de Prague" with which the collection begins, one is given the legend of Ahasver in the form of travel notes: and what else did he notice about Prague but its eccentricity, the horror of the cathedral in the Castle District, his "*unheimlich*" [uncanny] adventures with the Eternal Jew, the sorrows of the ghetto and the din of local brothels. You have also read just these kinds of things in "Zone": "In the agates of St. Vitus you see your own features and are horrified"...In reality, "Le Passant de Prague" is almost an autobiographical commentary on the verses from "Zone."

In essence, "Zone" was Apollinaire's translation of his earlier work, testament to his development as a writer. And, as Teige observed, "Zone" was not an original but, like Čapek's translation, an adaptation, a variation on Apollinaire's love affair with Prague, prose and poetry.

Like "Zone," "Le Passant" ends at daybreak, the magical *heure bleue* where nothing is fixed and night's enchantment meets day's harsh reality. After a sleepless night spent walking the dark back streets of Prague's poorer quarters, Apollinaire and his guide, Isaac Laquedem, the self-professed Wandering Jew, are about to part company. Laquedem has grown tired of Prague and is about to set off once again on his perpetual journey as an exile. When he takes his leave of the young Apollinaire, he tells him: "Vous tombez de sommeil. Allez dormer. Adieu! [You are about to drop from fatigue. Go to sleep. Farewell!]" (*Hérésiarque et Cie.* 24). The major difference between this ending and that of "Zone" is that in the poem Apollinaire no longer needed an external symbol, the mythical Jew, to act as his foil. Since the struggle between past and present was embodied by opposing aspects of Apollinaire's identity (his narrator and protagonist), he merely had to take leave of himself. Yet the vision was, in essence, the same. What changed in "Pásmo" was that when Čapek seized control of Apollinaire's narrative, he made this relationship tangible. By making allusion to the story, he brought the narrative back to Prague, Apollinaire's spiritual homeland, his *vlást*. Čapek understood that as the son of a Polish mother and an unidentified father, Apollinaire had no place in France. In Paris he was condemned to the rootless migration of exiles like his poor emigrants in St. Lazare and his *Juif Errant*. Because of his foreign origins, his genius had been relegated to its inferior position behind all the busts in the Académie Française. However, Čapek and the generations of critics succeeding him recognized his true identity and, in doing so, they brought him home. Apollinaire's Slavic heart and abiding love for Prague had made him one of them. This Prague Apollinaire became the perfect father figure upon which to build the modern tradition, because once the historical figure had died, there was no one around to dispute the myth.

By means of his perplexing inaccuracies and outrageous additions, Čapek achieved the impossible. He constructed an adaptation that transcended the limited scope of its original to shine with an even brighter aura. Despite the fact that Čapek seemed to betray Apollinaire in certain key instances, he did so only to promote a greater good — to keep his spirit alive and bring the Czechs into the modern age. By calling out to the sleeper of "Le Passant" and then continuing Apollinaire's poem where his voice left off, Čapek spared Apollinaire the utter devastation of his tenseless apocalypse. According to Čapek's version of the story, Apollinaire did not die in Paris and the world did not end in fiery conflagration. Instead, Čapek's

gentler vision of the end returned the poet to the shelter of Prague's eternal present tense, where his spirit lives on in the Czechs' hearts and minds. As the hands of the clock in Prague's Jewish Quarter turn in reverse, the dreamy Apollinaire of Prague and the sun's rolling head transport us back to the opening line. Here, thanks to Čapek, Apollinaire's wonderful work can begin again.

NOTES

1 All translations from Czech and French are by the author.
2 Teige is undoubtedly referring to Vrchlický and Jaroslav Goll's work here.

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