Charles University

Faculty of Arts

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

English and American Literature

Františka Zezuláková Schormová

African American Poets Abroad: Black and Red Allegiances in Early Cold War Czechoslovakia

Afroameričtí básníci za hranicemi: Černo-rudá aliance v Československu na počátku studené války

DISSERTATION THESIS

Thesis Supervisor: doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D

2020

I declare that the following PhD dissertation is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned and that this thesis has not been used in another university study, or to acquire another or the same title.

Prague, August 28, 2020

Františka Zezuláková Schormová

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Introduction

"I receive this honor in all humility holding it not so much personal but rather as an act of symbolism towards the race which I represent in America and on the continent of Africa."[1] Thus W. E. B. Du Bois addressed the grand fourteenth-century gothic hall of the Karolinum at the Charles University in Prague. We only have the written version of the speech: it is impossible to hear what Du Bois is saying, as the short video clip has no audio. Here, under a statue of the Holy Roman Emperor and Bohemian King Charles IV, the founder of the university, on October 23, 1958, the African American intellectual is awarded an honorary doctorate. The doctorate is in the area of history, yet it is Zdeněk Vančura, a professor of American Literature in the English Department at the Faculty of Arts, who hands the award to Du Bois. The guest of honor looks tired. He is ninety years old. His journey through Eastern Europe begins in Prague. The next stop is Humboldt University, Berlin, another doctorate is awaiting him in Budapest and then Moscow. Still, he would later note: "I had no reason to think that Charles University even knew my name."[2]

Czechoslovakia certainly did. The first translations of Du Bois appeared in an anthology of African American poetry, *Litany of Atlanta* (1938), named after one of Du Bois's poems. "The Story of My 83rd Birthday" was translated and published in 1954; and in 1958, the same year he was awarded the honorary doctorate, Du Bois's poems "Litany of Atlanta" and "The Rosenbergs" appeared in an anthology of the poetry of Black diaspora,[3] *Černošská poezie: světová antologie* [Black Poetry: A World Anthology], put together by Abe Čapek, an expert on US literature at the Institute of Modern Philology of the

[1] W. E. B. Du Bois, "Acceptance Speech at Charles University," October 23, 1958, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312)., Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[2] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.
[3] Following the decision of media such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Lost Angeles Times,* I am capitalizing the word Black to reflect the shared history, culture, and identity of the Black community. This does not include quotes from secondary sources.

Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. He had met Du Bois nine years before the African American scholar, writer, and activist came to Prague. In the office of the Council of African Affairs on 23 West 26th Street in New York City, Čapek interviewed Du Bois.[4] In 1958, this would have seemed like it happened in a different life – indeed, Čapek was a different person at the time.

Čapek – a common Czech surname shared with one of the most important Czech writers, Karel Čapek, who gave the world the word *robot* – hides an American Communist, Abraham Chapman. Along with his family, Chapman spent thirteen years in Cold War Czechoslovakia. When he eventually returned to the US, he left behind him articles and books dedicated to US literature and politics – and the anthology *Black Poetry*. Cultural artifacts from the 1950s such as this anthology have either been seen as the work of a zealous Czech Communist or a sly translator only pretending to be one, in order to smuggle subversive ideas and stories across the Iron Curtain. Chapman was neither.

Čapek/Chapman could not rekindle his acquaintance with Du Bois in Prague. At that time, he was working in China. The idea for this stay arose two years earlier when Chapman took part in the celebration of Benjamin Franklin's anniversary at an international cultural conference in Peking in 1956. Du Bois was also invited to this event, but could not attend. In a letter expressing her sorrow over his absence, the YWCA worker Talitha Gerlach wrote to Du Bois: "The United States, as you probably know, was represented by Abe Capek who came from Prague. He delivered an excellent speech – a

[4] In this interview, Chapman and Du Bois agreed on the importance of connecting the civil rights attempts with the situation worldwide. As Du Bois says in the interview, "I think not even Negroes are sufficiently alert to what is happening in Africa and how it is connected with the situation here."
Abraham Chapman and International Workers Order, "An Interview with W. E. B. Du Bois on Negro Life and History," *Fraternal Outlook* 11, no. 2 (February 1949): 6–7; 22, 22.

credit to American writers, to Benjamin Franklin and to the best in American life and thought."[5] Du Bois could not have connected the two names: but Chapman, an American coming to China as a Czech citizen to speak about US literature, illustrates the transnational dynamics of the era.

Since the transnational turn in literary studies, the journeys of people, texts, and ideas have been at the forefront of scholarship. American studies especially have adopted these approaches. Perhaps it was the transnational history of the discipline itself. Part of this played out in Prague, too. Eleven years before he handed the doctoral scroll to W. E. B. Du Bois, Zdeněk Vančura hosted another US intellectual, F. O. Matthiessen, one of the founders of the discipline. Matthiessen begins his journal, *From the Heart of Europe* (1948), by stating that he wanted to "write about some of the things it means to be an American today. This is the chief thing I came to Europe to think about."[6]

Yet, the discipline seems to be interested only in specific types of journeys. As Peter Morgan claims in "Literary Transnationalism: A Europeanist's Perspective":

> The implicit identification of the "transnational" with the postcolonial Anglophone states and nations of the British Empire results in conceptual gaps, particularly in relation to language and culture, as well as history and politics, and hence scarcely addresses the questions raised by literary transnationalism on a global scale.[7]

[5] "Letter from Talitha Gerlach to W. E. B. Du Bois," December 16, 1956, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.
[6] F. O. (Francis Otto) Matthiessen, *From the Heart of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 3.
[7] Peter Morgan, "Literary Transnationalism: A Europeanist's Perspective," *Journal of European Studies* 47, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 3–20, 9.

Specific regions, languages, cultures, and historic periods were omitted. Focusing on stories such as Chapman's, the to-and-from across the Cold War world is not only an attempt to close one of the gaps but also sheds light on these omissions.

In "Transnational American Studies: A Postsocialist Phoenix," Joseph Benatov examines the origin of the transnational studies, dating it to the demise of the Soviet Union. Before that, anti-imperial rhetoric was too strongly associated with the Soviet project. As he writes, despite being ignored in the field,

> "Eastern Europe" constitutes the ur-borderland of American studies; Cold War and post-Cold War events in these nations shaped the development of the field and the emergence of more explicitly anti-imperial political critiques in the 1990s as precursors of more recent transnational perspectives.[8]

We find a similar contextualization of the terms, concepts, and disciplines we rely on in Aamir R. Mufti's *Forget English: Orientalism and World Literatures* (2018). He examines the concepts of world literature and their grounding of Orientalist thinking, the very framework they claimed to overcome. In other points of his critique, Mufti agrees with critics who have drawn attention to the Anglophone focus of world literature scholarship and transnationalism.

But, despite its shortcomings, world literature allowed us to follow figures such as Chapman from one national context to another, without relying solely on reception or comparative literature. However, instead of Casanova's cultural field (a homogenous space with its center in Paris), another field emerges, with different dynamics, different

[8] Joseph Benatov, "Transnational American Studies: A Postsocialist Phoenix," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 65, no. 1–2 (March 1, 2019): 23–42, 24.

centers, and different rules – a space which Rossen Djagalov refers to as "the world republic of leftist letters."[9] This world republic had its own canons, practices, processes of cultural production, and its own centers. This was the context for both Chapman and the contemporary writers he put in his anthology, and was based on an internationalist vision. When Casanova describes the literary world, she claims that "competition among its members […] defines and unifies the system while at the same time marking its limits."[10] But in contrast to the competition, struggle, or violence (all words Casanova uses to hint at the aggressive nature of the literary field, though she leaves this violence unpoliticized), the world republic of letters had a different currency: international solidarity.

In relation to African Americans, this rhetoric has too easily been dismissed as propaganda. But, as Mary Dudziak has shown in her seminal book *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2000), this propaganda not only helped the Civil Rights movement, but also shaped it. Dudziak does not deal with literature *per se*, but she mentions the silencing of more radical Civil Rights speakers, singers, and writers on the US scene. Scholars such as Mary Helen Washington, William Maxwell, and James Smethurst have explored the mechanisms of this silencing; they have also reconsidered the complex relationship between the US Radical Left and African Americans, adding to the effort of earlier accounts of the literary Left, such as Alan Wald's. While their works show the socio-cultural formations of the era and the intricate relationships between individuals and ideology without victimizing or vilifying the individual actors, these

[9] Djagalov works with this concept in articles quoted in the following chapters and most recently, in his newly published monograph, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and the Third Worlds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2020).
[10] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 40.

authors stay within the US framework. The CPUSA, however, provided an international audience.

Not only texts traveled across the Atlantic. Kate A. Baldwin's *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters Between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (2002) looks at the journeys of African American artists to the Soviet Union and also how the words of figures such as Paul Robeson and Langston Hughes were frequently mistranslated to make them compatible with official Soviet rhetoric on race, ethnicity, and nationality. Accounts such as Baldwin's, together with current reconsiderations of Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, inspired new disciplines such as Black Slavic studies. Such approaches were often reduced to the Cold War binary of the US and USSR. But the world republic of letters did not run only on orders from Moscow: people and texts traveled through, and were consecrated by, other centers. Prague was one of these.

The Czechoslovak capital was a seat of international organizations, the location for large congresses, place of exchange for African students, Latin American writers, African American activists, and a refuge for the Anglophone Leftist community. In the last few years, historians have explored this Prague, a city that Chapman also inhabited. Perhaps the association with the official regime and the uneasy questions this Prague opens up (such as Czechoslovak complicity in the colonial project) is why this locale was so long lost in Czech cultural memory. Better known is the narrative of the "complete isolation of the 1950s," where the publishing houses took it on themselves to "make sure the cultural connections to the West were never completely severed."[11] The memory culture that

[11]"V padesátých letech jsme žili v určité uzavřenosti, to musíme uvážit. To skutečně bylo uzamčení."Josef Forbelský, "Překlad jako katalyzáror literatury," *Služebníci slova*, ed. Šustrová, Petruška, Prague: Nakladatelství Pulchra, 2008), 60–66, 64. "Naše nakladatelství mají pečovat o to, aby naše spojení s kulturním Západem nebylo nikdy přerušeno." Jindřich Pokorný, "Chápali jsme překlad jako službu," Šustrová, *Služebníci slova*, 237.

prevailed in Czech literary discourse during the 1990s and early 2000s was preoccupied with forms such as diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, and book of interviews; including the story of the translation of US literature and the role of figures such as Josef Škvorecký, Jan Zábrana, and Lubomír Dorůžka. It is a thrilling tale of smuggling copies of books and sometimes authors themselves, a story of forged texts, jazz, of Allen Ginsberg, a story from a time when engaging with US literature was subversive. A Czech Americanist who later edited an anthology of US and African American poetry, Josef Jařab wrote: "translation of US literature became alternative politics."[12]

But the emancipatory potential of these translations together with the undeniable sacrifices on the part of the translators have discouraged follow-up questions. What precisely was this politics? As scholars such as Emily Apter have pointed out, translation is never neutral. It is a creative act, based on betrayals and distortions, fueled by individual agendas and circumstances. And not only translations are worthy of scholarly attention: editors' choices and accompanying texts also shape cultural discourse – its overt content and its tacit codes – in important ways. Reading translations alongside originals helps us to explore the tension between different contexts of the works and also between translation and the original texts, raising issues of adaptation and appropriation, especially important for such cases as the Czech translation of the poetry of the Black diaspora. Translators such as Škvorecký and Dorůžka gave us one side of the story. But how does the story change if we put Chapman and his journey in the center?

In 1998, Ann Kimmage, Chapman's daughter, published a memoir called *An Un-American Childhood*: *A Young Woman's Secret Life Behind the Iron Curtain*. It is telling

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[12] "Zvláště z americké a západoevropské literatury se postupně vyvíjelo jakési alternativní politikum." Josef Jařab, "Na úvod: Mezi realitou a literaturou," *Amerika u nás a v nás*, Originally a František Palacký Prize Speech, 2012 (Prague: Nadace Dagmar a Václava Havlových Vize 97, 2018), 23.

that it is available to English readers but has never been published in Czech, despite Kimmage's attempt to do so. As she was told, other stories have been in demand in the years since 1989.[13] Yes, readers were interested in the communist period, but no, they did not want a story of a journey eastward across the Iron Curtain. That would have upset their opinions. Still, Kimmage's book is not a book of literary history: it is a personal memoir, an international Red Diaper narrative, a story of a transition between cities, languages, and cultures – from New York to Prague and back again. Such stories often tell of things lost: language, culture, family, political idealism. If we follow Chapman on his Cold War odyssey we also see the consequences of such exchanges.

In the summer of 1950, the Chapman family boarded a train in Grand Central Station in New York City, starting a thirteen-year trip that would take them to three continents and across the Iron Curtain. The first chapter sets the scene of this journey, focusing on the contacts between the global and Anglophone internationalist scene with Czechoslovakia and the space across which such contacts took place. It deals with the particular mechanisms of the world republic of leftist letters, focusing on Prague's role.

This chapter also looks at the cultural exchanges between Czechoslovakia and African Americans, both political and literary. It explores not only Czech and Czechoslovak sympathies towards African Americans and the narratives surrounding them, but also the influence that the First Czechoslovak Republic established in 1918 had on ideas of African American self-determination. Mutual influences also played out in poetry, for instance, as we see in Langston Hughes's correspondence with his Czechoslovak admirers and translators, the use of Czechoslovakia as a motif in Hughes's works, and also on his influence on Czech and Czechoslovak poets. Here, the Eastern side

[13] Ann Kimmage, Personal E-Mail to the Author, February 12, 2018.

of the Iron Curtain emerges as a vantage point from which to reconsider blank spaces on the map of US Leftist poetry.

In its second part, the chapter examines Chapman's US background. Drawing on his correspondence with the African American writer Richard Wright, we see Chapman's interest in African American literature, and also his engagement with the CPUSA, especially his journalistic career, and also the circumstances of his departure from the US in Winter 1950. Following the arrival of the Chapmans in Czechoslovakia, it shows the issues the family experienced in Prague and, based on the available evidence and comparison with other members of the US Leftist Community in Prague, suggests several possible reasons for their journey.

The following chapter positions Chapman within the Czech story of US literature. It introduces a generation of writers, translators, and editors, especially Josef Škvorecký, Jan Zábrana, and Lubomír Dorůžka. These were the mediators of US culture, whose interests were frequently formed by their experiences. Their cultural engagement is filtered here through a network of Prague streets. The narrative of US literature was formed in official institutions, but also in the publishing houses, Charles University classrooms, intimate circles. Translation, and the agenda of the individual translators, is foregrounded in this chapter. It shows specific strategies employed in publishing US works in the late 1950s, especially against the background of the broader cultural and political shifts of that time.

These strategies involved also African American literature. I read Škvorecký's translation of a poem called "Break of Day" by Sterling Brown. Combining critical approaches to Brown's poetic *oeuvre* and his use of the Black vernacular, this chapter looks at the further appropriations in translations, focusing on the issues of authenticity

and folk-ness. These issues are also connected here to Josef Škvorecký and Lubomír Dorůžka's other projects, such as the anthology *American Folk Poetry* and their jazz anthologies. Enriching the global story of Cold War jazz, these also show how the agenda and rhetoric of the Czechoslovak mediators of US culture contrasted with Chapman's internationalist vocabulary. Comparing Chapman's vision of African American literature with that of his Czech counterparts opens up questions on white mediation and also reveals problematic parallels in the Czechoslovak discourse and concepts of race.

The third chapter follows Chapman back to the US. Negotiating the broader shift within the official US culture away from the internationalism and the anti-imperialist critiques of the earlier period, it reads *Black Poetry* against an anthology Chapman put together in 1968, *Black Voices*. Edited on different sides of the Iron Curtain and ten years apart, the two anthologies tell different stories of African American poetry. Chapman's journey played out at a time of fundamental reconsideration of how African American literature was read, taught, and institutionalized: here the focus is on the framing of both of these anthologies and the editorial decisions about contemporary female poets. Looking closely at a poem called "Deixa passar o meu povo" by the Mozambique poet Naomia de Sousa and "A Black Woman Speaks" by the US poet Beulah Richardson, both featured in *Black Poetry*, illustrates the ideas and personalities that were left behind in Prague as they did not fit the new narrative of African American poetry and African diaspora literature. When compared, the choices in the two anthologies betray the allegiances of the era, making an argument for including projects such as the Czechoslovak *Black Poetry* in the canon of African American poetry – and Prague in the newly reformulated Black Atlantic.

1. Prague, Red and Black

A rococo chateau south of Prague, July 1951: in a setting very different from the iconically bleak Cold War scenes, Joseph Starobin, a CPUSA member and *Daily Worker* correspondent, met with the chair of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, Jan Drda. The chateau, expropriated from the Colloredo-Mansfeld family during the Nazi occupation, and then again after the Communist coup d'état in February 1948, now served as headquarters of the Writers' Union. Here – perhaps while looking out at the French gardens – Starobin formulated his plea. He wanted Czechoslovakia to establish systematic relations with progressive cultural workers in the US, mainly writers. As he said, "Most of them are in danger of being put on the index, if they're not on it already, with all the consequences that entails: their books won't be published and they won't be able to find employment."[14] The publication of their works in Czechoslovakia would alleviate their "feelings of isolation," as well as provide them with material support.[15]

Both men were in their mid-thirties: the elegant yet already balding Starobin with his thickly rimmed glasses, and Drda, a hefty man with a big face and a kind smile. The minutes of the meeting state that these two had been introduced by the German author Stefan Heym (though it does not say if they were introduced on this occasion or another).[16] Both Starobin and Drda were fierce anti-fascists who had dedicated years of their lives to the Communist cause: Starobin, however, left the Party only three years after

[14] "Většině z nich hrozí index, pokud na něm již nejsou a všechno další, co je s tím spojeno – nebudou tištěni, bude jim zatěžko vůbec sehnat nějaké zaměstnání." "'Návrhy Josepha Starobina,' Correspondence from Pavel Bojar (Union of Czechoslovak Writers) to Bedřich Geminder (Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party)," July 13, 1951, Folder 5, Archival Unit 19, National Archives Chodovec Prague.

[15] "Šlo o to, aby se necítili tak isolováni," "'Návrhy Josepha Starobina.'".

[16] "Correspondence from Pavel Bojar (Union of Czechoslovak Writers) to Bedřich Geminder (Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party)," July 13, 1951, NA UV KSČ 100/3, Folder 5, Archival Unit 19, National Archives Chodovec Prague.

this meeting and later became an expert on US communism.[17] Drda, a prominent figure in Czechoslovak politics, later encountered problems when he protested against the Soviet occupation that ended the Prague Spring in 1968. But, in 1951, they met as two members of the same international movement. Notwithstanding the apparently comradely atmosphere of the meeting, this encounter can be read in various ways, some of which illuminate the limits of the proclaimed Communist internationalism.

There was a certain irony in Starobin asking Drda to support leftist US writers, as it was Drda who, as an apparatchik of the new Czechoslovak political regime, had assisted in silencing and imprisoning some of his fellow Czech writers. Moreover, Starobin repeatedly stresses the "moral and material" support Czechoslovakia could provide these writers with (along with journalists and people in the peace movement).[18] Royalties, however, would be difficult: in Eastern bloc countries, this was a grey area (moreover, as is clear from the archives, Czechoslovak officials denied almost all pleas for money from US Communists). But Starobin was not exaggerating: US Radical Leftist writers – prosecuted, denied passports, publication opportunities, and employment – needed all the support they could get. Starobin's search for help overseas is part of a Cold War mosaic that will later include the transatlantic help given by the West to East European dissident writers in the 1970s and 1980s.

It seems from the archives that Starobin arrived in Czechoslovakia with high hopes. On one hand, this needs to be taken with a pinch of salt: Starobin, as was usual for CPUSA functionaries on similar assignments, traveled to various Eastern bloc countries, and the Czechoslovak Writer's Union was only one stop on his itinerary. On the other

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[17] He became widely known thanks to his 1972 publication *American Communism in Crisis, 1943–1957* published in 1972. Although Starobin does not explicitly state so – in the book, he focuses on US Communism – his East European experience might have contributed to his departure from the Party.
[18] "aby se dostalo morální i hmotné podpory." "'Návrhy Josepha Starobina.'"

hand, he speaks about “an international publishing house” which would “publish works by Anglo-Saxon writers and other writers from capitalist countries,” a project for “obvious reasons” not possible in the USSR, implying that Czechoslovakia would be better suited.[19] From Starobin’s point of view, this was feasible, which illustrates the status of Czechoslovakia in the Cold War – with its capital, Prague, both as a synecdoche for the whole country, and also the place with the greatest cultural cachet in the country, whether this is measured in events, publishers, or proximity to political power.

Although in 1951, Starobin’s vision of cooperation between Czechoslovakia and US Radical Leftist cultural workers seemed promising, it was never completely fulfilled. Contacts between US Communists and the Eastern bloc grew weaker within a year, due to US legislative limitations on travel, and it came almost to a standstill in the second half of the 1950s, as many (including Starobin himself) left the CPUSA either by or after 1956. But the ways in which culture travels could not always be planned: various contacts across the Iron Curtain were fostered, enabled, and not always overseen by the authorities. In the case of US cultural workers, these contacts rarely took on concrete form (such as the transfer of money): yet, they were still crucial for Radical Leftist authors. For these were often imaginatively preoccupied with formations that surpassed national structures (among these, internationalist visions or various transcontinental or transracial solidarities, some of which were forged in the 1930s); such visions were integral to their work, along with their awareness of an international audience and the diverse and surprising ways in which their texts could circulate. It can make a difference to what you write knowing who will read it. These exchanges – that include poetic influences, texts in translation, and also

[19] “dává na uváženou příslušným osobnostem a institucím myšlenku Mezinárodního nakladatelství pod mezinárodní záštitou, jež by vydávala publikace autorů z anglosaských i jiných kapitalistických zemí pokrokového zaměření, protože distribuce tisků vydávaných anglicky v Sovětském svazu je ze zřejmých důvodů za určitých okolností těžká.’” “‘Návrhy Josepha Starobina.’”

people who traveled back and forth across the Iron Curtain – are therefore not only a side note to what we know about these writers. By placing them in a differently conceived literary space, we change how we read them. One such exchange stands at the center of this chapter: between Leftists African Americans and Czechoslovakia.

1.1. World Literature, Soviet Style

The minutes of Starobin and Drda's meeting were written up by the secretary of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union and immediately sent to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Drda could only listen to what Starobin had to say; he was not empowered to start an official meeting, as he lacked sufficient information. In the jargon of the day, this probably meant that Starobin did not have a letter from a prominent CPUSA member who was already known to Czechoslovak Communist functionaries. Starobin's only capital was literary: as the minutes recorded, the journalist "knows Jorge Amando and Pablo Neruda."[20] In a 1950s Communist version of name-dropping, Starobin also mentions the editor-in-chief of *Masses and Mainstream*, Samuel Sillen, who, according to Starobin, could serve as mediator for the proposed cultural exchange: Sillen could "provide information on the writers in question and […] arrange for their works to be sent here for the review process."[21]

By mentioning Sillen, who had been to Czechoslovakia twice, Starobin might gain the trust of his Czechoslovak colleagues (the early 1950s was a time of spy paranoia on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and these were often justified); the meeting also demonstrated that, as was typical for cultural exchanges of the time, the selection of texts

[20] "zná Jorge Amado a Pabla Nerudu". "Correspondence from Pavel Bojar to Bedřich Geminder."
[21] "Ten by podal další informace o spisovatelích, postaral by se také o zaslání jejich děl k nám pro lektorát." "'Návrhy Josepha Starobina.'"

to be sent from the US was to be entrusted to a single person.[22] The obsession with mediators, gatekeepers, and literary figures with high literary prestige was one of the basic principles of the Cold War cultural circulation, especially between parties such as US Communists and their Eastern European counterparts. Here, it is useful to rely on other models than the Eastern/Western bloc divide: the interview of Starobin and Drda can be seen not as a meeting between people from two competing political blocs, but rather it could – and was – seen as the dialog of two members of the same literary space.

The world republic of leftist letters was far from homogenous – and its geography included unexpected places like the Dobříš chateau. Latin American intellectuals especially drew on the hospitality of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, to the extent that the chateau became an important part of the Latin American cultural scene. Not only was Dobříš a place to meet participants from the other parts of the world republic of the leftist letters but also, as Michal Zourek shows in his article on the chateau, it was a place where they could, sometimes for the first time, also meet certain cultural figures from their own country:

> Dobříš can be described as being a truly significant cultural center in the Communist cultural world at end of the 1940s and in the first half of the 1950s. Where, in the 1960s, the Cuban Casa de las Américas was the institution associated with Latin American Left-wing intellectuals, it can be said that Chateau Dobříš was the Casa de las Américas of the 1950s.[23]

[22] "'Návrhy Josepha Starobina.'"
[23] Michal Zourek, "Chateau Dobříš: The Centre of Latin American Leftist Intellectuals behind the Iron Curtain," *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Latino-Américaines et Caraïbes* 44 (November 1, 2018): 58.

And beyond Latin American writers, the chateau was open to intellectuals from across the globe. But if the chateau warmly welcomed some, its gates were closed to others: both literally, as the premises were not open to the public; also, since the chateau was for the Czechoslovak Writers' Union, and luminaries of official culture sphere in general, those who resisted the party line had no business there. Not being able to publish was an issue for both older writers who did not share the political convictions of their colleagues, as well as for the younger generation. The latter were well aware of these paradoxes. One of them was Jan Zábrana, who moved from a small town to Prague in 1950 to pursue his studies and literary career (he was rejected by the university, and only later could he work as a literary translator). In his diaries, Zábrana repeatedly recalls meeting Pablo Neruda, another champion of the world republic of leftist letters, at a book signing event. Almost thirty years after, in March 1979, he wrote:

> Pablo Neruda, as a guest of the Czechoslovak nation, lounged around at Dobříš, stuffed his luggage with Prague ham, gave out autographs and signed translations of his Stalinist poetry at a time when Czech poets were being hunted violently down and over half of them were not allowed to publish. […] This I will remember with bitterness until I die.[24]

Not everybody had reason to judge the Chilean author so harshly: as Zourek writes, Neruda was "extremely sociable" and he "made many friends in Czechoslovakia during

[24] "Pablo Neruda byl v Čechách státním hostem, válel se na Dobříši, nadíval si kufr konzervami s pražskou šunkou, rozdával autogramy a podpisoval překlady své stalinistické poezie ve chvíli, v letech, kdy čeští básníci byli štvaní jako na honu – par force – kdy jich víc než polovina nemohla publikovat […]. Do smrti na to budu myslet s hořkostí..." Jan Zábrana, *Celý život*, vol. 2, eds. Dušan Karpatský and Jan Šulc (Prague: Torst, 1992), 698.

his frequent visits."[25] Jan Drda was one: he, in turn, was part of a delegation that visited Neruda in his home at Isla Negra in 1954 to celebrate his fiftieth birthday.[26] Besides friendship, what these writers had in common was that they were chosen to represent their respective countries. As Djagalov writes:

> What more than anything held the post-war People's Republic of Letters together – besides the unevenly practiced doctrine of socialist realism or the relatively homologous structures of writers' unions and publishers subordinated to Party authorities of each Soviet-bloc state – was a very small number of representative writers, or monopolists, as we shall call them.[27]

Of contemporaneous Czechoslovak authors, Drda was the most translated, "with a total of a million copies of his books in ten Soviet languages."[28]

Drda, a "chubby bon vivant, nicknamed the 'nobleman of the chateau'" on one hand,[29] and a cultural watchdog strictly guarding the ideological purity of Czechoslovak literature on the other (for example, he was known for his particular hostility towards Czech Catholic authors); he was also a laureate of the Stalin Prize in 1949 and 1953. It would be easy to assume that his position as chair of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union secured this monopoly rather than his work, but Drda's short stories, with their strong antifascist message, together with his popular narratives frequently based on fairy tales

[25] Zourek, "Chateau Dobříš," 16.
[26] Zourek, "Chateau Dobříš," 16.
[27] Rossen Djagalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post-WWII People's Republic of Letters," in *Socialist Realism in Central and Eastern European Literatures under Stalin: Institutions, Dynamics, Discourses*, ed. Balázs Apor (London: Anthem Press, 2018), 26.
[28] Djagalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post-WWII People's Republic of Letters," 32. In US literature, it was mostly Fast – a fact that Starobin bitterly commented upon in his various writings.
[29] Zourek, "Chateau Dobříš," 50.

and folk tales, also corresponded to (and helped codify) the demands of socialist realist literature. Figures such as Drda were crucial to literary production in their country, both because of their contacts with other participants of the world republic of leftist letters, and also for their connections with Moscow, which served as a final authority. Moscow's position, however, had been weakened precisely by this system of local potentates, who had established their own power and cultural prestige: as Djagalov has it, "those networks of transnational mediators often challenged Moscow's centrality in the People's Republic of Letters."[30] Moreover, with the onset of the Cold War, to be associated directly with the Soviet Union posed a danger to western Communists. For this reason, the planned Soviet-organized international congress of writers that was to take place in Stalingrad in September 1948, had been relocated to Prague.[31] In the end, the congress did not take place at all: but the choice of its new destination shows the importance of the Czechoslovakian city for the world republic of leftist letters.

1.2. The Communist Geneva

In this period, when politics and literature were so openly connected, Prague's centrality to the world republic of letters went far beyond literature: the presence of international organizations, journals, students from all over the world, and different groups of emigrants reached such an extent that the French historian Annie Kriegel labeled Prague the Communist Geneva.[32] Organizations included the International Union of Students, International Radio and Television Organisation, International Organisation of Journalists, and the World Federation of Trade Unions. These were supported by a complex

[30] Djagalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post-WWII People's Republic of Letters," 30.
[31] Djagalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post-WWII People's Republic of Letters," 26.
[32] In Czech historiography, the term has been popularized in Karel Bartošek's *Zpráva o putování v komunistických archivech: Praha – Paříž 1948–1968* (Litomyšl: Paseka, 2000).

infrastructure that also included radio broadcasts aimed at audiences all around the globe. Magazines published out of Prague were to have a similar reach: from 1962, there was *Solidarity/Solidarité* published both in French and in English, and also *World Marxist Review.* Prague became a crossroads for various bodies, ideas, texts, and goods. Some of them only passed through, others stayed for various periods of time, and a last group made the Czechoslovak capital their new home.[33]

There were a number of reasons Prague was so prominent in the global leftist community of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Its convenient location in the heart of Europe was one of them: situated at the Western border of the Soviet sphere of influence, Prague was a gateway for both sides. The logistics were also good: there were direct flights from Prague to various places, the Indonesian Jakarta being one of them.[34] Moreover, Prague was one of the few major cities in the region that had not been destroyed by bombings during the war. Czechoslovakia's industry and agricultural system, already quite developed before World War II, had survived: although the post-war situation was rough, this still offered a relative advantage. Earlier, when it was part of the Habsburg empire, the Czech lands had an export-oriented industry, and this was strengthened during the Czechoslovak First Republic founded in 1918.[35] As Marta Holečková writes, during this period Czechoslovakia initiated and fostered diplomatic and economic contacts with regions that would be later known as the Third World.[36]

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[33] One visitor was Che Guevara, who, as was recently discovered, stayed in Prague for several months in 1966. Prokop Tomek, "Dům, v němž bydlel i Guevara: historie konspiračního bytu 'Venkov,'" *Paměť a dějiny: revue pro studium totalitních režimů* 10, no. 3 (2016): 30–40.
[34] Marta Edith Holečková, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity: Universita 17. listopadu (1961–1974) a její místo v československém vzdělávacím systému a společnosti* (Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2019), 34.
[35] Czechoslovakia inherited most of the empire's industry system but its market was too small. Andrea Komlosy, "Austria and Czechoslovakia: The Habsburg Monarchy and Its Successor States," in *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650–2000*, eds. Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus, and Lex Heerma van Voss (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 61.
[36] Holečková, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity*, 11.

Moreover, these extraordinary relations between Czechoslovakia and regions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America later paved the way for the Soviet Union, as Zourek suggests.[37] According to Natalia Telepneva and Philip E. Muehlenbeck, this was also a pattern throughout the Cold War: "Prague not only acted without diktat from Moscow, but often drove communist policy on the continent."[38]

Prague also became a place of refuge for Communists and Communist-associated groups from Europe, North America, and Australia.[39] In her article on the Anglophone Leftist community in Czechoslovakia, Kathleen Geaney adds capable cadres and the relatively rich Communist party to the list of advantages missing from other countries of the Eastern bloc.[40] As was already mentioned, other reasons had to do with the position of the Soviet Union at that time: Djagalov remarks that Moscow in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a "much less cosmopolitan space than Moscow of the 1930s."[41] Developments within the Communist Party, mass purges, and shifts in official aesthetics and the Cold War meant that Moscow not only ceased to be the center of the avant-garde, as it was in

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[37] Zourek, "Chateau Dobříš," 43.

[38] Natalia Telepneva and Philip E. Muehlenbeck, "Introduction," in *Warsaw Pact Intervention in the Third World: Aid and Influence in the Cold War*, eds. Philip E. Muehlenbeck and Natalia Telepneva (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 17. As they claim, "preoccupied with reconstruction and the emergence of the Cold War in Europe, Stalin was not particularly interested in developing contacts with non-communist leaders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America after the end of World War II. The rapid decolonization and social revolutions that swept through the Third World in the late 1950s offered new opportunities for Stalin's successors." Telepneva and Muehlenbeck, "Introduction," 6. More on the relationships with Africa in Muehlenbeck's monograph *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945–1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and in Petr Zídek's publications on the topic.

[39] For more information on the specific groups from Europe, see Vladimír Nálevka, "Španělé v poválečném Československu." In *Dvacáté století. Ročenka Semináře nejnovějších dějin Ústavu světových dějin Filozofické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy v Praze* (Prague: Univerzita Karlova, 2005), 77–95; Pavel Szobi, "Portugalci v 'komunistické Ženevě': Praha jako středisko antisalazaristické opozice (1948–1974)" *Soudobé Dějiny* 21, no. 4 (2014): 609–34; Kōstas Tsivos, *Řecká emigrace v Československu (1948–1968): od jednoho rozštěpení ke druhému* (Prague: Dokořán, 2012); Ondřej Vojtěchovský, *Z Prahy proti Titovi! Jugoslávská prosovětská emigrace v Československu* (Prague: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2012).

[40] Kathleen Geaney, "Špatná strana hranice? Anglicky mluvící levicová komunita v Československu na počátku studené války," *Střed. Časopis pro mezioborová studia Střední Evropy 19. a 20. století. Centre. Journal for Interdisciplinary Studies of Central Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries* 5, no. 1 (2013): 44.

[41] Djagalov, "Literary Monopolists and the Forging of the Post-WWII People's Republic of Letters," 28.

the 1920s and 1930s, but also had to be wary of association with certain projects. When Irving Potash came to Prague to establish the headquarters for US Communists who had fled the US, he admits that Moscow had the best conditions for such an organization. However, according to the report, Potash was also aware that "the imperialists would immediately start screaming that Moscow is steering the CPUSA and the situation of the Party would be even worse."[42] The Soviet capital could not host similar projects: Prague, on the other hand, could.

Starobin's example makes clear that, in relation to US Communists, similar suggestions were rarely implemented. As the global leftist community began to fracture in the late 1950s, and contact with the US Communist scene decreased, cooperation with other regions took precedence. "It has been decided that Czechoslovakia will become the study center of choice for the young intelligentsia of some non-socialist countries, especially those in the African and Asian peace zone," says a report that stresses the need for an "ideologically sound" teachers of Czech in China in 1958.[43] Various scholarship programs and study loans, later augmented by work programs, became especially prominent in the 1960s. This was seen as a way to foster contact with decolonizing states: connections with what were referred to as the more progressive states among them were favored, but students also came from regions across the political spectrum. The number of scholarships for regions reflected political developments and changing priorities – in the early 1960s, the focus was on the African countries.

[42] "Imperialisté by však okamžitě strhli pokřik, že Moskva řídí KS USA a situace strany by se ještě více komplikovala" "Záznam pro soudruha Novotného: Sdělení soudruha Potashe," n.d., NA ÚV KSČ 1261/2/4, Archival Unit 597, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague.

[43] "Podle usnesení příslušných míst se má Československo stát vyhledávaným studijním střediskem pro mladou inteligenci některých nesocialistických zemí, především z afrického a asijské pásma míru." "Correspondence from the Ministry of Education and Culture to the Czechoslovak Embassy in Beijing," September 10, 1958, Teritoriální odbor – tajné 1955–1959 – Čína, kart. 2., Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 1961, this led to the founding of a new university, the University of 17th November, based on the Soviet example of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.[44] In addition to students from abroad, there was also a small number from Czechoslovakia: these were either future experts who were later to relocate to African or Asian countries (some returning experts also taught at this university) or students of translation or interpretation.[45] In her study of the university, Holečková points out that, apart from broadly formulated ideas of transcontinental help, the goal was to strengthen Czechoslovak contact with the countries in question through alumni.[46] In turn, the range of special study programs and scholarships drew students to Prague. Even for those students who funded their studies themselves, Prague was still cheaper than Western Europe or the US.[47] Moreover, in comparison to Western European countries, Czechoslovakia was ostensibly untarnished by colonialism and imperialism.[48]

This narrative, generally supported by the official structures, fostered an impression of colonial exceptionalism, defined by Filip Herza as "the widely held conviction that Czechoslovakia historically did not possess any overseas colonies and therefore was not involved either in colonialism or racism."[49] This obscured the

[44] University represented the largest project, but there were study programs independent from it, such as a program at the Film School at the Czechoslovak Academy of Performing Arts. A recent book on the experiences of those students, *Filmmakers of the World, Unite!*, put together by Tereza Stejskalová, talks about various issues experienced by both the students themselves and also Czechs that came in contact with them. The filmmakers often became key figures for the film industry in their home countries and they Prague experience shaped their aesthetics similarly to how they also influenced their Czechoslovak peers during the most critically acclaimed era of Czechoslovak film history, the Czechoslovak New Wave. The stories of over a hundred students from Korea, Syria, Iran, and Sri Lanka have never been reflected in Czech culture.

[45] This department later became the Department of Translatology at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University. For more information on Czechoslovakian experts in Africa, see the work of Jan Koura and Mikuláš Pešta from the Cold War Research Group at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University.

[46] Holečková, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity*, 57.

[47] Holečková, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity*, 122–23.

[48] Holečková, *Příběh zapomenuté univerzity*, 28.

[49] Filip Herza, "Colonial Exceptionalism: Post-Colonial Scholarship and Race in Czech and Slovak Historiography," *Slovenský Národopis / Slovak Ethnology* 68, no. 2 (June 1, 2020): 177.

complicated links and networks of colonialism, both historically as well as in Czechoslovak foreign policies of the time. Along with the official line that racism did not exist in socialist societies, this might be one of the reasons why race as a category of analysis remained a blind spot in Czechoslovakia, and even in the Czech Republic later – including academic debate, as Pavel Barša has pointed out.[50] Moreover, the history of Prague as a racially diverse city, especially during its internationalist era in the 1950s and 1960s, seems to be lost to popular memory: "Cultural contacts linked to the past regime leave a nasty taste in the mouth," as Tereza Stejskalová puts it in her book on foreign students at the Film School of Czechoslovak Academy of Performing Arts.[51] With the search for new models of global solidarities, these stories have now started to re-emerge – and these complex narratives reveal both a lost internationalist vision, as well as clashes that erupted with local communities. In Czechoslovakia, however, there was one particular group that was welcomed with open arms, even though this embrace was enacted mostly through literature: African Americans.

1.3. My Czechs Understand Me?

Starobin was not the only US Communist seeking Czechoslovak support: less than a year before, the African American lawyer and CPUSA functionary William L. Patterson also came to Czechoslovakia to develop contacts between the country and Leftist African Americans. In contrast to Starobin, Patterson went directly to Prague. He provided a list of

[50] Pavel Barša, "Nulový stupeň dekolonizace," *Artalk.cz*, January 20, 2020, https://artalk.cz/2020/01/20/nulovy-stupen-dekolonizace/.

[51] Tereza Stejskalová, "Students from the Third World in Czechoslovakia: The Paradox of Racism in Communist Society and Its Reflection in Film," in *Filmmakers of the World, Unite! Forgotten Internationalism, Czechoslovak Film and the Third World*, ed. Tereza Stejskalová (Prague: Tranzit.cz, 2017), 63.

newspapers which would exchange information with the Czechoslovak press,[52] and suggested that a delegation of African Americans should be invited to Czechoslovakia, giving a specific list of people.[53] African Americans, as Patterson informed his hosts, were the "most active part of the progressive movement" and therefore deserved the most help.[54]

In his public career, Patterson was known for emphasizing connections between the colonial system and the US racism. He saw Black liberation not as limited to particular national contexts, but as a global movement. At the onset of the Cold War, this jarred with official US rhetoric: according to Mary Dudziak, Patterson's "efforts to internationalize the civil rights movement ran directly counter to U.S. government efforts to create and sustain an image overseas of a progressive and just nation."[55] The unavoidable clash came with "We Charge Genocide," a petition directed against the US government that was presented at a UN summit in Paris in 1951. Patterson prepared it in collaboration with the Civil Rights Congress (as well as individuals such as the African American singer Paul Robeson) and it was signed by many leading African American cultural figures, intellectuals, and activists. The petition received uniformly negative publicity back in the US and it had grave consequences for the people involved. Dudziak

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[52] "Letter to Evžen Špic," November 10, 1950, NA UV KSČ 100/3, Folder 5, Archival Unit 19, National Archives Chodovec Prague Interestingly, Patterson stresses mainly that these newspapers should also get information on the "immense growth and development" in Czechoslovakia (perhaps as the way to enlist more African Americans for the cause in a less direct way than with the Soviet example).

[53] "Materiál od s. W. L. Pattersona: O pozvání černošské delegace do ČSR," Fall 1950, Folder 5, Archival Unit 19, National Archives Chodovec Prague. On this list, there is also Paul Robeson, arguably one of the most visible Americans in 1950s Czechoslovakia, and the African American poet Langston Hughes – he was repeatedly invited by various institutions, e.g., as a guest of honor at the XIII International Film Festival in Karlovy Vary, but he never visited Czechoslovakia. "Correspondence from Langston Hughes to Ladislav Kachtík," April 8, 1962, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[54] "Memorandum W. L. Pattersona Komunistické straně Československa," Fall 1950, NA UV KSČ 100/3, Folder 5, Archival Unit 19, National Archives Chodovec Prague.

[55] Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 65.

remarks that “Patterson had broken the unwritten rule of Cold War civil rights activism. He had aired the nation’s dirty laundry overseas.“[56]

In October 1950, a year before the UN Paris summit, Patterson had asked his Czechoslovak comrades for help. One idea was to strengthen the anti-racist line by creating an international human rights organization.[57] The Czechoslovak authorities were afraid that this would weaken the world peace movement (and promptly issued a question to Moscow as to what they thought about Patterson’s requests).[58] Patterson approached the Czechoslovak authorities with requests on other occasions, but he never gained assistance in the form he hoped for. One reason that writers from the US could not avail of the support Czechoslovakia was willing to give (e.g., stays at the chateau in Dobříš) was that critics of the US regime had their passports revoked. Therefore, the relationship with African American writers played out mostly through translation, publication, and promotion of their works.

This had started long before the Cold War, and was intense in its way: perhaps symptomatically, this literary love affair began with a book by a white abolitionist. The first translations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) arrived only a year after the publication of the original, and in two independent translations. Eva Kalivodová writes that it resonated among Czech readers because of the parallels between African Americans and Czechs and Slovaks in the Austrian empire.[59] Other analogies were drawn by Czech writers who traveled to the US in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period corresponding with the last phases of the National Revival. These

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[56] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 66.
[57] “Correspondence from Alfred Dressler to Bedřich Geminder,” October 10, 1950, UV KSČ 100/3, Folder 5, Archival Unit 19, National Archives Chodovec Prague.
[58] “Correspondence from Alfred Dressler to Bedřich Geminder.”
[59] Kalivodová, Eva. “19th-Century Czech Translations of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’: What Has Been Left Unspoken.” *Hermēneus. Revista de Traducción e Interpretación*, no. 19 (December 14, 2017): 101.

parallels, however, did not influence the racist inflection of the discourse: descriptions of African Americans, as Josef Švéda points out, replicated the stereotypes of the time (at least those to be found in larger, more dominant nations).[60] While the Czechs saw a parallel between their own fate and that of African Americans, they turned a blind eye to the concept of race and the more complex workings of racism, including its dehumanizing power.

The Czech national self-determination after World War I has, in turn, been noticed by the African American cultural figures. Charles Sabatos, in his essay "Long Way from Prague: The Harlem Renaissance and Czechoslovakia," joins scholars such as Brett Edwards, Paul Gilroy, and Kate A. Baldwin, who view Black culture of the 1920s not solely as a US phenomenon, but a movement with internationalist allegiances and inspirations. He argues that Czechoslovakia provided one of the models for the Harlem Renaissance writers, claiming, "Locke's models of liberation were drawn not so much from Africa, where independence from colonial rule lay decades away, but from nations in Central Europe that had been freed from imperial rule at the end of World War I."[61] Czechoslovakia (together with Ireland) is explicitly mentioned in Locke's introduction to *The New Negro* (1925), a watershed anthology for the Harlem Renaissance. Czechoslovakia, at that time a newly formed country was seen as "as a uniquely democratic, multiethnic, and stable American ally among the chaos of Eastern Europe"[62] and an example of a group that "had developed self-reliance through cultural achievement."[63]

[60] Josef Švéda, *Země zaslíbená, země zlořečená – Obrazy Ameriky v české literatuře a kultuře od poloviny 19. století k dnešku* (Příbram: Pistorius & Olšanská, 2016), 74.
[61] Charles Sabatos, "A Long Way from Prague: The Harlem Renaissance and Czechoslovakia," *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 50, no. 1 (2017): 40.
[62] Sabatos, "A Long Way from Prague," 42.
[63] Sabatos, "A Long Way from Prague," 40.

During World War II, Czechoslovakia also inspired solidarity. In a poem called "Shall the Good Go Down," published in 1943, the African American poet Langston Hughes reacted to the tragedy of Lidice (a small village in Central Bohemia that was razed by the Nazis, its adult male population executed and women and children sent to concentration camps). Hughes, also a member of the Save Lidice Committee,[64] gives the event almost biblical meaning. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, God would not destroy a city if there were at least ten just people. In one poem, Hughes asks:

All over the world
Shall the good go down?
Lidice?
Were they good there?
Or did some devil come
To scourge their evil bare?[65]

Hughes strengthens this motif by adding another place to the geography of the poem, the Civil War Spain: "Were folks good there?/ Or did some god/ Mete punishment/ Who did not care?"[66]

In the 1930s and the 1940s, Hughes wrote many poems about specific political events. These also include "Song for Ourselves," written as a reaction to the 1938 Munich agreement, a settlement between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy that forced Czechoslovakia to surrender its border regions to Nazi Germany, leading to the German

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[64] Langston Hughes, Arnold Rampersad, and David E Roessel, "Shall the Good Go Down," in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 656.
[65] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 278. Originally published in *Span* (Oct.-Nov. 1943), 7.
[66] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 278.

occupation of Czechoslovakia. Starting with the line "Czechoslovakia lynched on a swastika cross," Hughes uses the lynching metaphor to connect the situation of a country threatened by Nazis to lynching in the US South, drawing a similar metaphor as when he writes about the Black Christ in "Christ in Alabama."[67] There, as Cary Nelson writes, Hughes asked the contemporary reader to "understand the black man as the Christ of our time. Those who crucified Christ are thus linked with every racist white in the modern South."[68] In "Song for Ourselves" racist whites are linked to the colonial powers who lynched Czechoslovakia (Nazi Germany especially).[69] But Czechoslovakia does not confront this fate alone: Ethiopia and Spain are also "left to die slow," "one after another."[70] No one is protected against fascist violence and Hughes drives home the point with his question at the end of the poem: "Where will the long snake of greed strike/ again?/ Will it be here, brother?[71]

Linking domestic racism to European fascism was integral to what Alan Wald calls the "antifascist crusade" of the American Literary Left in the second half of the 1930s and during World War II, especially in the Popular Front, when anti-fascist sentiments united artists and thinkers on the left side of the political spectrum.[72] However, as Wald points out, these connections often stayed on the rhetorical level: in comparison to the Double-V campaign that demanded a simultaneous victory on the anti-racist and the anti-fascist

[67] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 207.
[68] Cary Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left* (London: Routledge, 2013), 70.
[69] Drawing the parallels between the two poems further, it would also mean that Czechoslovakia in the role of the lynchee becomes symbolically Black. As we will see in the following chapter, this deeply problematic identification was used by some of the (white) Czechoslovak critics and writers as well.
[70] Nelson, *Revolutionary Memory*, 70.
[71] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, "Song for Ourselves," 207. Originally published in *New York Post* (Sept. 19, 1938), 17.
[72] As contemporary historians have shown, there is a transnational dynamic to US racism: the Jim Crow laws had a profound influence on Hitler's racial politics. See for instance James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

front, within the Popular Front, there was an "axiom that the defeat of the European fascist and Japan was the precondition for enhancing democracy in the United States."[73] In another poem, "Message for the President," Hughes states that the rights of African Americans were sidelined. Preparing an imaginary speech to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Hughes talks about the "Jim Crow army" and "Jim Crow navy," asking the president "Just like you lambast Hitler/ Give Jim Crow a blow."[74] Here, Czechoslovakia is also mentioned: in this poem, it no longer functions as a country that has been "left to die slow," but illustrates the way the US attends to foreign regions instead of addressing racism at home:

> I hear you talking about freedom
> For the Finn,
> The Jew,
> And the Czechoslovak –
> But you never seem to mention
> Us folks who're black![75]

With the silencing of more radical Civil Rights voices in the second half of the 1950s, explicit contrasts between US foreign policies and domestic race relations faded from public discourse. This, however, did not mean that the criticism disappeared: as Thomas Borstelmann shows, African American newspapers, for example, criticized the "generous refugee programs established by the U.S. government for white aliens fleeing

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[73] Alan M. Wald, *Trinity of Passion: The Literary Left and the Antifascist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 125.
[74] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 591–2.
[75] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 590–91.

the 1956 invasion of Hungary," in contrast to the status of African Americans within the US.[76] However, Hughes, one of the victims of post-war anticommunist hysteria, was keeping a low profile in the 1950s, and he also dialed back his political poetry. On one hand, this change can be explained by Hughes's development as a poet; on the other, it exemplifies a broader shift towards the depoliticization of US literature at the time. As scholars such as James Smethurst, Cary Nelson, and others have pointed out, for Hughes, this process also included the elision of Hughes's political poems in the US. For the most part these were not reprinted or discussed by critics, and, if mentioned at all, were seen as didactic, propagandistic, and inferior to the rest of his writings. Even in the 1930s and 1940s, Hughes was sending poems he felt could not be published in the US to his European translators – and in the 1950s and the early 1960s, it was the translations in languages like Czech that kept these poems in circulation.[77]

By using Czechoslovakia in his poems, Hughes drew both positive and negative analogies, continuing the tradition started, on one side, by nineteenth-century Czech travel writing and on the other by Alain Locke. These analogies numbered among other strategies with different aims such as self-determination, but as we will see in the next chapter, the mental shortcut they provided was often problematic. The mutual contacts were, however, not limited to rhetorical maneuvers: during the Cold War, letters were exchanged, poem influenced poem, and work was translated. Hughes occupies a special place within this exchange: he was not the only African American who had been translated into Czech at that time, but both his importance for the Czech literary scene,

[76] Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 106.
[77] Marcel Arbeit, "Adoptivní syn české literatury – Afroameričan Langston Hughes," in *Otázky českého kánonu. Sborník příspěvků z III. kongresu světové literárněvědné bohemistiky*, ed. Stanislava Fedrová (Prague: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2006), 431.

dating from the interwar period, and the role he played as a cultural intermediary, make him the ideal figure to reveal these contacts and connections.

1.4. Czechoslovak Hughes

"Every educated person in our country knows the name of Langston Hughes," wrote the Czech poet and translator Kamil Bednář in a letter to the African American writer.[78] This was not empty flattery. Other African American writers were translated into Czech, but Hughes was different: he had multiple contacts with Czechoslovakia, both in correspondence and his poems; also, he was a significant influence on Czech writers and poets; altogether, we find clustered around him many of the important literary relationships between Cold War Czechoslovakia and African American poetry. Not only was Hughes the most published African American poet: between 1948 and 1955, he represented American poetry as a whole. His was the only poetry collection by a US poet, living or dead, that was published in this period. But Hughes entered the Czechoslovak literary scene long before the Cold War, the first translations appearing in 1928. At first, they were published in literary magazines and later also in an anthology of US poetry called *Američtí básníci* [American Poets] in 1929, edited by Arnošt Vaněček. The editor, a great admirer of African American poetry, also put together the first Czechoslovak anthology of African American poets in 1938, *Litanie z Atlanty* [Litany of Atlanta].

Hughes's poetry was a major influence on Skupina 42 [Group 42], a 1940s avant-garde formation of visual artists and writers who were interested in "the everyday,

[78] "Correspondence from Kamil Bednář to Langston Hughes," September 25, 1961, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

frightful and glorious drama of man and reality," as one of the founding texts has it.[79] The drama that drew them was life in the city, its language and people, which they often captured in free verse. In contrast to the francophone orientation of much interwar Czech poetry, US poets inspired Group 42, among them T. S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg, and Hughes. Jiřina Hauková, a poet and a member of the group, even translated some of Hughes's poems – although, as Marcel Arbeit shows in his analysis of her translation of "Song for a Dark Girl," some of these texts were so transformed in the process that they might be viewed as Hauková's original poems.[80] Others, such as two important Czech poets, Josef Kainar and Ivan Blatný, found models in Hughes. Blatný's second collection, *Tento večer* [This Night] published in 1945, is especially indebted to Hughes. In comparison to the lyricism and florid descriptions of his two earlier collections, here Blatný seldom uses rhyme and, but relies on repetitions and fragments, collaging pieces of conversations overheard on the street. Poems such as "Báseň v cizím byte" [Poem in Someone Else's Flat] are dialogues with (and at the same time, Czechoslovak variations on) Hughes's poems: Zornitza Kalazarska writes, that, in this poem, Blatný established an analogy between someone else's flat and someone else's text.[81]

Intertextuality is strong in the whole collection. Two poems, "Druhá" [Second] and "Třetí" [Third], begin with an epigraph from Hughes. These epigraphs are also the first lines of Blatný's poems. "Second" uses a quote from "Homesick Blues," "De railroad

[79] "každodenní, úděsné a slavné drama člověka a skutečnosti." Jindřich Chalupecký, "Svět, v němž žijeme," *Program D 40 1939–1940*, no. 4 (February 8, 1940), 89.
[80] Arbeit, "Adoptivní syn české literatury – Afroameričan Langston Hughes," 428.
[81] "zachytil mizející celistvost zlomkovitého a fragmentárního, jež se vznáší 've vzduchu' cizího bytu, stejně jako 've vzduchu' cizího textu." Zornitza Kazalarska, "'Smutná píseň je ve vzduchu': Opakování jako textová strategie zpřítomňování skrytého," *Česká literatura* 60, no. 2 (2012): 148.

bridge's/A sad song in de air" in a translation by Vaněček.[82] Kalazarska remarks that this poem traveled even further through Czech literary history: for instance, Miroslav Holub's later use referred to Blatný as much as to Hughes.[83] Holub used the image of a railroad bridge both in his poem "Neděle" [Sunday], but also in the manifesto of a group of poets Květen [May], "Náš všední den je pevnina" [We Are Grounded in the Everyday] (1956). In the second half of the 1950s, this group transformed the dominant modes of poetic expression. In comparison to the war and post-war years, influenced by the interwar experiments and also Group 42 (that the May poets were inspired by), the official doctrine of social realism valued comprehensibility, accompanied by simplistic rhyme schemes and a limited number of acceptable topics.

During this period, in 1950, Hughes's collection *O Americe zpívám* [I Sing America] came out. The contemporary norms for poetry shaped not just the choice of poems for this collection (put together by Jaroslav Bouček), but also the translations themselves. Along with Hughes's political poems (and one song lyric he never wrote), this collection also includes Hughes's famous blues poems, such as "Weary Blues" and "Song for a Dark Girl." These, however, were transformed: one of the most common methods was to regroup lines into quatrains. Hughes's language also has been leveled out in *I Sing America*: as a result, Hughes's racial identity, so stressed by the Czechoslovak Communist critics, gets lost in translation. Of course, it would be difficult for any translator to come up with a suitable equivalent for Hughes's use of African American vernacular. But it is noteworthy that, in Hughes's 1950s translations and in accordance with contemporary poetic modes, Hughes sang America in a high Parnassian mode,

[82] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, 72. Originally published in *Measure* (June 1926): 16, and *Literary Digest* (July 3, 1926): 30.
[83] Kazalarska, "Smutná píseň je ve vzduchu," 151–52.

worthy of nineteenth-century National Revival poets who frequently served as models for the literary production of the time. As he journeys into Czech, Hughes comes to sound a little like Longfellow.

When Jiří Valja, a translator who put together two collections, *Černoch si zpívá blues* [Black Man Sings the Blues] in 1957, followed by *Harlemský zpěvník* [Harlem Songbook] in 1963, consulted his choices with Hughes, he requested the English originals of poems published in *I Sing America*: "I have learnt from other sources about the existence of other valuable poems. Unfortunately I know only their Czech titles which I translate literarily into English."[84] What follows (i.e., Valja's reverted translation of the titles of Hughes's poems) is another example of the topsy-turvy ways of transcultural communication. Hughes, on the other hand, did not always oblige: as he says in his response, "Some of the poems which you mention were topical poems relating to events of the times, and, as such, are now very dated."[85] Despite Hughes's complicated relationship to his 1930s and 1940s work, his explicitly pro-Soviet poems had other unforeseeable qualities. For one, despite the changes made in the process, poetry in Czech translation still broadened the expressive range of the engaged art of the period. Poems such as Hughes's could remind their Czech readers of a then-forgotten lesson from the 1930s: that politically engaged poetry and experimental forms were not mutually exclusive. Moreover, within the dynamics described in the following chapter, these poems helped to push through new translations of more jazz-oriented poems that so fascinated and inspired the Czech poets.[86]

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[84] "Correspondence from Jiří Valja to Langston Hughes," September 6, 1955, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[85] "Correspondence from Langston Hughes to Jiří Valja," September 16, 1955, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.
[86] Another poet who was strongly inspired by Hughes was Václav Hrabě, a member of what was called Czechoslovak Beat generation, who published poems with the names such as "Malé černé blues" [Little

Hughes was nevertheless of great help to Valja: Thanks to his advice, Valja put together a collection of African poetry *Prudké sluneční pochodně: verše afrických básníků* [*The Sharp Sun Torches: Verses of African Poets*] that was published by the Mladá fronta publishing house and distributed as their New Year gift in 1961/1962.[87] As Hughes confided to Valja, he was working on a similar project himself, an anthology entitled *Poems from Black Africa*, which came out 1963.[88] This was not the only time Hughes served as a mediator of African poetry for Czech translators: in Bednář's correspondence with Hughes, the former lists the translations he has made for an anthology and asks for advice on other writers.[89] This deepens the picture of Hughes as a cultural intermediary, a position that has garnered interest in recent years thanks, above all, to Vera M. Kutzinski's *The Worlds of Langston Hughes: Modernism and Translation in the Americas* (2012). She shows that the African American poet "moved in different worlds [and] had not one life but many" – and translation was integral to this movement.[90] In what Kutzinski calls "a plurilingual poetics,"[91] translation became a mode of writing and thinking for the author, whether this was driven by the knowledge that his texts were being translated (in his correspondence with Valja, Hughes takes great interest in the issues of the translatability of his poetry into Czech), or translations Hughes himself made. But Hughes went even further: not only did he translate from French and Spanish,

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Black Blues] or "Kdybych byl černochem" [If I Was Black]. More on Hrabě and his blues inspiration in Hoffmann, Bohuslav, "Vývojové souřadnice poezie Václava Hraběte: Problematika jejího ohlasu," *Česká literatura* 42, no. 3 (1994): 255–75.

[87] "Correspondence from Jiří Valja to Langston Hughes," April 26, 1961, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[88] "Correspondence from Langston Hughes to Jiří Valja," May 4, 1961, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[89] "Correspondence from Kamil Bednář to Langston Hughes," June 26, 1961, Langston Hughes Papers, Czechoslovakian Letters, 1946–66, Box 224, Folder 3713, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

[90] Vera M. Kutzinski, *Worlds of Langston Hughes: Modernism and Translation in the Americas* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 2.

[91] Kutzinski, *Worlds of Langston Hughes*, 2.

but he also arranged and encouraged other translations, and mediated other cultural exchanges. The connections such as the one between Hughes, Czech translators, and African poets not only reveal Hughes's role as a cultural entrepôt: by maintaining these contacts, Hughes both profited from and contributed to the importance of Prague in these networks.

Bednář and Valja were not Hughes's only Czech contacts: he also corresponded with publishing houses, cultural institutions, and occasionally with his Czechoslovak fans. In these exchanges, the names of Hughes's translators and also poets influenced by him are sometimes mentioned: however, never the name of a poet who was, at one point of his career, so deeply influenced by Hughes, Blatný, as mentioned above. In 1948, Blatný was sent to London to represent the Syndicate of Czechoslovak Writers (the predecessor of the Czechoslovak Writers' Union with its seat at Dobříš). He was a last-minute addition to the group of delegates, replacing another author who was considered politically unsuitable for such a trip. Apart from Blatný, there was another member of Group 42, the poet and visual artist Jiří Kolář, and Arnošt Vaněček, editor and translator of African American poetry, mentioned above. Blatný came to know Hughes through Vaněček's translations – at that time, he spoke no English himself.

This did not hinder Blatný from taking drastic action. Once in London, he decided not to return to Czechoslovakia. In that political climate, emigration to the West meant no chance of return. In the UK, Blatný suffered a mental breakdown and spent the rest of his life in psychiatric hospitals in England. As it turned out, he was writing poetry the whole time. By a series of coincidences, his poems eventually made it to Toronto into the hands of another emigrant – a translator of American literature and a great admirer of Hughes – Josef Škvorecký. More than thirty years after Blatný's emigration, new collections of his

poetry were published, even though countless poems were lost, either thrown away by the hospital staff, or destroyed by Blatný himself.

When Langston Hughes's poetry arrived in Czechoslovakia, it influenced key artistic projects such as Group 42 and also played a role in the reconfigurations of the poetic language in the second half of the 1950s. In the critical narratives of transnationalism, such a story would be an example of successful cultural transfer. In comparison, Blatný's journey to the Anglophone space, as thrilling as the story may be, less so. Yet, it was such stories, of prominent cultural figures who found refuge in the West, that dominated the Western narratives of Cold War, and, since the 1990s, also received the critical and popular attention in the former Soviet-aligned space. However, movement across the Iron Curtain was far from unidirectional. While the attention to cities such as Prague and their role in the global leftist community helpfully complicate the Moscow-ran-it-all narratives of the Cold War, by attending to individual figures who exchanged capitalism for life in a communist country we not only complement East-West emigration stories: these figures represent a part of the same Cold War mosaic. One of these emigrants was Abraham Chapman a white US Communist who, together with his family, left the US for Czechoslovakia in 1950. Following Chapman on his journey, with all its twists and turns, reveals unexpected intermediaries, allegiances, and cultural transfers invisible in previous Cold War cultural histories.

1.5. Chapman and Wright

Abraham Chapman was born April 27, 1915, in Chicago to orthodox Jewish parents: they spent much of his youth in Palestine and there he met his future wife Belle Schulman. Together, they returned to the US: during their time in Chicago in the early 1930s,

Chapman befriended Richard Wright. According to Wright's biographer Michael Fabre, Chapman and Wright probably met in a John Reed Club, a network of local organizations that, between 1929–1935, united Marxist-oriented artists and intellectuals, named after the US activist and journalist John Reed; these clubs were connected to the CPUSA.[92] The two were in frequent and close contact, as their correspondence shows (Chapman's side has been preserved): for instance, Wright first showed *Fire and Cloud*, a novella that became part of Wright's debut *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), to Chapman.[93] Chapman preceded Wright in a move from Chicago to New York: after urgent pleas (in one letter of January 19, 1937, Chapman invites Wright to come to New York so they can be "talking, laughing, paintin' the town red"[94]), Wright joined them in 1937 and stayed with the Chapmans until he leased an apartment several months later.[95] Wright would later dedicate his essay, "How Bigger was Born," to "Abe, Belle, Manie and Lora."[96]

The letters date mostly from the period when the Chapmans moved from Chicago to New York City while Wright stayed behind. Not only do they discuss literature and politics, but Chapman serves as Wright's confidant in romantic matters, as critic of his literary works, and occasionally as benefactor when he provides Wright with support in the form of accommodation and food. He also encourages Wright to find a literary agent and enter competitions. The criticism and help seemed mutual, as when Chapman writes,

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[92] Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 2nd ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 109.

[93] Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 134.

[94] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," January 19, 1937, Richard Wright Papers, Box 96, Folder 1256, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

[95] Contrary to what Fabre writes (140), Wright did not move in with the Chapmans – the correspondence shows that this offer, mentioned by Chapman several times, was no longer an option when Wright came to New York. Instead, in Hazel Rowley's words, "Wright used the Chapmans' apartment as his daytime base and slept in Harlem." Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 125.

[96] Rowley, *Richard Wright*,159. Emmanuel "Manny" Chapman was Abraham Chapman's brother and "Lora" here is Chapman's daughter Laura. Chapman later included this essay in his *Black Voices* anthology (1968).

in Winter 1936, that he would like to "send an essay to International Literature + you know the ropes."[97] Regards from Chapman's wife Belle accompany all the letters and sometimes, she is the one who resumes the conversation, in a tone that demonstrates mutual friendship, each letter starting with "Dear Dick." The last letter from the Chapman side, dated June 9, 1945, is all the more surprising: "Dear Mr. Wright, Enclosed please find a check for 20$, payment of loan you extended to us. Sincerely, Belle Chapman."[98]

Why the sudden coldness? It is hard to judge based on one note: perhaps there was a special reason (Chapman, for example, also addresses Wright with his full name when he asks him to write for his new progressive monthly – in contrast to Belle Chapman's note, however, it was an official request on letterheaded paper); perhaps there were other letters in between that are lost to us. Based on the letters, however, the two started to drift apart in summer 1936. In a lengthy letter of August 17, 1936, Chapman regrets that he and Wright "can't grope together, as we did many an evening in Chi[cago], over a dinner table or in a streetcar, or over a glass of beer, State St., after a show, etc.,"[99] but is more skeptical about the recent development in Wright's thinking. He quotes Wright's written remark that "we [presumably as people, artists, writers] must fall back upon ourselves in the last analysis for true guidance."[100] Chapman counters: "Didn't Proust fall back upon himself for true guidance, and didn't Joyce clothe his romantic bias in the reality of everyday life? […] This is a very dangerous form of individualism concealed."[101] This letter is followed by a long silence on Wright's side and the two do not resume proper contact until December (when Chapman writes that he was "amazed at [Wright's] silence

[97] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," January 11, 1936.
[98] "Correspondence from Belle Chapman to Richard Wright," June 9, 1945, Richard Wright Papers, Box 96, Folder 1256, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[99] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," August 17, 1936.
[100] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," August 17, 1936.
[101] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," August 17, 1936.

and didn't know what to make of it").[102] In January, however, Chapman again mentions his new venture and also an undertaking he and Wright planned together ("I am still interested in the project we spoke of in Chicago – a joint study of Negro literature") and again encourages Wright to move to New York.[103]

"Comradely, Abe" – Chapman would end his letters with these words. By early Spring 1937, Wright had already left the Communist Party, while the Chapmans were both increasingly active in New York Communist circles. Chapman's letters, however, retain their friendly tone up to 1941, although it is clear that the roles have reversed a little: Wright received a Guggenheim grant and what seems to be the last letter before Belle Chapman's note is her request for assistance with a job search. If there were more letters after, there are lost: but in the light of Wright's public refusal of the Party, his success, new marriage, and relocation to Paris in 1946, this seems improbable. In any case, the correspondence would have ceased when the Chapmans left the US: when I asked Ann Kimmage, Chapman's daughter, about Wright, she wrote that "once in hiding in Czechoslovakia it was hard or impossible for [Chapman] to keep up those contacts unless they would have traveled to the Eastern bloc."[104]

The correspondence, conducted in the happier days of the friendship, displays Chapman's deep interest in African American literature: there are his frequent commentaries on Wright's manuscripts, and questions regarding secondary sources on the topic. The projects he writes about to Wright seldom got beyond the planning stage, among these "joint study of Negro literature," mentioned above, or "a reconsideration of the Marxist approach to art with certain new points [Chapman had] been working on: the

[102] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," December 11, 1936.
[103] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," January 19, 1937.
[104] Kimmage, Personal E-Mail to the Author.

process of literary development, the new humanism, etc."[105] But there were more successful endeavors: in 1936 Chapman writes that he is contributing to a "Hebrew literary monthly in Palestine," for which he, for example, wrote "an essay on American Negro literature (with translation)" or "studies of American literature (with translations)."[106] Chapman also contributed to various newspapers and magazines such as the New York City-based Communist Party newspaper *Daily Worker*, the Yiddish language newspaper *Morning Freiheit*, and his own monthly, *Equality*. His articles from the late 1930s and 1940s often focused on the global rise of fascism. He also published academic articles on Far East policy and several short books.[107] As a journalist, writer, and member of various boards and committees of the CPUSA and its front organization, Chapman's Party membership was known to all: in the US, at the end of the 1940s, this was like having a bull's eye on one's forehead.

1.6. On a Search for a Better Life

It started with employment issues: the Institute of Pacific Relations assigned Chapman to write a report on the political situation in the Philippines, to be finished by the end of 1949. The final report, although "in quality and essential accuracy judged as acceptable"[108] was rejected due to Chapman's membership on the executive committee of the Committee for a Democratic Far Eastern Policy which had connections to the CPUSA. The Institute of Pacific Relations itself, however, was soon in the crosshairs of anti-

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[105] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," January 19, 1937.
[106] "Correspondence from Abraham Chapman to Richard Wright," April 7, 1936.
[107] Abraham Chapman, *Nazi Penetration in America* (New York: American League for Peace and Democracy, 1939); *The Effects of the Moscow Conference and the Current Victories of the Allied Armies in the Struggle for Jewish Unity against Fascism* (New York: Morning Freiheit Association, 1943); *The North Atlantic Pact for Peace or War?* (New York: New Century Publishers, 1949).
[108] *Institute of Pacific Relations: Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-Second Congress, First-[Second] Session* (Washington: US Govt. Print. Off., 1951), 5024.

communist crusaders. At this point, more than employment was at stake. The hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary United States Senate took place between July 25, 1951, and June 20, 1952. Chapman was summoned, but he never showed up for his hearing. By that time, the whole family had completed a strenuous journey that included stays in several hiding places in Mexico and the Netherlands; eventually, in the winter months of 1950/1951, they were settling into their new life in Czechoslovakia.

They did not find the Communist Paradise they might have expected. First, there was the unstable political climate. The General Secretary of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia, Rudolf Slánský, had, as Kimmage writes, promised her father "a job suitable to his American communist background and experience" in Czechoslovakia.[109] Soon, however, Slánský was himself in no position to help the Chapmans. In a trial orchestrated from Moscow,and modeled on similar trials in other Soviet-aligned countries, Rudolf Slánský was, together with thirteen other Party members, accused of involvement in a Trotskyite-Titoite-Zionist conspiracy, and eleven of them, including Slánský, were hanged in December 1952. With Slánský's execution, the atmosphere of witch-hunt that the Chapmans experienced back in the US was now repeated in their new homeland. They even encountered similar financial insecurities, as the spy paranoia of the early 1950s resulted in a situation where some Anglophone foreigners had to wait years before being assigned a job or a suitable place to live.

There were legislative issues, too: Czechoslovakia had no official category of political asylum. In February 1953, this situation was finally addressed. The document

[109] Ann Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*: *A Young Woman's Secret Life Behind the Iron Curtain* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 76.

defined those with the right to political asylum as “citizens of foreign countries who left their homelands because they were persecuted for their progressive opinions, for the protection of interests of the workers, for their scientific activities, or their fight for national self-determination.”[110] Czechoslovakia was supposed to provide them with “all the benefits appertaining to the working citizens of a People’s Democracy,” with the main outlay falling to the Czechoslovak Red Cross, which was supposed to “attend to the material and cultural needs” of the asylum seekers, with a special assistant paid by the Ministry of Interior.[111]

The Chapmans qualified for political asylum. Their ideological background was flawless: both Abraham and Belle Chapman joined the Party in 1935;[112] moreover, in his letter of recommendation in 1955, Irving Potash lists Chapman’s activities back in the US as follows:

> Comrade Abe Čapek has occupied a number of responsible posts in our Party. He was a member of the New York State Committee and of various State and National Commissions. He wrote pamphlets and taught in Party schools, served as editor of a number of Party publications, and fulfilled other important tasks in the Party.[113]

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[110] “Občané cizích států, kteří emigrovali ze své vlasti proto, že byli pronásledováni pro své pokrokové přesvědčení, pro ochranu zájmů pracujícího lidu, pro vědeckou činnost nebo pro boj za osvobození národa (dále jen političtí emigranti), mohou se ucházet o povolení asylu v Československé republice.” “Zásady o povolování asylu politickým emigrantům,” n.d., Folder 2, Archival Unit 6, NA ÚV KSČ 100/3, National Archives Chodovec Prague.

[111] “hmotné a kulturní potřeby” “všemi ostatními výhodami, které náleží pracujícím občanům lidově demokratické republiky.” “Zásady o povolování asylu politickým emigrantům.”

[112] “Memorandum and Recommendation Regarding Comrade Abe Čapek,” December 12, 1955, Archival Unit 596, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague also “Memorandum and Recommendation Regarding Comrade Belle Čapek,” December 12, 1955, Archival Unit 596, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague.

[113] “Memorandum and Recommendation Regarding Comrade Abe Čapek.”

Potash, a Furriers' Union official, was himself in Czechoslovakia at that time, having been expelled from the US in 1955, during the Smith Act trials involving Communist Party leaders. Such letters of recommendation were common among newly arrived US citizens – but it seems odd that it was necessary to write it in December 1955, almost five years after the Chapmans settled in Prague. This could only mean one thing: the family was still struggling.

Potash was puzzled: "I have repeatedly asked whether there existed any political problem which stood in the way of a definite work assigned for Čapek and his wife and I have been assured that no such problem existed,"[114] he writes to the Czechoslovak authorities. Potash who, according to the documentation, "was in charge of the group of US Communists who take shelter in the People's Democracies," did not stop advocating for the Chapmans' cause.[115] In May 1956, he threatened that if the couple is not given appropriate employment, he would ask the Polish People's Republic or People's Republic of China to accept them. He continues:

> Comrade Čapek and his wife are the only Americans in Prague among those given asylum who do not have a definite work assignment even though they have the most honorable record of activities and devotion with the Communist Party of the United States. They have been obliged to work on their own as free-lancers, which is incompatible with their record as responsible Communists living in a People's Democracy.[116]

[114] "Correspondence from Irving Potash to Gustav Souček, International Section of the Central Committee, Communist Party Czechoslovakia," n.d., NA ÚV KSČ 1261/2/4, Archival Unit 597, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague.
[115] "Záznam o rozhovoru s. Součka se soudruhy Williamsonem a Potashem," n.d., NA ÚV KSČ 1261/2/4, Archival Unit 597, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague.
[116] "Correspondence from Irving Potash to Gustav Souček."

Kathleen Geaney's article, "Špatná strana hranice? Anglicky mluvící levicová komunita v Československu na počátku studené války" [On the Wrong Side of the Border? English Speaking Leftist Community in Czechoslovakia at the Beginning of the Cold War], is by far the most comprehensive source on Anglophone migration to Czechoslovakia during the Cold War.[117] She remarks "[t]he expectations which political émigrés or idealists had of life in Communist Czechoslovakia were often far from socialist reality; in many cases this led to deep frustration."[118] However, not all Anglophone immigrants had it so difficult, as recent studies of the individual cases have shown.[119] The motivation of the different émigrés seemed to be the decisive factor: in the case of the Chapmans, this remains an unanswered question.

1.7. Motive Unknown

Potash's letter, officially entitled "Memorandum and Recommendation Regarding Comrade Abe Čapek," also includes a strange formulation: "As far as I am able to determine, I am convinced that our Party will by no means consider the circumstances of his leaving the U.S. and his seeking of asylum in Czechoslovakia as reflecting in any way upon his Party loyalty."[120] Yet it seems that it was precisely this Party loyalty that forced

[117] "Očekávání příslušníků politické emigrace či idealistů od života v komunistickém Československu se často míjela se socialistickou realitou, což v mnoha případech přispělo k hluboké frustraci dotyčných cizinců." Geaney, 40.

[118] Geaney, "Špatná strana hranice?," 41.

[119] Jiří Bašta, "Propagandistické využití kausy amerického emigranta G. S. Wheelera Praha, Police of the Czech Republic, pp. 224–251," *Securitas Imperii: Sborník k problematice bezpečnostních služeb* 7, 224–251 (Prague: Úřad dokumentace a vyšetřování činnosti Státní bezpečnosti ve Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Ministerstva vnitra České republiky, 2001); Helena Durnová and Doubravka Olšáková, "Academic Asylum Seekers in Communist Czechoslovakia," in *Scholars in Exile and Dictatorship of the 20th Century*, eds. Marco Stella, Soňa Štrbáňová, and Antonín Kostlán, 90–103 (Prague: Centre for the History of Sciences and Humanities of the Institute for Contemporary History of the ASCR, 2011); Doubravka Olšáková, "V krajině za zrcadlem. Političtí emigranti v poúnorovém Československu a případ Aymonin," *Soudobé dějiny (Contemporary History)* 14, no. 4 (2007): 719–43; Petr Vidomus, "'Američan – a musí emigrovat do Československa!' Škvoreckého jazzman Herbert Ward optikou zpráv FBI," *Soudobé dějiny* 2017, no. 1–2: 164–206.

[120] "Memorandum and Recommendation Regarding Comrade Abe Čapek."

the family out of the US in the first place. Potash, a high-ranking CPUSA official and a close friend of the Chapmans, was probably aware of the reasons they had to leave the US, but he withheld this in his letter.

The background to their hasty departure from their New York home – and Ann Kimmage strongly points to this option – could have been the Rosenberg case. Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were arrested in summer 1950, sentenced the following year, and executed three years after their arrest, in June 1953. But this is not the only possible explanation. By comparing similar cases, we can surmise that there are at least four conceivable reasons why the Chapman family left the US and settled in Czechoslovakia.

1. Chapman was a US spy sent to Czechoslovakia.
2. The Chapmans went to Czechoslovakia for ideological and/or economic reasons.
3. Chapman, an important member of the CPUSA, was sent to Czechoslovakia to be kept safe.
4. Chapman was a Soviet spy and Soviet intelligence was afraid he would be discovered.

There is no evidence for the first option. Given the political convictions of both Abe and Belle Chapman, and the struggles Abe encountered at the Institute of Pacific Relations, the second possibility is worth serious consideration. However, in similar cases – such as George S. Wheeler or Herbert and Jacqueline Ward – no change of name was required. In contrast to the Chapmans, the stories of the Ward family, and also that of George S. Wheeler were used for propaganda purposes. The third option would mirror a frequent practice of the CPUSA at that time. Chapman could have been a “deep, deep freeze”

cadre, a category defined by Junius Irving Scales and Richard Nickson as “trusted cadres removed from political activity, with changed identities and appearances, severed from all familiar haunts and associates (there were to be a source of leadership should other levels of leadership be discovered and arrested).”[121] The Chapmans could have been sent away as a precaution during the anti-communist witch-hunts: however, as Geaney writes, these emigrants were often treated better than the others, especially in the matters of living conditions and jobs.[122] This was not the case of the Chapmans.

If Chapman was a Soviet spy, however, the Czechoslovak authorities would not necessarily have known that – according to Geaney, this was not an unusual procedure.[123] Several aspects of Chapman’s story support this idea. In the US, Chapman worked as a journalist and journalists were good targets for foreign espionage organizations. The route the Chapman family took was typical for secret agents: as Geaney writes, it was a “common practice to send its anglophone agent to Czechoslovakia, or use Prague as a place of transfer to Moscow.”[124] Besides the route, there was also the time: as Haynes and Klehr write, “the year 1950 was a high point in Soviet intelligence contacts fleeing the United States.”[125]

The Chapmans took great pains to change their identity and cover their traces, including the name change – and they also severed all contacts with their friends and family back in the US. Chapman signed his articles (even those published abroad) under

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[121] Junius Irving Scales and Richard Nickson, *Cause at Heart: A Former Communist Remembers* (Lexington, MA: Plunkett Lake Press, 2019), 224.
[122] Geaney, “Špatná strana hranice?,” 53.
[123] “V některých případech československé úřady nebyly o pravé totožnosti takovýchto jedinců ze strany sovětských orgánů informovány.” Geaney, “Špatná strana hranice?,” 48.
[124] “pro představitele Sovětského svazu bylo poměrně běžnou praxí posílat své anglicky mluvící agenty na nějaký čas do Československa.” Geaney, “Špatná strana hranice?,” 48.
[125] John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona – Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 413.

his Czechoslovak name, and even people who had known him in the US, such as Potash, use the name "Čapek" in the relevant documents.

In comparison to other US families in Czechoslovakia, the Chapmans are also conspicuously missing from the lists of asylum seekers – they must have obtained Czechoslovak citizenship in 1954 at the latest. While other CPUSA functionaries – such as Irving Potash, Joseph Starobin, and Henry Winston – traveled around Eastern Europe, it seemed that it was especially important for the Chapmans to stay in Czechoslovakia as Czechoslovak citizens with their new name. There were two exceptions: their stay in China in 1959–1960 and their trip to Moscow in Winter 1957–1958, where they received privileged treatment, as Kimmage writes in her book.[126] There, Kimmage also mentions Chapman's suspicious encounters:

> Periodically my father had private meetings with Russians from whom he received gifts. A few times I went with him to meet those large-framed, friendly looking Russian men. I never asked my father what they talked about. It was just part of the unexplained things that happened. Why did they bring him gifts, and what did they expect in return? I had no idea.[127]

Could Kimmage be right in her suspicions about her father (or possibly, both of her parents)? Were the Chapmans involved in Soviet espionage? The evidence remains inconclusive. The answers are not in the Czech archives: the State Security Archives have no records of Chapman/Čapek until 1965 when Chapman was already back in the US.[128]

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[126] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 149.
[127] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 131.
[128] As I was notified by e-mail on February 22, 2019. This could mean than the Czechoslovak authorities either did not know or had destroyed the records. The latter might have happened when the Chapmans were

Only the Chapmans' file from the National Archives and Records Administration might shed light on the reasons the Chapmans came to Czechoslovakia.[129] However, as thrilling as Chapman's story might be, with its secret identities and spies, there is little to be gained from further conjecture along these lines, as it would distract from the larger issues that Chapman's figure raises.

Fleeing from America, Chapman became an ambassador of US culture in Czechoslovakia. As we will see in the next chapter, he obtained a job as an Americanist at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and wrote numerous articles on American literature for both popular and academic audiences, along with a book on US journalism and other texts (such as the afterword to a centenary translation of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*).[130] He also became one of the Cold War intermediaries for literary relations between Czechoslovakia and African Americans. In 1958, he put together an anthology of the Black diaspora *Černošská poezie: světová antologie* [Black Poetry: A World Anthology], bringing to Czech not only previously unpublished African American poets of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also contemporary leftist African American writers. Exile has long been deemed a special place from which to write literature: it has also encouraged new ways to read it. He brought with him to

preparing for their return to the US and the fact that they were Czechoslovak citizens had to be covered up – Kimmage mentions the collaboration with a Czech secret agent (Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 235).

[129] After a more than a year after my Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, I was able to find out the records are in the custody of the National Archives and Records Administration. These were compiled between December 1941 and April 1971 and consist of approximately 450 pages. Until this file is made available, the only sources on the Czechoslovak stay of the Chapman family are the scattered information in the Czech archives and Kimmage's book.

[130] Jiří Levý, a literary historian and a prominent translation theoretician, has criticized Chapman's text. In his article on the translations of Whitman, Levý reacts to the Chapman's stress on Whitman's working class origin by claiming that Whitman needs no apologists: this can also be read as a proof of Whitman's status in the world republic of leftist letters. Jiří Levý, "Walt Whitman v českých překladech," *Host do domu*, no. 2 (1955): 515.

Czechoslovakia the way he read African American poetry written by people he knew back in Chicago and Harlem – changing these literary works in the process.

Yet, Chapman was not the only intermediary on the Czechoslovak literary scene: a new generation of editors and translators emerged in the second half of the 1950s, who both profited from, and helped to create, the new cultural possibilities of the era. In the official rhetoric, they shared the same citizenship of the world republic of letters with Chapman – but their background, approach, and convictions differed greatly from his. This meeting played out very differently from the meeting of Starobin and Drda at chateau in Dobříš. While in the summer of 1951, Starobin and Drda shared and voluntarily participated in the building of the Communist internationalist vision (a vision, that included Prague as both a crossroads and a final destination), by the time Chapman was putting together the Czech anthology *Black Poetry* in 1958, this vision was mostly seen as a relic of the past. Placing Chapman in the center of the story of these exchanges – instead of on the margins where he was placed by the Cold War cultural memory along with African students and other Leftists communists in Prague – not only challenges the dominant story of US–Czechoslovak cultural transfer during the Cold War, but also provides a new model for how we think about similar Cold War encounters.

2. Anthologies Undercover

Almost two decades after the end of the Cold War, Josef Škvorecký, a Czech writer, publisher and translator in exile, was reminiscing about an anthology of African American poetry he and a fellow English graduate, the translator and musicologist Lubomír Dorůžka, worked on in the 1950s. Even fifty years later, Škvorecký was embittered, as is clear from a 2007 email:

> It was originally our [Škvorecký and Dorůžka's] idea, and I think I was in contact with the publishing house as the sole editor. At this period, however, Abraham Chapman came to Prague. […] When he found out about the anthology, he was immediately interested, and he was forced upon me as a co-editor. He told me the anthology was incomplete and brought me a pile of magazines, one American, *Sing Out!*, and various others, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. He asked me to give these to the translators for them to choose appropriate poems as he spoke neither Spanish, Portuguese, nor French, and that he would arrange these into a book. So I told him I didn't really speak these languages that well either and backed out from editing the book altogether.[131]

[131] "Původní návrh na tu antologii byl skutečně náš, a myslím, že jsem ve styku s redakcí vystupoval jako jediný editor. Tou dobou se ale v Praze objevil Abraham Chapman […]. Když se dozvěděl o té antologii, začal se o ni zajímat a vnutili mi ho jako spolueditora. Řekl mi, že je antologie neúplná, a přinesl mi haldu časopisů, jeden americký, *Sing Out!* a různé španělské, portugalské a francouzské časopisy a požádal mě, abych časopisy dal příslušným překladatelům, kteří sami vybrali vhodné básně, protože on španělsky, portugalsky ani francouzsky neumí, a on by to jen sestavil do knihy. Tak jsem mu řek, že ty jazyky tak neovládám a z editorství jsem vycouval." Michal Pribáň, Personal E-Mail from Josef Škvorecký to Michal Pribáň, March 25, 2007. Michal Pribáň and Alena Pribáňová put together Josef Škvorecký's correspondence with Lubomír Dorůžka and Josef Škvorecký, quoted in this chapter. This e-mail was kindly forwarded to me by Michal Pribáň on Feb 12, 2018.

A month later, in an e-mail to a fellow exile, Ota Ulč, Škvorecký puts it more bluntly: "[Chapman] forced me out of editing Contemporary African American Poetry and made it World Black Poetry."[132]

Škvorecký and Dorůžka were members of a new generation of translators and cultural intermediaries who were pushing against the norms of contemporary publishing both in their original writing and in their translations. US and especially African American literature was part of that mission. Chapman was formed by the US radical tradition of the 1930s and official CPUSA policies on decolonization and its connections to the African American liberation movement, and saw the anthology as "a gesture of solidarity."[133] Not only were their visions incompatible: their different backgrounds, agendas, and political opinions, made it impossible for them to work together. The Czech anthology, *Černošská poezie: světová antologie* (I will refer to the title here with its English translation, *Black Poetry: A World Anthology*) was published in 1958 with poetry from across the Black diaspora and Abraham Chapman was its sole editor.

Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology responds to the calls of Joseph Starobin and William L. Patterson for engagement with contemporary (African American) Leftist writers. It is also one of the local contemporary canons of the poetry of the Black diaspora. The period has been presented as a void in the US narrative of US poetry – which is true not only of radical poetry but also African American writing between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts movement. The canons of US literature made *outside* the US not only add to scholars' efforts to reconstruct the period from, as Mary

[132] "Mě zas [Chapman] vytlačil z editorship [sic] Současné americké černošské poezie, z které udělal Světovou černošskou poezii." Ota Ulč, *Škvorečtí: čtyřicet let zážitků a korespondence* (Prague: Šulc – Švarc, 2014), 216.
[133] "projev solidarity" Abe Čapek [Abraham Chapman], "Před první stránkou," in *Černošská poesie: Světová antologie*, ed. Abe Čapek (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1958), 12.

Helen Washington puts it, "cultural amnesia," but they also challenge the centrality of US-based canons.[134] (Just because such books are edited in the US does not mean they are not also local and temporary.) Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology also contributes to the reconsiderations of scholars such as Mark Naison and William J. Maxwell, who claimed that despite the problematic relationship between the CPUSA and its African American sympathizers, the Party still managed to create a platform for its African American members, not only nationally but also further afield.

Researchers such as Kate A. Baldwin have made similar claims about African American writers in the Soviet Union. Adding Prague to the cultural transit between Harlem and Moscow helpfully complicates the narrative. The CPUSA's support for African American writers awoke no enthusiasm in the cultural intermediaries on the other side of the Iron Curtain who, under similar slogans of international solidarity, were limited in their personal freedom, studies, and employment. The clash between Chapman and his Czechoslovak contemporaries came down to who gets to tell the story of African American literature. Contrasting Chapman with the Czechoslovak intermediaries not only reveals the larger forces behind the memoirs, autobiographies, and interviews of these editors and translators, but it also explores, as Todd Carmody puts it, "the ambivalence and instability at the appropriative heart of white investment in black culture."[135]

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[134] Mary Helen Washington, *The Other Blacklist: The African American Literary and Cultural Left of the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 19.
[135] Todd Carmody, "Sterling Brown and the Dialect of New Deal Optimism," *Callaloo* 33, no. 3 (2010): 827.

2.1. Trampled Generation

"When I read Ginsberg/ I'm not thinking of America/ I'm thinking/ how we were upstanding, reasonable, even pure,/ and how they overhauled that, *made us us*, […] how they, to make a cheap point cheaply,/ destroyed a generation,/ a generation that war had spared," writes Jan Zábrana, one of the translators who contributed to Chapman's Czech anthology, *Black Poetry*.[136] Zábrana, a friend of Škvorecký and later to become one of the legends of Czechoslovak translation, was also a poet and author whose diaries *Celý život* [A Whole Life] were, according to one of their editors "published in five editions so far and belonged to the most read and discussed Czech books of the 1990s."[137] In his reading of the poem, Quinn links the destroyed generation to Zábrana's parents, imprisoned during the early years of the Communist regime for their political activity.[138] Reading Zábrana, we see that the destroyed generation he refers to is his own. In Winter 1975 Zábrana even claims, alluding to the writers that were translated by them: "*Trampled generation* [italics in the original]… That was us! Not the Lost Generation."[139]

When Zábrana refers to his generation, he means a specific group of people born in the 1920s and 1930s, and who survived World War II only to experience the Communist *coup d'état* in February 1948 (and be disappointed by the abrupt end of the Prague Spring twenty years later). In the 1950s, Zábrana was acquainted with several key figures of the

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[136] Jan Zábrana, *Básně* (Prague: Mladá fronta and Torst, 1993), 100. English translation of this poem was kindly provided by Justin Quinn.
[137] "[Celý život] vyšel dosud v pěti vydáních a stal se jednou z nejčtenějších a nejdiskutovanějších českých beletristických knih devadesátých let." Jan Šulc, "Zaknihovaný život Jana Zábrany," in *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, ed. Eva Kalivodová and Petr Eliáš (Prague: Karolinum, 2018), 16. Zábrana's remarkably clever, but also bitter accounts of his daily life in the Communist Czechoslovakia fitted in, and helped to create, the 1990s literary scene with its recollections on the forty years of Czechoslovak state socialism. An English selection from Zábrana's diaries will be translated by Jonathan Bolton and accompanied by translations of Zábrana's poetry by Justin Quinn.
[138] Justin Quinn, *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86.
[139] "Rozdupaná generace… To jsme byli my! Ne ztracená." Jana Zábrana, *Celý život*, vol. 1, eds. Dušan Karpatský and Jan Šulc (Prague: Torst, 1992), 366.

1950s semi-official cultural circles, many of whom shared the same fate: this chapter focuses on one particular group of US culture and literature enthusiasts. Dorůžka, another translator and an avid propagator of jazz, called this group "us boys talking together" (paraphrasing a work of a Czech author, Karel Poláček, that could be literally translated as "us boys who walk together").[140] He was referring to Josef Škvorecký, Jan Zábrana, František Jungwirth, Stanislav Mareš, and also the orientalist Miloslav Žilina. Dorůžka, Škvorecký, Zábrana, and Mareš all participated on the anthology which later became Chapman's *Black Poetry*, and they also put together and translated other anthologies of African American and US poetry. They were young, gifted, and male: although they were female translators from English, they seldomly translated poetry. Women such as Eva Kondrysová, Jarmila Emmerová, and Eva Masnerová were crucial for the whole system of publishing politics, but they are mostly remembered for their roles as editors. The creative collaborations, major projects, and commonly discussed ideas happen almost exclusively in the male circle.[141]

[140] Lubomír Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti* (Prague: Torst, 1997), 319. "My hoši, co spolu chodíme" has been translated into English as "we lads who always go round together." The expression is not commonly used, but it is well known. The translation in this text comes from an alternation Poláček uses, "us boys talking together" ("those of us who are on speaking terms" in the English translation). Karel Poláček, *We Were a Handful*, trans. Mark Corner (Prague: Karolinum, 2016).

[141] In Czech cultural history, this tendency surfaces most clearly within the Czech dissident movement and in its samizdat production where women frequently served as typists and editors. However, like the memoirs of the translators and editors from the 1950s and the 1960s, this is not only a problem of history but of historiography and cultural memory. In his analysis of Ludvík Vaculík's *Český snář* [A Czech Dreambook, translated to English in 2019 by Gerald Turner] a diary from 1980 considered the seminal work of the Czech dissident literary circles, Jan Matonoha claims women are depicted as doing reproductive work but never productive work (Jan Matonoha, "'Ženám inženýrství nevěřím: Zraňující přilnutí a gender v Českém snáři,'" *A2*, no. 16, August 5, 2015, 5). Translation is also traditionally viewed as reproductive, rather than productive: in this period, when authorship was a problematic and impossible choice, poetry translation was the most prestigious work. Czech translation history also knows translator duos, such as Luba Pellarová and Rudolf Pellar who from the 1960s on translated numerous US titles. It is telling that, in numerous interviews and also in Rudolf Pellar's memoir, *Nejdřív se musíte narodit* (Prague: Radioservis, 2008), they often stress that it was Luba Pellarová's task to make the rough translation while Rudolf Pellar chiseled the text into its final Czech form.

In Prague, there were two places for “the boys,” where their networks and their perspectives on literature were forged: one was the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University. The neo-classicist building looking over the Vltava river at the Prague Castle was opened in 1930 only to be closed nine years later, during the Nazi occupation. When it opened its gates again, in late spring 1945, there were some students who could not wait to enter their studies: among them, young Dorůžka and Škvorecký, who had both been in Germany as forced laborers during World War II, together with other students and professors from the University. As Václav Černý, writer, philosopher, and literary scholar and prominent lecturer at Charles University who was also active in the anti-Nazi movements during the war says in his *Diaries*: “Let it be said, once and for all: the generation of students which in such numbers populated our universities in 1945, was one of the most promising generations in the history of our culture in the last century!”[142] In his enthusiastic praise – so rare in his diaries – he explicitly mentions Petr Kopta, another translator in *Black Poetry*.

The lectures took place everywhere, including ballrooms, and, in summer 1945, a special third semester was established, so the students could work at a quicker pace. Jaroslav Schejbal, who studied at the English department in this period recalls that after the universities were reopened, 1200 students applied to study at the English Department. Unusually for the period, the Charles University had a professor devoted only to American literature, Zdeněk Vančura. His seminar, which Schejbal attended, had 80 students signed up.[143] In one of these courses, in 1946, Josef Škvorecký and Lubomír

[142] “Budiž zde řečeno ihned a provždy: studentská generace, která roku 1945 neobyčejně početně zalidnila naše vysoké školy, byla jedním z nejslibnějších pokolení v dějinách naší kultury za poslední století!” Václav Černý, *Paměti III 1945–1972* (Brno: Atlantis, 1992), 114.
[143] Between 1948 and 1953 alone, Vančura directed 65 dissertation theses on US literature (Josef Petráň and Lydia Petráňová, *Filozofové dělají revoluci: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy během komunistického experimentu (1948–1968–1989)* (Prague: Karolinum, 2015), 129.

Dorůžka met. In line with his literary interests, Škvorecký had a paper on Hemingway.[144] Dorůžka was interested in Scott Fitzgerald who, along with Carl Van Vechten, was also the topic of his thesis; Škvorecký completed his studies with a thesis on Thomas Paine.

During their studies, the situation in Czechoslovakia changed. After the Communists seized power in February 1948, the universities were subjected to purges. Škvorecký and Dorůžka managed to finish their studies, but Mareš and Zábrana, the two youngest of the group, were not allowed to start: Zábrana, whose parents were imprisoned, and who was thus considered "utterly ideologically unsuitable," was rejected in 1950 by the Faculty of Arts;[145] the same happened to Mareš two years later (in the 1960s, Mareš would eventually finish with a degree in economics, Zábrana tried theology at a different faculty but was, again, expelled for ideological reasons). In the following years, both made their living working in factories and warehouses and with their first published translations.

Even those who had finished their studies had limited options. In the academic sphere, there was no place for people who weren't interested in building socialism. A slight window of opportunity opened during the re-organization of the publishing system according to the Soviet model. The students of various philologies found places in the newly established State Publishing House of Literature, Music, and Arts. This was located at the House of Arts Industries at Národní Třída 36, where the publishing house rented

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[144] Lubomír Dorůžka and Josef Škvorecký, *Psaní, jazz a bláto v pásech: dopisy Josefa Škvoreckého a Lubomíra Dorůžky z doby kultů (1950–1960)* (Prague: Literární akademie, 2007), 120.

[145] "Nebyl jste přijat pro naprosto nevyhovující ideologické předpoklady ke studiu." A formulation that, as Zábrana writes to Antonín Přidal, "In an absurd fashion, I remember exactly, even after thirty-two years." ("Obchází mě pocit absurdity z toho, že si po dvaatřiceti letech tu formulaci pamatuju přesně.") Antonín Přidal and Jan Zábrana, *Když klec je pořád na spadnutí: vzájemná korespondence Antonína Přidala a Jana Zábrany z let 1963–1984*, ed. Jiří Opelík (Prague: Torst, 2018), 352. Zábrana's diaries betray his literary interest and his first attempts as a poet and translator from his teenage years. But his dream of studying philology and having a literary career were stymied when his parents were imprisoned for their activities in the socialist party.

several floors in a functionalist building in the center of Prague's New Town, a ten-minute walk from the Faculty of Arts. Finished in 1938, it is a majestic glass and metal building with ribbon windows that has seven floors and a three-level basement, nowadays home to an alternative theatre, the only reminder of its importance as a cultural center in Prague. As Jindřich Pokorný, translator from Romance languages, remarked: "It was said in Prague in this period that actual Faculty of Arts is at Národní Třída."[146]

This "shadow university" (as another translator has it) was based on interpersonal relationships that resulted in various collaborations: from consultations to a joint project in which it is hard to distinguish individual authorships.[147] This was the wider network and home of "the boys." Dorůžka worked in the music department and Josef Škvorecký in the Anglo-German section. Dorůžka also wrote a report on ideological soundness for Škvorecký, necessary for the job (there, he illustrates Škvorecký's moral qualities with a reference to Škvorecký's lectures on "social standing of the African American proletariat and its culture").[148] Their encounters were not only in this building (although the rooms at the publishing house were instrumental for many meetings important for the history of Czech literature and translation), but also played out on the pages of *Světová literatura* [World Literature], a magazine crucial for the publication of US literature in Czechoslovakia. Zábrana was a freelance translator for his whole life, but he translated for both the publishing house and the magazine and was also connected with them through his wife, Marie Zábranová, who edited Italian and Russian literature.

[146] "Dokonce se v Praze říkalo, že dneska je filozofická fakulta na Národní třídě." Pokorný, "Chápali jsme překlad jako službu," Šustrová, *Služebníci slova*, 237. This impression was only strengthened when some of the employees (such as Eva Masnerová and Jarmila Emmerová) returned to the Faculty of Arts and taught at the English department of the university (and later at the Department of Translatology).
[147] "stínové univerzity" Josef Forbelský, "Česká kultura potřebuje pro svůj vývoj různé katalyzátory včetně překladu," in *Slovo za slovem: s překladateli o překládání*, ed. Stanislav Rubáš (Prague: Academia, 2012), 89.
[148] "sociální postavení amerického černého proleteriátu, jeho kultura atd." Lubomír Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 296–97.

Jan Zábrana and Josef Škvorecký met in 1954 through their mutual friends when Škvorecký needed help with a translation of a poem. There is a black-and-white photograph of the two of them, from the 1950s, perhaps from when the anthology was put together. Zábrana was then in his late twenties and Škvorecký early thirties: the dark and sturdy coats and berets (Zábrana is wearing a light one, Škvorecký's is darker) make them look older and wearier. Škvorecký, with the round glasses that became his trademark, is serious; Zábrana's lips are curved in a slightly ironic smile. It is not hard to recall Zábrana's words on their generation: in Summer 1971, he would write that, in the socialist system, his generation was "dying on the wine."[149]

2.2. Prague Layers

There is a busy Prague street behind Zábrana and Škvorecký. The stop, where a tram is just arriving, represents the only lead to the location of the photograph.[150] The two men are standing in Na Příkopě Street, one of the busiest shopping areas in the center of Prague, connecting two major squares, Wenceslas and Republic Squares. It was only a third of a mile to the State Publishing House of Literature, Music, and Arts in Národní Třída 36 but also close to other publishing houses such as Československý spisovatel [Czechoslovak Writer] in Národní Třída 9, where Zábrana met Pablo Neruda in the early 1950s. Walking through Prague in the 1950s and early 1960s, one could meet the diverse members of the internationalist community. If Škvorecký or Zábrana took the no. 3 tram, visible in the photograph, they would end up in Kobylisy, where Chapman and his family lived in an expropriated villa.

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[149] "[socialismus] v němž uhnívaly životy našich generací," Zábrana, *Celý život*, vol. 1, 220.
[150] There is no tram station on Na příkopě Street anymore, as the tram line was replaced by the underground in 1985.

In comparison to both the locals and other groups, the US community in Czechoslovakia was privileged. They obtained accommodation despite the housing shortage in the early 1950s, in some cases without paying rent. This did not mean the housing was comfortable, as numerous complaints show. These complaints were addressed to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (until 1960, this was on the same street where the picture of Škvorecký and Zábrana was taken). In some cases, the Central Committee was also able to assist these immigrants with jobs. In the 1950s, there were fourteen US immigrants in Czechoslovakia and they all held elite posts: as Doubravka Olšáková writes, "the group of former US citizens included a writer, radio editor, three scientists, two artists, and two language teachers."[151] Prestigious positions held by the US Communists contrasted with the limited choice of the field of study and profession available to the locals. This did not always mean the positions were awarded only on the applicants' political merit; those cases we know of show that the process was easier for them.[152] Irving Potash's complaints, quoted in the previous chapter, indicate that the Chapmans found it difficult to obtain employment. On the other hand, Chapman was able to obtain a doctorate in US literature and work first in the Economics department, and later in the Modern Philology department of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.[153]

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[151] "Ve skupině bývalých občanů USA tak nalezneme spisovatele, rozhlasového redaktora, tři vědce, dva umělce, dva jazykové lektory." Doubravka Olšáková, "V krajině za zrcadlem. Političtí emigranti v poúnorovém Československu a případ Aymonin," *Soudobé dějiny* 14, no. 4 (2007): 728.

[152] Vidomus writes that when Herbert Ward started to play with the Prague Symphony Orchestra, "it is likely that he did not undergo a standard audition process." Petr Vidomus, "Czechs Give Asylum to US Family: A 'Different' Jazz Ambassador Herbert Ward through the Lenses of FBI Reports," trans. Jiří Mareš, *Czech Journal of Contemporary History* (2018), no. 6: 31

[153] Škvorecký commented in his usual tone: "in this case, it was the examiners who must have been trembling, not the examinee" ([během získávání titulu] se myslím spíš třásli zkoušející, než zkoušený). Ulč, *Škvorečtí*, 216. As I was notified by e-mail on February 7, 2019, the Charles University archives do not hold a record of Chapman's doctorate. I was informed this could also be due to a changed system of doctorates between 1950 and 1960. The Archives of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science did not yield

Working with Chapman was unthinkable for Škvorecký, and perhaps for others, too. This did not mean Chapman was isolated: Ann Kimmage writes that Chapman "frequently helped those who needed his English expertise," and she recalls one example of "an older Czech gentleman translating Thomas Wolfe's novel *Look Homeward, Angel*" who used to come and ask questions to "clarify the distinctions between the Czech and the American ways of perceiving things."[154] When she recalls the early 1960s, she also writes that, once a week, Chapman "went to a small downtown restaurant Rotiserie [*sic*], where he met with Czech writers."[155] Rotisserie was a well-known intellectual meeting place in a neo-baroque building on Mikulandská Street, frequented by the likes of the future president Václav Havel and his brother Ivan.[156] Which Czech writers did Chapman meet? Kimmage does not remember: as she wrote: "I know he had a lot of contacts in the intellectual and academic world but do not know exactly who they were. One thing that limited him was he did not know Czech so all his Czech friends had to speak English."[157]

There were other English-speaking acquaintances in Prague. While Kimmage does not focus on life in the Prague Anglophone community, archival material shows that the members were in contact with each other, though the group was far from homogenous.[158] Mary Hawker, the daughter of the economist George S. Wheeler, describes how, "[a]

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any information on Chapman either. However, the materials from both departments Chapman worked in there are only partly available.

[154] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 210. *Look Homeward, Angel* was first published in Czech in 1936 and the same translation by Zdeněk Vančura and Vladimír Vendyš has been re-published several times (with a slight adjustment of the Czech title). It is unlikely the translation of this particular book was consulted with Chapman. Vendyš, however, translated another book by Wolfe, *Of Time and the River* (together with Jarmila Urbánková) which was published in 1961 and could therefore be the book Kimmage refers to.

[155] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 210.

[156] Ivan M. Havel, ed., *Dopisy od Olgy* (Prague: Knihovna Václava Havla, 2011), 91; Zdeněk Lukeš, "Rotisserie," in *Praha Václava Havla: průvodce po stavbách spojených s životem dramatika, disidenta a prezidenta* (Prague: Knihovna Václava Havla, 2016), 74.

[157] Kimmage, Personal E-Mail to the Author.

[158] Thea Favaloro is working on an MA thesis exploring the lives of the women within this community, Eleanor Wheeler and Belle Chapman among them.

group of anglophones met regularly in one or the other's home, in the 50s to discuss politics, later (men only) to play poker (for money, very low bids)."[159] This could have coincided with the meeting of Anglophone immigrants, officially led by Antonín Krčmárek. A former CPUSA member, he notified the Central Board of the Czechoslovak Communist Party of these meeetings in a letter asking for approval for further meetings. As he wrote, "these are people with a positive relationship to our system, but since they are not politically active here, they need to participate in political activity among themselves."[160] Krčmárek's letter included a list of topics (among them also the "African Americans in the US") and of names of both current and potential members: the Chapmans are, under their Czech name Čapek, on the second list.[161]

Despite the antipathy Škvorecký's group felt towards Chapman, the line between the Czechoslovak intermediaries and the US Communists was not impermeable. As Josef Jařab, who would later become the main Czechoslovak expert on African American literature, recalls, he met Chapman at the Wheelers' apartment. Jařab was not impressed by this new acquaintance: "Then, I was not yet interested in African American literature and I can't say the meeting [with Chapman] would motivate me. […] I saw some of his articles but they did not really catch my attention."[162] While in the US, Chapman moved

[159] Mary Hawker, Personal E-Mail to the Author, March 18, 2019.
[160] "Že by chtěl skupinu pro lidi americké národnosti provádět osvětovou a politicky výchovnou práci, protože jde o lidi, kteří mají kladný poměr k našemu zřízení, ale poněvadž nejsou politicky nijak zapojeni, potřebovali by provádět mezi sebou politicky výchovnou činnost," Antonín Krčmárek, "Letter from Antonín Krčmárek to the International Section of the Central Committee, Communist Party Czechoslovakia," May 5, 1952, NA ÚV KSČ 1261/2/4, Archival Unit 596, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague.
[161] Krčmátek, "Letter." In another enquiry on the same topic, this time by one of the members, Morton Nadler, a scribbled note on the minutes from the meeting says that "as friends, this group is allowed to meet, but for an organized activity, they would need an authorized rule book" ("jako přátelé se scházet mohou pro organizovanou činnost jejich skupiny by museli mít schválené stanovy")."Zápis rozhovoru s p. Nadlerem," September 17, 1952, NA ÚV KSČ 1261/2/4, Archival Unit 596, folder 178, National Archives Chodovec Prague.
[162] "V té době jsem ještě o afroamerické literatuře tolik nevěděl a nemůžu říct, že setkání s [Chapmanem] mě nějak motivovalo, ale seznámil jsem se s myšlenkou, že existuje, pak jsem viděl nějaké jeho práce, ale moc jsem se o něj nezajímal." Personal interview with Josef Jařab, Olomouc, February 6, 2020.

among the literary circles in both Chicago and New York, knew Richard Wright and other young African American authors, walked the streets of Harlem, and understood the references to places, names, and everyday realities; but when he moved across the Iron Curtain, his status changed. While occasional visitors such as Du Bois did not interfere with the way Czechoslovak editors and translators represented US literature, Chapman's knowledge and his position was not an advantage – it was a threat.

2.3. Soldiers and Tricksters

One of the reasons Škvorecký was so upset about giving up the anthology was because translation projects often took years to arrange (even though officials viewed anthologies more kindly than individual collections). Still, for somebody like Škvorecký to be put in charge of such a project implied broader developments on both the domestic and international fronts.[163] On the Czechoslovak literary scene, the magazine *Světová literature* [World Literature] was of note: its existence was made possible by these changes and which, in turn, played a major role in publishing previously forbidden authors, especially from the US. First published in 1956, it brought back names that had disappeared from the Czech journals, bookshops, and libraries after 1948. In 1956, for example, *World Literature* published Hemingway and Faulkner, in its typical genre of a lengthy review with excerpts ("recenze s ukázkami"): their return in book form followed (Hemingway's the same year, Faulkner's two years later).[164] Jungwirth, Mareš, Zábrana, and Dorůžka all published there. In 1957 and 1958, Škvorecký was deputy editor, but

[163] The situation in the Soviet Union in the Thaw period and the engagement with Western culture at that time has been recently examined by Eleonory Gilburd in her book *To See Paris and Die: The Soviet Lives of Western Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap–Harvard University Press, 2018).
[164] More in an article on Anglophone writers published in the journal (also includes an overview): Zuzana Semínová, "Počátky časopisu Světová literatura a angloameričtí autoři." *Souvislosti* 14, no. 1/2 (2003): 73–86.

when his book *Zbabělci* [The Cowards] came out in 1958 and caused a scandal due to its language and its depiction of World War II, he had to return to editing classics in the publishing house.

The story of *The Cowards* shows that, even in these circumstances, publishing a book was not easy, and translated works were no exception, especially if they came from the US. It was a time-consuming process that often took more than two years: book reports had to be written by several members of the Communist Party and only trustworthy translators and editors were placed in charge of projects. The book approval involved several levels of control (from the Central Committee of the Party, the government, and also the publishing house itself) and it changed as various institutions of censorship were established.[165] These processes also involved erasures, additions, and rewriting of certain passages.

Caution didn't always help, and absurd situations often arose: production could be called off at any moment, even after the book was printed. Some of the censorship methods were subtler – suspicious books were not supposed to be reviewed, and some were strategically published along with other books, so as not to arouse too much interest.[166] Sometimes, distribution options were regulated: this also related to the choice of publisher. In the centralized publishing system, each book was assigned to a publishing house according to its origin, genre, and topic. Famous US novels were published by Naše vojsko (which translates as "Our Military"). This had a different distribution system geared chiefly at the army. It also had special requirements for employees of its specially

[165] For more information on the publishing system see e.g., Petr Šámal, "'V zájmu pracujícího lidu. Literární cenzura v době centrálního plánování a paralelních oběhů,'" in *V obecném zájmu: cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749–2014*, ed. Michael Wögerbauer, Petr Píša, Petr Šámal, and Pavel Janáček, (Prague: Academia, Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2015): 1097–1223.
[166] Šámal, 1121.

designed bookshops, as well as its own printer; it fell under the authority of the Office of Political Administration of the Czechoslovak People's Army.[167] Our Military's limited distribution allowed for a broader choice of authors than was possible in popular publishing houses that focused on fiction (such as Czechoslovak Writer or the State Publishing House). So, in a series called "Knihovna vojáka" [The Soldier's Library], Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology *Black Poetry* was published by Our Military, preceded by a translation of Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*.

Despite shifts on the cultural front in the late 1950s, there were still technical obstacles. Getting the primary sources turned out to be a major difficulty. One of the easiest options were Western Leftist magazines that were available in Prague: *Masses and Mainstream, Sing Out!, Daily Worker* (occasionally, there were other publications, such as the *Times Literary Supplement* that provided valuable information on newly published books). Books could be either borrowed from the humble stocks of the English department at the Faculty of Arts (the subject of a lot of early correspondence between Škvorecký and Dorůžka) or from the so-called "English library" at the National Library in the historical complex of buildings not far from the faculty. The US embassy also had a library on its premises: obtaining books there, was, however, dangerous in some periods.[168] Between 1963 and 1965, Mareš was employed at DILIA, a Prague-based association of authors and copyright holders – the coveted foreign books might be obtained by an official request through this agency. The last option, especially after 1968,

[167] Work for this publishing house also substituted obligatory military service for writers such as A. J. Liehm, Eduard Petiška, Jiří Gruša, and Pavel Šrut. "Naše vojsko," *Slovník české literatury po roce 1945*, online, Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR.
[168] In 1970, Jan Zábrana's friend in Brno, Antonín Přidal, enquired about a collection of Robert Lowell's poetry. As Zábrana wrote to him, "they must have it in the library at the embassy, but who is going to get it there, I know these things, they snap a picture of you and you get five years in the uranium mines in Jáchymov." ("Rozhodně to mají v knihovně tady na velvyslanectví, jenže kdo tam pro to půjde, já vím, fotočlánek klapne a 5 let v Jáchymově"). Přidal and Zábrana, *Když klec je pořád na spadnutí*, 65.

for friends and acquaintances abroad to send books. This was also tricky and often entailed using intermediaries.

As the translators recall, these efforts seldom resulted in their holding a book in their hands: earlier in this chapter, we saw that Zábrana never studied English and had to consult his friends on numerous occasions. But even with a university diploma in English, the others struggled as well: both Škvorecký and Dorůžka frequently mentioned how confused they were by Faulkner's *A Fable*, which they translated together.[169] Consultations with the occasional English-speaking guests or language instructors became an important source of information: even at the beginning of the 1980s, one translator recalls addressing an English-speaking couple at a bus stop or happily discovering a teacher of English from Chicago, as he was stuck with a translation of Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March*, which takes place in that city.[170] Others contacted authors directly: as I mentioned above, in his correspondence with Hughes, Valja admits he also had to seek help and repeatedly asks about particular passages and words in Hughes's poetry. That Chapman was so rarely used as a source of information, both factual and linguistic, underlines that the fact that Chapman's America was not *their* America. His version threatened theirs.

Translation was central, and in Czechoslovakia during state socialism, the role of translators shifted, under various dispensations: first, from the enthusiasts of the nineteenth-century Czech National Revival then the Czechoslovak First Republic (1918–1938), to the cultural watchdogs sanctioned by the official structures of the 1940s and

[169] As Dorůžka writes: "We were looking for Americans who happened to be in Prague. When a sufficient number of them finally confirmed they did not understand [the text] either, we calmed down." ("Sháněli jsme Američany, kteří se objevili v Praze. A teprve když nám relevantní počet z nich potvrdil že ani oni tomu tak docela nerozumějí, upokojili jsme se.") Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 309.
[170] František Fröhlich, "Jistých posvátých krav bylo nutno dbát i v doslovech," in Rubáš, *Slovo za slovem*, 102–3.

1950s. Although professionally trained translators arrived only when the program in Translation Studies at the University of 17th November was established in 1963, translators such as Škvorecký or were experts in language and linguistics. For them, translation was also a form of self-expression, often the only public one. *The Cowards* came out nine years after Škvorecký finished it, Zábrana was only allowed to publish his poetry for a limited period in the late 1960s. Although Zábrana was denied a university education, diary entries from his teenage years that he was interested in both writing and translation from the outset.[171] He is now viewed as the best translator of his generation and beyond, but his diaries eloquently express his bitterness at having to spend his life translating the words of others.

As Šámal reminds us, the system depended on the self-censorship of a wide range of actors: the writers, editors, and translators themselves learned to pre-empt ideological impasses and used various strategies to avoid them. These gradually became deliberate practices for pushing through certain translations: these translators, along with the editors, assumed the roles of tricksters, as they often mention in various recollections and interviews.[172] This showed in the choice of materials, the arguments used in paratexts that defended choices of works, and even in the details such as the arranging of materials within a magazine or an anthology. For translators of US literature, the strategies and tactics they employed often covered up for the fact that a relatively small group of cultural

[171] As he writes in the summer of 1948, a few days after his seventeenth birthday: "I want to keep on: to translate, translate as long as it takes for me to perfectly translate the formally deepest verses." ("Ale chtěl bych nepovolit v tomhle: překládat, překládat tak dlouho, až se zdokonalím tak, abych mohl tlumočit bezvadně formálně nejhlubší verše.") Zábrana, *Celý život*, vol. 1, 37.
[172] This tendency has culminated during the so-called "pokrývání," in which translations (and even original works) were "covered" for by a different, politically safer name. These actions required extensive planning: if the secret came out, there would be trouble for all parties involved. Such practices often make claims about text and translation authorship difficult. A publication from the early 1990s maps out almost 700 titles: more have been discovered since then. Zdeňka Rachůnková, ed. *Zamlčovaní překladatelé: Bibliografie 1948–1989* (Prague: Ivo Železný, 1992).

intermediaries shaped the canon of US literature for several generations. For the canon of poetry, anthologies were crucial. They are a microcosm of broader cultural choices, and at the same time they attempt to present a coherent image, if not also create it.

2.3. Chapman's *Black Poetry*

Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology, *Black Poetry*, is divided into four geographical groups: the US, Caribbean Islands and Guyana, Latin America, and Africa. Apart from the US, the largest and chronologically organized section, these are divided into further groups according to specific regions. Just as Chapman suggested, the original languages were English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.[173] In the introduction, he draws an explicit connection between the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-racist agenda as he recalls recent events such as the 1956 Black Writers Congress in Paris and the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, as well as the emerging US civil rights movement. For Chapman, a shared history of oppression forges a common identity: for him, the Black diaspora is united by "expression of the experience, emotions, and self-awareness of black people that they had obtained through their clash with Western civilization."[174]

At the same time, Chapman also sees Black liberation as a national question. This might seem contradictory to the internationalist message of the whole anthology. However, Chapman here is following the official CPUSA line of the 1930s. The sixth congress of the Comintern, the Communist International, brought both the Black Belt

[173] The paradox of such an anthology bringing only translations from European languages is not lost on Chapman and he addresses the issue in the foreword, explaining that the lack was due both to difficulty of obtaining poetry in other languages and also the mediating role of the poets writing in the language of the colonizers. Čapek, 10.
[174] "básnické vyjádření zkušeností, emocí a uvědomění černocha, jichž nabyl střetnutím se západní civilisací." Čapek, 7.

thesis as well as the connections between African American liberation and the world anti-colonial struggle.[175] As James Smethurst writes in his study of the New Negro Movement of the 1930s, this influenced both the CPUSA and the broader African American Radical Left.[176] If Chapman found Škvorecký's original concept "incomplete" it was because the US focus missed these connections: in his study of the transnational anti-imperialist culture, Benjamin Balthaser remarks that "'race' was understood as a transnational term, linking slavery, colonialism, Jim Crow, and capitalism into a single frame of analysis."[177]

In Czechoslovakia, *Black Poetry* was the first book-length anthology which introduced African poets. Three years after its publication, a slim volume put together by Jiří Valja appeared, an anthology partly based on Langston Hughes' recommendations. *Sluneční prudké pochodně: verše afrických básníků* [Sharp Torches of Sun: Poems of African Poets] (1961), however, was not published officially, but distributed as a Christmas gift by the publisher. In 1977, the Africanist Vladimír Klíma put together an anthology, *Černý Orfeus: moderní poezie tropické Afriky* [Black Orpheus: Contemporary Poetry of the Sub-Sahara] (Klíma also published an anthology of African American poetry a year later, but kept the two projects separate). Apart from anthologies, Czech and Czechoslovak translations from the African continent include two collections by Léopold Sédar Senghor and one by Aimé Césaire (the only post-Cold War addition to this list is a collection by Nigerian poet Niyi Osundare in 2003).

[175] "CPUSA argued that African Americans constituted an oppressed nation with the right to political and economic control, including the right to form a separate political state, in the so-called Black Belt region of the rural South where African Americans formed the majority of the population." James Edward Smethurst, *The New Red Negro: The Literary Left and African American Poetry, 1930–1946* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.
[176] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro,* 22.
[177] Benjamin Balthaser, *Anti-Imperialist Modernism: Race and Transnational Radical Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 15.

In comparison to African poets, African American poetry had a long publishing history in Czechoslovakia. Still, Chapman's poetry brought new names. This was especially true for two categories: older African American authors such as Phyllis Wheatley, George Moses Horton, and James M. Whitfield, and African American poets of the 1940s and 1950s, often openly political. While these poems might have reminded the Czech translators and readers of the politically engaged anthologies of the early 1950s such as *Hlasy básníků bojujících na západě* [The Voices of Poets Fighting in the West] which came out a year later, or *Poesie zbraň pravdy. Básníci světa v boji za mír a socialismus* [Poetry, a Weapon of Truth: Poets of the World Fight for Peace and Socialism] (1953), Chapman came from a different tradition in which openly Leftist poems and poems openly thematizing oppression of African Americans lacked a platform beyond literary magazines and small circles.

Examples of such poets would be Beulah Elizabeth Richardson (Beah Richards) who gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s because of her activism and also her acting, Lucy Smith, and Sarah E. Wright (whose later novel *This Child's Gonna Live* [1969] explicitly connected race and gender issues), and Bayou poet Marcus Bruce Christian. Bruce McM Wright's collection *From the Shaken Tower* (1944) was published in England and edited by Langston Hughes, and he later made his name as a lawyer representing jazz legends and a Criminal Court judge. His "Journey to a Parallel" connects sexual topics with World War II locations in Czechoslovakia such as Prague and Plzeň. A Detroit poet Naomi Long Witherspoon (Madgett) is represented here by "Refugee" a poem also published in Langston Hughes's and Arno Bontemps' anthology, *The Poetry of the Negro 1746–1949* (1949). This anthology served as a model for the US sections of Chapman's *Black Poetry*: a quote from its introduction is on the cover of *Black*

Poetry and some poets, such as Alfred A. Duckett, are represented by the same poems. Although there is no evidence in the archives of Our Military which authors and poems were chosen by Škvorecký and which were added by Chapman, the above-mentioned poets were probably in the latter category, as they do not appear in other Czech sources. For other poets, *Black Poetry* represented the first appearance in Czech of many: Fenton Johnson, Jessie Redmond Fauset, as well as Countee Cullen, Frank Marshall Davis, Robert E. Hayden, Margaret Walker, and Myron O'Higgins would appear again either in later anthologies of African American poetry or in Škvorecký and Dorůžka's jazz anthologies published in the 1960s.

Chapman never learned Czech: his foreword was written in English and was translated by Františka Faktorová. Fifteen other translators were involved in the project, but the only other female translator was the poet Jiřina Hauková, mentioned in the previous chapter. Notable translators who took part in the project were Kamil Bednář, who also corresponded with Hughes (among other matters, about the poems he translated for *Black Poetry*), and Petr Kopta.[178] Zábrana is also here: he became famous for his translations from English and Russian, but his translations in *Black Poetry* were from French.[179] The original editor of the whole project, Škvorecký, only translated one poem for the final text of *Black Poetry*: "Break of Day" by Sterling A. Brown. Chapman's

[178] As Škvorecký claims, Kopta, who allegedly considered them too Leftist only chose long, unrhymed poems as the translators were paid by the line. Pribáň, Personal E-Mail from Josef Škvorecký to Michal Pribáň. Still, Kopta (expelled from his studies of Comparative Literature at the Faculty of Arts during the 1949 purges and later also imprisoned for his attempt to flee the country), chose his poems well. Among the writers he translated for the anthology were Aimé Césaire, Bernard B. Dadieé, and Thierno Ba.
[179] Zábrana, famous for his translations from English and Russian, has only translations from French in *Black Poetry*. He learned French at high school but, influenced by his friends, decided to focus on English instead. Jan Zábrana, *Potkat básníka: eseje a úvahy*, eds Antonín Přidal and Vladimír Novotný (Prague: Odeon, 1989), 407. It is interesting that recent academic interest in Zábrana's other translations does not mention his work for *Black Poetry* (e.g. Šárka Belisová and Tereza Kortusová, "Zábranovy překlady francouzské poezie," in *Jan Zábrana: básník, překladatel, čtenář*, eds Eva Kalivodová and Petr Eliáš [Prague: Karolinum, 2018], 62–69. The text also includes a list of Zábrana's translations from French where poems from Chapman's *Black Poetry* are missing. Zábrana's translation for this anthology are briefly mentioned in a section of the book dedicated to his translations from English).

choices, together with his anthology, represent his view of African American literature. His experience with the US situation and his internationalist vision shaped the final version of the anthology. What, then, does Škvorecký's choice of poem and the way he translated it say about the Czechoslovak translator's vision and African American literature?

2.4. Break of Day

Chapman's *anthology* includes a diverse sample of poetic expressions, modes, genres, and topics. Škvorecký's choice is one of the more traditional. Sterling A. Brown was already known to Czech readers. His poems were first published in Arnošt Vaněček's *Litany of Atlanta* (1938) and also in several literary journals between the wars. In *Black Poetry*, he is represented by four poems: "Old Lem," "Break of Day," "Strong Men," and "Me and My Captain." Brown, in fact, did not write the last one: it was a song originally collected by Lawrence Gellert and published in Brown's anthology *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes* (1941). Whether or not it was an oversight, distortions such as these were not uncommon in Cold War translation: *I Sing of America* (1950), the collection of Langston Hughes's poetry also included a song Hughes never wrote.

Each of Brown's four poems in *Black Poetry* was translated by a different translator. Škvorecký translated "Break of Day," originally published in 1938. The eight-stanza long poem begins as follows:

Big Jess fired on the Alabama Central

Man in full, babe, man in full.

Been throwing on coal for Mister Murphy

From times way back, baby, times way back.[180]

As the reader discovers in the second stanza, Big Jess has a "pleasing woman, name of Mamie" and "a boy growing up for to be a fireman/just like his pa" and a cabin "longside the tracks."[181] His life, however, provokes envy in the local whites:

Crackers craved the job what Jess was holding

Times right tough, babe, times right tough,

Warned Jess to quit his job for a white man.[182]

Jess laughs them off, but his train is stopped by a mob, and Jess is shot: "They left Big Jess on the Black Bear Mountain/ Break of day, break of day."[183] In the last stanza, Jess's wife waits for the sound of his whistle, "the grits are cold, and the coffee's boiled over," but Jess is not coming back – he is "done gone."[184]

Škvorecký's interest in Sterling A. Brown began long before *Black Poetry*: when he was finishing his studies, Škvorecký was teaching at various high schools in the north of Czechoslovakia. In one of his frequent letters to Dorůžka in Prague, he wrote about a lecture on Hughes and Brown he gave in the town of Náchod, Škvorecký's birthplace in Northeast Bohemia, in 1950.[185] He and Dorůžka also translated two other poems by

[180] Sterling A. Brown, "Break of Day," in *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*, ed. Michael S. Harper (Evanston: TriQuarterly Books, 1996), 156. Originally published in *New Republic* 85 (May 11, 1938): 10.
[181] Brown, Harper, 156.
[182] Brown, Harper, 156.
[183] Brown, Harper, 156.
[184] Brown, Harper, 156.
[185] Dorůžka and Škvorecký, *Psaní, jazz a bláto v pásech*, 41.

Brown: “Slim Greer” and “Slim in Hell.”[186] These two could be characterized as a more typical tall tale: Slim Greer, based on a real character, represents here (and in other poems, such as “Slim Greer in Atlanta”) a trickster-like figure. John Edgar Tidwell, writing about Brown’s use of tall tales, claims that these representations, running “counter to the usual claptrap of stereotypes” helped to shape a different, subversive view.[187]

This is, however, not the case of “Break of Day.” Big Jess is not a hero from a tall tale: the poem lacks the narrative style, the language, and the play of the fantastic and plausible typical of tall tales. The translations, however, play with the genre more than the original: when Jess is described as a “man in full,” Škvorecký translated it as “guy like a mountain” (“chlap jako hora”), a Czech colloquial expression that refers to purely physical height and robustness.[188] Robert G. O’Meally sees him as one of Brown’s badmen who violate “social conventions and spaces.”[189] Brown does use the badman figure in his poetry, also as a form of alternative history (“Forget about your Jesse James/ And Billy the Kid;/ I’ll tell you instead what/ A black boy did.”[190]). However, in comparison to Slim Greer who “Passed for white/ An’ no lighter/ Than a dark midnight” and lived with a white woman who “thought he was from Spain/ Or else from France,” Jess’ transgressions are of a different kind: he does not try to subvert the existing order –

[186] Sterling A. Brown, “Slim Greer,” trans. Lubomír Dorůžka and Josef Škvorecký, *Host do domu* 3, no. 7 (July 1956), 297. “Slim Greer in Hell,” translated as “Slim v pekle” in the 1950s or 1960s was only published in a book of poetry and poetry translation by Josef Škvorecký, in his revised version, alongside “Slim Greer.” Josef Škvorecký, *Na tuhle bolest nejsou prášky*, ed. Michal Přibáň (Prague: Ivo Železný, 1999): 233–237; 231–233.
[187] John Edgar Tidwell, “Slim Greer, Sterling A. Brown, and the Art of the Tall Tale,” in *After Winter: The Art and Life of Sterling A. Brown*, ed. John Edgar Tidwell and Steven C. Tracy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155.
[188] Brown, “Časně zrána,” in *Černošská poezie,* ed. Abe Čapek (Prague: Naše vojsko, 1958): 83–84. 83.
[189] Robert G. O’Meally, “‘Game to the Heart’: Sterling Brown and the Badman,” *Callaloo*, no. 14/15 (1982): 44.
[190] Brown, Harper, 154.

he longs to be a part of it, with his young family and a stable job.[191] The tragedy of his story lies in the fact that, as a Black man, he is not allowed to do this.

As in his other poems, in “Break of Day,” Brown takes inspiration from various oral forms – this poem is close to a ballad. The rhyme scheme is irregular, but Brown uses repetition and caesuras in each second and fourth line (while the first and third lines propel the narration) to support the song-like quality of the poem. Škvorecký follows this line in his translation, too, replicating the strong rhytm and short lines that leave little space to maneuver. He translates Brown’s “baby” by “Lord” (“Bože”) (occasionally also by the exclamation “ach,” an equivalent to the English “oh”). In two instances, in the third and fifth stanza, he replaces the word “baby” the more specific “kid” (“dítě”): in both “I’m on my way, baby, on my way” and “So long sugar baby, so long babe,” Mamie seems to be the addressee.[192] Škvorecký tries to substitute Brown’s word play, too: where Brown calls Jess’ wife Mamie “Sweet-hipted Mama, sweet-hipted Mame,” Škvorecký repeats the phrase “žába jako lusk,” newly combining two slang expressions: “žába” for a young girl and “holka jako lusk,” an expression for an attractive woman.[193] Brown uses colloquial expressions such as “done gone” or words such as “crackers.” Škvorecký replaced the latter with neutral “whites” (“bílí”), but substitutes this when, in the seventh stanza, he uses onomatopoetical (and agrammatical) “ze tmy rána prásk ach, rána prásk” for “shot rang out, babe, shots rang out.”[194]

Within Brown’s oeuvre, “Break of Day” is one of the poems James Smethurst has characterized as “male-identified secular vernacular forms associated with the rural

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[191] Brown, Harper, 77.
[192] Brown, “Časně zrána,” 83.
[193] Brown, Časně zrána, 83.
[194] Brown, Časně zrána, 84.

South."[195] In comparison with his other poems, however, it does not rely on the Black vernacular. Brown, a supporter of Radical Leftist organizations, has never been associated with the CPUSA directly: but, as Smethurst points out, he was one of the poets who explored the Black vernacular in the 1920s and early 1930s, along with Helene Johnson and Warren Cuney (also represented in Chapman's *Black Poetry*).[196] This was about to change: as Mary Helen Washington writes, by midcentury, most Black writers "incorporated black vernacular forms in their work,"[197] encouraged by the flourishing of anthropology, folklore studies, and musicology in the 1920s and 1930s. In Brown's case, his interest in the vernacular was strengthened by his work at the Office of Negro Affairs, a section of Federal Writers Project, where he led a project that interviewed African American ex-slaves (in what would later become the Slave Narrative Collection).

Brown and others understood the South as the source of authentic Black national culture. As Smethurst writes, the "midwives of New Negro Renaissance," Alain Locke and James Weldon Johnson, shared with US Communists "the notion that the base of black culture arises from the farmers and farm laborers of the rural South."[198] Based on models of European nationalism, the reclaiming of Black folk culture became a common project for both Radical Left and non-Communist Black intellectuals, often as way to directly oppose the mass culture of the urban centers of the North.[199] This authenticity had to be constructed first. Todd Carmody shows that Sterling A. Brown was integral to the project. Not because he claimed this authenticity, but because he invested so much in transcription (both in his poetry and in his work for the FWP), which emphasized that

[195] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 26.
[196] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro,* 29.
[197] Washington, *The Other Blacklist*, 21.
[198] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro*, 25.
[199] Smethurst, *The New Red Negro,* 24.

"blackness is not something to be discovered but is actively constructed and mediated by the dominant culture."[200] This construction and mediation are replayed in translation. Authenticity is at the heart of the debates on both translation and also "folkness" (that often used "artificiality" as its opposite). What happens, then, when such poems travel into Communist Central Europe?

2.5. Folk, Jazz, and a Loud Slap

"Cultures take what they want and need from other cultures, without much regard for the proprieties," writes Justin Quinn.[201] This also goes for the individuals behind these cultural transfers – and their tastes and preferences play a significant role in this process. Brown's use of colloquial language attracted Škvorecký. It is not a coincidence that Škvorecký, in his original works, often relies on colloquial expressions and neologisms (often based on phonetic transcription, which reminds us of Brown's work). As we have seen in Chapter 1, Czech poetic norms, like those of prose, started changing in the second half of the 1950s. Translations, too, helped this shift, especially certain titles such as Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye, translated by Luba Pellarová and Rudolf Pellar (published in 1960). As Stanislav Rubáš writes:

> this translation was pioneering for its use of colloquial language in literature […]. The Czech translation of Salinger's novel helped loosen the language's expressivity for many other translations and also original texts that came after. In

[200] Carmody, "Sterling Brown and the Dialect of New Deal Optimism," 833.
[201] Quinn, *Between Two Fires*, 11.

other words, the history of the Czech language has been co-written by translators.[202]

The second reason Škvorecký was interested in Brown was Brown's use of folk-inspired forms and his general dedication to the folk project. "The essential quality of socialist literature, and also literature from the period of building socialism, is its folkness": so begins a study by Jan Mukařovský, rector of the Charles University between 1948 and 1954.[203] "Lidovost," is a key term and the closest translation to English would be "folkness." This study was written for a conference on "Folkness in Czech Literature" that the newly established Czech Academy of Sciences organized in 1954. Mukařovský, an important Czech structuralist and a member of the interwar Prague Linguistic Circle, denounced his previous theories after the war and participated in the building of a new aesthetic, to which "folkness" was integral. However, as with similarly vague concepts applied from above (socialist realism itself included), it was appropriated by various cultural actors.[204] It helped to push through literature from enemy cultures: as one translator puts it, "if it was folk poetry, they [the cultural watchdogs] could endure that it came from the US."[205]

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[202] "Zmíněný překlad pak sehrál průkopnickou roli v pojetí hovorovosti literárního jazyka […]. Český překlad Salingerova románu, vydaný poprvé v roce 1960, pomohl uvolnit jazykovou expresivitu mnoha jiných překladů i původních próz, které přišly po něm. Jinými slovy, dějiny českého jazyka u nás psali mimo jiné právě překladatelé." Stanislav Rubáš, "Dvacet sedm životů," in *Slovo za slovem,* 13.

[203] "Lidovost je základní vlastnost literatury socialistické i literatury z období budování socialism." Jan Mukařovský, "Lidovost jako základní činitel literárního vývoje," *Česká literatura* 2, no. 3 (1954): 193.

[204] For a Soviet example, see Kate A. Baldwin's analysis of the use of folk aesthetic in Paul Robeson's artistic endeavors in the Eastern bloc and his transnational reconceptualization of the concept. Baldwin, "Black Shadows across the Iron Curtain: Robeson's Stance between Cold War Cultures," in *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 202–251.

[205] Pokorný, "Chápali jsme překlad jako službu," 236.

Škvorecký exploited this fully in an anthology he was preparing with Dorůžka, and which Dorůžka refers to as "[their] most significant project."[206] They were working on this from the early 1950s, and it eventually came out under Dorůžka's name in 1961. *Americká lidová poezie* [American Folk Poetry] was originally intended as a two-volume book, including both white and African American poets "ordered not according to racial discrimination, but chronologically, to keep the democratic character."[207] This character was also stressed by the choice of translators: there was a public competition and interested translators could send versions of a small number of poems; the winners were given larger parts to translate. In the end, there were 12 translators including Škvorecký, Zábrana, and Dorůžka: Stanislav Mareš, as Dorůžka writes, was onfe of the discoveries of this competition and he met the rest of the group as they were preparing it.[208] The anthology stresses the folk origin of its contents: if the authors of particular songs and poems are known, their names are only given in the appendix. Five sections are dedicated to African American songs, as they represent "most typical and the most distinctive" voices of America.[209]

In line with contemporary rhetoric, *American Folk Poetry* refers to both the verity and authenticity of the US folk and the situation of the African Americans, even going as far as to draw parallels between Russian serfs and African American slaves.[210] Aside from the translations of African American spirituals, it also contains blues lyrics, where this genre is presented as the "birth sister of spirituals."[211] This was an argument Škvorecký

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[206] "náš nejvýraznější projekt" Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 305.

[207] "[Antologie] však nemá být sestavena z hlediska rasové diskriminace, nýbrž pouze chronologicky, aby měla demokratický character." Dorůžka and Škvorecký, *Psaní, jazz a bláto v pásech*, 223.

[208] Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 308.

[209] "Jeho ústy zpívá Amerika nejtypičtěji, nejosobitěji." Lubomír Dorůžka, introduction to *Americká lidová poezie* (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1961), 22.

[210] Dorůžka, "Introduction," 23.

[211] "rodná sestra spirituálů" Lubomír Dorůžka, ed., *Americká lidová poezie*, trans. E. F. Burian et al. (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury a umění, 1961), 408.

and Dorůžka would also stretch to jazz. In their introduction to another project, an anthology of Czech and US poets called *Jazzová inspirace* [Jazz Inspiration] in 1966, they present jazz as an African American folk alternative to classical music.[212] "For us, the generation that grew up during the Protectorate, jazz naturally became a religion of sorts," write Škvorecký and Dorůžka in the introduction.[213] It was their life-long obsession: Dorůžka was a musicologist and music critic, Škvorecký was inspired by jazz in his writings and often thematizes it in his short stories and novels. Their fascination with African American literature was inspired by it, and overlapped with their jazz obsession.

The Communists rejected jazz as bourgeois art in the early 1950s. In 1958, it was still controversial in Czechoslovakia: a book called *Svět jazzu* [The World of Jazz], written by Dorůžka (including a short story by Škvorecký and also Zábrana's translations that had passed the first round of censorship), was withdrawn at the last minute and the whole print run was pulped. It was precisely the official rejection of jazz in the Eastern bloc that led the US State Department to choose this style as the vehicle for a more positive message about US race relations in 1956, in their Cultural Representation program. Originally, popular music was also considered, but jazz, persecuted in the Eastern bloc and associated with Western modernism, seemed to better fulfill this diplomatic objective.[214] Paradoxically, the legitimization of jazz in Czechoslovakia was assisted by two US citizens, but not in a way the State Department could have anticipated. Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology *Black Poetry*, perhaps against both his and

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[212] Lubomír Dorůžka and Josef Škvorecký, "Předmluva," in *Jazzová inspirace* (Prague: Odeon, 1966), 12.
[213] "pro naši generaci, která dospívala za protektorátu, se jazz stal přirozeně něčím na způsob náboženství." Dorůžka and Škvorecký, "Předmluva," 22. By protectorate, he means Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia that was established in 1939 following German occupation of the Czech lands and ended with the German surrender in 1945. Jazz was prohibited in Nazi Germany and its territories.
[214] Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 112.

Škvorecký's initial expectations, presented African American cultural works as always progressive; and there was Herbert Ward, the US bassist who, with his wife Jacqueline and their two sons, sought asylum in Czechoslovakia. As Dorůžka puts it, when Škvorecký found out about the arrival of the Wards from *Masses and Mainstream*, the US leftist journal available in Prague, he and Dorůžka immediately rushed to their hotel with a plan for a collaborative project. For the sake of jazz on Škvorecký's and Dorůžka's part, and with the hope of artistic fulfillment on the side of the Wards, both sides were able to overcome their initial mistrust.[215] After all, what better ideological cover than a musician who, according to official newspaper accounts, came to Czechoslovakia in pursuit of artistic freedom?

Really the Blues, named after Mezz Mezzrow's memoir *Really the Blues* (1946)*,* was a multi-genre performance that presented the history of African American music and included dance, poetry, and music with Herbert Ward as the star, accompanied by a band called Pražský dixieland (Prague Dixieland).[216] It was a collaborative project: apart from Ward, there was Škvorecký, Dorůžka, and Ludvík Šváb, a film theorist, as well as a psychiatrist who was also a jazzman. The show was short-lived, but Ward's status of US political refugee, seeking artistic freedom in Czechoslovakia, helped to push through other jazz projects he participated in. As Petr Vidomus points out, the Wards' case offers a counterpoint to the mission of the State Department-sponsored jazz tours: "While Armstrong was intentionally used by US diplomacy, Ward was an unintended consequence of the persecution of left-wing citizens in the United States in the early 1950s."[217]

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[215] Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti,* 302.
[216] Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 302–4.
[217] Vidomus, "Czechs Give Asylum to US Family," 6.

While, during the US jazz tours, jazz was the vehicle for the political message, in the case of the Wards, this was reversed: the political message of the show (and Wards' position as political emigrants) helped to push through jazz. But not everybody was thrilled by this connection. As Škvorecký put it in 2007, "Chapman once came to rehearsals and started to lecture to Jacqueline [Ward] about the reactionary nature of jazz. She got so angry that she smacked him so hard that he was barely able to stagger out of the theatre."[218] The accounts of this episode were all written years after the incident and details of the time and occasion differ: Dorůžka claims it was not a rehearsal, but that Chapman got slapped because of his unfavorable review of the performance.[219] But these versions have one thing in common: the general joy over Chapman's humiliation.

Škvorecký and Dorůžka's relationship to the Wards was not cordial (*Really the Blues* was canceled after a limited number of performances because, according to Dorůžka, Ward was unsatisfied with the financial compensation).[220] But Chapman was dangerous as he interfered with the narrative of the show, a narrative that perfectly corresponded with contemporaneous US accounts of jazz: that the story of African Americans, a story of racial oppression, led to jazz. The difference between these narratives was the following: the story of US race was sold as a success by Cold War US strategists, whereas Škvorecký and Dorůžka, on the surface, presented jazz and also the translations of African American culture, to flag US racism. At least this was their official line of argument: hidden between the lines, the message was different – and Chapman's version did not comply with that either. While he saw the history of oppression as a

[218] "Chapman tehdy přišel na zkoušku a začal Jacquelinu poučovat o reakční povaze jazzu a ta se tak naštvala, že mu dala facku tzv. Mlaskavou, po níž se vypotácel z divadla." Pribáň, Personal E-Mail from Josef Škvorecký to Michal Pribáň.
[219] Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 303.
[220] Dorůžka, *Panoráma paměti*, 303–304.

phenomenon of the Black diaspora more generally, for the Czechoslovak translators, this history represented a parallel to their own situation.

2.6. Mediators

Alluding to US racism was one of the most prominent strategies in Czech publishing of US literature and US culture. Škvorecký learned this early, as an anecdote he wrote to Dorůžka from Náchod demonstrates. A school inspector visited his class when he was singing a blues song. Škvorecký turned the potentially dangerous situation around when he followed the song with a lecture on the spirituals and the oppression of Black working class in the US; the story ends with the inspector praising his lesson.[221] The argument that a particular artifact emphasized US racism helped not only the publication of African American literature but also other cultural artifacts, from jazz recordings to Faulkner's novels.

The parallel was often hidden in the works themselves. Big Jess in Brown's "Break of Dawn" is punished for his "bid for a decent life" (as Joanne V. Gabbin puts it), his desire to do his job – a sentiment the writers and translators of the era must themselves have experienced.[222] This tendency became stronger in the translations of African Americans that appeared from the 1960s on, also encouraged by *American Folk Poetry* anthology which brought many of the translations for the first time. An example would be African American spirituals which, in the 1970s and 1980s, became popular for their anti-regime stance. As Quinn writes, "often one text fulfilled the aim of two very different parties."[223] The spirituals, officially consecrated for their anti-racist message, carried a

[221] Dorůžka and Škvorecký, *Psaní, jazz a bláto v pásech*, 14.
[222] Joanne V. Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 113.
[223] Quinn, *Between Two Fires*, 87

very different liberation message.[224] In a system where reading between the lines became the default practice, the meaning of cultural artifacts shifted: in the case of spirituals, this sometimes entailed the originals were invented.[225] Spirituals provided an opportunity to trick the oppressive regime. On the other hand, the rhetorical tricks, implausible allegories, and an almost ritualized playing of the anti-racism card all show what gets lost in translation: US racial relations themselves. If all African Americans were oppressed (an argument frequently used in the translations of African American literature), this did not mean all oppressed were Black.

During the Cold War, translation was often able to effect cultural and social change: on the other hand, it was involved in colonial processes of domination and compliance. The earlier translations of Langston Hughes, as shown in Chapter 1, erased the very identity the official structures emphasized – the new generation of translators did not repeat this erasure. Behind their use of colloquial language in translations was a grander strategy. The fact that this eventually led to a greater variety in translation politics should not occlude another fact: the message of these poems was expropriated. This was partly

[224] Svatopluk Karásek, a member of Czech underground bands such as DG 307 and Plastic People of the Universe and also a Protestant pastor used African American spirituals in distinctive translations often based on the sound more than meaning, uses this argument in the legal trials against the members of underground in the early 1970s. According to the so-called *Brown Book* which records these processes, the fact that his songs are based on spirituals becomes crucial for this defense. Karásek is even asked whether he feels inspired by spirituals "such as the ones sung by Paul Robeson" – and he agrees."Na dotaz obhajoby, zda se cítil inspirován spirituály, jaké zpíval Paul Robeson, odpověděl kladně." Martin Machovec, et al., eds, "[Průběh hlavního líčení ve dnech 21.–23. 9. 1976]," in *"Hnědá kniha" o procesech s českým undergroundem* (Prague: Ústav pro stadium totalitních režimů, 2012), 169.

[225] Eventually, this tendency was so strong that it led to translations without originals, as with the Czech version of the song, "Little More Faith in Jesus," sung by the semi-official band Spirituál Kvintet. The original version would be too religious for the authorities' liking. The new variant, however, has a very clear anti-regime message that proclaims a utopian vision: "I will go whenever I want to/ I will read whatever I want to/ when the law comes back." The censorship committee, however, as Jiří Tichota recalls, was not appeased by the explanation that it is a translation of a spiritual: they wanted the original. He asked a friend at the English department to re-translate the song. Honza Dědek, "NEJ HITY: Ježíše vystřídalo právo na právo," *Lidovky.cz*, January 23, 2012, https://www.lidovky.cz/kultura/nej-hity-jezise-vystridalo-pravo-na-pravo.A120118_144544_ln_kultura_wok.

due to the refusal to engage with the cultural implications of another race involved in the exchanges – their own.

Like Blackness, whiteness is contextual. As Sabatos reminds us, there were times in which Czech immigrants to the US would be considered non-white, or, more precisely, "ethnic":

> Soon after World War I, the Johnson Quota Act of 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 restricted the arrival of immigrants from "newer" groups (such as the Czechs and Slovaks) based on a formula of "national origins" that remained in force for over forty years. Thus the full impact of the "New Negro" can be understood not just through an international perspective, as [Brett Hayes] Edwards and others have shown, but through an interethnic approach – defining "ethnic" in the specific sense of minority groups that were in the process of assimilating into white American society but had not yet fully done so.[226]

In the 1950s, the situation was different. If anything, Cold War race politics made these translators even whiter in US eyes: at the onset of the conflict, the US stress on the suffering of (white) people in the Eastern bloc was one of the main rhetorical strategies for nurturing anti-Soviet sentiment. On the other hand, the official rhetoric held that racism did not exist in socialist societies and Soviet discourses of decolonization denied any compliance with the colonial project; this, then, made the need for deeper analyses of

[226] Sabatos, "A Long Way from Prague," 60.

both domestic racist practices and the concept of race seem superfluous in the public discourse.[227]

Finally, the translators were just not that interested. As Brian Goodman points out, "Škvorecký's entire project as a writer and translator during the Thaw was to expand the boundaries of socialist realism by introducing new forms of vernacular modernism into Czech literary culture."[228] The popularity of white US mediators such as Mezzrow and Warren Miller underlines this point: Škvorecký, interested in jazz, vernacular forms, and US literature, found the perfect vehicle in African American literature, as it was ideologically acceptable, and he drove home this advantage in his publication struggles. The national framing helped: African American art represented an oppressed people in the US. On the other hand, Chapman's version did not fit this purpose. Such an anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial agenda did not appeal to these translators. For them, it was already compromised by restrictions in the Eastern bloc and too closely tied to official propaganda, as well as figures such as Chapman. There is a further important point here: viewing the race situation in the US as an isolated phenomenon allowed Škvorecký and his friends to overlook the analogy with other forms of global oppression such as colonialism. Many great works were translated as a result of these strategies. On the other hand, that these works were translated did not ensure any deeper awareness of race than that provided by official Communist propaganda.

2.7. Across the Ocean

For a post-Cold War reader, Chapman's 1950s and early 1960s political stances, reflected in the composition of, and the introduction to his Czechoslovak anthology *Black Poetry* is

[227] More in Ian Law, *Red Racisms: Racism in Communist and Post-Communist Contexts* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012).
[228] Brian Goodman, "A Cowards' Guide to World Literature: Josef Škvorecký's American Epigraphs." A draft of a chapter from a manuscript was kindly sent to me by Brian Goodman.

easily recognizable as a product of Communist ideology, especially CPUSA policies. But, as we have seen, his Czech counterparts had their agenda, too, which was not, indeed could not, be expressed as openly in their paratexts. After 1968, Škvorecký and Stanislav Mareš both emigrated (Škvorecký to Canada and Mareš to Australia).[229] They were therefore spared the fate of their friends and colleagues in the period that came after the 1968 suppression of what is known as Prague Spring and was characterized by purges, during the subsequent period of what is called normalization. For the generation born after World War I, this was the third time their lives were turned upside down. Only in the 1990s were they finally given the recognition they wished for. Mareš's émigré texts were published; Škvorecký and his wife were awarded state prizes and Škvorecký published (often for the first time) his novels, essays, and articles; Dorůžka authored several books of memoirs (*Panoráma paměti, Panoráma snů*). Zábrana, however, did not live to see his friends return, nor the public and academic interest in his work, as he died in 1984.

Škvorecký is of particular interest, mostly because he became so trenchant in his political pronouncements, and they resonated in the anglophone world as he was a public figure on Canadian cultural scene (he and his wife emigrated to Canada in 1969). This is partly due to what Djagalov calls "the interpretative monopoly of the Cold-War coalition between American Slavicists and Soviet-bloc literary émigrés."[230] In Škvorecký's case, it is both his career at the University of Toronto where he – apart from US literature – lectured on Czechoslovak cinema, and through his publishing activities: together with his wife who was also a writer, Škvorecký established a publishing house that brought out works by writers silenced in Czechoslovakia. While it is indeed worth re-evaluating their

[229] Zábrana faced the same decision when he was invited for a session on "New Trends in Slavic Poetry" in March 1970 in Colombus, Ohio, but chose to stay in Czechoslovakia. The invitation to this event is reprinted in Kalivodová and Eliáš, *Jan Zábrana*, 84.
[230] Djagalov, "'I Don't Boast About It, but I'm the Most Widely Read Author of This Century,'" 41.

choice of books, and the implications of those choices for Cold War literary circulation, Škvorecký's role in the Canadian cultural scene reveals more – both about his position in his new homeland and about the intellectual atmosphere in North America during the 1980s. As Stephen Henighan puts it:

> In a climate of reactionary chic, Škvorecký's pronouncements on the evils of Eastern communism and the naïve duplicity of Western liberalism, both in interviews and in his humorous, sometimes bawdy, fiction, have found a receptive audience: he is Solzhenitsyn with sex-appeal, as in tune with the fashionable wisdom of the 1980 as Allen Ginsberg (whose work Škvorecký has translated into Czech) was with that of the 1960s.[231]

The fact that he was a life-long jazz fan did not change Škvorecký's broader attitudes toward race and racism. Even in the years following his emigration, he was uninterested at best; and hostile at worst. Both in his writing and in his public position in Canada, Škvorecký expressed anti-communist views that were often inflected with other conservative ideas. Drawing on his experience with an oppressive regime (as Henighan writes, Škvorecký repeatedly voiced his impatience with those "who have not had my life experience"),[232] Škvorecký repeatedly criticized Canadians for what he saw as their political naivety and tolerance towards leftist views that, for him, also included sensitivity toward race and feminism. These stances were also reflected in his writings, most visibly

[231] Stephen Henighan, "Josef Škvorecký and Canadian Cultural Cringe," in *When Words Deny the World: The Reshaping of Canadian Writing* (Erin, Ont: Porcupine's Quill, 2002), 19. The original article was published in *Canadian Literature*, 1988.
[232] Henighan, "Josef Škvorecký and Canadian Cultural Cringe," 24.

in his novel *Příběh inženýra lidských duší* (1977), translated into English in 1984 as *The Engineer of Human Souls*.[233]

While Škvorecký's moral high ground lost its potency after 1989, at the same time when he fell out of fashion with his Anglophone readership, Škvorecký later adopted the same stance in post-Communist Czechoslovakia. When Henighan writes about Canadian readers in the 1980s as reacting "with a cringe of inferiority to the statements of writers hailing from more 'cosmopolitan' climes," which, as he claims, was also in accordance with the popularity of the "right-wing clichés" that Škvorecký evoked, the dynamic was repeated in his dealings with a Czech readership in the 1990s.[234] Škvorecký, who had authentic experience of Western liberalism, warned against feminism and political correctness as new forms of ideological oppression.[235] For Czech cultural debates now this

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[233] The novel was translated by Paul Wilson. *The Engineer of Human Souls* was awarded by the Governor General's Award for fiction in English in 1984: this is discussed by Henighan in "Josef Škvorecký and Canadian Cultural Cringe." *Engineer* has been criticized for its stereotypical portrayals of Chinese, Italian, Arab, and Indian students in the class of Danny Smiřický, Škvorecký's alter ego, at a Canadian college (including their appearance, accents, and intelligence), for Smiřický's treatment of women and their portrayal in the novel. In his review of the book, Terry Goldie pointed out the bias of US and Canadian critics of the book, claiming that he could "can hear a thousand cheers for the anti-communism but at best a few muted rejections of the anti-feminism, the racism, and the general anti-social character of the novel." Terry Goldie, "Political Judgements," *Canadian Literature* no. 104 (Spring 1985): 167. Still, criticism such as Goldie's has been limited to the Anglophone sphere. Despite Škvorecký's status as a canonical author in the Czech Republic, as yet there has been no feminist critique of his works.

[234] Henighan, "Josef Škvorecký and Canadian Cultural Cringe," 26.

[235] He authored a three-part series of articles in 1992 while talking about sexual harassment, date rape and politically correct terms in these topics. Josef Škvorecký, "Je možné mluvit a psát správn*ě* bez diskriminace?: dobrodružství amerického feminismu," *Respekt*, November 16, 1992, 13; Josef Škvorecký, "Je možné mluvit se ženou bez pohlavního obt*ěž*ování?: Dobrodružství amerického feminismu," *Respekt*, September 28, 1992, 13; Josef Škvorecký, "Je možný sex bez znásilnění?: Dobrodružství amerického feminismu," *Respekt*, August 10, 1992, 10. As Oates-Indruchová points out, these shaped the debate for years to come: "The magazines that published these and other antifeminist articles were read by intellectual elites, from whose ranks the contributors were recruited. This gave such voices currency and legitimacy, further enhanced by the high moral status the authors derived from their persecution under Communist rule." Libora Oates-Indruchová, "Unraveling a Tradition, or Spinning a Myth?," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties : Between Protest and Nation-Building*, ed. Chen Jian et al. (London: Routledge, 2018), 251. Also discussed in: Jiří Homoláč, "'Politická korektnost' z hlediska analýzy diskurzu." *Slovo a smysl* 5, no. 9–10 (2008): 161–82.

means we have to critically re-evaluate the canon of US literature in Czech and the interpretive monopoly of people like Škvorecký.[236]

Emily Apter calls translation the "war zone". For our argument, there are two theaters of operation: first, the war in the trenches fought by the translators in the afterwords, introductions, reviews, and translations themselves which, in the Czechoslovak context, started in the second half of the 1950s and continued until the Velvet Revolution in 1989; and second, the ideological and aesthetical clash between Chapman and Škvorecký's generation. Chapman might have won the battle over *Black Poetry* but, in Czechoslovakia, he lost the war. The version of African American and American literature and culture that Škvorecký and his contemporaries forged became the canon for Czechoslovak readers, and this has lasted to the present day. Chapman's *Black Poetry***,** forward-thinking in its conceptualization of the Black diaspora, was in other respects a relic of structures that had vanished by the late 1950s. With the revelation of Stalin's crimes, the Hungarian revolution in 1956, the suppression of the Left in the US, and Western Leftists' refusal to engage with the everyday reality of the Eastern bloc, the networks that brought Chapman to Czechoslovakia in the first place were long gone, and with them, the message of international solidarity as presented in Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology. Five years later, Chapman was gone, too. In 1963, disappointed by life in a socialist country, the Chapman family boarded a plane back to the US, leaving behind the name Čapek, together with his anti-imperialist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist vision.

[236] Moreover, during the Cold War, these emigrés often had a similar interpretative monopoly on Eastern European culture. This pattern and the implication for Anglophone literature have recently been reconsidered, i.e. by Justin Quinn in his book *Between Two Fires* that I am also quoting in this thesis.

3. Prague, Harlem, Maputo

"How did you think you could help the Negroes in Alabama and Mississippi by attacking the United States in Prague?" This question was placed by the Committee on Un-American Activities to the African American lawyer William L. Patterson on April 22, 1959.[237] The Committee was enquiring about the statements that Patterson had made during his journey nine years earlier. He had not only visited Czechoslovakia, a country omitted from his original passport application, but while there he had talked about the situation of African Americans in the US.

After his trips in the early 1950s and also after his presentation of a petition called *We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People* to the United Nations delegation in Paris, Patterson's passport was revoked. By 1959, it had been restored, but the Committee, wishing to prevent the "issuance of passports to undesirable people, that is, to people whose traveling abroad might injure the security of the United States," was worried about what Patterson might say next.[238] And also where he might say it, as Patterson had wide international networks, and drew support from various groups abroad. For Patterson, as Mary Dudziak writes, "the struggle for black liberation was global."[239]

It was precisely this global dimension that jarred with the official narrative of US racial relations. The post-war "rewriting of race," as Penny M. Von Eschen calls it,[240]

[237] U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, 86th Cong., 1st Sess., 22–24 April and 5 June 1959, Testimony of William Patterson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), in *Hearings* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1959), 764.
[238] "Testimony of William Patterson," 750.
[239] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights,* 65.
[240] Penny M. von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 153. The changing perception of racial identities and the global Cold War refigurings of race in this period have also been, apart from the sources quoted here, recently also analyzed by Kate A. Baldwin in *The Racial Imaginary of the Cold War Kitchen: From Sokol'niki Park to Chicago's South Side* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2016).

required an intense nationalization – only then it could be presented as a “story of redemption,”[241] a triumph of US democracy. At the same time, the influences were distinctly international, and Patterson was aware of this, too, when he responded to the Committee’s allegation, stating that he was not “attacking the United States,” but “Jim Crow practices,” and that what “has been done to alleviate this situation, has been done by virtue of the pressure of world opinion against these conditions.”[242]

At a time when racial relations in the US were carefully scrutinized by newly decolonizing states as well as by the Eastern bloc, the representatives and officers of the US did not want the most fervent critics of these relations to shape the narrative. Canceling passports of people such as William L. Patterson, and also W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson was one way the FBI, the State Department, the Justice Department, and Congress contributed to, as Thomas Borstelmann writes, “the successful campaign to limit their audiences.”[243] And as Patterson, Robeson, and Du Bois were prevented from traveling, hearings and prosecutions also forced the Communist Party to send some of its most reliable cadres abroad. Paradoxically, however, this created a network that the US could no longer control. Abraham Chapman’s Cold War stay in Czechoslovakia, at the very moment when figures such as Patterson were not allowed to travel to the Eastern bloc, is an example of such a process.

Chapman’s struggles in the US did not mean he was met with enthusiasm in Czechoslovakia and neither was his anthology, with its Communist editor and featured poets. By the time it came out in 1958, the Czech translators and editors of US culture had developed strategies to smuggle in US and African American literature: but what they

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[241] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights,* 65.
[242] “Testimony of William Patterson,” 764.
[243] Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 77

wanted from it differed from Chapman's vision. Unclaimed by either these Czechoslovak mediators or those in the US who set the course for cultural politics in the period, *Black Poetry*, is an artifact of the Leftist republic of letters and the internationalist connections and visions that the US representatives were trying to stymie. Transnational in its framing and its back story, the significance and scope of *Black Poetry* is most apparent in comparison with another anthology, put together by the same person under a different name and on a different continent. Ten years after *Black Poetry*, after his return to the US, Chapman put together a different anthology of African American literature, *Black Voices.* This chapter follows Chapman on his journey between the two anthologies, from Czechoslovakia back to the US: this helps us count the losses of the internationalism of the period, but also to discover what was left behind in Prague. The shift between *Black Poetry* and *Black Voices* not only reflects the changes in the discourses on African American literature (and, more broadly, also framing of race), but following it helps to uncover works and authors lost in the US Cold War narrative of African American literature, challenging the narrative of rupture in African American writing between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts movement.

3.1. Let My People Go

In the introduction to the Czechoslovak anthology, Chapman points to one poem that, for him, represents the "international aspect of black literature – the common interests of black people in the whole world."[244] It is by the Mozambique poet Noémia de Sousa "Deixa passar o meu povo," written in 1949 and published four years later in an anthology called *Caderno de Poesia Negra de Expressão Portuguesa* (edited by Mário Pinto de

[244] "Je to báseň, v níž se projevuje onen mezinárodní prvek černošské literatury – společné zájmy černochů na celém světě." Čapek, "Před první stránkou," 12.

Andrade and Francisco José Tenreiro in Lisbon, 1953). Born 1926, De Sousa was shaped by her experiences during World War II and the decolonization movement; she was a member of a generation that included other Lusophone poets such as Agostinho Neto and Viriato da Cruz from Angola, and Francisco José Tenreiro from São Tomé. Apart from Neto, these poets, active especially in the 1940s and 1950s, are represented in Chapman's *Black Poetry*, and united, as James de Jongh puts it, by their "self-determination through their African identity and their anti-colonial struggle."[245] In "Deixa passer o meu povo," de Sousa connects with these with the American part of the African diaspora. Through her macaronic use of the English language, and her references to Harlem and African American public figures, she forms allegiances based on their common shared heritage and questions the basis for the Portuguese colonial family.

"Deixa passer o meu povo" is set on a warm night in Mozambique. The speaker is not able to fall asleep, so she turns on the radio hoping to be soothed. However, the opposite happens:

> The voices from America stir my soul and nerves.
>
> And Robeson and Marian sing to me
>
> Black spirituals from Harlem.
>
> "Let my people go"
>
> – Oh, let my people go,
>
> Let my people go! –
>
> They say.[246]

[245] James de Jongh, *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 119.
[246] Mas vozes da América remexem-me a alma e os nervos.
E Robeson e Maria cantam para mim

The title of the poem, "Deixa passar o meu povo," is a Portuguese translation of a line of the chorus of the US spiritual, "Go Down, Moses," "Let my people go." The English phrase appears six times in the poem (twice, at the end of the first and of the last stanza, where it is accompanied by its Portuguese equivalent). Together with the Portuguese translation, the line also provides the chorus, like the spiritual "Go Down Moses," in which the phrase appears at the end of each section. Instead of relying on a specific poem by an African American author, De Sousa chose a traditional song based on the Biblical story of Moses pleading with the pharaoh to release the Hebrews.[247] By using a line from the spiritual, and quoting it in the original English, she broadens the notion of "my people" from the anti-slavery cause to the colonial situation.[248]

But the African American situation is not evoked only for its history: through her use of Harlem, de Sousa also connects the global anti-colonial struggle to the Civil Rights movement in the US. As de Jongh claims, the Lusophone poets of de Sousa's generation "took the emerging ghetto of Harlem as a legendary instance of racist oppression and

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spirituals negros do Harlém.
'Let my people go'
– oh deixa passar o meu povo,
deixa passar o meu povo! –,
dizem
A rough translation from the Portugese original has been done with the kind help of Felipe Kaiser Fernandes. "Cinco décadas de poesia recuperada em 'Sangue negro' (2001) de Noémia de Souza," *Revista Transas*, Accessed February 2, 2019, https://www.revistatransas.com/2017/10/07/cinco-decadas-de-poesia-recuperada-em-sangue-negro-2001-de-noemia-de-sousa-portugues/.

[247] The song has also allegedly been used by the abolitionist Harriet Tubman as a code for signaling her arrival during her rescue missions, but this has been disputed by historians.

[248] While, in the original poem, the title is in Portuguese, the title of the Czech translation in Chapman's anthology is the English "Let my people go." Since the particular song has been sung by Paul Robeson who has visited Czechoslovakia repeatedly and is also mentioned in the poem, the spiritual could have been widely known. Another possible reason points towards the everyday realities of translations: the translators of the poem, Zdeněk Hampejs (later Hampl) and Kamil Bednář frequently worked as a translation tandem. Hampejs, an expert on Portuguese and Lusophone literature and a lecturer at the Faculty of Arts at Charles University prepared the rough version and Bednář, a poet who, as discussed in Chapter 1, also corresponded with Langston Hughes, wrote the final, poetic version of the translation. The original title could have therefore been lost in translation.

employed it as an internationally recognized emblem of solidarity in the Pan-African struggle for political and social justice, just as the previous Africana generation had mythologized New Negro Harlem."[249] In "Deixa passar o meu povo," Harlem is embodied by the voices Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson, but it also represents a utopic place from which these voices come and wake the speaker of the poem:

> Then I open my eyes, I can't sleep anymore,
>
> Anderson and Paul ring through my body
>
> Their voices neither soothing nor tender
>
> "Let my people go!"[250]

Roused from sleep, she discovers that the act of writing itself solves her restlessness:

> Unsettled,
>
> I sit at a table and start to write
>
> My body filled with
>
> Let my people go.[251]

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[249] de Jongh, *Viscious Modernism*, 114.
[250] E eu abro os olhos e já não posso dormir.
Dentro de mim soam-me Anderson e Paul
e não são doces vozes de embalo.
"Let my people go!"
"Cinco décadas de poesia recuperada em 'Sangue negro' (2001) de Noémia de Souza"
[251] Nervosamente,
sento-me à mesa e escrevo...
(Dentro de mim,
deixa passar o meu povo,
'oh let my people go...')
"Cinco décadas de poesia recuperada em 'Sangue negro' (2001) de Noémia de Souza"

The turn to writing is the key moment. Inspired by the words of the spiritual, the speaker sets down her own words of protest on paper. Gender is important here: not only is the speaker a woman, but a woman depicted in the act of writing. As Hillary Owen shows, women were associated with the oral tradition and their access to written sources was limited.[252] This also meant a smaller number of women identified with the new national consciousness that emerged through this writing. Of course, women were part of anti-colonial movements, but, as Owen points out, "Women, it would seem, must be *either* feminist *or* anticolonial."[253] De Sousa's poetry shows the opposite – but her Czech translation does not reflect it, as the speaker is rendered as male. While Chapman's introduction gets the gender of the poet right, the translation of the poem and also the short bio at the end of the anthology give de Sousa as male. Translation plays an ambivalent role here: on one hand, it enlarges the circulation of the poem, drawing in new languages and regions into the anti-colonial struggle, on the other hand, it obscures the scope of these struggles and undermines the message of the poem. The creative act is supported by various figures who come to the speakers' side:

> Familiar figures lean over my table
>
> My mother with her rough hands and a tired face
>
> And the revolts, suffering, humiliation
>
> Tattoo the virgin paper in black.[254]

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[252] Hilary Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx: Women's Writing of Mozambique, 1948–2002* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007). 21.
[253] Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx*, 49.
[254] Na minha mesa, vultos familiares se vêm debruçar.
Minha Mãe de mãos rudes e rosto cansado
e revoltas, dores, humilhações,
tatuando de negro o virgem papel branco.
"Cinco décadas de poesia recuperada em 'Sangue negro' (2001) de Noémia de Souza"

Apart from family members, Paul Robeson and Marian Anderson also arrive in the room. “Go Down Moses” is best known in Louis Armstrong’s version today; however, Robeson and Anderson also recorded the song. Both singers were also known for their support of the Civil Rights movement. The African American singer Marian Anderson was also a frequent topic of de Sousa’s journalism. For example, she wrote a detailed portrait of Anderson for *O Brado Africano*, a newspaper where de Sousa ran the women’s page. According to Hillary Owen:

> This piece, one of de Sousa’s longest and very similar in style to her poetry, suggests that the reference to Anderson in her poem “Deixa passar o meu Povo” was not simply the passing invocation of a well-known name but indicated a more deep-rooted quest for black female role models of resistance in American music and entertainment.[255]

The speaker, animated by her anger, makes her final plea, positioning herself with Anderson and Robeson:

> And as long as they come
> These mourning voices from Harlem
> As long as these familiar figures visit me
> On long, sleepless nights
> I cannot be soothed by the empty music
> Of Strauss’s waltzes

[255] Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx*, 232.

I will write, I will write

And Robeson and Marian will shout with me

Let my people go

OH LET MY PEOPLE GO. [256]

European music is replaced by the African American spirituals sung by Marian Anderson, who the poet calls her sister, and Paul Robeson: “Paul/ who I don’t know/ But who is of the same blood and the same beloved sap of Mozambique.”[257] Family relationships and blood are common images in de Sousa’s poetry: her only poetry collection is called, in both its original and updated version (1951 and 2001) *Sangue Negro*, her first poem “O Irmão Negro.”[258] The family created in “Deixa passar o meu povo” is based on the shared struggle of the African diaspora, both in the past and in the present.

Through her use of English, Harlem, and these African American figures, de Sousa draws on a different culture than the (white) Portuguese culture she grew up in. Her vision of a transcontinental family not only presents an alternative to the multiracial family present in the Portuguese colonial imagination,[259] but also to the nationalized narrative of race in the US. Like

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[256] E enquanto me vierem do Harlem
vozes de lamentação
e meus vultos familiares me visitarem
em longas noites de insônia,
não poderei deixar-me embalar pela música fútil
das valsas de Strauss.
Escreverei, escreverei,
com Robeson e Marian gritando comigo:
Let my people go,
OH DEIXA PASSAR O MEU POVO
“Cinco décadas de poesia recuperada em ‘Sangue negro’ (2001) de Noémia de Souza.”
[257] “Paulo, que não conheço/ mas é do mesmo sangue e da mesma seiva amada de Moçambique,” “Cinco décadas de poesia recuperada em ‘Sangue negro’ (2001) de Noémia de Souza.”
[258] Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, eds, “Sousa, Noémia De,” *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 27.
[259] Lusotropicalism, an ideological concept first described by the Brazilian sociologist Gilbert Freyre, was used to explain and justified Portuguese colonialism as different from other forms of colonial reign. The

Patterson, Robeson was also not allowed to leave the country in the mid-1950s. As Dudziak writes, the State Department argued that Robeson's travels would not be in the national interest, as he also talked about the situation of African Americans, which the State Department considered to be "a family affair."[260] Here, the equation of national and family resembles Langston Hughes's use of familial metaphors: in "I, Too," the African American poet famously proclaims himself "the darker brother" who is sent to the kitchen to eat.[261] In "I, Too," Hughes argues for a place at the table: by late 1950s, figures such as Robeson and Patterson were marginalized, and internationalist families and strategic allegiances such as the one in de Sousa's "Deixa passar o meu povo" were gradually forgotten.[262]

3.2. Families Old and New

There were other reformulations of the family, for instance as internationalist proletariat. For the people on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain, membership was automatic. For Western writers, the authors' progressiveness – an elusive notion that was gradually

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notion of a multicultural, multiracial Portuguese family as also used by the authoritarian regime of António de Oliveira Salazar in his *Estado Novo.*

[260] Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 62.

[261] Hughes, Rampersad, and Roessel, "I, Too," 46. Originally published in *Survey Graphic* (March 1, 1925), 683.

[262] Paul Robeson, one of the African American figures mentioned in Noémia de Sousa's poem, also had a vision of an internationalist family: his was, however, interracial and connected to his vision of folk music. When Kate A. Baldwin writes about the Russian translation of Paul Robeson's text *Here I Stand* (translated into Russian – and to both Czech and Slovak – in the same year), she notices peculiar changes in the translation of the internationalist family Robeson writes about: "The distancing of 'colored peoples' into a family separate from that of white Russian one belies an admission that while the communists of the world might denounce racism, they retain subtle ways of restraining impulses and actions to that end. Not the least of these actions was a Soviet reassertion of the superiority of a Russian family of whiteness over the homogeneity of its Euro-imperial fraternal order and the 'family of colored nationals' including those housed within the USSR." Kate A. Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and the Iron Curtain: Reading Encounters between Black and Red, 1922–1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 231. In her analysis of the movies of Abderrahmane Sissako, *October* and *Rostov-Luanda*, Jennifer Wilson made a case for the use of the term "friendship" for the visitors from Africa and Asia as opposed to "family" used for other Slavic nations. Jennifer Wilson, "Black Skin, White Snow: Sissako's October and Rostov-Luanda" (American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting, UCLA, Los Angeles, 2018). Other sources on Czechoslovak and Soviet discourses of friendship are to be found in a recently published book by Rachel Applebaum, *Empire of Friends: Soviet Power and Socialist Internationalism in Cold War Czechoslovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

broadened in the second half of the 1950s – secured membership. “The literature of the African diaspora is, at its core, a part of the progressive literature of the world,”[263] writes Chapman in his introduction to *Black Poetry*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, cultural mediators such as Škvorecký relied on similar arguments while presenting poets such as Hughes, but they were also trying to forge new ties – find new relatives – through the authors they were translating. One of the main grudges they held against Western Communists like Chapman was that they *chose* membership. But, as Chapman’s departure from the US shows, while membership was indeed voluntary, not all of a member’s subsequent movements were. When recalling the story of her childhood and teenage years in Czechoslovakia with her father, Chapman’s daughter writes that “the events of the McCarthy era steered me into the arms of the international communist family.”[264] And it was this family that the Chapmans eventually decided to leave.

In Fall 1963, after thirteen years of exile in Czechoslovakia, the Chapmans came back to the US. Their return had been planned since the early 1960s after the family returned from their two-year stay in China.[265] This was partly due to the changing political climate in the US during the Kennedy administration and, according to Kimmage, also because “enough time had elapsed for the statute of limitations to free my father from any danger of imprisonment or persecution.”[266] To be able to return, their Czechoslovak citizenship had to be erased from the record: in the new versions of the official documents, the family had lived in Czechoslovakia on a residency permit for

[263] “Černošská poesie je svou podstatou součástí pokrokové literatury světa.” Čapek, “Před první stránkou,” 14.
[264] Ann Kimmage, “Grandmother Twice Lost,” in *Grandmothers: Granddaughters Remember*, ed. Marguerite Guzman Bouvard (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 149.
[265] This thesis does not focus on the Chapmans’ stay in China. In her book, however, Kimmage writes at length about their time there; relevant materials are also to be found in the archives of the Czech Foreign Ministry.
[266] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 231.

foreigners.[267] The name Čapek was also erased: Kimmage writes that all her documents "had to be annihilated or falsified to [her] original name."[268]

As soon as the Čapeks became Chapmans again, the family flew to London and boarded a ship to New York. This is how Kimmage describes the situation upon their return:

> For the old comrades who greeted us at the ship, our return was a faint victory after a series of major failures and setbacks for the party. […] Not all the teary-eyed comrades who greeted us on the day of our return were able to understand how and why our exile changed Abe and Belle so much. There was no adequate vocabulary to describe what they had survived. My parents were too worn out to explain to people who still held the convictions they once lived by themselves what they had learned in their practical apprenticeship in the communist world. All Abe and Belle desired now was to resume their private lives.[269]

The mysterious circumstances of his arrival in Czechoslovakia and the erasures necessitated by his return to the US make it difficult to trace Chapman in the Czech archives. But if the American Čapek is hard to find, it is as if the Czechoslovak Chapman never existed. Chapman's files are presently at Brown University: as Anne Kimmage remarked, this was due to the friendship between the African American poet Michael S. Harper who taught at Brown.[270] In these files, references to his Czechoslovak stay are so

[267] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 233.
[268] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood*, 231.
[269] Kimmage, *An Un-American Childhood,* 240.
[270] "My father was friends with the black poet Michael Harper. He was quite a bit younger than my father and he visited him in Stevens Point Wisconsin with his family a few times. Harper taught poetry at Brown University. I am not sure but perhaps he helped my mother arrange the contact with the library there." Ann

rare and vague it seems as though he had never been here. Once, when he was introduced before a lecture, his degree from Prague was mentioned (as if he traveled there solely for his education); in a letter to F. J. Bryant, he writes that he used to have a copy of Bryant's book *Write On* but "but it was stolen while I was in the East."[271] Here, it is not clear whether he means east of the Curtain in Europe or whether he is referring to his time in China. An obituary even claims Chapman had lived in New York up to 1954, whereas in fact the whole family left the city and the US in 1950.[272]

When I enquired about this, Anne Kimmage wrote to me: "Once back in the States after his exile in Czechoslovakia he did not want it officially known he worked under the name Abe Capek."[273] She claims that they followed events in Czechoslovakia, but there is no evidence of further contact with anyone from the country. The wish to "resume private lives" was also a political decision. While, after his Czechoslovak experience, Chapman's politics changed, his lengthy stay in a country East of the Iron Curtain itself could have been problematic for his new employers and audiences. However, the Leftist structures themselves changed, too: apart from the Khrushchev revelations, the events in Poland and Hungary, and the pressures of the Cold War anti-communist discourse, there were also CPUSA internal conflicts. In 1972, more than thirty years after he visited the Dobříš chateau mentioned in Chapter 1, Joseph Starobin wrote his book *American Communism in Crisis, 1943–1957* in which he claims that this was the period in which the CPUSA went from being "the most influential radical movement in American history" to "the sect it

Kimmage, Personal E-Mail to the Author. Harper also dedicated a poem to Chapman, reprinted in Kimmage's book.

[271] "Letter from Abraham Chapman to F. J. Bryant, Jr.," October 27, 1970, Abraham Chapman Papers, Box 1, John Hay Library, Brown University.

[272] Jon N. Loff, "In Memory of Dr. Abraham Chapman (1915–1976)," *CLA Journal* 20, no. 1 (1976): 133.

[273] Ann Kimmage, Personal E-Mail to the Author.

had been in the twenties and which it has remained since 1958."[274] This process had begun when the Chapmans fled the US in 1950 – and which helped precipitate this departure – and was completed by the time they returned.

But not everything was left behind in Prague. With a Ph.D. from the Charles University, Chapman started to look for employment in academia. He found a position in Stevens Point, at Wisconsin State University (now University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point), where he remained until his death on March 7, 1976. It was here that he taught courses in African American literature and put together his five US anthologies: *The Negro in American Literature* (1966), *Black Voices* (1968), *Steal Away: Stories of the Runaway Slaves* (1971), *New Black Voices* (1972), *Jewish-American Literature: An Anthology of Fiction, Poetry, Autobiography, and Criticism* (1974), and *Literature of the American Indians: Views and Interpretations: A Gathering of Indian Memories, Symbolic Contexts, and Literary Criticism* (1975).[275] It was the second of them, published ten years after *Black Poetry*, that articulated his new vision of African American literature.

3.3. Defining African American Literature

"An anthology lies somewhere between a literary artifact and literary criticism. It is an act of interpretation that selects and presents poems,"[276] writes Justin Quinn. |It is also important how an anthology's scope is demarcated. In his analysis of anthologies during the Harlem Renaissance and its attendant issues of African American cultural self-determination, Brett Hayes Edwards raises the question of the "of the particular way an

[274] Joseph R. Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943–1957* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). 3.
[275] *Black Voices* and *Steal Away* were also issued in a British edition, the latter under *Steal Away: The Slaves Tell Their Own Story* (1973).
[276] Quinn, *Between Two Fires*, 70.

anthology frames race, the particular way it articulates an epistemology of blackness."[277] For him, anthologies of African American writing always have an agenda (though perhaps all anthologies do).

Hayes notes that in Europe of the 1920s there was an "obsession in anthologizing the Negro": "great interest in researching, notating, transcribing, assembling, and packaging almost anything having to do with populations of African descent."[278] He views this as part of the institutionalization of anthropology.[279] While Hayes only deals with a few languages for his analysis, this tendency also spread to Central and Eastern Europe and the new Soviet Union, although it was more prominent in the 1930s.[280] In the Soviet Union, a US Communist helped to put together an anthology called *Africa in America* (1933). As Jennifer Wilson writes, "[f]or the Soviets, the anthology was part and parcel of their plan to situate 'the Negro' (particularly the American Negro) as a natural political ally during the Cold War."[281]

Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology was put together in internationalist Prague during the period of decolonization and also when Communist nations developed strategic interests in the new states discussed in the first two chapters, three years after the Bandung conference. In the introduction, he stresses the continuities within the Black diaspora:

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[277] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). 55.
[278] Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora,* 54–55.
[279] Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora,* 55.
[280] Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora,* 55.
[281] Jennifer Wilson, "The Soviet Anthology of 'Negro Poetry,'" *The Paris Review*, May 15, 2018, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2018/05/15/the-soviet-anthology-of-negro-poetry/.

> The European invasion has scattered the inhabitants of Africa around the whole world. It has uprooted thousands and thousands of people, and slavery, brutal and devilish, has relocated them to the Caribbean islands, North and South America, to a new and hostile environment. In the new world, the new black communities grew, and they became a part of the Western hemisphere, no less organic than its white colonizers who came by different routes and from a different environment. […] The worlds that surround black writers are different, as are their languages and national cultures. What they have in common are their recollections of their African heritage, the knowledge of their kinship with the African people, and the shared and indelible memories of slavery and the slave revolts.[282]

When comparing *Black Poetry* and *Black Voices*, we are mostly struck by the absence of this internationalist vision in the latter: the poems Chapman selected for *Black Voices* are all by US poets. Whereas the work in *Black Poetry* was translated from four languages, *Black Voices* has only one language – English. Not only is the framework strictly monolingual, but it is also strictly national. If the Czechoslovak anthology was meant to be an "expression of solidarity, friendship, and alliance with the liberation movement of the black people,"[283] *Black Voices*, on the other hand, had a different aim, which was

[282] "Evropská invase rozprášila obyvatele Afriky po celém světě. Vykořenila tisíce a tisíce lidí, a otrokářství, surové a ďábelské, je přemístilo na Karibské ostrovy, do Severní a Jižní Ameriky, do nového, nepřátelského prostředí. V novém světě vyrostla černošská společenství a stala se součástí západní polokouple, součástí neméně organickou než její bílí kolonisté, kteří přišli jinými cestami a z jiného prostředí."
"Světy obklopující černošské spisovatele jsou různé, různé jsou jejich jazyky a národní kultury. Společná je vzpomínka na dědictví Afriky, vědomí spřízněnosti s africkým lidem, společné a nesmazatelné jsou vzpomínky na otroctví a revolty otroků." Čapek, "Před první stránkou," 8–9.

[283] "Svazek 'Černošská poesie' se dostává do rukou českého čtenáře nejen jako literární událost, ale i jako projev solidarity, přátelství a spřízněnosti s osvobozeneckým hnutím černochů." Čapek, "Před první stránkou," 16 Similar claims could be – and have recently been – compared with the Czechoslovak collaboration with various states of the diaspora, including the exports of arms to various African countries. See Philip Muehlenbeck, "Czechoslovak Arms Exports to Africa (1954–68)," *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945–1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 87–123.

formulated in the introduction: to reclaim African American literature as both "part of a literature shared with white America as a whole" and as a "distinct and special body of literature."[284] This is also reflected in the representation of various genres. While the Czechoslovak anthology is dedicated solely to poetry, *Black Voices* is split into four parts: Fiction, Poetry, Autobiography, and Literary Criticism.

In the introduction, Chapman recalls the history of African American literature, mentioning genres such as folk literature, slave narratives, and sermons (although he assigns "literary merit" only to works of the "modern period," from the 1920s on).[285] Similar histories are needed, writes Chapman, "before any meaningful debate can take place,"[286] as "[a]ll too often, and for far too long, it has been spurned or neglected part of our literary heritage."[287] *Black Voices* was the first anthology Chapman edited in the US, but he had published other texts before this where he expressed similar sentiments: for instance, the book *The Negro in American Literature: A Bibliography of Literature* (published by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English in 1966) and also his article "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History" published in *The College Language Association Journal* in 1967 for which he received the CLA Association Biennial Creative Scholarship Award in 1968.

In this article, Chapman notes the "literary 'whites only' policy" in American literary histories.[288] As he writes "large, significant body of specialized studies" are available, but "the general literary histories remain sorely lacking in this field."[289] This

[284] Abraham Chapman, ed., Introduction, *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature* (New York: Signet, 1968), 29.
[285] Chapman, "Introduction," 24.
[286] Chapman, "Introduction," 25.
[287] Chapman, "Introduction," 25.
[288] Abraham Chapman, "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History," *CLA Journal* 11, no. 1 (1967): 41.
[289] Chapman, "The Harlem Renaissance in Literary History," 42.

changed a year later when *Black Voices* was published, and Chapman reflects this in his introduction, noting "a greater appreciation of what black writers have contributed and are contributing to the diversity of American literature, and movement towards greater inclusion of works by Negro writers in our American literature courses in the high schools and colleges."[290]

An anthology is no longer a "contribution to the anti-racist and anti-colonial fight that has always inspired world literature."[291] While in *Black Voices*, literature is read in national terms, it is also read for its ability to "illuminate the human realities of black America," offering insight which "cannot be approximated by the social sciences."[292] This insight also has pedagogical implications. As Chapman writes in the introduction to *Black Voices*, literature can show the Black students "the creative and imaginative power and achievements of the black man and can prove very important psychologically."[293] The anthology is meant not only to bring forth the less known part of (African) American literary history but to turn these into curricula; here he states the aim:

> To bring to the general reading public and to the students of American literature in the high schools and colleges a large and diverse collection of writing by black Americans at a popular price – literature worth reading as literature and worthy, in my opinion, of inclusion in the American literature curriculum in the schools.[294]

[290] Chapman, "Introduction," 49.
[291] "České překlady černošské poesie nechť jsou příspěvkem k protirasistickému a protikoloniálnímu boji, který vždy inspiroval světovou literaturu." Čapek, "Před první stránkou," 16.
[292] Chapman, "Introduction," 33.
[293] Chapman, "Introduction," 26.
[294] Chapman, "Introduction" 27.

By 1968, when the anthology came out, Chapman was a lecturer at Wisconsin State University. As he describes it, "I have taught a special course on the Negro in American literature to urban high school teachers from all over the country."[295] Introducing *The Negro in American Literature: A Bibliography of Literature* (1966), Chapman also mentions that it is based on a course with the same topics, a course that he first taught in summer 1965 in Wisconsin.[296] That course was dedicated to both African American characters and literature by African American writers. In Wisconsin, Chapman was a lecturer at the English department and in charge of the American Literature Survey Courses.[297] His articles, anthologies, other publications, and also pedagogical activities in African American literature were, as his correspondence shows, especially welcomed on the high school level.[298]

Chapman's turn from an internationalist vision towards issues of university curricula reflects the wider discourses that transformed race from institutional and world-historical phenomenon to a psychological and sociological issue, defined purely in

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[295] Chapman, "Introduction," 26

[296] Abraham Chapman, *The Negro in American Literature*, Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English. Special Publication No.15 (Wisconsin State University, 1966), 5.

[297] Chapman was also a member of associations such as the College Language Association, founded in the late 1930s by Black scholars as an organization of college teachers of English and foreign languages. Chapman's other professional memberships also reflected his interests, such as The National Council of Teachers of English and The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (today Association for the Study of African American Life and History). Also of note is his role as biographer of Afro-American literature for the Modern Language Association. He also published "twenty-five articles and reviews in many popular periodicals and scholarly journals: *Pan-African Journal, Arts in Society, Tomorrow, Current History, Saturday Review*, and the *CLA Journal*. He also served as a contributing editor for the *Negro American Literature Forum*." Loff, "In Memory of Dr. Abraham Chapman," 133.

[298] Chapman spoke to teachers in Milwaukee and to students from Booker T. Washington High Schools. Moreover, under the headline "Curriculum Exchange," Joanne Dale in her text "Integrating Literature by Minority Writers in the Literature Program" (1968) recommends Chapman's earlier publication *The Negro in American Literature*: "the first and, at the time of its publication, the most comprehensive one if its kind" and writes that the bibliography should "prove helpful in identifying the works of Negro American authors and engaging teacher readers in a thoughtful assessment of these works and their place in American literature." Joanne Dale, "Integrating Literature by Minority Writers in the Literature Program," *Negro American Literature Forum* 2, no. 1 (1968): 9.

national terms.[299] And education was seen as one of the means to overcome them. In the case of *Black Voices*, this is also supported by the fact that the anthology was published as a paperback and sold for the modest sum of $4.95. Both Chapman's correspondence and online readers' reviews show that many readers encountered the book in high school classrooms or in their college courses.[300] But poetry anthologies, like curricula, can never include everything; it is the systemic exclusion of certain groups that makes the grounds of the editorial choices suspicious. And apart from the national framing of the anthology, Chapman still excludes an entire group of African American authors: women.

3.4. From *Black Poetry* to *Black Voices*: The Vanishing Women

The poetry section of Chapman's US anthology, *Black Poetry*, contains 24 poets: but only four are women. Women authors are markedly underrepresented in other sections of the anthology, too: only Ann Petry and Paule Marshall appear in the Fiction section, while the Autobiography and Literary Criticism sections feature no women whatsoever. Moreover, as Niama Leslie Williams notes in her analysis of *Black Voices*, eight male authors are quoted at length in the introduction in contrast to only two short quotes from Alice Walker and Lorraine Hansberry. As she concludes, "Chapman's introduction and table of contents

[299] Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 156. In her analysis of the Little Rock events, Mary Dudziak also shows how cases such as these, featuring children and revolving around education, represented a central stage of the Civil Rights Battle. Dudziak, "The Little Rock Crisis and Foreign Affairs: Race, Resistance and the Image of American Democracy," *Southern California Law Review* 70, no. 6 (September 1, 1997): 1641-1716.

[300] Out of twenty reviews on the website Goodreads, seven mention encountering the book in a classroom (mostly on high school, but also college-level). Apart from reviews, the website also allows the user to make lists: *Black Voices* appear on lists such as "Books for 11th Graders to read" or "Omaha Public Schools 11th Grade Reading List." "Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature" *Goodreads*, Accessed May 5, 2020, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1138962.Black_Voices.

leave the reader with the distinct impression that African American literature is an overwhelmingly male affair."[301]

But, as is clear from William's study, *Black Poetry* was no exception among the anthologies of African American poetry in that period. It is the comparison with the US section of his Czechoslovak anthology that reveals the contrast. Of the thirty-three represented poets, twelve are women.[302] It is clear that Chapman knew about these poems, but chose not to include them in his US anthology. In contrast to *New Black Poetry*, an anthology Chapman edited in 1972, there is little material available for the selection process for *Black Poetry*.[303] Admittedly, *Black Voices* is less historical in its scope than his Czechoslovak anthology, and some exclusions – e.g., Phyllis Wheatley – might be due to the different scope of the US anthology. Still, Chapman does not include any of the women poets of the Harlem Renaissance or the subsequent years in his US anthology. It is the contemporary women poets that offer an interesting contrast between *Black Poetry* and *Black Voices*. For *Black Poetry*, Chapman chose Margaret Walker, Naomi Long Witherspoon (Madgett), Sarah E. Wright, Lucy Smith, and Beah Richardson. In *Black Voices*, Walker and Madgett appear again, together with Gwendolyn Brooks.[304] While for his Czechoslovak anthology, Chapman chose the poets associated with the CPUSA, ten years later, it is precisely these poets he leaves out.

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[301] Niama Leslie Williams, *Black Poetic Feminism: The Imagination of Toi Derricotte* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2006), 31.
[302] Admittedly, women are underrepresented in other parts of the anthology. De Sousa is an exception. But as we have seen, in both the translation of her poem and in her biographical profile, she is taken for a man.
[303] In the poetry section of *New Black Voices,* the four women poets from *Black Voices* are accompanied by Audre Lorde, Nikki Giovanni, and Nayo-Barbara Malcolm. There were no women in other sections.
[304] Madgett's letter is one of the few documents in Chapman's papers concerning the compilation process for *Black Voices*. In December 1967, she wrote to Chapman that the forthcoming book "sounds interesting. I look forward to having a copy and hope that it will be suitable as a basic text for my Negro literature class." Letter from Naomi Madgett to Abraham Chapman, December 5, 1967, Abraham Chapman Papers, Box 1, John Hay Library, Brown University.

This can be viewed from two perspectives. For his Czechoslovak anthology, Chapman had probably access to a limited number of sources: and the work of poets published in magazines such as *Masses and Mainstream* were simply easier to obtain. Lucy Smith may exemplify this. The poems are chosen from two of her collections (*No Middle Ground* [1951] and *Give Me a Child* [1955] together with Sarah E. Wright who was also in *Black Poetry*) were published when Chapman was already in Czechoslovakia. This would correspond to the common narrative in Czech discourse on the literary and cultural history of the era: the only criteria for a work to be translated and published, especially in case of such officially sanctioned projects such as *Black Poetry*, were political. On the other hand, could suitability and availability explain why is Smith represented by eight poems in the anthology, comparable to Langston Hughes's twelve poems Claude McKay's eleven? Since there is no archival material on how the anthology was put together, it is hard to say. But in addition to asking which poets made it across the Iron Curtain, we can also ask who was left behind in Prague – and why.

The most prominent example is Beulah Richardson. In Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology, Richardson is represented by two poems, "Liberal" and "A Black Woman Speaks," both translated by Zdeněk Lahoda. Richardson read the latter at the Women's Workshop of the American People's Congress for Peace in Chicago, organized by American Women for Peace and the Women's International Democratic Federation. "A Black Woman Speaks" is an excursion through the history of Black and white women in the US that tries to decode the construction of race and the idea of white supremacy: "What then is this superior thing/ that in order to be sustained must needs feed upon my flesh?"[305]

[305] Beulah Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks: Of White Womanhood, of White Supremacy, of Peace: A Poem* (New York: American Women for Peace, 1951), 2.

In her inquiry, Richardson starts with an assertion of her position:

> It is right that I a woman
> black
> should speak of white womanhood.[306]

Richardson speaks for herself, Black women, and also all women, “rather than seeing herself as one who needs a white figure to speak out on her behalf,” as Claudia May puts it.[307] But her use of the ahistorical “I” does not exclude others from claiming the narrative. Here May reflects on the use of the first-person singular:

> By framing *A Black Woman Speaks* in the first person, Richardson brings a sense of immediacy to historical events; she also expands the uses of the literary convention of the first-person narrator by leaving room for the possibility that the views of an individual can be adopted by, or aligned with, those who share the same sentiments.[308]

In “A Black Woman Speaks,” Richardson draws parallels between slavery and other forms of oppression:

> They brought me here in chains
> They brought you here willing slaves to man.

[306] Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks,* 1
[307] Claudia May, “Airing Dirty Laundry: Representations of Domestic Laborers in the Works of African American Women Writers,” *Feminist Formations* 27, no. 1 (2015): 161.
[308] May, “Airing Dirty Laundry,” 158.

[…]

If they counted my teeth

they did appraise your thigh

and sold you to the highest bidder

the same as I.[309]

Addressing white women, she blames them for not fighting, and setting their "mind fast on my slavery/ the better to endure your own."[310] But despite the oppression of both groups, the consequences differ: "We are women all/ and what wrongs you murders me."[311] Richardson's right to speak of white womanhood is also supported by the fact that her "fathers," "brothers," "husbands," and "sons" "die for it; because of it."[312] Her plea concludes with a vision of a common fight:

What will you do?

Will you fight with me?

White supremacy is your enemy and mine.[313]

Richardson's excursion through the history of US race relations also invokes famous figures from African American history such as Harriet Tubman or Crispus Attucks. But she also brings in figures from contemporary incidents of injustice towards African Americans, for instance, the Martinsville Seven, Rosa Ingram, and Willie McGee.

[309] Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks,* 2–3.
[310] Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks,* 4.
[311] Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks,* 3.
[312] Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks,* 1.
[313] Richardson, *A Black Woman Speaks,* 9.

The Czech translation in Chapman's anthology leaves both the historical and contemporary figures out. It is difficult to determine whether this was a change made in translation: since Richardson performed the poem several times, they are several versions of it. However, the source for the anthology was probably a booklet *A Black Woman Speaks…. of White Womanhood of White Supremacy of Peace: A Poem by Beulah Richardson*, published by the American Women for Peace in 1951, as was the only time it appeared in print by the time the anthology was published. Comparing the poem and its Czech translation, we note that whole passages referring to specific aspects of the US context are missing – whether references to the Ku Klux Klan or figures such as Tubman or Ingram. The translation of Richardson's poem makes the oppression of African Americans seem more abstract than Richardson's poem, which is rooted in a specific historical context.

Richardson's poem also reflects her activism. She worked for the Party-associated Civil Rights Congress and wrote for Paul Robeson's *Freedom* newspaper. Through these circles Richardson met other Black Communists such as William Patterson, and perhaps more importantly Louise Thompson Patterson, Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Rosalie McGee, and Charlotta Bass. Together, they founded Sojourners for Truth and Justice in 1951. It was an organization pointing out the connections of race, gender, and class, aiming for "organizing and protecting black working-class women" and forging "transnational ties of political solidarity with women across the black diaspora and beyond."[314] The organization existed only for a year: while its scope "prefigure[d] radical feminist and especially socialist-feminist writings of the

[314] Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 149.

1960s and later,"[315] by 1953, as Washington puts it, "black left-wing cultural workers were under intense pressure to distance themselves from radical left-wing affiliation."[316] Not everyone gave in to these pressures, but those who didn't paid a high price for resisting.[317]

3.5. From *Black Poetry* to *Black Voices*: The Vanishing Women II

One poem appears in both *Black Poetry* and *Black Voices*: "For My People" by Margaret Walker (in the Czechoslovak anthology, this poem is accompanied by Walker's two other poems, "Harriet Tubman" and "We Had Been Believers"). Walker's eponymous collection was awarded the Yale Younger Poets Prize in 1942 and is considered one of the seminal works of the Chicago Black Renaissance. As Michael Fabre writes in his biography of Richard Wright, Walker was also a part of the South Side Writer's Group.[318] After Chicago, Walker returned to Jackson, Mississippi, where she spent the rest of her life and where she also taught at Jackson State University. She and Chapman met in 1968, bonded over their past friendship with Richard Wright.[319] After that, they corresponded occasionally, and Chapman also enthusiastically reviewed her historical novel, *Jubilee*

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[315] Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 260. More info in also in Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

[316] Washington, *The Other Blacklist*, 200.

[317] Richardson is better known under her stage name Beah Richards, an actor with an Academy Award nomination and perhaps best known for her role as Baby Suggs in the 1998 adaptation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Recently, *A Black Woman Speaks* has also gained attention for its intersectional perspectives, for example Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak's article "Remembering and Reclaiming the Genius of Beah Richards' A Black Woman Speaks ... of White Womanhood, of White Supremacy, of Peace." Pelak looks at Richardson's poem through today's perspectives on feminism and intersectionality, claiming that "remembering and studying Richards' work is particularly valuable for antiracist feminist scholars with white privilege, like myself, who are interested in dismantling racism and decolonizing." Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak, "Remembering and Reclaiming the Genius of Beah Richards' A Black Woman Speaks ... of White Womanhood, of White Supremacy, of Peace," *Race, Gender and Class* 21, no. 3/4 (2014): 191.

[318] Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 128.

[319] Maryemma Graham, ed., "An Interview with Margaret Walker, Kay Bonetti, 1991," *Conversations with Margaret Walker* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), 132.

(1966), which he mentions in the introductory note to "For My People" in *Black Poetry.* Although written in the early 1940s, this poem became iconic in the late 1960s. As Howard Rambsy writes, it appeared in "more than twenty-five collections between 1968 and 1974, making it one of the most anthologized African American poems of the era. The frequent publication of 'For My People' made the poem a mainstay in black arts discourse decades after the poem's initial appearance."[320]

Rambsy discusses Walker's poem when analyzing anthologies of the Black Arts movement: as he writes, sixty anthologies of African American writing came out between 1965 and 1976.[321] In his view, they presented the Black Arts as a "coordinated and collective enterprise," and therefore "operated as central forces in the formulation of a canon of black poetry."[322] Rambsy's analysis echoes Hayes's examination of the 1920s anthologies and their importance for the Harlem Renaissance, identifying the historical moment, the publication context of these anthologies, and the way they contributed to the conceptualization of these artistic and social movements. But what happened between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts movement? Focusing solely on the US context, there were considerably fewer anthologies in the 1940s and 1950s, with notable exceptions, such as *The Negro Caravan* (1941), put together Sterling A. Brown, Arthur P. David, and Ulysses Lee, or Hughes's and Arna Bontemps or *The Poetry of the Negro* (1949), which strongly influenced the US section of Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology. This was not due to any rupture in African American writing, but to a shift that came with

[320] Howard Rambsy, "Platforms for Black Verse: The Roles of Anthologies," *The Black Arts Enterprise and the Production of African American Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 76.
[321] Rambsy, "Platforms for Black Verse," 50.
[322] Rambsy, "Platforms for Black Verse," 50, 77.

the post-war US narrative that presented US poetry as depoliticized, mostly male, and white.[323] Looking at anthologies in translation helps counter this narrative.

In the US, these reconsiderations involved exploring the relationship between the African American writers and the pro-Communist Left. Scholars such as Mary Helen Washington, Bill V. Mullen, and James Smethurst have tried to tell a different story, one that moves beyond the binary of clashes between the African American writer and the rigorous white structures of the Party (as William J. Maxwell puts it, "white seduction and betrayal of Black mouthpieces"[324]), a story we know from Richard Wright's work and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In retracing the continuities and the ways the CPUSA provided platforms for Black writing, these scholars countered the Cold War narrative some of the poets created about their own work.

Gwendolyn Brooks is also featured in *Black Voices*. Rambsy identifies her one of the poets who had achieved recognition long before 1968, but for who "anthologies of the 1960s and 1970s extended the circulation of their poems and greatly influenced what became the poets'signature poems."[325] Washington illuminates how Brooks's contacts with pro-Communist circles in Chicago were important for her career as a poet and also for her poems, showing that, contrary to the poet's own narrative, her "radicalism was not a product of the 1960s."[326] Washington summarizes thus:

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[323] In his dissertation "Behind Enemy Lines: The New American Poetry and the Cold War Anthology Wars," Stephen Delbos looks at Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry 1945–1960* and claims that the constructed opposition between avant-garde and academia and the binary between raw and cooked poetry effectively excluded political, feminist, and African American poetry (*The New American Poetry* only includes one poet of color, LeRoi Jones). Innovation came from the pens of white men. Delbos's dissertation calls for a Cold War context even for works without an obvious Cold War context, joining the efforts of, among others, Cary Nelson who looked at the mechanism of deradicalization of the canon, including on the institutional level. Stephen Delbos, "'Behind Enemy Lines: The New American Poetry and the Cold War Anthology Wars'" (PhD dissertation, Prague, Charles University, 2017).
[324] Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 5.
[325] Rambsy, "Platforms for Black Verse," 75.
[326] Washington, *The Other Blacklist*, 29.

> The consensus among scholars of the Left is that Brooks was part of a broad coalition of mainly black artists, writers, and community activists who were making their own history of radical black struggle, which exceeded, transformed, and expanded Communist Party-approved aesthetics but cannot be divorced from its influence and support.[327]

This support took various forms and lasted for several decades. As Smethurst reminds us, "Even as late as the early 1950s, a vibrant Left political and cultural African American subculture still existed in Harlem."[328] However, as a consequence of US anti-communism of the period, as Rambsy puts it, "many African American poets of those eras had to be 'rediscovered' during more modern times."[329] Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology *Black Poetry* shows that the process of rediscovery is not over.

3.6. 1968

Black Voices was published the same year that the Prague Spring was brought to an end when Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. The CPUSA received the news with mixed reactions.[330] The Chapman family, no longer connected to the organization, according to Kimmage also followed the events: "We were devastated when the Soviet

[327] Washington, *The Other Black List*, 166
[328] James Smethurst, "Poetry and Sympathy: New York, the Left, and the Rise of Black Arts," *Left of the Color Line: Race, Radicalism, and Twentieth-Century Literature of the United States*, ed. James Smethurst and Bill V. Mullen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 261.
[329] Rambsy, "Platforms for Black Verse," 52.
[330] "So here we were in the United States committed to the struggle for reform within the framework of the CP, and it's being done in Czechoslovakia, by all the rules, and then that happens. That's why it was so shattering for us," recalls Dorothy Ray Healey in her book written with Maurice Isserman, *California Red: A Life in the American Communist Party* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 232. Healey visited Czechoslovakia only a year before 1968. Peggy Dennis, another US Communist who visited the country, talks about the mixed reactions in *The Autobiography of an American Communist: A Personal View of a Political Life, 1925–1975*, 1st US ed. (Westport [Conn.]: LHill, 1977), 278.

invasion reversed the trend of liberalization."[331] The events of 1968 also shaped Cold War mobilities: not long after the invasion, Josef Škvorecký, the original editor of *Black Poetry*, emigrated to Canada and another translator from the Czechoslovak anthology, Stanislav Mareš, to Australia.

Škvorecký became a prominent cultural figure on the Canadian cultural scene. With a degree in US literature from Prague, he, too, taught this subject to Northern American students. With his wife, Zdena Salivarová, he founded a publishing house that became an important node of exile culture. For this, they were later awarded the Order of the White Lion, one of the most significant Czech state awards, by the new president, Václav Havel, a couple of months after the Velvet Revolution. "For twenty years [Josef Škvorecký and Zdena Salivarová] moved the center of Czech literature from Prague to Toronto, saving it from a coma," says one of the articles commemorating Josef Škvorecký.[332] This line from a mainstream liberal magazine exemplifies the prevalent attitude of Czech literary history that foregrounded exile and samizdat work, ignoring regime literature, and policing the border between these three categories. At the same time, the narrative has remained mostly national.

Similarly, while Paris has long been seen as one of the capitals of the Black Atlantic, in Prague also African American literature was "debated, critiqued, encouraged, performed, published, produced, and preserved," as Washington defined the "leftist spaces of the Black Popular Front."[333] While Washington understands space in a broader sense here, cities, it seems, played a particular role in maintaining continuities: when James Smethurst writes about the rise of the Black Arts, he also traces it from Harlem to

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[331] Kimmage, Personal E-mail.
[332] Petr Třešňák and Ondřej Nezbeda, "Před pěti lety zemřel Josef Škvorecký," *Respekt online*, January 8, 2012, https://www.respekt.cz/tydenik/2012/2/torontsky-mirakl.
[333] Washington, *The Other Blacklist,* 22.

Chicago and back to New York again.[334] Could Prague be one of the centers of African American writing of the time? This suggestion might seem far-fetched, but artifacts such as Chapman's Czechoslovak anthology indicate how difficult it is to draw a line demarcating "ours" and "theirs" in literature, whether this is on a national, linguistic, or, more problematically, racial level.

Patterson's visit to Czechoslovakia in 1950 shows that the Cold War both strengthened the need to forge existing alliances and, at the same time, restricted their extent. When he came to Prague, he already knew about the forthcoming legislative changes such as the Smith Act that would prevent him from traveling. That is why he provided suggestions for contacts between Czechoslovakia and African Americans, from inviting cultural figures to collaboration with the African American press.[335] But people like W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson were soon to be without passports, too. By restricting the travel of the pro-Communist African Americans, one of the routes for Leftist internationalism was closed.

Black Poetry became one of the ways this relationship played out. While on one hand, it draws poetic maps of the anti-colonial, anti-racist understanding of the Black diaspora, it also shows the limits of the Cold War literary solidarities. In comparison to the original versions, the translations of poems of Richardson and de Sousa tell only part of the story. On the other hand, contrasted with Chapman's US anthology, the changes illuminate the lost allegiances of the era, making an argument for including projects such as the Czechoslovak *Black Poetry* in the canon of African American poetry as a part of a much wider, multi-lingual reconsideration. Both *Black Poetry* and *Black Voices* tell a story of African American poetry, but we've long known the story in *Black Voices*.

[334] Smethurst, *Poetry and Sympathy*, 260–261.
[335] "Memorandum W. L. Pattersona Komunistické straně Československa."

Chapman’s story represents the US internationalist vision less as a rupture and more as a continuous process, with changing centers and able to accommodate various languages and sites of resistance.

Conclusion

In 1953, the year of Stalin's death, the US novelist Raymond Chandler published *The Long Goodbye*, which was translated to Czech fourteen years later as *Farewell to Lennox.* The detective, Philip Marlowe, meets Terry Lennox by chance: there is something uncanny about the man Marlowe eventually grows fond of. Lennox seems to be able to switch names and identities and, eventually, fakes his own death. In uncovering the story behind the *Black Poetry* anthology, I frequently felt more like a detective than a literary scholar. For me, Chapman has sometimes been as elusive as Lennox. The search started with a little note in the content section of the anthology which said the introduction to the anthology has been translated. Why would an editor named Abe Čapek need a translation (and from what?), I wondered. Little did I know that the search for an answer would take me across the Atlantic, and through numerous libraries and countless pages of archival materials.

Like the mysteries surrounding Lennox in the *The Long Goodbye*, Chapman's story can never be fully revealed. Chapman stays turned away from us, like the figure in Caspar David Friedrich's painting, "The Wanderer." But the story is not so much about the figure itself as about the landscapes he points to, the insights he allows us on the decolonizing, Cold War world. The settings of these scenes differ: it starts with the Prague to which Chapman fled, an internationalist space and one of the centers of the world literature of letters, a space I explore in the first chapter. The city with its literary institutions, streets, and memory also provides the setting of the second chapter which deals with Czech translators and their transnational legacy, reinstating one US critic, Chapman, in the story of Czech translations of (African) American literature. Finally, in the third chapter, Chapman comes back to the US and turns away from the

internationalism of the earlier period: his new framing of African American literature exemplifies the transformation of the race narrative under way in the US at the time.

Following Chapman revealed familiar figures in a new light: Chapman's Prague differed from the Prague I grew up in. But cities age in layers that are not entirely impermeable. I visited the various libraries and archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences where Chapman worked; wrote parts of the thesis in the National Library, frequently opting for the same place Jan Zábrana used to sit in the early 1950s, as I found out later (second row from the end, by the window);[336] took seminars in US literature in the same classrooms of the Faculty of Arts where Škvorecký and Dorůžka met. The search for Chapman also led me to places I had never been: from New York to Jackson, Mississippi. And, with some figures of this story, we were not just moving across the same maps, but the same institutions and structures that enabled and shaped this movement. Matthiessen went from Harvard University to lecture on US literature at Charles University and I moved between the same universities in the opposite direction to learn more about the very same subject.[337]

But if Matthiessen came to Europe to think about America, during my stay in the US, I found out I more frequently think about Czech literature and the people who mediated the exchanges with US culture. I admired them: Jan Zábrana never had the chance to visit any English-speaking country, yet, from his desk in Malešice, a sleepy part

[336] Zábrana, *Celý život*, vol. 1, 563.
[337] I went in a framework of a Fulbright scholarship for PhD students; Matthiessen is frequently referred to as a Fulbright scholar. In *From the Heart in Europe*, Matthiessen does not go into detail on the funding of his stay, referring to himself as to a "visiting professor" (Matthiessen, *From the Heart of Europe,* 107). However, his direct participation in the program is highly unlikely: while the legislation was introduced in September 1945, it was only in the Fall 1947, when Matthiessen was in already Prague, when first agreements were closed with several countries including China (the first US scholar who received the award was a sinologist). Czechoslovakia was not among them. (Ralph H. Vogel, "The Making of the Fulbright Program," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 491 (1987): 11–21, 14). Nevertheless, Matthiessen's stay in Europe was stimulated by the same currents that were dispersing the new Fulbright scholars at that time – and from the time on.

of Prague, he was able to recreate the worlds of Sylvia Plath and Allen Ginsberg. I also thought about Czech literature because I was frequently asked about it. While on paper, transnational and world literature approaches have been major influences in literary studies, one still frequently becomes the representative of one's culture of origin in the very environments that have declared the end of nation-based approaches. While this does not have to be reflected in one's scholarship per se, questions of who has the right to speak about what emerges and becomes even more complicated when thinking about racial identities.

Still, African American literature loses when regarded only in national narratives, and so does Czech literature. And not only literature: it is especially important today to recall internationalist history and the various allegiances of the early Civil Rights movement. One of the thirteen guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement is that the movement sees itself "as part of the global Black family, and we are aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black people who exist in different parts of the world."[338] It remains to be seen if this will result in transnational practice: while activists globally have added names to the US lists of those killed by police violence, this interest has not always been reciprocated. The way Black Lives Matter movement gained global attention is a testimony not only to the power of grassroots organizing and social media but to the position of the US as an empire.

Following events in the US from 2016, and also the tendencies to decolonize institutions, language, or education, protests in countries such as Belgium, France, and Great Britain brought forward the connections between imperialism, racism, and colonialism. These connections have only recently made their way to the Czech Republic.

[338] "What We Believe," Black Lives Matter, accessed August 1, 2020, https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/.

As Filip Herza writes, in Central Eastern Europe, "race – unlike ethnicity – often remains the least explored aspect of local ideological landscapes."[339] One of the reasons is that the region sees itself as excluded from the colonial project altogether.

So, it is the construction of whiteness and racial identities that needs to be questioned. The analysis of translations such as those in *Black Poetry* can contribute to this work by asking how translation helped to shape the construction of these identities by textual means and how they were performed in them. A border-crossing figure such as Chapman encourages further inquiries into the history of how we think about race and how we frame international solidarities, but, from the perspective of summer 2020, they also point to the limits of these solidarities – and the fragility of such mobilities.

[339] Herza, "Colonial Exceptionalism," 176.

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the circulation of African American leftist poetry in the early Cold War, especially between the United States of America and Czechoslovakia. The dissertation relies on transnational and world literature scholarship while pointing to its limitations, especially regarding the Cold War context. I follow the story of Abraham Chapman, a US communist living in Prague from in the 1950s, using the concept of the world republic of leftist letters. The first chapter explores the mechanisms of this space and Prague's role within it. It also looks at the cultural relationship between Czechoslovakia and the African American community, describing the background of Chapman's journey to Czechoslovakia. The second chapter focuses on the clash between Chapman and the Czechoslovak intermediaries of US culture such as Josef Škvorecký, Lubomír Dorůžka, and Jan Zábrana and the competing versions of African American poetry, especially in Abraham Chapman's anthology of Black diaspora poetry *Černošská poezie: světová antologie* [Black Poetry: A World Anthology] that he edited in 1958, while in Czechoslovakia. The third chapter examines women poets featured in *Black Poetry*, contrasting the Czechoslovak anthology with *Black Voices* that Chapman edited ten years later, when he was once again in the US. The two anthologies not only illustrate changing Cold War discourses and imaginaries of race and of African American literature, as well as the complexities of the civil rights movement, but also reveals the people, texts, and allegiances invisible in previous Cold War cultural histories.

Key words: Abraham Chapman, Cold War cultural exchange, transnationalism, African American poetry, Czechoslovakia, translation

Abstrakt

Tato dizertace se věnuje cirkulaci poezie afroamerických levicových autorů na počátku studené války, zejména mezi Spojenými státy americkými a Československem. Práce používá transnacionální přístupy i přístupy, jež zohledňují celistvé vidění světové literatury, zároveň ale upozorňuje i na jejich nedostatky, zejména při analýze kulturní produkce během studené války. Osu dizertace tvoří příběh Abrahama Chapmana, amerického komunisty, který žil v Praze v padesátých letech dvacátého století.
K mapování Chapmanových cest je zde používán koncept světové republiky levicové literatury. První kapitola se věnuje mechanismům tohoto prostoru a také roli Prahy v něm. Přibližuje také kulturní vztahy mezi Československem a afroamerickou komunitou. Druhá kapitola je věnována střetu mezi Chapmanem a československými zprostředkovateli americké kultury, jako byli Josef Škvorecký, Lubomír Dorůžka nebo Jan Zábrana, věnuje se zejména neshodám ohledně rámování afroamerické poezie. Během svého pobytu v Československu sestavil Chapman antologii *Černošská poezie: světová antologie* (1958), jež je ve třetí kapitole této práce srovnávána s antologií *Black Voices*, kterou Chapman uspořádal o deset let později po svém návratu do USA. Toto srovnání je zaměřeno zejména na afroamerické básnířky v obou antologiích. Rozdíly mezi Chapmanovými antologiemi pak mezi nimi pak nejen ilustrují měnící se diskurzy o konceptu rasy i o afroamerické literatuře, stejně jako komplexní mezinárodní historii hnutí za občanská práva, ale také odhalují autory, texty a spojenectví, které v historiích studené války zatím chyběly.

Klíčová slova: Abraham Chapman, kulturní výměna během studené války, transnacionalismus, Afroamerická poezie, Československo, překlad