

ABSTRACT

The doctoral thesis focuses on the translation persona and work of Ludvík Kundera. A poet himself, he translated verse first and foremost and was able to do so from many languages, although he sometimes resorted to the use of interlinear translations. The research, however, concentrates primarily on the description, analysis and reception of his direct translations in the Czech – German language pair, which was predominant in Kundera’s translation work. The thesis contributes to the understanding of the history of Czech literary translation after 1945 by describing Kundera’s translation method, making accessible part of his literary estate, notably his correspondence, and providing an update to Kundera’s translation bibliography.

Kundera is best known as the exclusive, authorized translator of Bertolt Brecht’s drama and poetry. His translations of Expressionists Georg Trakl and Gottfried Benn, for which he received the State Award for Literary Translation in 1996, are considered canonical today. The same holds true for his translations of Paul Celan’s poetry and Alfred Kubin’s novel *Die andere Seite (The Other Side)*. Kundera was also the first to introduce Czech readers to the poetry of Alsatian Dadaist Hans Arp and the poetry of East German lyricist Peter Huchel. The characterization and analysis of Kundera’s translations of the works by Kubin, Arp, and Huchel constitutes the primary focus of the thesis. At the same time, the selection of these three literary personalities points to the affinities between Kundera’s own authorial and translation work, which he simultaneously pursued for almost his entire life. The poetics of the three writers reflect some of the consistent features of Kundera’s original writing, namely his marked interest in language (also notable in Arp’s work), dreams (also developed in Kubin’s novel) and nature (also displayed in Huchel’s poetry). The translation analysis of selected text passages became the basis for the description of Kundera’s translation method, which is characterized not only by a conscious effort to achieve both formal accuracy and precision of expression, but also by relatively conspicuous poeticizing.

As a *spiritus rector*, Kundera initiated several extraordinary publications, for example, the Czech edition of Bertolt Brecht’s collected works and four German anthologies of Czech poetry. Despite political adversities, he forged many friendly ties with foreign poets and translators. Thus, this personal commitment has secured for him an important place in German cultural history as well. This perspective is explored in the final chapter of the doctoral thesis and illustrated by the archived records which have been made available here for the very first time.