

Summary

The Secret of Success.

German-Language Book Series *Album* by Publisher Ignác Leopold Kober in Broader Literary Contexts

ABSTRACT

The German-language book series *Album-Bibliothek der Originalromane der beliebtesten deutschen Schriftsteller* (1846–1861, Album-Library of Original Novels by Most Popular German Authors) which was published by I. L. Kober was a longseller on the Central European book market: it offered original German-language novels of a conventional nature and competed with the translations of popular foreign-language works that flooded the book market at that time. In the Bohemian lands, Kober's *Album* prompted the creation of a similar series of novels — *Bibliotéka původních románů historických i novověkých* [Library of Original Novels on History and Present] by publisher Kateřina Jeřábková, a well-known Prague publisher and editor of the *Lumír* magazine. In the present monograph, the author examines the appeal the genre composition of Kober's book series exerted on readers in comparison with contemporary Czech fiction, using the example of the genre of "real-life sketches" (*obrázky ze života*, *Lebensbilder*) as a specific genre that became an intersection of various forms of literariness between the discursive impulses of literary romanticism, Biedermeier and realism. Drawing on the methodological underpinnings of reception aesthetics and synoptic-pulsation theory, the monograph presents publishing and literary activities in the 1850s as a multilayered, internally diverse network of intercultural and intertextual connections, of which multilingualism was a natural part.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Ignác Leopold Kober (1825–1866) entered the history of Central European book culture as an entrepreneurial Czech-German publisher and bookseller. Thanks to his agile publishing activities, Czech readers could equip their home libraries with prestigious editions of original and translated fiction. Without Kober's investment, Czech literature would hardly have been able to boast with its first encyclopaedia as soon as the late 1850s: Rieger's *Slovník naučný*, modelled upon the German-language Brockhaus Encyclopaedia. Kober's contribution to Czech literature, culture and politics, his entrepreneurial commitment to numerous pieces of Czech culture became emblematic in the domestic reception of this respected publisher and editor. Kober distinguished himself from other Czech publishing companies of his time by successfully entering the international market and competing with other publishers. He succeeded in doing so thanks to the German-language book series *Album-Bibliothek der Originalromane der beliebtesten deutschen Schriftsteller* (1846–1861, Library of Original Novels by Most Popular German Authors), which he published from the humble beginnings of his publishing efforts on, first in Tábor and then in Prague, without interruption for more than ten years. This series of popular novels was a remarkable and commercially successful publishing project on a European scale, which was also known to readers in the Bohemian lands. Cotta's *Volksbibliothek der deutschen Klassiker* [Popular Library of German Classics], to which *Album* could be compared, was similarly stable on the German market. The profits from the sales enabled Kober to finance the publication of Czech-language fiction and educational literature and to become the most important Czech publisher of the 1860s.

The reason why the book series has not yet received sufficient attention in Czech literary studies is its focus on German books and its targeting popular audience. Earlier literary

scholarship in the field of Czech-German literary relations was heavily burdened by traditional notions of the literature of a small Czech nation in the heart of Europe asserting its right to exist in the midst of another, German-language culture. Until the early 1990s, it was not in the interest of Czech literary studies to reassess some long-standing Czech-German linguistic and national stereotypes, and the vast, internally differentiated field of popular literary production of conventional and trivial coinage was not compatible with the aesthetic criteria applied by literary historians to the canon of 19th-century Czech literature. It is only in recent years that the crucial importance of mediating institutions (publishing houses, bookshops, printers, libraries, etc.) as actors in specific fields of cultural production in the multilingual space of Central Europe has been highlighted (cf. monographs on the topic — e.g. *Handbuch der deutschen Literatur Prags und der Böhmisches Länder* [Handbook of German-language Literature of Prague and Bohemian Lands], 2017; *Na cestě k „výborně zřízenému knihkupectví“*, 2019 [On the Way to the “Well-Established Bookshop”]; *V obecném zájmu*, 2017 [In the Public Interest I, II]; *Geschichte des Buchhandels in Tschechien und in der Slowakei*, 2002 [History of the Book Market in Czechia and Slovakia]; and others).

The *Album* was primarily aimed at a broader readership and tailored the selection of authors and genres to their preferences. The genre range of the book series fluctuated between short fiction and large-scale novels. A prominent place in the series was occupied by the popular genre called “real-life sketches” (Czech: *obrázky ze života*, German: *Lebensbilder*), which became a key criterion for the selection of the works from Kober’s series analysed in the present monograph. Translations of French, Polish and Russian stories and novels, published in contemporary Czech and German-language periodicals and almanacs, were also adjusted to this genre. In the *Album*, Kober also initially offered translations of successful foreign fiction and thus, attempted to lure new readers. Gradually, however,

he replaced the translations with original German-language novels. In the Bohemian lands, the *Album* series prompted the creation of the series *Bibliotéka původních románů historických i novověkých* [Library of Original Novels on History and Present] by Kateřina Jeřábková, a well-known Prague publisher and editor of the *Lumír* magazine, who was also briefly involved in publishing the *Album* in Prague and used a similar publishing strategy as Kober for her Czech-language novel series.

Writing about everyday life formed the basis of the genre “real-life sketches”, and it also appeared in magazine illustration and caricatures which relied on the artistic techniques of lithography and daguerreotype and sought to portray lived reality as faithfully as possible. Caricature was also part of Kober’s German-language revolutionary journals (*Beiblatt zum Album*), which were supplements to the *Album* and had tangible impact on the Czech revolutionary journals (for instance, Havlíček’s *Šotek*). These expressive means of visual art intensified the effect of the real and created a fertile ground for the discursive demands of literary realism, which was only beginning to emerge in literary communication.

From an analysis of Gutzkow’s story *Ein Mädchen aus dem Volke* [A Common Girl], it is clear that the subtitle “Bilder der Wirklichkeit” [Images of Real Life] was only a partial symptom of the realist mode embedded in the prevailing practices of subjective and sentimental romanticism. A comparison of the individual texts reveals that a possible inspiration for both Gutzkow’s novel and some of the prose works of Božena Němcová (*Baruška, Chýže pod horami* [A Cottage in the Mountains]) was Paul de Musset’s salon story *La Bavolette*, which Gutzkow probably knew from the original French version and Němcová from a translation published in 1851 in the *Lumír* magazine. As translator of Gutzkow’s drama *Das Urbild des Urtartuffe*, Němcová was probably also familiar with the story *Ein Mädchen aus dem Volke* and incorporated partial motifs into the novella *Chýže pod horami*.

The compared prose works of Karl Gutzkow, Paul de Musset and Božena Němcová contained a common topos of the relationship between a peasant girl and a man of a different social class. The popular contemporary theme was appropriated by the individual texts through a variety of genre codes linked to an overarching genre of “real-life sketches”, within which the contemporary discursive forces, stretched between the practices of the prevailing sentimental, subjective, patriotic romanticism and Biedermeier, manifested themselves with varying intensity in the works analysed. The signs of realism appear in the individual texts only as a realistic modus, which is only external in the works under study and does not stem from their organizational and semantic dominance. In the conventional literary works of second- and third-order authors, such as Eugène Sue, Paul de Kock, Paul de Musset, and others, the effect of the realistic was applied – quite significantly – in the way the text was shaped (in terms of narrative poetics, imagery, motifs, topoi, and so on).

Rewriting and adaptation of popular reading practices in the works of canonical authors point to the fact that the intermingling of diverse forms of literariness involved not only aesthetically valuable literature but also conventional one. The movement between different literary planes was not unidirectional from high to low, but also the other way around. For example, the contact of some of the prose works of Božena Němcová with conventional foreign literature was much more intense than had been considered in Czech literary studies. Tracing the nature of these connections may yield new findings that may put the works of prominent canonical authors in new contexts.

Kober became involved in contemporary German programmatic debates on the nature of realism through the magazine *Kritische Blätter für Literatur und Kunst* (1857–1858, Journal of Literature and Art Criticism), which became the first platform of literary criticism in the monarchy to evaluate works of

literature in that multinational empire. On the basis of German programmatic debates on realism and the genre composition of popular libraries of original German-language novels and translations observed in the Bohemian lands, it can be assumed that the realist modus had manifested itself much earlier, in conventional translated and original German-language production. Particularly relevant there was the genre of “real-life sketches”.

With the *Album* series, Kober helped to strengthen the position of original German-language fiction against poor-quality translations and at the same time earned enough money to invest in publishing Czech literature beginning at the end of the 1850s. The driving force behind Kober’s entrepreneurial spirit was not primarily his Czech national perspective, as many Czech reflections might suggest, but an economic and transnational one. Kober did not perceive German as a hostile language that needed to be removed from the Czech book market; on the contrary, he attributed to it the function of a mediator of education. Indeed, this attitude is evidenced by his publishing activities for the *Album* series and German-language magazines ranging from revolutionary journals to the organ of literary criticism *Kritische Blätter für Literatur und Kunst*. Based on reception probes and comparative analyses carried out in the present monograph, the relationship between German and foreign-language literary production in the Bohemian lands in the 19th century is revealed in a form different from the traditional, nation-based perspective that to this day has dominated the narrative of the history of Czech literature and culture.

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