

# Siegfried Kapper and the South Slavic Literary Culture of the Western Balkans\*

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## SYNOPSIS

The article discusses the relationship of Siegfried Kapper (1820–1879), a Czech-German author of Jewish origin, to South Slavic literary cultures (in particular Serbian, Montenegrin and Croatian), the influence of South Slavic national poetry on his work, on Kapper's travels throughout the South Slavic countries of the Habsburg monarchy, of his contacts with distinguished figures of Serbian and Croatian culture and the South Slavic reception of Kapper's work, as well as the Czech reception of that part of Kapper's work, in which he conveyed the traditions of South Slavic literary monuments and the history of Czech society. The aim of the article is above all to provide a recapitulation and evaluation of Kapper's mediating role between German, Czech and the South Slavic literary cultures of the Western Balkans, which Kapper played within the Central European environment from the time of the national emancipatory endeavours of the 1840s until the time of his death.

## KEYWORDS

19<sup>th</sup> century; Jewishness; Siegfried Kapper; South Slavic folk poetry responses; South Slavic literary culture.

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*... he was far more than a writer: it was he who conveyed to the widest audiences abroad a report on the life, suffering, hopes and aspirations of the Croatian-Serbian nation<sup>1</sup>*

Lavoslav Šik (1931, p. 441).

In the history of Czech literature since the 1930s, the name of Siegfried Kapper (born Isaak Salomon Kapper) has been progressively obscured by the layers of decades in

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1 The text contains quotations from Serbian, Croatian and German originals, which were first of all translated by the author of the article into Czech, and subsequently translated into English.



which it has fallen into oblivion. Although Kapper ranked among the highly culturally and politically active intellectuals of his time, with a whole series of his younger contemporaries subscribing to his work and ideas,<sup>2</sup> his output and activity were little known to subsequent generations of Czech literati, and in Czech society today any awareness of the personality and work of Siegfried Kapper is rather an exceptional matter.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of today's European society and its proclaimed values, it might appear that the persona of a German Jew from the Smíchov district of Prague, who actively professed his allegiance to the Czech nation, always acting in its interest and personifying religious tolerance throughout his life, would become one of those who were ripe to be 'rediscovered' and 'reclaimed', at the very least as an inspiring, if not even 'iconic' figure. However, it seems that Siegfried Kapper was always in some way inapt for Czech society and its predominant ideas, values and norms (in his 'non-Czechness', 'Germanness' and 'Jewishness'), from the time during which he lived until the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. It would therefore be somewhat unrealistic to expect any sudden surge of interest in him and his work after several decades of being overlooked.

It is symptomatic of Kapper's eluding of the Czech memory that not even his basic biographical dates were stated precisely or known whatsoever, a situation which still frequently persists to this day. Kapper was born on 21 March 1820 (as listed in the Jewish register — see Donath 1934, p. 369), although a range of literary historical or biographical studies state 1821 as the year of his birth. The first report of Kapper's death in the Czech press, from June 1879, relates that 'he died following a protracted illness at the age of 58 at the time of half past eight in the morning on Saturday, the seventh day of this month, in the town of Pisa in Italy, and was buried in the cemetery there on Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup>' (Anonymous 1879, p. 3), which would mean that he had been born in 1821, and thus the erroneous information about the year of his birth is mentioned in a series of other both older and more recent texts (Schulz 1879, p. 697; Zirkl 1881, p. 70; Donath 1923, p. 13; Pěkný 2001, p. 499 ad.). This erroneous date of birth has been adopted from Czech sources also in South Slavic journals or academic publications (e.g. Pecinovský-Rastovčan 1917, p. 170; Esih 1934, p. 2). The incorrect date of birth is also stated in the postscripts of the Serbian Germanist Tomislav Bekić, contained in the latest editions of Serbian translations of Kapper's travelogues (Kaper<sup>3</sup> 1999, p. 186; Kaper 2005, p. 325).

There is not even any consensus regarding where his remains are buried. Hana Housková asserts that following Kapper's death on 7 June 1879, his remains were transported from Pisa in Italy to Bohemia and buried in the Jewish cemetery in Dobříš (Housková 1994, p. 61), whereas Peter Demetz, in his last publication, the collection of

2 In 1920 the Association of Czech Academic Jews (established in 1876 and following on from Kapper's aspirations for closer Czech-Jewish relations within the framework of the Czech nation) was renamed the Kapper Academic Association.

3 In Serbian translations the phonetic form of the name Kapper is used, thus in this article, when referring to the source, the form of the name is stated as both Kapper and Kaper.

essays *Dějště: Čechy* (Arena: Bohemia), which he indeed dedicated to Siegfried Kapper, insists that he remained buried in Pisa (Demetz 2008, p. 152).<sup>4</sup>

If the name of Siegfried Kapper has been mentioned within the Czech academic environment since 1989, then this is either because Kapper was the first Jewish poet to publish a collection of poetry written in Czech, or because he played an important role in the extensive discussion concerning the role and contribution of German Jews in the process of the self-determination of the Czech nation, through the process of moulding a purely Czech culture that was taking place in the Czech press in the 1840s. Within this context, what is noted above all is the harsh criticism of Kapper's poetic debut *České listy* (Czech Letters) penned by Karel Havlíček Borovský, and his dismissal not only of Kapper's poems from this collection, but of the entire notion that a German Jew from Prague could be accepted among the poets of the Czech nation whatsoever (see Petrbock 2011). As a native of Smíchov in Prague, Kapper felt himself to be a true Czech despite the fact that he had been born into a German Jewish family and his mother tongue was German. Kapper did not cease to profess his Czech nationality even after Havlíček's scathing criticism of his aforementioned poetry collection, or following other negative reactions which appeared in the Czech press both in the 1840s and later.

He is less frequently mentioned as the first translator of Máchá's *Máj* (May, 1844) into German, or as the author of the German translation of the *Královédvorský rukopis* (Dvůr Králové Manuscript, 1859), which are nonetheless significant facts within the cultural and national context of the time.<sup>5</sup>

In the period from 1989 to today, only minor attention has been paid to Kapper and his work in the form of individual articles. The first to be published was a short text on Kapper and his contribution to the Czech-Jewish movement by the historian Helena Krejčová (1990–1991), followed by a portrait of the author presented by Hana Housková (1994) in her text 'Just Do Not Call Me a Non-Czech', which takes its name from one of Kapper's verses, and Kapper's collection *České listy* was the focus of a text by Zuzana Urválková (2001). A portrait of Kapper in essay form was also included in his (aforementioned) book by Peter Demetz (2008).

Kapper's work does not find its place in broadly conceived Czech literary history compendiums or university lecture notes (see e.g. Lehár — Stich — Janáčková — Holý 1998). As a rule it appears in publications focusing on Jewish authors (see e.g. Holý — Nichtburgerová 2016), as well as which Kapper is referred to within the context of the Czech anti-Semitic discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, in these studies it is not his work that is the centre of attention, and he himself is not viewed as a distinctive creative figure, but rather as a person who fulfilled a certain function within this discourse (see e.g. Frankl — Toman 2012).

Thus, little has changed since 1934, when an extensive monographic study on Kapper was published by Oskar Donath, who wrote in his introduction: 'The Czech

4 Because the Jewish cemetery in Dobříš was damaged during the period of the Second World War, with the more recent tombs relocated and the cemetery subsequently falling into disrepair until the end of the 1980s (no reliable written documentation exists), it is not possible to confirm either assertion unequivocally.

5 Miroslav Červenka mentions Kapper as a forerunner of the creators of blank verse (Červenka 2006, p. 294).



intelligentsia, both Jewish and non-Jewish, is familiar with Siegfried Kapper only as the author of *České listy* and as a pioneer of the Czech-Jewish movement' (Donath 1934, p. 316).

The relationship of Siegfried Kapper to the literary cultures of the South Slavic nations of the Western Balkans, as well as the reception of his work within these literary cultures, has been addressed only peripherally. Nevertheless, translations or more precisely speaking revised versions of South Slavic literary monuments, travelogues from South Slavic countries and essays or lectures about South Slavic cultures in sum form a substantial part of Kapper's substantial literary output.<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is not possible to assert that Kapper's efforts as a mediator in this respect were not acknowledged whatsoever (see e.g. Beringer 1932, p. 322), but today they are buried deep in literary historical memory. As a result, in this contribution we focus precisely on Kapper's relationship to the South Slavic countries and their literary cultures, in particular those of Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia.

In literary historical or historiographical texts of South Slavic provenance, we encounter the name of Siegfried Kapper exclusively with very positive connotations. The reason is clear, and this consensus reigns throughout the South Slavic environment of the Western Balkans. In a study dedicated to Jewish writers, the Serbian columnist, writer and translator Ana Šomlo asserted the following: 'Dr. Siegfried Kapper ranks among those who in the past have made the greatest contributions to the dissemination of Serbian and Croatian national poetry and its popularisation worldwide' (Šomlo 1970, p. 177). This statement can be presented as an example which can be found in many different variants in the South Slavic reception of Kapper's work.

Kapper began to take an interest in Serbian national poetry early on in his life, during his studies in Prague. He was inspired in this direction particularly by the collection *Volkslieder der Serben* (1825), written by a poet publishing under the pseudonym Talvj (born Therese Albertine Luise von Jakob, after her marriage Robinson), as well as by the work of Jacob Grimm, who was also captivated by Serbian national poetry (see Donath 1934, p. 322). Kapper himself confirms this among other matters in his travelogue, in which he retranslated an interview he conducted in person with the Serbian military commander Stevan Petrović Knićanin in Belgrade in 1850:

*Then I told him how, stimulated by Talvj's translation of Serbian heroic songs, a desire was awakened within me to familiarise myself with the language, history and customs of the nation that had made such a great impression on me. [...] In addition I recalled that my desire to acquaint myself with the Serbian nation had been stimulated also by the appraisal of Serbian heroic songs by one of the greatest German scholars (Grimm), and so I decided to fulfil this desire (Kaper 2005, p. 98).*

In August 1841, Kapper commenced his study of medicine in Vienna, where he began to associate with other students of Slavic nations (in particular Slovenes, Croats and

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<sup>6</sup> Czech literary history has an even greater deficit with regard to the German-written works of Siegfried Kapper, which is also noted by Zuzana Urválková (2001, p. 53). It is necessary to point out that even after the passing of twenty years there has been no progress in Czech literary history in terms of the recognition of Kapper's German-written works.



Serbs), who were also enthused by Slavic national poetry, and it was the debates in Viennese café society that reinforced Kapper's interest in South Slavic literature and its loose translation. Kapper had already begun translating Slavic folk poetry into German before his arrival in Vienna. However, these were primarily translations of Czech, Slovak or Ukrainian poetry. Kapper's first published attempts at poetry appeared in 1839 in the magazines *Ost und West* and also in Frankl's *Österreichisches Morgenblatt*, in which Kapper's first poem imitating the Serbian national song 'Mussajs Grabgesang' was also published in 1841 (Kapper 1841, p. 101).

Among other works, Kapper continued to translate South Slavic national poetry into German in the following years. In the Viennese periodical *Sonntagsblätter*, also edited by L. A. Frankl, he published the poems 'Liebe laßt sich nicht hehlen' (Kapper 1843a, p. 740) and 'Der Flüchtling in Czernagora' (Kapper 1843b, p. 860).<sup>7</sup>

In his Viennese period during the first half of the 1840s, Kapper was pronouncedly influenced both intellectually and creatively by another two of his friends with whom he had previously associated in Prague: Moritz Hartmann and Ludwig A. Frankl, who also introduced Kapper to the society of the young Viennese poets, and arranged opportunities for him to publish in several journals and almanacs.

In 1843 Kapper was joined in Vienna by his friend and fellow traveller Václav Bolemlír Nebeský, who was instrumental in Kapper's decision to begin writing poetry also in Czech, and subsequently also to publish his Czech-written collections. His intention in doing so was to clearly demonstrate the pertinence of the idea that the Jewish intelligentsia living in the Czech lands, whose native language was predominantly German, could and indeed should contribute to the nascent Czech national literature.

However, of decisive and entirely fundamental significance for Kapper's lifelong interest in, or rather fascination with South Slavic culture, was above all his encounter and subsequently ensuing friendship with (or perhaps more precisely his admiration for) Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the distinguished Serbian linguist and ethnographer. Kapper's respect and the ardent relationship he harboured for Karadžić can be seen in his text 'Vuk Stefanović Karadžić. A Biographical Sketch', which Kapper published in four issues of the magazine *Květy* in (Kapper 1867a),<sup>8</sup> thus three years after Karadžić's death: 'For all the Slavic nations shall honour him throughout the ages, his name is and shall forever be held in the greatest esteem among all the patriots of the world' (*ibid.*, p. 86).

In this text, Kapper presented Karadžić's life story in considerably idealised form. This is most probably based on what Karadžić himself narrated to him in person about his childhood, adolescence and other events in adulthood. Kapper's account of Karadžić's life is of the character of an almost mythologising romantic story about a boy from humble origins, with a strict parental upbringing, who from his childhood years yearned for education, listened to Serbian national songs by a blind singer and his mother, and then wrote them down in ink he had made with his own hands while attending to his father's meagre herd, for the sake of recording the heritage of his oppressed nation. At the age of sixteen he left to join the uprising, hiding his notebook

<sup>7</sup> Kapper was later included in the collection *Slavische Melodien* (Kapper 1844).

<sup>8</sup> By coincidence in the year in which Karadžić's form of standard Serbian language was definitively accepted.



containing the national songs he had set down on paper in his father's house. However, the house and the textbook inside it were reduced to ashes during the Turkish suppression of the uprising. The boy thus set out into the world, where he encountered all kinds of pitfalls and adversities, in order to achieve what he desired: education and the preservation of the Serbian national treasure, namely its traditional literary monuments.

Kapper continues further, depicting the events of Karadžić's adult life also in a similar spirit. The way in which Kapper presents Karadžić's life tells us more about Kapper's relationship to Karadžić than it would had it been an impartial narration of Karadžić's life story. In relation to Kapper, Karadžić played the role of an initiator into the realm of Serbian national poetry, and it may be inferred that Karadžić's affection for Kapper was all the more valuable to Kapper the more painfully he felt his rejection by Havlíček and his Czech circles. It is evident also from the diction of two of Kapper's preserved letters addressed to Karadžić (Štěpánková-Weingartová 1958, pp. 299–300), one of which is written in rather inept Serbian and undated, while the other is written in German and dated 12 March 1852, that Kapper's relationship towards Karadžić was highly respectful, and that Kapper greatly appreciated Karadžić's affection for him.

Siegfried Kapper published his first book, the collection *Slavische Melodien*,<sup>9</sup> in 1844, and within the Austrian and German literary environment it gained a favourable reception (see e.g. Anonymous 1844, pp. 36–38). A very positive review was published also in the Czech magazine *Květy* (Nebeský [W. N.] 1844, p. 28). One of four sections (12 compositions), entitled 'Aus Illyrien', is devoted to South Slavic folk songs.<sup>10</sup> This is a revised version of the motifs which Kapper encountered in the aforementioned collection *Volklieder der Serben* by Talvj and in Wilhelm Gerhard's collection *Wila. Serbische Volklieder und Heldenmärchen* (1828), as well as in Mérimée's mystifying imitation of Illyrian folk songs *La Guzla, ou Choix de poésies illyriques, recueillies dans la Dalmatie, la Croatie et l'Herzégovine* (1827; see Čurčin 1905, p. 195).<sup>11</sup>

Václav Bolemír Nebeský, the author of the Czech review (signed with the initials W. N.), said the following about Kapper's style of working:

[...] *these are neither translations nor imitations of national songs, but poems in their own right. Mr. Kapper has been engaging himself with our national poetic tradition, although he has brought with him a large and predominant resource of modern elements, in particular German poetry; [...] This is interwoven in the poems of Mr. Kapper with Slavic veins and threads, in which our voice stands out; they are*

9 In a note on the poem 'Liebe laßt sich nicht hehlen' published in *Sonntagsblätter* (Kapper 1843a, p. 740), the name of this future collection is stated as *Liederstimmen der Slaven*, in a note on the poem 'Der Flüchtling in Czernagora', published in the same periodical one month later (Kapper 1843b, p. 860), the name *Slavische Melodien* is now used.

10 The other three sections are devoted to Slovak (49 poems), Czech (29 poems) and Moravian (29 poems) folk songs.

11 Here Čurčin states directly: '[...] this is a loose adaptation of a number of motifs adopted from Talvj or from Gerhard, similarly as in the case of the freely inventive writing in Mérimée's "Illyrian" costume' (Čurčin 1905, p. 195).



*variations on our motifs, a modern instrumentation of our simple sounds. Sometimes it is an almost free translation of a national song, sometimes he has used a line or a verse and made of it a whole poem, sometimes he has taken images, ideas, turns of phrase or feelings from a number of poems and poured everything into one; sometimes our own national song can only be heard in the distance* (Nebeský [W. N.] 1844, p. 28).



We present this extensive quotation from Nebeský's review because it represents an apposite expression of Siegfried Kapper's manner of creative activity, not only in the case of this collection but also with regard to his poetic output, mediating national traditions during the course of the following three decades.

Two years after the German-written collection *Slavische Melodien*, Kapper published his Czech-written *České listy* (Kapper 1846). The critical response that this collection generated is the best known chapter in the life and work of Siegfried Kapper in Czech literary history, and as a result we shall not deal with it here. However, it is necessary to recall at this point that it was Havlíček's negative reaction in particular (Havlíček 1846) that resulted in Kapper ceasing to publish in Czech for several years, though he then clung all the more to his passion for the literary culture of the South Slavs of the Western Balkans. Therefore, to this extent the 'České listy affair' is important also for our own investigation.

Siegfried Kapper graduated in Vienna on 2 January 1847, and from 1 May 1847 to 6 February 1848 he practised the medical profession in the Croatian town of Karlovac.<sup>12</sup> There can be no doubt that he chose Karlovac as the place to pursue his profession precisely because of his literary penchant for that region, which was an essential component of his life (see e.g. Wurzbach 1863, pp. 451–452).<sup>13</sup> He also made use of his professional engagement in order to travel throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, Dalmatia and the Kvarner Islands (Stratimirović 1937, p. 2).

Little information is available about Kapper's brief engagement in Karlovac. It is recalled in an article by the Zagreb lawyer Lavoslav Šik dated 1931 entitled 'Jevrejski liječnici u Jugoslaviji', published in the journal *Liječnički Vijesnik* (Šik 1931, pp. 440–442), focusing on a group of almost twenty Jewish doctors working within the territory of the states of former Yugoslavia, one of whom was Kapper. The article presents Kapper as a 'courageous warrior for the rights of the South Slavs, a loyal son of his Czech homeland and a proud, self-confident devotee of Jewishness' (*ibid.*, p. 440). However, the article provides practically no information about the performance of his medical practice in Karlovac. Šik mentions a number of texts about Kapper written by both Czech and South Slavic scholars, and with reference to the Czech reception of Kapper recounts that he was 'praised by the Zionists, just as he was by the assimilationists of the opposite persuasion' (*ibid.*, p. 442). Nevertheless, there is not a single mention of the critical reception encountered by his collection

12 At this time no medical faculty yet existed within the South Slavic territory of the Western Balkans.

13 '[...] in order that, in direct contact with the people and environment, he could deepen and broaden his studies and research of the South Slavs, to which he had already devoted himself for many years.'



*České listy*. On the contrary, it judges the poems of *České listy* to be of 'especial value' with reference to the fact that their author was the first to attempt to bring together the Czech and Jewish nations within the Czech lands (ibid.).

During the time of his residence in Karlovac, Kapper became friendly with a number of individuals from the circles of the young liberally-oriented intellectuals of Karlovac, including the lawyer and columnist Dragutin Kušljan,<sup>14</sup> who attended the Prague Slavic Congress of 1848, and the Slavic scholar and columnist Imbre (Emerich) Ignjatijević Tkalac. He was also in personal contact with Ivan Mažuranić, a distinguished personage of Croatian culture, society and politics of the day, who at that time held the position of senator of the city of Karlovac.

At the beginning of February 1848 Kapper embarked on a further journey to the Slovene Littoral and Venice, but on 20 February he returned to Vienna due to the political and social upheavals that were in progress, thus his planned trip through the Danube region came to fruition only in part. In Vienna he was entirely consumed by the turbulent events, in which he actively participated and reported on as a correspondent. However, this activity prevented him from concentrating on South Slavic literature as he had done in the preceding years. Although he did not cease to write poetry, the German-written collection *Befreite lieder. Dem jungen Oesterreich*, published in 1848, contains poems primarily of a socially and socio-politically engaged and tentative nature.

During this period Kapper published articles under the initials D. L. K. in the Viennese magazine *Sonntagsblätter*, edited by L. A. Frankl. In the articles 'Karlovacer Berichte', 'Die ungarisch-kroatischen Wirren' and 'Kroatische Tage' he asserted the rights of the Croatian nation (see Šik 1931, p. 441).

In the years 1850–1851 he again began travelling around the South Slavic countries. During 1850 he travelled through Slavonia, Vojvodina, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, and in the following year he returned once more to travel through the region (Stratimirović 1937, p. 2).

In Berlin in 1851 he anonymously published the book *Die serbische Bewegung in Südungarn*, which was translated into Serbian by Svetozar I. Zdravković and published still during the course of Kapper's life — also anonymously — in two volumes with the title of *Srpski pokret v južnoj Ugarskoj (1848)* in the years 1870 (volume one) and 1879 (volume two).

Kapper also published travelogues written in German about his journeys through the South Slavic countries, which are practically unknown within the Czech environment. By contrast, they received considerable acclaim in the Serbian and Croatian milieu. *Südslawische Wanderungen* was published in book form in two volumes. The first volume of the *Südslawische Wanderungen* travelogue was published in Serbian in 1935 under the title *Po našem Podunavlju. Putopis iz 1850 godine*, translated by Đorđe Stratimirović (Kaper 1935). The title appositely captures Kapper's journey from Novi Sad via Karlovac and Zemun to Belgrade. Both volumes of Kapper's *Südslawische*

<sup>14</sup> Three letters from Kapper have been preserved from March 1848, addressed to Kušljan, informing his friend of the political events then taking place. The second of these (dated 12 March 1848) is signed using Kapper's pseudonym Simo Putt (see Maixner — Jakić — Esih 1950, pp. 171–174).



*Wanderungen* were finally first published in Serbian under the title *Krstarenja po južnoslavenskim krajevima* in 2005, both translated by Tomislav Bekić (Kaper 2005).

Kapper's narration of his journey to Belgrade begins with his arrival in Novi Sad by steamship on the Danube. Kapper visited Novi Sad after the town had been damaged by heavy artillery fire from the Petrovaradin fortress, burned down and subsequently looted by the Hungarians and Croats (12 June 1849). Kapper's poignant description of the oppressive atmosphere in the ruined and depopulated city is accompanied by an erudite account of the events of the time, and its distinctive flavour is further augmented by a conversation that takes place between the traveller, passing through the town, and a small Jewish boy for whom carrying luggage represents his sole means of supporting his family. The traveller's empathetic account of the plight of the Jewish boy evokes the verses from Kapper's poem 'Ben-oni' from *České listy*:

*O why does that boy stand alone  
So far from the noisy crowd  
As if he feared to raise  
His lowered head to that same joy  
That they cherish?  
[...]  
'The son of a Jew is he!' — That is the whole of his guilt  
The reason why he stands alone  
The reason why the denial of the Son  
will cut you off from the source of mirth  
(Kapper 1846, pp. 20–21, emphasis by the author of the poem).*

Kapper presents the urban scenery of Belgrade in a hugely contrasting manner. Set against the grey and oppressive emptiness of Novi Sad, here he suddenly encounters the oriental colour and spontaneous vitality of a city in which Serbs and Turks,<sup>15</sup> as well as representatives of other nations, including Jews, coexist companionably side by side. It is evident from Kapper's description that he is impressed by this atmosphere of cosmopolitanism and inter-religious tolerance:

*Here, before my eyes, a brightly coloured life was in full swing; all those unusual and diverse things and people, colours and costumes, presented a genuine refreshment for eyes accustomed to indistinct and monotonous fashion! It appeared as if a painter's canvas were spread out before us, swarming with vividly adorned people and groups. With a little fantasy one could imagine that one was somewhere in the Orient or perhaps somewhere in one of the tales from One Thousand and One Nights (Kaper 2005, p. 71).*

Kapper composes this travelogue from an account in the narrative present, which he combines with a description of the setting and with passages of dialogue which

15 The relations between the Christian Slavs and the Turks were the centre of Kapper's interest in a further text of a travelogue nature, *Christen und Türken. Ein Skizzenbuch von der Save bis zum Eisernen Thor* (Kapper 1854).



present conversations with the people he encounters during his travels, either intentionally or by chance, whether they are respected and renowned, or for example nameless fellow travellers or merchants. The environment is described very vividly and convincingly, which is due to the fact that it is presented as the living space of the people therein, as a space in relation to the people who inhabit it.

Another important element of Kapper's text is the explanatory passages organically incorporated into the narrative, relating to the socio-political situation of the time in Central Europe, but also in particular the history, literature, language and national traditions of the Danube region he visited.

Overall Kapper's travelogue is very skilfully constructed and engagingly presented, in which the individual elements (narration, description, dialogue and explanation) are balanced, mutually complementary and illuminating. Kapper's text is valuable not only because it provides us with a re-presentation of a foreign (other) everyday life of that time to which he is open and endeavours to comprehend, and because it is interwoven with a consequent interpretation of the events of the time, but also because through its narration of the 'foreign' and the 'familiar' it illuminates the standpoint of Siegfried Kapper himself as a traveller.

Kapper's travelogues were the focus of an entire chapter in the monograph *Deutsche Reisebeschreibungen über Serbien und Montenegro* by the Serbian literary critic Zoran Konstantinović, entitled 'Siegfried Kapper als Reisebeschreiber' (Konstantinović 1960, pp. 67–79).

However, Kapper's travels throughout the South Slavic countries bore fruit not only in the form of travelogues, but also poetic texts. In the aforementioned travelogue, Kapper recounts: 'I arrived here with the hope and conviction that I would gather sufficient material relating to the last battles, and that I would also find some new poem' (Kaper 2005, p. 98).

In 1852 Kapper published the German-written collection of Serbian national poems *Gesänge der Serben*, furnished with an extensive introduction and voluminous footnotes. As Jan Krejčí convincingly demonstrates, a comparison of Kapper's collection with Karadžić's *Srpske narodne pjesme* shows that both collections overlap in their content. He assesses Kapper's poems as follows: 'They can be considered to be *translations*. In them Kapper had no other intention than to convey them in German language. Nothing is changed even by his attempt to create cycles by placing together poems that either relate to the same subject directly or are at least in a mutual correlation, and by marking the relevant section with a distinctive heading' (Krejčí 1911, p. 15).

Kapper did not resolve to publish the book edition of his Czech revision of Serbian national poetry until twenty years later (although he had already published some of the poems in journals in the 1860s), under the title *Zpěvy lidu srbského* (Songs of the Serbian People; Kapper 1872). Two years later he then published a second volume under the same title (Kapper 1874).

In the same year in which he published *Gesänge der Serben* he was also working on the tragedy 'Kara Djordje', as he mentions in a letter addressed to Vuk Stefanović Karadžić dated 12 March 1852: 'My tragedy "Kara Djordje" is now half way through its third act, and I hope to complete it in the summer of this year' (Štěpánková-Weingartová 1958, p. 299). However, Kapper evidently never completed and published any tragedy under this title. Under the title 'Kara — Djordje' he published only

a German-written portrait of Karađorđe Petrović, the father of the famous Serbian Karađorđević dynasty (Kapper 1857–1858).

Kapper considered his most essential work in terms of conveying Serbian national poetry to be his epic, which he first of all published under the title *Lazar der Serbencar. Nach serbischen Sagen und Heldengesängen von Siegfried Kapper* (Kapper 1851) and later renamed *Fürst Lazar. Epische Dichtung nach serbischen Sagen und Heldengesängen von Siegfried Kapper* (Kapper 1853).

Kapper began working on this epic when still working in the Croatian town of Karlovac, as he narrates in his autobiographical text: ‘In Croatia I became intimately acquainted with the history and heroic poetry of the Serbs, and it is there that I wrote “Knez Lazar”’ (quoted according to Donath 1934, p. 377).

In this work Kapper rewrote material concerning an iconic (for the Serbian nation) figure from Serbian history, a symbol of resistance against the Turks, Prince Lazar, who was killed in the battle of Kosovo field. Kapper (similarly to Grimm) was convinced that the individual surviving poems of the Serbian national tradition narrating the battle of Kosovo field and Prince Lazar were fragments of a greater whole, which he intended to reconstruct through the means of his epic.

*Fürst Lazar* underwent a series of amendments as against the original, from the writing of the punctuation or changes in the orthography, through changes in the lexicon and word order to changes in the composition or content: for example, the poem ‘Der Tag von Kossowo’ is divided into two poems, of which the second bears the title ‘Zwei Sterbende’ (in the sixth book edition of *Fürst Lazar*). The entire epic is composed of the preface ‘Kossowo’ and the following six volumes, of which each contains from three to eight poems. The individual volumes relate in chronological order to the specific historical period of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the tragic events were played out on Kosovo field.

Kapper’s epic drew the attention of both Serbian and Croatian scholars. As early as in 1905 it was dealt with in the doctoral thesis *Das serbische Volkslied in der deutschen Literatur* by the Serbian scholar of German and Slavic studies Milan Ćurčin, who focused on Kapper’s work especially in his final subchapter ‘Siegfried Kapper und J. N. Vogl’ (Ćurčin 1905, pp. 190–200).

Twelve years later a detailed comparative analysis was published by the Croatian scholar Slava Pecinovski-Rastovčan, entitled ‘Kapperova “Lazarica” i naša narodna pjesma’, in which she compared Kapper’s epic with Vuk Stefanović Karadžić’s collection *Srpske narodne pjesme* (Pecinovský-Rastovčan 1917). In her study she set herself the chief objective of identifying and separating Kapper’s actual translation from his loose revision of Karadžić’s work. In her study, she demonstrated thoroughly and in detail (often verse by verse) where Kapper remains faithful to Karadžić’s original and where the totality of his composition required him to supplement creative additions to the tale of Kosovo.

South Slavic scholars held Kapper’s epic *Fürst Lazar* in high esteem, and appreciated Kapper’s skill in conveying their own national literary monuments in poetic form. Slava Pecinovski-Rastovčan describes how Kapper, who was very well acquainted with traditional Serbian national poetry, had succeeded in ‘adopting the spirit of the nation, as a result of which it was easy for him to compose poetry in the same tone’ (ibid., p. 173). In connection with this epic, Milan Ćurčin spoke of





Kapper as the 'most worthy representative and poetic mediator of Serbian folk songs' (Čurčin 1905, p. 195), and Sreten J. Stojković states the following about Kapper's epic of Prince Lazar: 'His epic is interwoven with powerful romance and beautiful poetry, and so it is a delight to read for all, including those who may not be imbued with Serbian sentiment' (Stojković 1901, p. 87).

A somewhat mysterious and rather opaque chapter in the life and work of Siegfried Kapper is constituted by his work on the Czech version of this epic, or more precisely speaking the existence of a manuscript of this intended version which was in preparation. It is clearly evident from a whole range of sources (autobiographies, obituaries, literary-historical studies from various historical periods and notes in the press of the day) that Kapper was preparing a Czech version of the Prince Lazar epic, but it is less clear as to the time frame in which he did so and whether it was ever completed, and if so, what form it was in. Mojmír Otruba, the author of the entry 'Siegfried Kapper' in *Lexikon české literatury* (Lexicon of Czech Literature), in the dictionary formulation of the entry resorts to a modal form of expression regarding Kapper's Czech version of the epic: 'the work probably remained unfinished' (Otruba 1993, p. 655).

In the *Nový pražský kalendář pro město i pro venkov* (New Prague Calendar for Town and Country) compiled by Jakub Malý in 1880, vague information is provided in the portrait of Kapper: 'In the years 1872–74 his *Zpěvy lidu srbského* was published, and at the same time he conceived the idea of a Czech reworking of his Tsar Lazar' (Malý 1880, p. 103).

It is a documented fact that a preserved fragment of the manuscript of 'Knez Lazar' was donated to the National Museum by his widow Anna on 25 September 1903 (Bartoš 1926, p. 11).

In his portrait of Siegfried Kapper, published on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kapper's death, Jaroslav Kamper reflects upon the fate of the manuscript of Kapper's 'Knez Lazar', and contrary to Mojmír Otruba's view contends that it is more probable that Kapper completed the manuscript:

*Did the poet complete it in manuscript form and later, with the exception of the first few songs, lose all the other parts? Or was it never finished at all, with the poet, embittered and disgruntled at the failures that his Czech works had encountered, as well as by the mistrust that had resulted from his honest endeavours, set down his pen before he completed the work? It appears that the first scenario is more probable. The manuscript has been embellished by another's hand, which has entered a number of expressions in pencil as a substitute for those used by the poet, which may have appeared less appropriate in the view of the editor of the manuscript. We do not know the identity of this literary friend to whom Kapper presented his work. We do not know if it was V. B. Nebeský, a faithful comrade of the poet and an ardent protector of his Czech Muse, or someone else from Kapper's small circle of literary friends. However, it is more probable that the poet submitted the entire manuscript (the other parts of which were later lost, when and how we do not know) to this unknown critic than that he presented only a part of his work for assessment, and moreover a part so incomplete that it would not even permit a secure judgement regarding the value, composition and arrangement of the work. It is also scarcely admissible that*

*Kapper would have read to his literary friends only the beginning of the work, and thus it is highly probable that the Czech ‘Knez Lazar’ was completed, and that we were robbed of its other sections only by some fateful chance occurrence (Kamper 1904–05, p. 63).*



Jan Krejčí, who devoted considerable attention to the work of Siegfried Kapper, also confirmed this ‘mystery’ surrounding Kapper’s manuscript, when he wrote in 1919 about Kapper’s ‘great Slavic epic “Kněz Lazar”,<sup>16</sup> of which, by means of some mishap thus far inexplicable, only a fragment has been preserved’ (Krejčí 1919, p. 22). It also ensues from his formulation that he presumed the existence of the finished work. A mention in an obituary of Kapper by the Croatian poet and critic August Šenoa also creates the impression that Kapper’s Czech-written work ‘Knez Lazar’ had been completed by the author (see Šenoa 1879, p. 404).

In my research into the existence of Kapper’s manuscript, I came upon a brief note in *Květy* from 20 April 1871, which informs us without any doubts that Kapper’s ‘Knez Lazar’ was completed: ‘Dr. Siegfried Kapper produced his “Tsar Lazar” in a Czech version. This rendering is not a translation of the same poem from German, but in many respects an entirely independent work’ (Anonymous 1871, p. 127).

In 1874 a sample of Kapper’s poetic composition ‘Knez Lazar’ was published in *Lumír*, specifically part VIII, ‘Guslar’. A footnote is attached to the title of the composition, which reads: ‘The poem shall be published in its entirety by the press of the bookshop of Dr. Grégr and Ferdinand Dattl’ (Kapper 1874b, p. 145).

It is stated in section ‘V. Reading of manuscripts and new features from Czech literature’ in the records of the activity of the Artists’ Forum that on 14 March 1874 Siegfried Kapper presented a reading from his work, which was listed in the records under the title of ‘Kněz Lazar’ (Jelínek 1913, p. XVI). A question remains as to whether Kapper appeared with an unfinished fragment (which is possible), and also as to whether his presentation resulted in him never finishing ‘Kněz Lazar’, as well as whether this presentation caused Kapper to end his co-operation with the Artists’ Forum. This cannot be ascertained from the records and entries on the activity of the Artists’ Forum. Nevertheless, the above entry is the last record of Kapper’s participation in the programme of the Artists’ Forum.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Within the Czech environment the title ‘Kněz Lazar’ (Priest Lazar) was sometimes used for the Czech version of Kapper’s work, despite the fact that in Serbian ‘knez’ means ‘prince’ and not ‘priest’.

<sup>17</sup> Kapper co-operated with the Artists’ Forum from the time of its foundation. On 9 February 1867 he presented a lecture in the forum on the theme of ‘How to read contentious passages in the Dvůr Králové Manuscript’ (Kapper was a defender of the authenticity of the *Manuscripts*, but in his lecture he expressed doubts concerning the punctuation and word order contained therein). One month later (9 March 1867) he also gave a lecture entitled ‘The poet Karolides on the genealogical dates of Pavel Skála of Zhoř’. His name is listed on the date of 16 March 1867 in the section ‘I. Interviews’ on the theme of ‘Tragedy. Tragicism’, as well as the name of Hálek. On 8 January 1870 Kapper held a conversation with Sabina, Hálek and Krajník on the theme of ‘On translations’. On 11 January 1873 he held a discussion with Barák, Vlček, Urbánek, Hauf, Pražák, Zákrejs and Kundrát concerning the reorganisation of the life of the forum, and on 29 November of the same year he took part in a debate on





In a review of Kapper's later work *Gusle, ohlasy písní černohorských* (*Gusle, Echoes of the Songs of Montenegro*) published in *Národní listy* dated 2 July 1875, Jan Neruda mentioned that he was still awaiting the publication of Kapper's Czech epic: 'Immediately afterwards he focused his attention on his Serbian songs. He selected from their narrative wealth to create his epic, superb cycle "Fuerst Lazar". Now he is reportedly revising this poem in Czech form, and shall also publish the original in Czech. It is a shame that he did not write it in Czech in the first place!' (Neruda 1875, p. 1).

However, in a review of a book by S. Singer in 1882, František Chalupa wrote that 'based on national folk songs, Siegfried Kapper wrote the great poem *Lazar der Serbenar*, which was published in Vienna in 1851 by František Lev. It contains twenty-four songs. Kapper intended to render this poem also in Czech, and in his manuscript retained eleven songs from the poem *Knez Lazar*' (Chalupa 1882, p. 142).

Whether Kapper's full manuscript of his Czech version of 'Knez Lazar' was lost or was never produced, the report that this work was in preparation generated positive anticipations within the Czech literary community. At the same time, on the basis of preserved fragments of the manuscript, later scholars also judged the literary qualities of the work as a whole. For example, Jaroslav Kamper was of the opinion that Kapper's Czech 'Knez Lazar' had been completed by the author, and based on the surviving fragments of the manuscript stated the following: 'In my humble opinion this is Kapper's most mature and artistically valuable work, providing a testimony, especially in terms of diction, to the wealth of the poet's vocabulary and his formal skill' (Kamper 1904–05, p. 71).

However, Kapper focused not only on the reworking of Serbian national poetry, but also published numerous articles on the Serbian literary tradition. Most of these were published in German, although in 1867 Kapper published a more expansive text as a sequel, under the title 'Recollections of the Glorious Serbian Nation' (Kapper 1867b).

In the Czech literary community it was probably Kapper's *Pohádky přímořské* (*Seaside Tales*, Kapper 1873) that ultimately won him the greatest acclaim. A brief note on the publication of the book with a very positive review was published immediately following the book's publication in *Lumír* (Anonymous 1873, p. 556).

As Ferdinand Schulz recounts in his portrait of Kapper, it was in particular one of his fairytales entitled 'Talas' (Kapper 1865), a story already published previously in the magazine *Květy*, which 'upon its publication generated no small sensation within the circles of our poetic society of the time, and in its way remains unparalleled to this day in our country' (Schulz 1879, p. 699).<sup>18</sup>

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the theme of 'How poetry writing began'. He gave a lecture on the theme of South Slavic literature on 25 April 1868 ('On the national songs of Herzegovina') and 25 October 1873 ('The national songs of Serbia, especially the legends'). He subsequently presented a lecture on general themes of the South Slavic nations, their history and culture on 23 May 1868, entitled 'The Slavic idea in the songs of Serbia and Montenegro' (see Jelínek 1913, pp. I–XXV).

18 As early as in 1870, in an unsigned article with the title of Dr. Siegfried Kapper, the editorial board of *Květy* returns to this fairytale by Kapper: 'Indeed, if Kapper had written only his seaside tale "Talas", which we printed in the first annual of unillustrated "Květy", his reputation would be assured in Czech literature' (Anonymous 1870, p. 366).





It is also symptomatic that *Pohádky přímořské* is the only book of Kapper's to have been republished in Czech (Kapper 1998).

Another revision of South Slavic national poetry was published by Kapper under the title *Gusle, ohlasy písní černohorských* in 1875. The author explains the term 'ohlasy' (echoes) in his final 'Reminder' concerning the verses of the collection in a rather negative delineation: they are neither 'translations' nor 'original poems'. The positive definition of the 'echoes' is rather of a metaphorical nature: 'They are *images* from the steep mountains towering above the Adriatic, upon which the Slavic spirit is preparing for a great battle for Slavic freedom from centuries of oppression by barbarous nations' (Kapper 1875, pp. 191–192, emphasis by author of collection).

Kapper's collection received both favourable critical attention and a warm reception on the part of readers. In *Ženské listy* the publication of *Gusle* was welcomed by Eliška Krásnohorská, who highly appreciated Kapper's aspiration to convey the South Slavic literary culture: 'Dr. Kapper narrates charmingly, with heartfelt veracity, absorbingly and picturesquely' (Krásnohorská [E. K.] 1875, p. 142), despite her subsequently expressed reservations. She also stated explicitly that she was unable to assess Kapper's authorial input in the reworking of the Montenegrin songs.

Krásnohorská's principal reservations regarding Kapper's collection consist in the fact that 1) 'his versification is somehow strangely convulsive, not flowing, the cause of which can undoubtedly be sought in the non-Czech, unnatural composition of the sentences' (*ibid.*, p. 143), as well as in the fact that 2) the epic testimonies are inappropriately (often incongruously) forced into the verses. However, Krásnohorská avoids identifying these shortcomings as a consequence of Kapper's insufficient feel for the Czech language, and attempts to moderate her critical formulations by applying them as a generalisation: 'but with Kapper, as with the great majority of today's poets, we find a diction so deformed that in prose it could certainly not count as beauty' (*ibid.*). Or: 'It seems that our poets abhor the natural charm of our diction, and instead create various knots and spikes upon it, which in addition to their ugliness also lend it a flavour of affectation' (*ibid.*). Ultimately, however, Krásnohorská also draws attention to a number of evident Germanicisms (e.g. 'na ženu že slyšel') and a series of grammatical errors, which the edition of *Gusle* contains in abundance. Nevertheless, she justifies even these reservations as a consequence of the 'prevailing fashion of ugliness', and not as a deficiency of Kapper's feeling for writing poetry in Czech language.

The review of *Gusle* published by Josef Holeček (under the initials J. H.) in *Lumír* in the same year was in a very similar spirit. In particular the reviewer highly rated the song 'Svatba Maksima Crnojeviće' (The Wedding of Maksim Cronojević), which he even ranked among 'the most accomplished epic poems of all time' (Holeček [J. H.] 1875, p. 424). However, his fundamental critical reservations are in principle identical to those expressed by Krásnohorská: what in places is its very poorly comprehensible syntax, and the clumsy forcing of testimonies into verses:

*If we are reading a national poem — and perhaps only an echo of it — then we want every verse to contain also the completed idea which the very simplicity of the national song entails. As a result, an irksome impression is created by the dragging of*



*a single idea from the end of the first verse into the beginning of the second, in which once again a new idea is begun and is once again unfinished, of which many examples can be found in Gusle (ibid., emphasis by author of review).*

One more review was also published. The author was Jan Neruda, whose name appears in connection with Siegfried Kapper precisely in those texts dealing with the anti-Semitic sentiments in Czech society of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, Neruda's review of Kapper's *Gusle* is positive in its entirety, and contains no reservations whatsoever. Neruda concurred with Holeček in regarding the composition 'Svatba Maksima Crnojeviće' as the finest of the entire collection (Neruda 1875, p. 1).

Towards the end of his life, Siegfried Kapper focused primarily on the literary culture, traditions and history of the Montenegrins. Three extensive studies ('Das Fürstentum Montenegro', 'Montenegrinische Skizzen' and 'Montenegro Tagebuchblätter'), which he published only in magazines in German in the years of 1875 and 1876, were compiled into a book compendium by the editor and translator Tomislav Bekić, and published in Serbian in 1999 under the title *O Crnoj Gori* (Kaper 1999).

It therefore ensues from the above reviews of Kapper's later works that it was far from the case that Kapper's work did not receive attention in the Czech society of the 1870s, or that it was even dismissed, as it may appear to scholars focusing particularly on the period of the 1840s, when Kapper published *České listy*.

When Siegfried Kapper died on 7 June 1879, in addition to the Czech periodicals *Osvěta*, *Květy* and *Humoristické listy*, an obituary of Kapper appeared also in the then highly influential Croatian journal *Vienac*. The author of the obituary was the aforementioned distinguished Croatian writer and critic August Šenoa, who in the text did not neglect to mention that he knew Kapper personally. He described Kapper as a 'modest, highly educated and refined' person, who was well versed in Croatian language.<sup>19</sup> He also mentioned Kapper's friendship with Mažuranić and Kušljan. Of Kapper's works he mentions 'several highly interesting travelogue sketches from our lands', *Přímořské pohádky* and *Lazariáda*, and notes that he also published an excellent study on Montenegrin schools in *Vienac*<sup>20</sup> (Šenoa 1879, p. 404).

During the course of his life, Siegfried Kapper published translations of his poems or short texts on South Slavic poetry and traditions also in other South Slavic journals, such as *Ljubljanski časnik* (1850), *Triglav* (1865), *Dragoljub* (1868) or *Matica* (1869; see Goldstein, entry 'Siegfried Kapper').

For Siegfried Kapper — as ensues from his articles on South Slavic literatures and cultures, and from texts of a travelogue or historical-political nature — aesthetic value was not of primary importance in his revision of original works. Kapper undoubtedly endeavoured assiduously to achieve the most accomplished and powerful poetic expression, but he was nevertheless convinced that it was through an acquaintance with national poetry that the past and character (i.e. culture, politics and morality) of individual nations could be better understood, and that through

19 According to Ivan Pederin, Šenoa's praise of Kapper's knowledge of both Czech and Croatian represented a veiled rebuke of Croatian Jews, who (similarly to Czech Jews) spoke and wrote predominantly in German (Pederin 2013, p. 150).

20 Here he had in mind the text 'Škole u Crnoj Gori' (Kapper 1877).

such an acquaintance it would then ultimately be possible to arrive at a mutual understanding between nations. It was towards this aim above all that his literary work was directed.

At present Siegfried Kapper and his work find themselves in a somewhat paradoxical situation: an author who, in a time when national self-determination was considered a defining idea and value, endeavoured to act as a mediator between German, Czech and a number of South Slavic cultures (and at the same time was an advocate of religious tolerance) has fallen into oblivion in a society which presents its institutionally proclaimed values such as internationalism, pluralism and freedom of religious persuasion as key priorities.

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