

## UNCLE TOM'S CABIN IN THE SLOVENE LANGUAGE

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Harriet Beecher-Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Negro Life in the Slave States of America* (1852) is one of the American books that have been most often translated, issued and reprinted in Slovene. The article will present a few facts about the numerous translations, from the first ones to those sold in today's bookshops.

In 1853, only a year after the first publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the Slovenes got the translation of this American 19th century best-seller. As if the early translation was not surprising enough, there were even two translators who wanted to bring the famous book to Slovene readers: *Janez Božič* and *Franc Malavašič*. *Janez Božič* (1829 - 1884) did the translation as a student of theology in Ljubljana. After his ordination he worked as a chaplain and a teacher and only in 1858 started studying classical and Slavonic philology in Vienna. *Franc Malavašič* (1818 - 1863), on the other hand, was trained as an army surgeon in Ljubljana. He devoted nevertheless most of his time to writing (drama, prose and poetry) and translation work. After 1850 he mainly translated and adapted drama and prose from German into Slovene - it is in this period that he adapted H.Beecher-Stowe's novel.

The adaptation of *Janez Božič*, entitled *Stric Tomaž ali življenje zamorcov v Ameriki (od Henrijete Stowe)*, was published by *Janez Leon* in Celovec; *Franc Malavašič's* adaptation, *Stric Tomova koč, ali življenje zamorcov v robnih državah severne Amerike*, was published in Ljubljana by *Janez Giontini*.

The fact that there were two Slovene translations on the market can be considered as a proof that in the middle of the 19th century Slovenes were well-informed at least about the most remarkable international contemporary literary events. At the same time the two books, translated from German, prove that the main source through which the Slovenes came in touch with American literature was the German book market. Even if both translations have the same German source the two books do differ, accordingly they will be presented in contrast.

Both translators have preceded the text with an introduction. *Franc Malavašič* starts his by stressing the importance of the book that has been translated into almost all the languages of "civilised" nations. Afterwards, in order to help the reader understand the novel, he explains the terms presumably unknown in the Slovene environment. He thus explains the name of the "United States of America" and the geographical expression "North-American," as well as the terms used to

denote people whose predecessors belonged to the white and black human race, e.g. mulatto, quadroon. With the same objective, i.e. wanting to facilitate the comprehension, he does not only mention the USA monetary unit, but also indicates its comparative value to the currency used in Slovenia.

The second part of the introduction is characterised above all by a moralistic tone. Malavašič points out that even in the States where slavery is permitted by legislation there are masters who treat their slaves better than some Slovenes deal with their domestic servants. In the conclusion his wish that American slaves may be free one day is expressed.

Janez Božič also first of all brings the information about the importance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: he declares that no contemporary literary work has attracted so much attention and mentions that it has already been translated into some other Slavic languages. He additionally tells that his adaptation is made from the German translation. Supposing that all readers do not know what evil slavery is, the translator presents the condemnation that H.Beecher-Stowe wrote in the 45. chapter (Concluding Remarks) of the novel: "Nothing of tragedy can be written, can be spoken, can be conceived, that equals the frightful reality of scenes daily and hourly acting on our shores, beneath the shadow of American laws and the shadow of the cross of Christ." (441), what is rendered as: "Nič bolj žalostnega /.../ kar bi bilo podobno temu, kar se vsako uro ...pod varstvom američanskih postav in med kristjani godi." (viii)

To facilitate the reader's geographical orientation Božič furthermore introduces the three American states - Louisiana, Ohio and Kentucky - where the novel takes place.

The second part of the introduction reveals some aspects of the moral situation among Slovenes. Despite the fact that the institution of slavery is unknown, suffering caused by immoral and unfair behaviour can be met in Slovenia, too. Discord within families has many faces and it is often rooted in alcoholism, an evil that should be eradicated by joint efforts, including those of public authorities, and not left to be fought with just by the Church. In this context the importance of education to responsibility is underlined. The sense of responsibility should be evident also in the fair treatment of domestic servants. The author reveals that the unjust ways which legally exist in the USA have their clandestine existence among Slovenes as well, as *it is from sin that slavery derives*. (xi, underlined by Božič).

The author explains various degrees of mixing between the white and the black races and thus repeatedly shows his wish to facilitate the understanding of the story. In addition his intention to make the readers sensible to the suffering and to the injustice in their own country and in their own lives is clearly expressed. There is furthermore a suggestion for those who would like to help in America: they should help the Slovene missionaries there.

The two introductions prove that both translators:

- presented the importance and the popularity of the novel on the international level;
- explained the words and expressions that Slovene readers could not be expected to comprehend;

- understood that for H.Beecher-Stowe slavery was a moral evil that poisons the life of society as a whole;
- considered the moral condition of the Slovenes and encouraged the readers to combat injustice and show compassion in their own environment.

Malavašič and Božič thus proved that they understood the importance of extra-literary elements that particularly effect the comprehension of a foreign literary work.

The analysis of the texts shows that both translators shortened and summarised many chapters where the story evolves; on the other hand they simply omitted some chapters, especially those containing less action. In spite of this procedure they managed to preserve the two parallel stories: the one about Uncle Tom and the other about the young Negro family. The original novel with 45 chapters (446 pages of the pocket edition of Bantam Classics containing the complete text of the original hard cover edition) is reduced to 9 chapters of almost the same format.

The adaptation of Janez Božič covers 155 pages: accordingly, the first chapter gives the main information of the first three chapters of the original. The same procedure can be noticed in the rest of the translation. Consequently, some lines of the action are presented in a new order. A few episodes of the same story, which are to be read in various chapters in the original, are thus placed together (and most often considerably shortened) in a single chapter. The sixth chapter, for example, includes the story of the family that succeeded in reaching Canada: this is told in the original in the chapters 13, 17 and 37. Among the omitted parts of the original there is the whole chapter 23, "Henrique," in which H.Beecher-Stowe confronts the children who have completely opposed attitudes to slaves and slavery. If it can be claimed that the adaptation in itself does not basically alter the content of the novel as a whole, this is not true for the chapter 9 in which Božič transforms Cassy's daughter into her sister, what is in contradiction with the original (chapter 43).

The adaptation is also strongly felt as far as the conclusion is concerned: the reader is only informed that George writes to one of his friends about the family's intentions to move to Liberia in order to enjoy real freedom. The Concluding Remarks (chapter 45) with H.Beecher-Stowe's evidences that her story is based on real life situation are thus completely omitted.

Franc Malavašič presented the text on 139 pages. Only three of the titles of his chapters differ from the titles found in the adaptation just presented, but even these differences are not due to the different contents of individual sections but only to other wording. The contents of the adaptations are thus basically identical.

Besides some other minor differences, Malavašič gives another ratio between a dollar and a florin than Božič and, what is much more important for the authenticity of this adaptation, Eliza is discovered to be Cassy's daughter. On the other hand Malavašič shortened the ending even more than Božič: George tells in just two sentences that he has decided to move to Liberia.

As far as proper names are concerned the two translators have followed more or less the same policy: they have left some names in the original form, as the one

of Mr. Bird, and changed the others. Among the latter there are some differences, e.g. the family name Shelby becomes Šelbi with Božič, and Želbi with Malavašič.

The two translations are accompanied by illustrations: Božič's adaptation contains 6 pictures, the one of Malavašič only 4. The illustrators are not named. This is not surprising since even the translator Janez Božič is indicated only with his initials, as J.B.

In 1888 the second revised edition of Malavašič's adaptation was published under the title *Strijc Tomova kočā ali življenje zamorcov v robnih državah svobodnih držav Severne Amerike*. The book was again published by Janez Giontini.

A new translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was issued in 1918. The translator *Silvester Košutnik* formed a new title: *Stric Tomova kočā: Povest iz suženjskega življenja*. Surprisingly enough the author is not mentioned, but there is a note "Translated from the German original." The reprinted translation that was issued in 1932 appeared with the same omission of H.Beecher-Stowe's name and the misleading information about the original language.

The book does not contain any preface or specific information for the reader but it is evident already from the Contents page that the adaptation is even shorter than the previous ones: 127 pages of the approximately the same format as the books from 1853. It seems that Košutnik translated only those parts of the text which most directly concern Tom's and George's endeavours. A new feature of the translation are the Slovenized names of protagonists: for example Eliza's husband George Harris becomes Ivan Harij. The adaptation that does not contain any illustrations was published by Anton Turk.

In 1934 the most important Slovene translation of the novel was published. Its significance is not due just to the new title, *Kočā strica Toma*, which became the standard one, but to the translated text as a whole. In addition, the accompanying texts and notes reveal a new, a more professional approach towards both, the primary source and the secondary material.

The cover page itself is a turning point as the author's name is written correctly in its complete form. Besides, there is the information that the translation is a "selection from the novel with the same title" and the annotation that *Olga Grahor* (1907 - 1985), the translator, adapted the original text and accompanied it with an introduction as well as with notes. Her text brings relevant information about the geographical, socio-historical and literary aspects of the masterpiece. At the time of the publication of *Kočā strica Toma* O.Grahor had already finished her studies of history and geography at the Ljubljana University, but it is only after the second world war that she graduated also at the Department of English (Faculty of Arts) in Ljubljana.

The Introduction gives the biography of Harriet Elisabeth Beecher-Stowe, emphasizing the facts that enabled her to be acquainted with the slavery issue. The reader is also informed that the author had to write *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853) in order to prove that her novel was founded on real knowledge of the matter.

O.Grahor did not only present the conditions which gave rise to the writing of the novel, but also explained slavery in its historical and social context. The causes and the consequences of the importation of slaves in America are raised, and the endeavours for the abolition are followed from the Quakers' fight and the American Anti-Slavery Society to the rebellion led by John Brown. The translator stresses the exceptional role of H.Beecher-Stowe who was fervently against the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) and succeeded in convincing masses of readers that slavery cannot be reconciled with Christianity.

In the presentation of the literary criticism and the artistic value of the novel among the positive traits humour and irony are accentuated; while among the elements subjected to much criticism sentimentality is stressed. The novel, particularly appreciated because of its ethical values and warm humanity, is shown as a literary creation worth of the attention of scholars as well as of the general reading public.

The translator's Introduction is followed by the Introduction H.Beecher-Stowe herself had written for the translations in Europe. The book is concluded with the Notes in which O.Grahor tells that all the names, with the exception of America, which was by then familiar to Slovenes as "Amerika," are spelled in their original form. They are even accompanied by the annotation of the pronunciation. After the explanation of a few terms, as abolition and plantation, some cultural information is given - quakers for example, are presented as an important group in the anti-slavery movement.

The fact that the translation is an adaptation is evident from the very start of the novel. Those parts of the text that are not translated are summarized in smaller print at the beginning of each chapter: e.g. the introductory text to Chapter 2 sums up most of the events of the original chapters 3, 5, and 6 and even part of Chapter 7. The remaining text of the seventh chapter forms the core of Chapter 2 - the famous story about the crossing of the Ohio river. The part of Chapter 19 in which St.Clare reveals to Ophelia what he thinks and feels about slavery and about the capitalist exploitation in England forms Chapter 6 of the translation. It is thus situated in the centre of the Slovene book, what is not surprising as the translator has considered it to be essential already in her Introduction.

*Koča Strica Toma* became the basic text for all subsequent editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the Slovene language.

After the second world war *Koča strica Toma* was first published in 1954. The translator *Olga Grahor* wrote the introduction "For the new edition of Uncle Tom's Cabin" in which she introduced the slavery issue, the author and her work to young readers. She explains that colonialists imported slaves to perform the hardest labour and that they had no rights whatsoever and that even their children became the sole property of their masters. It is stressed that H.Beecher-Stowe wrote the novel in order to protest against the enacted law prohibiting any assistance to the fugitive slaves. The writer is presented as a happy wife and mother who could not stand the idea that other wives should be separated from their husbands and children. O.Grahor presents the book as a sentimental novel in spite of the fact that it is based on real facts. She underlines that the author was not ignorant about the oppression of the working class in Europe and that she predicted a social

revolution. In conclusion the translator claims that everybody should be familiar with the novel as it expresses H.Beecher-Stowe's opposition to any form of exploitation.

Follows the word of *Kristina Brenkova* who adapted the novel. While telling that the original text had to be shortened and adapted, she emphasises that despite the adaptation "the whole story and the way of narration, and above all the basic idea and the intention of the writer are preserved." (ohranjena vsa zgodba in način pripovedovanja, predvsem pa osnovna misel in hotenje pisateljice).(6) The comparison with the original and with the 1934 issue, however, reveals the opposite. It is evident that all parts of the text where H.Beecher-Stowe claims that Christianity and slavery cannot exist together are left out. Suffice it to say that the resulting "new version" changes the message of the novel and completely distorts the author's argument and consequently the spirit of the book. Only a few examples will be given to illustrate the misrepresentation.

On the page 38 of the Slovene version the senator's wife tells to her husband, "You know, John, that I don't know anything about politics, but I know that I must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the desolate." /"Veš, John, da ne vem ničesar o politiki, toda vem, da moram nahraniti lačne, oblačiti gole in tolažiti žalostne."/ H.Beecher-Stowe, on the contrary, wrote, "Now, John, I don't know anything about politics, but I can read my Bible; and there I see that I must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the desolate; and that Bible I mean to follow."(77). When the Slovene version describes the stay of the fugitive family in the Quaker settlement all the sentences in which the noble people explain the reason of their help are left out. Among the rest also the sentence in which Simeon reassures George by saying, "Fear not, then, friend George; it is not for thee, but for God and man, we do it." The other key sentences which reveal how George started to understand the meaning of home, God and Holy Providence are not translated either.

There is another big discrepancy between the original Chapter 28 entitled "Reunion" and the Chapter 19 in the Slovene version. Even if also the latter has the same title, "Združitev," it does not adequately convey the message of the original. Several key elements are left out, as for example the importance of Mozart's Requiem in St.Clare's life and of his late mother's singing Dies Irae; or the change in Eva's father attitude towards Christianity which is expressed also in the following statement: "My view of Christianity is such that I think no man can consistently profess it without throwing the whole weight of his being against this monstrous system of injustice that lies at the foundation of our society; and if need be, sacrificing himself in the battle. That is, I mean that *I* could not be a Christian otherwise..."(312)

In the last part of the same chapter St. Clare is brought home; wounded he feels his death is near. He tells it to Tom, but not as indicated in the Slovene text, namely "I am dying," said St. Clare, pressing his hand./ "Umiram," je rekel St. Clare in mu stisnil roko."(123)/ because in the original the sentence is finished with the Master's supplication: "pray"(316) The English text then shows Tom's ardent praying which is followed by St. Clare's murmuring of the verses from Requiem. The Slovene chapter finishes with the translation of the last but one

sentence of the original: They saw that the mighty hand was on him. /Videli so, da je silna roka počivala na njem.(123) The message of the last sentence - "Just before the spirit parted, he opened his eyes, with a sudden light, as of joy and recognition, and said "Mother!" and then he was gone!" - thus remains out of reach of the Slovene reader, even if it is essential for the understanding of the chapter's title. The "Reunion" is the reunion of St. Clare with his mother, what is clear from the very last sentence that is the key to the message of the whole chapter.

Despite the omissions the adaptation as a whole reads well: its fluency is not interrupted by summaries in special print as it is the case with the 1934 translation.

The 1954 version was first reprinted in 1959. Several reprints and new editions followed up to the second part of the 90ties. In some of them, as for example in the 1973 edition, a new introduction addresses young readers. Similarly to other prefaces it underlines some prominent facts connected with H.Beecher-Stowe and the book, but again leaving out any point that would enable the reader to appreciate the positive role of Christian values either in the American anti-slavery movement or in the text of the novel itself.

Therefore, it is expected that the readers could be finally offered the real *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where the way of narration and above all the basic idea and the intention of the writer would be preserved. Thus the promise given in 1954 could be kept, and a due tribute would be paid to the novel which has a special place among American literature classics and which has established itself among the classics of children's literature.

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