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# Leoš Janáček's Interpretation and Misinterpretation of Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead*

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## Abstract

This article analyses the approach Leoš Janáček undertook in translating the original Russian text of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* to the Czech language. Confusing to some, Janáček's work uses a surprising amount of either words directly transliterated from Russian or peculiar expressions with a meaning often unclear to Czech audiences. Thus, from a linguistic perspective, certain passages of the libretto lack internal logic. Since the composer's death, there have been numerous adjustments made in the sung text, however, the article focuses primarily on the original version which, even though less graspable by meaning, tends to maintain authenticity intended by Dostoyevsky.

## Key words

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, Leoš Janáček, *From the House of the Dead*, opera, libretto, transliteration, Russian language, Czech language, misinterpretation

This study deals with the libretto of the opera *From the House of the Dead* by Leoš Janáček. The Moravian composer based his last musical-dramatic work on *The House of the Dead*, a novel written by one of the most significant representatives of the Russian literary realism – Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky. A significant amount of professional literature has been dedicated to Janáček's russiophilia and his warm relationship to Russian culture. Dostoyevsky's literary work as a theme for Janáček's opera has also been paid attention to by a number of musicologists. Up till this point, however, none of the studies have placed their primary focus on the relationship between the source text and the opera libretto. The main aim of this study is to observe what approach was chosen by Janáček to transform the original Russian version of Dostoyevsky's work into an opera libretto, whether any expressions and phrases have been semantically changed and, if this is the case, whether this has been done intentionally or only as a result of his imperfect knowledge of the Russian language.

The textual basis of Janáček's last great work was written by the composer himself; he did so by directly translating dialogues from Dostoyevsky's Russian edition as well as adjusting the Czech translated version. There were two main interventions from the original story. The first is the fact that Janáček reduced the number of characters by merging multiple characters into one. The second, made by Otakar Zítek who directed the premiere of the opera after Janáček's death, was adding a happy ending.

Janáček's intention was to capture Dostoyevsky's raw testimony from a Siberian prison as realistically as possible. For this very reason, the libretto is interwoven with Russian words and phrases used to highlight the authenticity of the specific environment. On the other hand, Janáček's peculiar way of translating the text brought semantic divergences into a number of the original thoughts of Dostoyevsky.

This study attempts to analyze in detail Janáček's approach to the literary text from a linguistic perspective, comparing individual parts of the libretto and the original Russian edition of *The House of the Dead*. Only occasionally did Janáček add his own sentences in the sung text and this was mostly done in order to increase the dramatic atmosphere of the moment or to close a particular scene. Therefore, the major part of the libretto consists of passages already included in the Russian original. The question remains to what degree the sentences translated by Janáček diverge from Dostoyevsky's testimony and whether these differences have a significant impact on the storyline of *The House of the Dead*.

Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* was apparently not Leoš Janáček's original choice for an opera adaptation. "As the historical literature shows, Janáček's original thought was to set music to Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. Perhaps, he abandoned this intention due to a certain similarity to *Katya Kabanova* and, hence, to Ostrovsky's *The Tempest*. Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead* was supposedly recommended to Janáček by his niece."<sup>1</sup> His intention to compile the

1 „V historické literatuře je zachyceno, že Janáček původně pomyslel na kompozici Tolstého *Anny Kareniny*, možná od toho záměru ustoupil přeci jen pro určitou podobnost s *Kátou Kabanovou*, potažmo s *Bouří od Ostrovského*. Po Dostojevského *Zápisích z mrtvého domu* prý Janáček sáhl na popud a doporučení své neteře.“ SRSTKA, Jiří. Černá Janáčková opera *Z mrtvého domu*. *Věstník Dilia*, podzim 2011, p. 44.

sung text directly from the Russian original is demonstrated by the fact that Janáček acquired the edition in the Russian language, published in Berlin in 1921. Similarly to most of his previous operas, the composer chose to write the sung text himself. Moreover, both the music and the text of the opera were created simultaneously as Janáček did not compile the libretto separately from the musical part; he wrote it directly to the autograph score.

The process of creating the opera was not easy. “*And that black opera of mine takes a lot of effort,*” he wrote to Kamila Stösslová in November 1927. “*It seems like I have been stepping lower and lower to the very bottom of the poorest of the poor. And that is a difficult walk.*”<sup>2</sup> The composer was fully realizing the unconventional theme of *The House of the Dead*. Oswald Chlubna states about Janáček’s attitude towards his last opera: “*I know from Mrs. Janáčková how much doubt he was in while creating the work and also that he did not intend to have the work performed. For this reason, he said he had written it for himself. The unusual theme that puts on stage only abominable acts and fate of lost individuals with no psychological analysis or reasoning, [...] could not have a response as strong as Janáček’s earlier operas.*”<sup>3</sup>

Janáček decided to use only dialogues from Dostoyevsky’s original, however, these are quite rare in the literary work. *The House of the Dead* cannot be considered a novel in the true sense of the word. Instead of the dialogues, we mostly find uninterrupted narration of the prisoners, inner contemplation of the main character and description of various aspect of life in Siberian prison. In their extensive monologues, the prisoners tell stories from their lives before prison. These stories are dark and gloomy, retained in memory in an idealized form. As a result, in Dostoyevsky’s original, we encounter several timelines consistently intertwining with each other. The first dialogue appears only in the second part of the book. At the same time, the dialogue also serves as an opening of Janáček’s opera.

To achieve at least partial consistency in the story, the composer had to concentrate on the most dynamic moments of the book. Thus, he did not include Dostoyevsky’s lengthy descriptions of the prison hospital, his detailed description of the punishment, prison food, unpleasant sanitary conditions, trading among prisoners, etc. Another step to the coherence of plot was by reducing the characters. The opinion that Janáček confused the individual characters is rather frequent in the musicological literature.<sup>4</sup> However, a deeper analysis of the libretto demonstrates the fact that these changes were made deliberately.

2 „*A ta černá opera moje dá mi hodně práce. Případá mi, jak bych v ní po stupních níže a níže krácel až na dno z lidstva nejbídnejších lidí. A to se těžko kráčí.*“ PŘIBÁŇOVÁ, Svataava. *Hádanka života: Dopisy Leoše Janáčka Kamile Stösslové*. Brno: Opus Musicum, 1990, p. 259.

3 „*Vím od paní Janáčkové, v jakých byl pochybnostech, když dílo tvořil, a že měl úmysl dílo nedat provést a proto také řekl, že si ho napsal pro sebe. Nezvyklost námětu, který bez psychologických rozborů a zdůvodnění staví na scénu jen odporné činy a osudy ztracených lidí, [...], nemohla mít takový ohlas, jaký měly dřívější Janáčkovy opery.*“ CHLUBNA, Oswald. K úpravě opery „*Z mrtvého domu*“. In *Opery Leoše Janáčka na brněnské scéně*. Brno: Státní divadlo v Brně, 1958, unpaginated.

4 POLÁŠKOVÁ, Anežka. Z nevydaných textů muzikologa Vladimíra Lébla – Leoš Janáček a Rusko. *Harmonie*, 2013, No. 9, pp. 16–18. E.g. The musicologist Vladimír Lébl stated in his lemma in *Divadlo hudby* in 1984: “*While composing, [Janáček] kept looking at Dostoyevsky’s original Russian text, and borrowed numerous*

In several places, the composer merged more characters into one. These characters take over the stories and thoughts of other individuals in Dostoyevsky's book. Consequently, the fate of the joker Skuratov connects to Baklushin's in the second act. Interestingly, Dostoyevsky put these two characters in completely different positions – Skuratov is treated by the other prisoners with disdain; mocked for his naivety and kindness. Baklushin, on the other hand, is popular and respected by everyone. („Он был тоже из шутников; но не давал потачки нашим брезгливым ненавистникам смеха, так что его уж никто не ругал за то, что он «пустой и бесполезный» человек.“<sup>5</sup> – He was a professed joker, but he never allowed himself to be slighted by those who did not enjoy his fun. Accordingly, no one spoke disparagingly of him.)

Possibly the most remarkable case of merging more characters into one is Luka Kuzmich. He enters into the plot of the opera as a prisoner responsible for a murder of a major. Furthermore, he also takes over sentences of Ustyanov lying on his deathbed in the prison hospital. Finishing the story of his unsuccessful marriage, agitated Shishkov recognizes in Luka Filka Morozov, a person responsible for his unhappy fate. This way, the composer achieved dramatic climax in the third act. Kuzmich is portrayed by Dostoyevsky as a cocky, arrogant, big mouth: “в нем действительно было что-то вострое, заносчивое” (there was something cutting and haughty in his demeanour). Shishkov's former friend Filka, who drank away his parents' money and tarnished Akulka's reputation, matches these characteristics as well.

The opera *From the House of the Dead* is a collective drama; the plot is not focused on a single main character. The character of Alexander Goryanchikov “*who is clearly a personification of Dostoyevsky, was not used [by Janáček] as a main character, however, with him entering and leaving the prison, the composer ‘framed’ the plot of the opera.*”<sup>6</sup> Goryanchikov enters into the plot at the moment when the prisoners are provoking a crippled eagle in the prison yard. A wounded wing does not allow the bird to fly, thus, similarly to the prison's inhabitants, the eagle loses its freedom. It is released from the cage at the same time when Goryanchikov is pardoned and the Prison Governor commands the guards to remove the shackles from his ankles (the apology uttered by the Prison Governor was put together from two different dialogues, neither of which Goryanchikov participated in in the book).

The wounded eagle represents an important component of the opera plot. One of the main themes of the work is projected into him; namely the unceasing desire for freedom and the will to live; the idea which, consciously or unconsciously, survives in each prisoner. When the animal is released, we hear the choir of the convicts singing,

*Russianisms for the opera score. These often come across as strange, made-up combination words. He cut the dialogues to the bare bones, with their meanings often balancing on the edge of clarity. It even happened that he confused certain characters”, p. 18.*

5 ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ, Федор Михайлович. *Записки из мёртвого дома*. Москва: Художественная литература, 1965, p. 151.

6 „jenž je zjevně personifikací Dostojevského, nevyužil [Janáček] jako hlavní dramatické postavy, ale vlastně jeho příchodem a odchodem ‚zarámoval‘ děj opery“. SRSTKA, Jiří. Černá Janáčkova opera Z mrtvého domu. *Věstník Dilia*, podzim 2011, p. 46

“*Svoboda svobodička! Vidiš, ani se neohlíží! Svoboda svobodička! Orel, car lesů!*” (Freedom, freedom! Look, he does not even turn back! Freedom freedom! Eagle the Tsar!). Although the prisoners are chased by the guards back to prison shortly afterwards, they do not give up the hope to live a full, dignified life. In Dostoyevsky's version, the story goes in a diametrically different direction. Here as well, the eagle is “released”, however, its wing has not healed, so the animal only totters away from the convicts, not looking back, “*Орла сбросили с валу в степь. Это было глубокою осенью, в холодный и сумрачный день. [...] Орел пустился прямо, махая большим крылом и как бы торопясь уходить от нас куда глаза глядят.*”<sup>7</sup> (They threw him from the ramparts on to the steppe. It was just at the end of autumn, a gray, cold day. [...] The eagle made off directly, flapping his wounded wing, as if in a hurry to quit us and get himself a shelter from our piercing eyes.) In contrast with Janáček's version in which the eagle, symbolizing freedom and liberty, will live on, his fate is rather uncertain in Dostoyevsky's story.

The scene mentioned above represents one of the only two positive moments in the whole opera when the gloomy atmosphere on the stage brightens up for a little while. The second bright moment is the play performed by the convicts to which the composer dedicated a considerable part of the act 2. Janáček became interested in the idea of “a theatre in a theatre”. Allegedly, this was also one of the main factors that inspired him to bring the opera to life.<sup>8</sup> Of the three performances in the book, the composer cut out the first one (a popular play of Pyotr Grigoryevich Grigoryev), he only set music to the other two plays; *A Play about Kedril and Juan* and the pantomime *About a Beautiful Miller*. The female roles in the pantomime are played by disguised prisoners. In this way, Janáček incorporated comic elements into the opera. However, the composer's musical expressionism and rawness do not cease to dominate the events on the stage.

As is well known, Leoš Janáček died before finishing his last work, so he never got a chance to hear his completed work. The opera premiered on April 12, 1930, almost two years after his death, with no final corrections made by Janáček. Otakar Zitek was in charge of the first ever staging of the opera at the National Theatre in Brno. Apart from several major changes in the libretto, Zitek decided to entirely change the closure of the opera. Břetislav Bakala and Osvald Chlubna, Janáček's students, then took charge of finishing the orchestration.<sup>9</sup> “... *Zitek asked us to consider the possibility of changing the gloomy ending by celebrating Goryanchikov's regained freedom and giving the rest of the convicts hope that they would be unshackled one day as well. [...] His intention was to end the opera by stressing out the prisoners' desire for freedom, symbolized by the released eagle, and even though it had a broken wing, it raised over the forests and the Siberian steppe.*”<sup>10</sup> In the

7 ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ, Федор Михайлович. *Записки из мёртвого дома*. Москва: Художественная литература, 1965, p. 274.

8 SRSTKA, Jiří. Černá Janáčkova opera Z mrtvého domu. *Věstník Dilia*, podzim 2011, pp. 44–47.

9 HAINS, Ernest. *František Neumann a jeho brněnské působení v letech 1919–1929*. Brno, 1967. Diploma thesis. Univerzita Jana Evangelisty Purkyně v Brně, Filozofická fakulta.

10 „... *nás Zitek [...] požádal, abychom uvažovali, zdali by nebylo možné pozměnit i truchlivý závěr opery využitím jáso tu nad nabytou svobodou Alexandra Gorjančikova a nadějí i ostatních vězňů, že i oni jednou budou zbaveni*

original version, the convicts are chased by the guards back to work and, thus, back to the hopeless cycle of life in prison. Janáček's students claimed that if the composer had had a chance to see the opera performed on stage, he would not have let it sound so gloomy. A similar argument was used to explain the adjustments of the opera in the cases of the interferences in the libretto in which the Russianisms were removed and the meanings of certain sentences were made more concrete.

As mentioned above, Janáček's main source was Dostoyevsky's Russian edition of *The House of the Dead*, however, he also had a Czech translation of the work at his disposal. Osvald Chlubna wrote in his paper *To the Adjustments of the opera From the House of the Dead*: "... at first we studied Dostoyevsky's '*The House of the Dead*'. I borrowed the Czech version of the book from Mrs. Janáčková from Leoš Janáček's library. I found many markings made by Janáček which he transcribed to the musical score without writing an actual libretto. And because he was using the Russian original while doing this, a number of clusters formed by combinations of Czech and Russian words and phrases [appear in the opera text]."<sup>11</sup>

The text version known from opera houses and program brochures is consequently a version that was created as a result of the corrections made by Otakar Zítek, Osvald Chlubna and Břetislav Bakala. They obviously did not work with the original Russian text of Dostoyevsky and they chose to use the Czech translation as a source.

The analysis below focuses on Janáček's original version of the libretto, before the corrections were made by his students and director Zítek.<sup>12</sup> It does not take into consideration the libretto currently used on stage. It is necessary to mention that, to a large extent, the libretto adjusted by Zítek, Chlubna and Bakala, differs from Janáček's vision as well as from the text written by Dostoyevsky.

\*

The comparative analysis of the source text and the target text provides three qualitatively different ways of Janáček's transformation of Dostoyevsky's work into an opera:

- 1) Correct translation of the dialogues or their paraphrasing without a significant shift in meaning.
- 2) Transmitting Russian words and phrases in the original, unchanged form as a deliberate means to portray the atmosphere of the Russian environment.

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*pout a slunce svobody jim zazáří do nové cesty. Jeho záměr byl ukončit operu touhou všech trestanců po svobodě, jejíž symbol byl v puštěném orlu, který, ač měl ulomené křídlo, vznášel se nad lesy a sibiřskou step.*" CHLUBNA, Osvald. K úpravě opery „Z mrtvého domu“. In *Opery Leoše Janáčka na brněnské scéně*. Brno: Státní divadlo v Brně, 1958, unpaginated.

11 „...nejprve [jsme] studovali Dostojevského ‚Zápisky z mrtvého domu‘. Vypůjčil jsem si je v českém znění od paní Janáčkové z knihovny Leoše Janáčka. Našel jsem v nich dost Janáčkových poznámek textových, které Janáček přenesl beze změn do partitury tak, že si vůbec nevypracoval textovou předlohu, libreto. A protože současně používal i ruského originálu, proto se mu shlukla směsice slov českých a ruských, ba celých ruských rčení, vět.“ CHLUBNA, Osvald. K úpravě opery „Z mrtvého domu“. In *Opery Leoše Janáčka na brněnské scéně*. Brno: Státní divadlo v Brně, 1958, unpaginated.

12 We would like to thank John Tyrrell, who is currently preparing a critical edition of the opera *The House of the Dead*, for providing us with the original vision of the libretto.

- 3) The use of Czech homonyms and paronyms of the Russian expressions or misinterpretation of the source text by mistranslating the Russian words and set phrases, resulting in an unintentional semantic shift in meaning.

Ad 1)

Most of the libretto was written by a flawless translation of the Russian dialogues into Czech, or by adding a new text by Janáček. As a result, from a semantic point of view, these passages hold the meaning of Dostoyevsky's story. They are perfectly understandable and logical.

Ad 2)

The reason why the composer did not feel the need to translate certain expressions was that he wanted to preserve the authenticity of the libretto. The untranslated words and sentences help draw the listener deeper into the story. They effectively portray the gloomy environment of the Siberian prison as well as an overall bleakness, typical of Dostoyevsky's book. Given the common Slavic origin of the source and target languages, these words appear natural in the Czech libretto, not violating the stream of the Czech diction.

For most part, their meaning is entirely graspable for Czech audience, alternatively, it can be easily deduced from the context, e.g.:

Words non-existent in Czech, directly transliterated from Russian:

- **vybřit hlavu** (**выбрит** лоб = shave his head),
- politický **přestupník** (политический **преступник** = political offender, political criminal),
- zbujníka budou **káznit** (разбойника будут **наказывать** = they are going to punish the robber),
- **prázdník!** (**праздник** = holiday, feast, celebration),
- **pozdravljajem s prazdnikom!** (**поздравляем с праздником** = Holiday greeting!),
- **sejčas** (**сейчас** = now, currently),
- **chleb sol** (**хлеб да соль** = **bread and salt**) – an phrase expressing a person's hospitality,
- na druhý den šel jsem k jeho **magacínu** (на другое это утро пошел я под его **магазин** = the next day I went to his office),
- já k tobě **v hosty** přišel (я к тебе **в гости** пришел = I came on a visit to you),
- miloval jsem tě **tři goda** (любил я тебя **два года** = I have loved you for two years)
  - Janáček replaced the number two (два) by three (tři) and transliterated the Russian word for 'years' – 'goda' (= 'roky' in Czech).

On this level, Janáček also preserved Dostoyevsky's words, often of archaic origin or words borrowed from jargon. In order to understand these expressions, certain knowledge of Russian cultural environment is necessary. Therefore, a common Czech listener might find them completely unintelligible:



- In one of the passages uttered by the Prison Governor in the first act we find the sentence “*A jaké to šiněli?*” (“*это какие шинели?*”= what kind of a greatcoat is that?). Шинель [shinel] means ‘greatcoat’, ‘overcoat’; an expression to describe ‘uniforms’, used in the Russian speaking environment from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Telling his story, Luka Kuzmych mentions *chochli* (*хохлы*), a Russian colloquial expression describing Ukrainians.
- *Timošek* (*тимошка*) = *палач* (executioner), how Dostoyevsky himself explains in the footnotes.
- *Jazeva palico* (*язевый лоб* [yazeviy lob]) = the Russian ‘лоб’ = forehead, ‘palico’ is a vocative case derived from ‘palice’ = sledgehammer; secondary meaning: an expression commonly used in Moravian region, meaning ‘head’. Among Siberian prisoners, the word ‘язевый’ [yazeviy] meant ‘stamped’; apparently, the convicts’ were sometimes branded on their foreheads.

In Dostoyevsky's book, there are several characters of origin other than Russian. Above all, peoples of Caucasus appear (Circassians, Lezgins, Dagestan Tatars and one Chechenian), as well as individuals of Slavic nations of the Russian Empire; the Polish and the Ukrainians. A representative of the last group mentioned has been unconsciously portrayed by Janáček in the libretto. Luka Kuzmich, who says in act I: “*Bašu, ni!, A vin, bisov syn! A pišet, pišet! Nu, bašu sobi*”. In Dostoyevsky's book, this passage is written in Russian writing system. (“*бачу: ну! А вин, бисов сын, все пишет, все пишет. Ну, бачу соби...*” [bachu: ni! a vin, bisov sin, vsye pishet, vsye pishet. Nu, bachu sobi...] = I tell him: No! And that devil's son just writes and writes! And I said to myself...). This is the only Ukrainian line that Janáček borrowed from Dostoyevsky. The composer was probably unaware that he was using the sentences not in Russian, but in Ukrainian. The fact is that the Ukrainian nation was never mentioned by Leoš Janáček. After all, he considered Gogol's *Taras Bulba* to be a Russian work with a Russian-oriented theme. Similarly to the majority of the society of his time, he apparently did not perceive Russian and Ukrainian as two different nations. He was not familiar with the existence of the Ukrainian nation with its own language. Obviously, Janáček's form *bašu* was an incorrect transliteration of the source word *бачу* [bachu] (= I see); the expression ‘pišet’ (with an added quantity of a vowel in the place of Russian dynamic stress) is a Russianism in a Ukrainian utterance. In Dostoyevsky's work, Luka speaks in Surzhyk; a mixed sociolect of Russian and Ukrainian which was at the time (and has been until our days) often a form of communication of Ukrainians living in eastern and central Ukraine (the formal Ukrainian uses the form *пише* [pishе]).

Ad 3)

In several parts of the sung text, we find interlingual homonyms (paronyms); words that sound the same or very similar in both language, however, their meanings differ.<sup>13</sup> In rare cases, these represent mere semantic nuances, such as:

<sup>13</sup> English language often uses the expression ‘false friends’.

- *Pták volný, surový, nepřivykne vězení!* (...птица вольная, **суровая** [surovaya], не привыкнешь к острогу-то<sup>14</sup> = the bird is free, **tough**, you cannot make it get used to prison). In Czech, the word 'surový' means 'brutal' or 'crude'.
- *Jaj, já **pustý**, zbytečný člověk!* (Skuratov's words); **пустой** [rustoy] человек (empty person), the Czech word 'pustý' means 'deserted', 'desolate'.

There are also a number of cases in the libretto when Janáček did not understand the original meaning of the Russian text, the result of which was not only the semantic shift, but also the fact that the lines lack internal logic:

- *Iššš! **Chlap!** Našel si pána!* (*Ишь **холоп!** Нашел барина!*) – 'холоп' [kholop] meaning 'servant' in Russian as opposed to 'chlap' meaning 'man', 'guy' in Czech.
- ***Zadávít majora?*** (in the original text **задарит** [zadarit] means to smother with gifts, to give gifts; in the sense that the Prison Governor will be able to buy himself out and keep his work position, either with money or with another kind of gifts.) The text continues: "*A u to **задарит**, [...], мало он денег-то нагрabil!*"<sup>15</sup> (he has not lined his pockets enough); there is no mention of killing ('zadávít') the Prison Governor in Dostoyevsky's text.

In the opera's introduction, we witness an argument between two convicts: "The Small Prisoner" and "The Big Prisoner". The Big Prisoner calls the eagle that has been captured by the convicts '**kahan**'. The argument is ended by the Small Prisoner saying: "*Tys podlec a ne kahan!*" (You are a scoundrel, not a khan.) This exchange of views may not be entirely understandable to a Czech speaker. In the Russian environment, the word *kahan* / *каган* denoted either a legendary bird that, according to the Russian tradition, brings luck to people's lives, or a head of the state of the ancient Turkic nations ('khan'). In Czech language the word only has one meaning: *kahan* = *hořák* (burner); *svítilna* (lamp).

In Dostoyevsky's book, the argument mentioned above starts with a question: "*Да что ты за птица такая?*" (What kind of bird are you?) In the Russian language, this sentence carries the meaning "What is special about you?" or "What is important about you?" Therefore, the following conversation does not concern the captured animal itself but character qualities of one of the convicts. For this reason, the argument is ended by the reaction "*Подлец ты, а не каган!*" (You are a scoundrel, not a khan.)<sup>16</sup>

In the opera, Skuratov tells his story from the times he used to live in Yuryev (nowadays the Estonian town Tartu where Germans formed a significant part of the population): "*Pěkné to město, mnoho Němců. **Po Němkách úkosem.** I zalíbila se mi německá Lujza.*" (Lovely town, full of Germans. I was **looking askance at the German girls.** I took fancy to a girl named Luisa.) Reading *The House of the Dead*, Janáček did not understand the meaning of the phrase "*немкам подмигиваю*" that can be translated rather as "I am eyeing up the German girls".

14 ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ, Федор Михайлович. *Записки из мёртвого дома*. Москва: Художественная литература, 1965, p. 273.

15 Ibid., p. 256.

16 Ibid., pp. 54–55.

Arguing with Luisa's husband-to-be, Skuratov calls him 'hastroš', meaning 'scarecrow' in English. Dostoyevsky used the word 'колбасник' [kolbasnik], a derogatory word to describe Germans (колбаса [kolbasa] meaning 'sausage'; at the time, Germans were already huge fans of butchery).

A Czech speaker might get puzzled by the expression 'zelená ulice' (green street) used in act 2 in the text "*Soudili. Usoudili zelenou ulici*". = "They judged me. They sentenced me to the green street." In Dostoyevsky's book we read "*А как вывели меня к наказанию, [...] меня по зеленой улице...*" = "When they brought me for punishment, [...] they sent me down the green street." In Russian, the phrase 'green street' used to denote a specific kind of punishment when a person was pushed between two lines of men armed with rods or sticks. The convicts walked down such "streets" and it was not a surprise when a person died as a result of the injuries. In Czech, an expression 'ulička' (little street) was used to describe this military punishment known from the Austro-Hungarian army.

In the scene with a prostitute, Janáček completely diverged from the original version. In the book Dostoyevsky writes: "*Хоть без ребрушка ходить, да солдатика любить!*",<sup>17</sup> meaning "I would not mind losing a rib, only if I could love a soldier". The composer radically changed the meaning of the sentence, translating it as follows: "*А což, **choť** bez žebra! **Choť** bez žebra, přece ráda za vojáčky!*" (And thus, a wife without a rib! A wife without a rib, I still like going with soldiers!) The words 'choť' (spouse) and 'хоть' [khot] (although, though) are paronyms; they sound exactly the same, but their meanings are entirely different. Czech audience will naturally understand the term as a 'wife' or a 'spouse'. In addition to the above mentioned difference, only few may realize nowadays that both authors most probably meant a result of the so called thoracoplasty; a surgical procedure involving the resection of ribs performed to cure tuberculosis.<sup>18</sup>

Another example of an interlingual homonym substantially changing the image of a scene can be found in act 3. The prisoner Shapkin explains the circumstances under which he was arrested for vagrancy and sent to Siberia. The story begins as follows: "*Šli jsme dva, já a Jephim. **Oxen** were in the fields, fright in the town.*) In the Czech text, we are dealing with an image of oxen; cattle grazing in a field. However, in Dostoyevsky's book, we find this: "*В поле **четыре воли**, а в городе жутко – известно.*"<sup>19</sup> In the given context, the expression 'воли' (nominative case in singular: 'воля' = will, freedom, liberty; not 'вол' with the plural form 'волы', meaning oxen) carries the meaning 'direction' or 'world side'; out of civilization human beings can feel free, they can head in whichever direction they wish.

17 Ibid., p. 63.

18 VOKURKA, Martin – HUGO, Jan a kol. *Velký lékařský slovník*. Praha: Maxdorf, 2009. We would like to thank Jiří Zahrádka for pointing out this type of surgery.

19 ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ, Федор Михайлович. *Записки из мёртвого дома*. Москва: Художественная литература, 1965, p. 233.

A few discrepancies occur in Shishkov's story. In the original version, the rich man (call 'батюшка' [batyushka] by the village people) is asked a question "Вы как, батюшка?" (How are you, batyushka?). He answers: "Живем и мы, [...], по грехам нашим, тоже небо коптим."<sup>20</sup> Dostoyevsky used a Russian phrase 'небо коптить' = 'жить бесполезно, бесцельно' (to darken the sky with smoke = to live a useless life, to live with no goal).<sup>21</sup> The whole sentence in English says: "We are alive, [...], paying the price of our sins, living a meaningless life." Janáček translated the passage word by word, consequently, the logic of the sentence disappeared: "По хříchu, **небе** **закуђи**." (For our sins, I am darkening the sky with clouds of smoke.)

A certain semantic shift in meaning also appears in the following sentences:

"A **starí** **rodí** **čové** **modlit se** **nevědí**." (And the old parents are not able to pray / cannot pray.) In the book the passage says "A **starí** **ki**, **tak te** **už** **komu** **molit'sya** **to** **ne znajot**..."<sup>22</sup> (And the old parents do not know anymore who to pray to).

"**Тy** **мáš**, **matičko**, **zlatem** **uši** **ově** **čeny!** **Podívej** **Akulku!**" (Your ears, mother, are covered with gold. **Look Akulka**.) This sentence does not make sense in Czech as the preposition 'на' = 'at' is missing. The original says: "У **тебя**, [...], **матушка**, **золотом** **уши** **завешаны**. **По** **давай** **Акулку!**"<sup>23</sup> (Your ears, mother, are covered with gold. **Get me Akulka!**)

Janáček did not translate the word 'набухвостить' in the sentence "тут **Филька Морозов** **набухвостит**."<sup>24</sup> (Filka Morozov **slandered** her.); he only transliterated it in a slightly changed form. As a result, the meaning of the line became unclear: "Tu Filka Morozov **nabuchvatil**." ('nabuchvatil' is a no-existent word in Czech).

Last point of this section addresses the Russian folk song that Janáček translated and used in the opera: "**У** **ме** **на** **м** **ла** **д** **о** **й** **н** **ě** **б** **ы** **л** **а**, **л** **ы** **ж** **к** **ы** **у** **м** **ы** **л** **а**, **в** **п** **о** **л** **ě** **в** **к** **у** **в** **л** **и** **л** **а**; **с** **к** **о** **с** **я** **к** **о** **в** **с** **к** **р** **е** **б** **л** **а**; **п** **и** **р** **о** **г** **и** **н** **а** **п** **е** **к** **л** **а**."

Janáček assigned the song to Skuratov whereas in Dostoyevsky's original, it is performed by the whole choir of convicts:

У **м** **е** **н** **я** **л** **ь** **м** **л** **а** **д** **о** **й** [u menya li mladoy]  
**Д** **о** **м** **а** **у** **б **р **а** **н** **о**: [doma ubrano]  
**Л** **о** **ж** **к** **и** **в** **ы** **м** **ы** **л** **а**, [lozhki vimila]  
**В** **о** **щ** **и** **в** **ы** **л** **и** **л** **а**; [vo shi vilila]  
**С** **к** **о** **с** **я** **к** **о** **в** **с** **к** **р** **е** **б** **л** **а**, [s kosyakov skrebla]  
**П** **и** **р** **о** **г** **и** **с** **п** **е** **к** **л** **а** [pirogi spekla]<sup>25</sup>****

20 Ibid. p. 237.

21 *Фразеологический словарь русского языка*, Москва: Русский язык, 1986, p. 206.

22 ДОСТОЕВСКИЙ, Федор Михайлович. *Записки из мёртвого дома*. Москва: Художественная литература, 1965, p. 243.

23 Ibid., p. 243.

24 Ibid., p. 239.

25 Ibid., p. 165.

(At my house, the house of a young girl,  
 Everything is in order.  
 I have washed the spoons,  
 I have out the shchi, [Russian cabbage soup]  
 I have wiped down the corners of the window frame/door frame,  
 I have cooked the pierogi.)

The first part of the song (*u meňa mladoj něbyla*) is an inaccurate borrowing of Dostoyevsky's words. Furthermore, Janáček transliterated the words 'с косяков' [s kosyakov] (off the corners of the door frame/window frame) as 'skorsakov' which does not have any meaning at all in Czech.<sup>26</sup>

From the linguistic point of view, the examples mentioned above add extraordinary unconventionality and freshness to Janáček's last opera. On the other hand, the way the characters express themselves may cause confusion about the direction of the story or certain parts of the story. Since its introduction to Czech and foreign opera stages, the work has gained popularity worldwide. It would most likely have been successful even without the corrections made by Janáček's students. John Tyrell wrote about the sung text commonly used in our days: "... some of his libretto is scarcely intelligible mishmash of transliterated Russian or even misunderstood Russian. It is understandable that Zitek attempted to provide an 'intelligible' Czech text to be sung in the theatre. These days, however, with almost every theatre providing subtitled translations, it seems reasonable to leave Janáček's sung text in its original state, emphasizing its distinctive sonic qualities, while allowing the theatre to provide an easily graspable text in the language of the country..."<sup>27</sup>

As demonstrated above, it is rather problematic that Janáček misinterpreted certain parts of the text to such an extent that he completely changed original thoughts of the Russian writer, or at times, made the libretto sound absurd or entirely unintelligible. By their adjustments and additions to the text, Janáček's students with Zitek made it more understandable to the Czech audience (e.g. Janáček's "*Tu Filka Morov nabuchvatil!*" and his students' version "*Tu Filka Morozov si namluvil!*"). In other cases, they corrected the composer's misinterpreted passages (e.g. "немкам подмигиваю" = "*po Němkách úkosem*" corrected to "*dívám se po Němkách*" = I am eyeing up the German girls). On the other hand, changing some Russianisms in the libretto sometimes caused an even greater diversion from the original meaning: "*И закурил же он у нас, парень! Да так, что земля стоном стоит, но городу-то сын гул идет.*" (**закурил** [zakuril] meaning "the boy overindulged so much the ground cried"). Janáček only transliterated the word: "*I zakuril kluk, až země zastonala*" (the boy smoked so much the ground cried). In the newer version we hear: "*A starý tak zařval, až zem se zatřásla.*" (the old man's roar shook the ground).

26 This example should be included in the section 2, however, for contextual reasons, it is mentioned in this section.

27 TYRRELL, John. Editing "From the House of the Dead". *Musikblätter* 2012, No. 3, p. 29.

The main goal of this study was to demonstrate to what an extent Leoš Janáček's libretto of *From the House of the Dead* differs from the Russian edition of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The House of the Dead*. The sung text contains a number of Russianisms, Russian archaisms, jargon words, Russian-Czech made-up combination words and several Ukrainian expressions. With the exception of the Ukrainianisms, which Janáček obviously considered to be of Russian origin, it is quite obvious these expressions were used intentionally in order to raise authenticity and originality of the artistic testimony. The intelligibility of the sung text was therefore of minor concern to the composer; he concentrated primarily on the sonic quality of the language. As a result, certain parts of the libretto may not be completely understandable to Czech audiences, however, it surely does not lack exotic mood, e.g. the folk song sung by Skuratov partially in Russian.

From a detailed analysis and comparison of both texts, it is apparent that, in many cases, the composer did not comprehend the true meaning of Dostoyevsky's words and translated the lines incorrectly. This was most probably caused by Janáček's imperfect knowledge of the Russian language (particularly Russian fixed phrases) and various facts about life in Russia. After the composer's death, the director Otakar Zitek, with the musicians Břetislav Bakala and Osvald Chlubna, adjusted parts of the libretto, but not all changes resulted in correct translation.

This is far from the only example of misinterpretation of literary text by a musical composer when translating into musical composition. After all, the Russianisms included in Janáček's Czech version of the sung text of *From the House of the Dead* never appear in the subtitles used when performing on foreign stages; translators are often forced to change the meaning of the sentences in order to make it graspable to a speaker of the given language code. Nevertheless, the above mentioned imperfections have no impact on the fact that *From the House of the Dead* is a remarkable work of a significant opera composer and that the work is rightfully performed with great popularity at Czech, as well as foreign opera houses.

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