

**BRANDES IN THE CZECH-SPEAKING WORLD:
DISMISSED AS A CRITIC, EMBRACED AS A NAME**

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ABSTRACT

In our contribution, we explore the Czech-speaking discourse related to Georg Brandes in the Bohemian Lands in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, which means before and shortly after Czechs gained their independence from Austria-Hungary in 1918. Our research of archival sources, especially periodicals and private letters, enables us to confidently claim that the impact of Brandes's criticism on the Czech arts was rather insignificant. At the same time, the sources give a clear picture that the Czech-speaking intelligentsia were interested in using Brandes's symbolic capital to promote their struggle for Czech cultural autonomy. Thus, it was not Brandes's works that can be considered influential in the Czech context but his persona. This strategy of using Brandes's symbolic capital mirrors his own efforts to be viewed as an international intermediary. Finally, we explore the East-West dynamics in Brandes's relationship with Czechs and vice versa, and here, we identify a considerable asymmetry.

Keywords: Georg Brandes; *Main Currents*; Bohemian Lands; Czechoslovakia; symbolic capital; reception; Eastern Europe; Habsburg Empire; Arnošt Vilém Kraus; Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

In the volume *The Activist Critic* on Brandes's ideas, methods, and international reception, published more than forty years ago, Radko Kejzlar summarizes Georg Brandes's (1842–1927) impact on the Czech-speaking world:

Wenn man also zusammenfassend Brandes' Rolle im tschechischen Kulturleben festhalten will, muß gesagt werden, daß Brandes mehr durch seine europäische Berühmtheit, als direkt durch sein Werk, die tschechische Literatur als solche beeinflußt hat. Doch sein Prestige und sein Weltruf habe dazu beigetragen, daß man seit seinem Besuch die skandinavischen Literaturen in einem anderen Licht sah und sie zu einem dauerhaften Vorbild und Bestandteil – und das gilt noch bis heute – der tschechischen Kultur gemacht hat.¹

¹ Radko Kejzlar, 'Georg Brandes und Prag,' in *The Activist Critic: A Symposium on the Political Ideas, Literary Methods and International Reception of Georg Brandes*, eds. Hans Hertel and Sven Møller Kristensen (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1980), 226.

Kejzlar may be right about Brandes's pioneering role in promoting Scandinavian literature, but it is debatable whether Brandes can be given the credit for paving the way for Scandinavians to a Czech-speaking audience. No less than six works of Ibsen were published in Czech translation before Brandes's first visit to Prague, in 1892, and long before his first work was published in Czech translation. Besides, numerous volumes of Andersen's fairy tales, as well as novels by Emilie Flygare-Carlén and Sophie Marie Schwartz, appeared in Czech long before Brandes's arrival.² In general, Brandes helped to attract European audiences to Scandinavian authors and in this regard the Czech cultural milieu was no exception. His role as a trailblazer for Scandinavian authors is, however, debatable. Kejzlar is undoubtedly right in claiming that Brandes's *oeuvre* played but a minor role in the Czech literary sphere. The key to Brandes's reception in Czech-speaking countries lies in Kejzlar's words *europäische Berühmtheit*, *Prestige*, and *Weltruf*. It is therefore surprising that in this work, Kejzlar did not focus on this aspect of Brandes's reception by the Czech-speaking cultural figures.

In this paper, we shed light on the lacuna in Brandes's Czech reception. We scrutinize Brandes's influence on Czech culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is important to note, however, that Czech-speaking intellectuals were not his only contacts in the multinational Bohemian Lands: he also interacted with the local German-speaking intelligentsia.³ The analysis will demonstrate that the Czechs showed greater interest in Brandes's persona than in his writings, because of his symbolic capital (in Bourdieu's understanding of the term as a 'reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as a local and national *notable*').⁴ It can be well documented that Czech intellectuals wished to engage with Brandes in the hope that he would promote Czech national culture abroad. Support from such an internationally respected intellectual would, they reckoned, provide international validation of the Czech national project. This is true especially of the period before 1918, the year the first independent state of Czechs and Slovaks was proclaimed and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937) was elected its first president. The interest in Brandes's international promotion of Czech culture lasted, however, even years after the founding of Czechoslovakia.

Czech cultural figures accentuated Brandes's Danish origins while his Jewish background played a negligible role in their reception of his work. Brandes's celebrity showed that intellectuals of small nations could achieve international prestige not only for themselves but also for their national cultures. The Czechs, without a nation-state of their own until 1918, tended to use Brandes's authority in their emancipatory struggle for more autonomy within the Habsburg Empire. Czech intellectuals often referred to Brandes as a neutral arbiter operating beyond the sphere of great powers and cultural dominance.

² Ondřej Vimr, 'Despised and Popular: Swedish Women Writers in Nineteenth-Century Czech National and Gender Emancipation,' in *The Triumph of the Swedish Nineteenth-Century Novel in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Yvonne Leffler (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2019), 87. URI: <http://hdl.handle.net/2077/60002>.

³ For example, Brandes's interaction with the Silesian German writer Maria Stona (born Stonawski, 1859–1944) is well documented. See Martin Pelc, *Maria Stona und ihr Salon in Strzebowitz: Kultur am Rande der Monarchie, der Republik und des Kanons* (Opava: Silesian University in Opava, 2014).

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Reprint-ed. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 291.

Our article thus seeks to corroborate the thesis formulated by Stefan Nygård in his recently published articles on the brokering role of Brandes as a representative of Scandinavia.⁵ The Czech perspective on Brandes therefore perfectly complements Nygård's approach, because his perspective is anchored in Scandinavia.

In the first part of the paper, we will present a brief summary of Brandes's in fact infinitesimal literary influence. Besides Kejzlar, Josef B. Michl, in his 1980 article 'Georg Brandes in Böhmen', also presented a survey of Brandes's Czech reception.⁶ Both Michl and Kejzlar, nevertheless, concentrate on the judgment of Czech men and women of letters and Brandes's influence on the field of Czech literature. None of our predecessors, however, has dealt with the question of what motivated a substantial part of the Czech literary élite to engage with Brandes's ideas. This is why the second, core part of the synthesis will focus on the Czech desire to employ Brandes as a promoter of the Czech-speaking arts and nation. The last and most controversial section of our paper is an invitation to further discussion. It is devoted to the cultural dominance of the Western perspective that Brandes sometimes displayed towards central Europe and the Slavs.

Brandes's literary imprint on Czech culture: 'The name of the departed rings hollow in our air'

These are words from an obituary for Brandes published in the daily *České slovo* (The Czech word) on 22 February 1927.⁷ They were supposed to summarize the influence that Brandes's literary works allegedly had on Czech culture. The anonymous author mentions Brandes's two visits to Prague⁸ and states that 'both times he would probably have been surprised if he had tried to find out what parts of his work had penetrated Czech culture.' Next to none, he boldly claims in the obituary, concluding with the wish that 'hopefully his death will raise more interest in his works. Surely, it may even now still be of invaluable benefit.'⁹ The obituary author's main argument resides in the modest number of Brandes's books translated into Czech, which in turn may, he writes, be a consequence of little interest on the part of the Czech public. As the author puts it: 'Even though Anežka Schulzová began to publish his *Main Currents* [in Czech], she barely got halfway through

⁵ Stefan Nygård focuses respectively on Brandes's mediating effort in the international arena in his article 'The Geopolitics of the "Modern Breakthrough": Cultural Internationalisation and Geopolitical Decline in Scandinavia 1870–1914,' *Geopolitics* 2022, DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2022.2094774. Furthermore, Nygård deals with the concept of Scandinavia as a European semi-peripheral region and the role of intellectuals in 'Georg Brandes and Fin de Siècle Scandinavia as a Cultural Semiperiphery,' *Art@s Bulletin* 11, no. 2 (2022): 9–19.

⁶ Josef B. Michl, 'Georg Brandes in Böhmen,' *Brünner Beiträge zur Germanistik und Nordistik* 2, no. 1 (1980): 109–24.

⁷ 'Jiří Brandes mrtev,' *České slovo*, 22 February 1927, 6. ('Jméno mrtvého zní tedy v našem vzduchu poněkud hluše [...].') Helena Březinová translated all original citations from Czech and Danish into English. In the text, we use English translations and original versions are given in the footnotes.

⁸ Brandes, however, visited Prague three times – first in 1892, then in 1905, and finally, passing through, in 1926.

⁹ 'Jiří Brandes mrtev,' 6. ('po obakrát byl by býval asi překvapen, kdyby byl pátral, co z jeho práce k nám proniklo [...] a snad teprve jeho smrt vzbudí u nás větší všímavost k jeho dílu. Byl by z toho i teď ještě prospěch neocenitelný?')

[them] and they received so little attention that one did not even think of publishing other Brandes books.¹⁰

The picture painted by *České slovo* is similar to that in an earlier article, published in the daily *Čas* (Time), on 3 April 1912 to mark Brandes's seventieth birthday.¹¹ The piece is authored by Gustav Pallas (1882–1964), a renowned scholar and translator of Scandinavian literature, who was clearly better informed about Brandes's books published in Czech. He mentions both Schulzová's translation of *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur: Den romantiske Skole i Frankrig*, published in Czech in 1894,¹² and Brandes's volume on Søren Kierkegaard in Schulzová's translation, released in 1904.¹³ The overall judgment is identical to that in the obituary: the influence that Brandes's works has had on the Czechs is infinitesimal.

In his newspaper remembrance seven years after her death, the Czech poet and essayist Josef Svatopluk Machar (1864–1942) gave a portrayal of Anežka Schulzová, Brandes's first translator and great admirer. It was in fact her father, Ferdinand Schulz, who had invited Brandes to Prague for his first visit, in 1892. Machar writes: 'Brandes had been their [the Schulz family's] guest in Prague. Of his *Main Currents* she translated the Romantic school in France and she wanted to translate the whole cycle – if this one turned out to be well received by readers. (It was not.)'¹⁴

These reminiscences leave the impression that Brandes and his ideas hardly influenced Czech writers and readers at all. It would be misleading, however, to focus on Brandes's works in translation only. The Czech intelligentsia acquainted themselves with his ideas predominantly in German translation and reflected those that circulated in the international cultural exchange long before they appeared in Czech. This was true of Masaryk, an informed literary critic himself, and one of the first to introduce Brandes to the Czechs. When disputing with Brandes in a treatise on Zola's naturalism in 1895, Masaryk clearly acknowledges Brandes's authority, yet reproaches him for being as narrow-minded as Zola since his approach to the human psyche was too mechanical and shallow.¹⁵

Recalling Pallas's article, Pallas notes in passing that the older generations were influenced by Brandes. This influence, however, did not consist in turning Brandes's ideas into works of art but rather in what Nygård defines as the core of Brandesian com-

¹⁰ 'Jiří Brandes mrtev,' 6. ('Sice svého času začala Anežka Schulzová vydávat v překladu jeho *Proudy*, ale nedošla s nimi ani do poloviny a pozornost byla k nim tak skrovná, že na jiné knihy Brandesovy se už ani nepomyslelo.')

¹¹ Gustav Pallas, 'Doslov k oslavám sedmsátých [sic] narozenin Jiřího Brandesa,' *Čas*, 3 April 1912, 5.

¹² Georg Brandes, *Hlavní proudy literatury století devatenáctého: Romantická škola ve Francii*, trans. Anežka Schulzová (Prague: J. Otto, 1894).

¹³ Georg Brandes, *Søren Kierkegaard: Literární studie*, trans. Anežka Schulzová (Prague: Jos. Pelcl, 1904). The last two works of Brandes published in Czech came out the year Brandes died and the following year, which is why they are absent from both articles: *Pověst o Ježíšovi (Sagnet om Jesus)*, translated by Milada Lesná-Krausová (1889–1961), the daughter of Arnošt Kraus (1859–1943), who corresponded with Brandes, came out in 1927. *Prvotní křesťanství* (translated by Jan Razil, probably from the German, *Urkristendom*) was published in 1928.

¹⁴ -by- [Josef Svatopluk Machar], 'Literární epizoda,' *Čas*, 25 February 1912, 3. ('Brandes byl před tím v Praze a byl jejich hostem, z jeho hlavních proudů překládala tehdy Romantickou školu ve Francii a chtěla přeložit dílo celé, dojde-li tento díl v čtenářstvu uznání. (Nedošel.)')

¹⁵ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, 'Zolův naturalism [part 3],' *Naše doba* 3, no. 3 (1895–1896): 226, 232.

parative literature: 'Comparison thus served a critical function in local debates when Brandes attacked domestic cultural stagnation and emphasized the need for Denmark to catch up.'¹⁶ In the 1880s and 1890s, Czech men and women of letters were obviously most inspired by Brandes's liberal approach in fighting what he considered to be the backwardness of Danish literature and encouraging authors to take up modern trends. Symptomatic of this is expressed in a recollection of František Xaver Šalda (1867–1937), one of the most influential Czech critics of the first half of the twentieth century. On the occasion of Brandes's seventieth birthday, Šalda, a professor of Romance literatures at Prague University, wrote a lengthy piece in *Národní listy*.¹⁷ In this article, he recalls his first visit to the Clementinum library in the late 1880s which he made with piety solely to read *Main Currents*:

Back then, in the late 1880s, my relationship to Brandes was to a certain degree typical: the awakened Czech and German youth with literary interests looked up to him with the same feeling of reverence. For the youth of central Europe then, Brandes was a great liberator, an emancipator; he liberated us from the old, closed, and fossilized tradition at home; he opened new cultural and literary, aesthetic, and social horizons; he brought us Western philosophical and poetic Positivism and Naturalism. [...] My initial enthusiasm for Brandes, however, did not stand the test of my more profound studies of aesthetic, literary, and social questions.¹⁸

His essay on the occasion of Brandes's eightieth birthday, entitled 'An Eighty-year-old Lucifer' paints a similar picture.¹⁹ In the beginning, Šalda recalls Brandes's immense impact, equating it to that of Flaubert, Zola, Tolstoy, Ibsen, Kielland, Mill, and Bjørnson. These authors, according to Šalda, gave courage to the intimidated Czech soul and liberated 'Czech brains from the Egyptian darkness *in estheticis*.'²⁰ The core of the essay, however, consists of depicting his parting of ways with Brandes. In retrospect, Šalda, Machar, and Masaryk unequivocally state that Brandes's Positivism and Naturalism in literature have been superseded, condemning his conception of literature as outdated and his approach as shallow.

In reaction to the Czech translation in *Čas*, a periodical closely associated with Masaryk's Realist group, Jan Herben (1857–1936) symptomatically called Brandes a 'pioneer of progress' (*průkopníkem pokroku*) but only because other enlightened, talented, and progressive authors, like Bjørnson, Ibsen, Kielland, Drachmann, and Jacobsen, had

¹⁶ Nygård, 'The Geopolitics of the "Modern Breakthrough,"' 19.

¹⁷ František Xaver Šalda, 'Georg Brandes: K jeho 70tým narozeninám dne 4. února t. r.,' *Národní listy*, supplement *Z kulturního života*, 4 February 1912, 17.

¹⁸ Šalda, 'Georg Brandes,' 17. ('Poměr můj k Brandesovi byl tehdy – na konci let osmdesátých – do jakéhosi stupně typický: se stejným pocitem úcty vzhlížela k němu tehdy probudilá část literární mládeže nejen české, ale i německé. Brandes byl tehdy mládeži středoevropské velkým osvoboditelem, emancipátorem: osvobozoval od staré, uzavřené a ztuhlé tradice domácí; otevíral nové obzory kulturní i literární, estetické i sociální; prostředkoval západní positivism a naturalism myšlenkový i básnický [...]. Můj původní entuziasmus pro Brandesa neodolal ovšem hlubšímu studiu problémů esthetických, literárních i společenských?')

¹⁹ František Xaver Šalda, 'Osmdesátiletý Lucifer,' in *Kritické projevy 12: 1922–1924*, ed. Zina Trochová (Prague Československý spisovatel, 1959), 35–39.

²⁰ Šalda, 'Osmdesátiletý Lucifer,' 36. ('pomáhal vypuzovat z českých mozků egyptskou tmou *in estheticis*:')

joined him.²¹ Otherwise, Herben brushes off Brandes's approach to literature as superficial:

Nowhere was Brandes's shallowness made so obvious as it was in Russia. A couple of years ago, Brandes went to Saint Petersburg to lecture on Russian Realists but in the end they listened to him with icy disappointment. Not only had local Russian critics analysed Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy's Realism much more profoundly than he had, but even in the West Melchior de Vogüé knew Russian Realism in an utterly different way from Brandes.²²

In his review, Herben refers to a series of his columns on Brandes's *Main Currents*, which he wrote back in 1886.²³ This supports the view that the Czech-speaking intelligentsia had reflected on Brandes's thoughts even before one of the volumes appeared in Czech in 1893. What is more important, however, is Herben's polemic with the enthusiastic review of the Czech translation, which was written by Jan Voborník and published in the daily *Národní listy* (National gazette).²⁴ Herben describes his initially positive stance towards Brandes's *Currents* as a sickness he had by now recovered from.²⁵ Herben's harsh metaphor of a cured sickness suggests that Brandes's Czech translation arrived on the scene rather late and a significant number of Czech intellectuals had already dissociated themselves from Brandes's ideas. This observation comports with the judgments made by Masaryk in his private correspondence with the writer Machar. In a letter of 6 May 1894, Machar made this critical remark concerning Brandes:

I mentioned Nietzsche. Have you read Brandes's article on him in *Zlatá Praha*? His shallowness is unparalleled. And on top of that, it takes considerable audacity to write about something after having merely leafed through it. Because the gentleman certainly cannot have read Nietzsche. Brandes is a columnist, nothing more. It is of the damned flashy, empty French school whose father was Sainte-Beuve.²⁶

²¹ [Jan Herben], review of *Hlavní proudy literatury století devatenáctého: Romantická škola ve Francii*, by Georg Brandes, trans. Anežka Schulzová, *Čas*, 9 December 1893, 773–74. This review was published anonymously but based on the references and other indications the author must be Jan Herben.

²² [Herben], review of *Hlavní proudy literatury století devatenáctého*, 773. ('Nikde nebyla tak odkryta povrchnost Brandesova jako v Rusku. Brandes zajel do Petrohradu před několika lety přednášet o ruských realistech, ale doposlouchán byl s ledovým sklamaním. Nejen domácí kritikové ruští dávno a mnohem důkladněji vyslovili se o realismu Dostojevského a Tolstého, nýbrž i na západě Melchior de Vogüé poznal realism ruský docela jinak než Brandes.')

²³ Herben wrote several essays under the name Jan Litera or the initials J. H. in *Hlas národa*, all published in 1886. In these essays, he drew on Brandes's works and critical approach. See 'Herben, Jan 1876 (autorská část)', *Retrospektivní bibliografie české literatury 1775–1945*, Prague: ÚČL AV ČR, <https://retrobi.ucl.cas.cz/retrobi/katalog/cast/A/skupina/Herben%252C+Jan+1876.0>.

²⁴ See Jan Voborník, review of *Hlavní proudy literatury století devatenáctého: Romantická škola ve Francii*, by Georg Brandes, trans. Anežka Schulzová, *Národní listy*, 1 December 1893, 4.

²⁵ [Herben], review of *Hlavní proudy literatury století devatenáctého*, 773.

²⁶ Machar to Masaryk, Vienna, 6 May 1894, in *Korespondence: T. G. Masaryk – Josef Svatopluk Machar*, eds. Helena Kokešová, Petr Kotyk and Irena Kraitlová, vol. 1, 1893–1895 (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, 2017), 102. ('Zmínil jsem se o Nietzsche. Četl jste v "Zlaté Praze" Brandesův článek o něm? Je to povrchnost bezpříkladná. A porce smělosti k tomu patří psát o něčem tak po pouhém prohlédnutí. Neboť ten pán jistě Nietzsche nepročtl. Brandes je fejetonista a nic víc. Je to proklatá blýskavá a prázdná francouzská škola, jejíž papa byl S[ain]te-Beuve.')

In agreement with Machar, Masaryk replied that Brandes was the 'prototype of the vulgar European liberal. It suits him well that he is propagated in our literature by the arch-conservative [Ferdinand] Schulz.'²⁷ Neither Machar nor Masaryk made these harsh statements publicly, yet similar criticism was expressed by Herben in the *Čas* review. On the one hand, Herben criticized Brandes's literary doctrine and scorned his criticism for shallowness; on the other, he admitted that Brandes's *Currents* could nevertheless contribute to Czech culture as an impetus to better literary criticism because the essay-like style makes criticism accessible to the general public.²⁸ Hence, the general disdain for Brandes's criticism went hand in hand with high acclaim for Brandes's role as a public intellectual. A telling example of this stance is an article published in *Čas* on 12 April 1890 referring to Brandes's letter to *Freie Bühne für modernes Leben*.²⁹ In this letter, Brandes reports on his many debates in the international arena and his lectures in Denmark, which were packed to capacity. The Czech commentator concludes his reporting on Brandes's letter:

We do not like Mr. Georg Brandes but we would still draw attention to the lively culture scenes in other countries: philosophical debates that move countless people to write, students who wait for three-quarters of an hour for the auditorium to open, students who pack the auditoriums to capacity so the lecture has to be held twice or three times. Are further explanations needed to convince us that the Danes, although smaller in number than us, still outdo us to such extent?³⁰

This passage corroborates Nygård's observation that according to Brandes 'cultural offense was the best defence for Denmark and Scandinavia. The national and the international were mutually constituent categories, and Denmark's 'political and cultural salvation lay in an enhanced Danish presence on the European cultural scene.'³¹ As should be clear from the Czech examples, Brandes's activity promoted Scandinavia abroad and served as an example to other small nations.

As we have sought to demonstrate the appeal of Brandes's theoretical works, and especially his conception of Naturalism, soon faded in the eyes of Czech men and women of letters. The opposite is true of the impetus to comparison or, rather, to catching-up, which Brandes provided throughout Europe – this aspect of his literary activity served as a model to emulate. Following the Danish example, Brandes's inspiration mainly consisted in the possibility of making an even non-independent small nation internationally

²⁷ Masaryk to Machar, Prague, 9 May 1894, in *Korespondence. T. G. Masaryk – Josef Svatopluk Machar*, 104. ('typ vulgárního, evropského liberalismu. Hodí se k němu docela dobře, že jej teď do naší literatury zavádí arcišošák Schulz.') Machar and Masaryk's correspondence as well as Herben's polemic review reflect the contemporary disputes between different fractions of Czech national movement, in this case the Realists and the Young Czechs. The socio-political contextualization of Brandes's reception is a topic in itself and needs to be further researched.

²⁸ [Herben], review of *Hlavní proudy literatury století devatenáctého*, 773.

²⁹ 'Zajímavé světlo na poměry dánské,' *Čas*, 12 April 1890, 234.

³⁰ 'Zajímavé světlo na poměry dánské,' 234. ('Pan Georg Brandes nám není sympatický, ale přece ukazujeme na duchovní ruch v zemích jiných: filosofická polemika, která hne nesčíslnými péry, studenti, kteří tři čtvrti hodiny čekají na otevření posluchárny, studenti, kteří naplňují síně tak, že je možná mítí přednášku dvakrát ba třikrát. Je potřebí dalších výkladů pro to, že Dánové, ač jsou počtem slabší nás, přece v literatuře tak velice nad nás vynikají?')

³¹ Nygård, "The Geopolitics of the "Modern Breakthrough,"" 13.

visible. This partial conclusion leads to the second section of our essay: the effort to use Brandes in the struggle for Czech emancipation from the Habsburgs.

Using the Brandes Brand: 'A church whose frescos a Barbarian hand has left covered with lime for centuries'

In using Brandes as an international celebrity, the Czechs' aim was twofold. First, they wished to achieve legitimization and acceptance as, in Friedrich Meinecke's conception, a *Kulturnation* (a nation with a great cultural history), if not yet a *Staatsnation* (a political nation or nation-state)³². Second, they sought to emphasize Brandes's non-German, semi-peripheral origin in order to underscore the possibility of small nations successfully competing with great powers. The Czech motivation for referring to Brandes comports with Brandes's mediating role as described by Nygård. According to Nygård, Brandes and other Scandinavian intellectuals, such as Bjørnson, were interested in redefining their 'role in the world-system by exploiting a position of relative detachment from dominant centres and to situate themselves and their regions as mediators.'³³ Precisely this quality of Brandes's being relatively detached from culturally dominant Germany was accentuated and valued in several articles written by Czechs in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

Brandes's status as a mediator and the Czechs' using it is evident in the recycling of Brandes's description of his Prague sojourn. After Brandes had visited Prague in late July 1892, he published a short cultural travelogue from Prague with the title 'Bøhmen.'³⁴ In this essay, he mentions his maneuvering between the feuding Czech and German clubs and he displays his conscious role as an unbiased mediator. The general view he presented is his acclaim for the Czechs' fierce struggle for the autonomy of their language, yet he also visits the German club and praises both groups for not pressuring him to take a stance. True to Romanticism, however, Brandes utters his conviction that the genuine spirit of Bohemia is incarnated in the Czech-speaking majority and he therefore approves of the national rebirth of the Czechs. He uses a visual-arts metaphor to express the current state of Czech culture:

But the movement is clear: Czechness will prevail and the German element will lose its ground here. The national passion of the Czech tribe has been so strong that it has changed the face of Bohemia and the look of Prague. A lot of power was hidden in these people since it could break through so rapidly. Its essence has made the same impression on me as a church whose frescos a Barbarian hand has left covered with lime for centuries. Suddenly the coating has been removed and the imagery has appeared with its original shapes and colours.³⁵

³² For a more profound analysis see Georg Schmidt, 'Friedrich Meineckes Kulturnation Zum historischen Kontext nationaler Ideen in Weimar-Jena um 1800', *Historische Zeitschrift* 284, no. 1 (2007): I-I. <https://doi.org/10.1524/hzhz.2007.284.jg.masthead>, 598.

³³ Nygård, 'The Geopolitics of the "Modern Breakthrough,"' 2.

³⁴ Georg Brandes, 'Bøhmen,' in *Samlede Skrifter*, vol. 11 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1902), 270–87.

³⁵ Brandes, 'Bøhmen,' 277. ('Men Bevægelsen er den, at det er det Tzechiske som vinder, det Tyske, som taber Jordsmon her, og den tzechiske Stammes nationale Lidenskab har været saa stærk, at den har

As Josef B. Michl has observed, Brandes might have written this piece about Bohemia shortly after returning home. Michl also mentions that the first translation of the Bohemia piece was first published in German in the volume *Charakterzeichnungen von Land und Leuten* (Leipzig, 1899).³⁶ But in 1894, an issue of the Brno daily *Moravská orlice* records an earlier translation into German. In September, it reported that Brandes's recollections of Prague were published in the latest issue of the *Neue Revue* in Vienna. In the Czech article, titled 'A Danish voice about our Prague', Brandes is described as a 'famous literary critic who with his activity embraces the whole contemporary cultural world.'³⁷ The rest of the article contains an accurate translation of Brandes's commendation of the Czech people for their persistence and industriousness. The report includes Brandes's statement that the Czech National Theatre is Europe's most beautiful, and uses the fresco metaphor.³⁸ Clearly, Brandes's Czech impressions were soon reimported to Bohemia and used to support Czech claims for international and domestic recognition. The Czechs' continuous use of Brandes is attested by the repeated use of the fresco metaphor in Czech periodicals. In an article from 21 February 1927, reflecting on his visits to Prague, Brandes is praised for grasping the relationship between the Czechs and Bohemian Germans during his speech for the Czechs on Žofín, an island on the Vltava in Prague, in which he used precisely this metaphor.³⁹ Interestingly, Brandes may have borrowed this image from his compatriot Frederik Schiern's *Breve fra Prag* (Letters from Prague) first published in book form in 1858. Schiern laments the oppression of the Czech language by the German and the arrogance of the German minority towards the suppressed Czech majority, and he cleverly calls life in Prague a 'palimpsest'.⁴⁰

A plethora of instances in Czech periodicals document the hunger of the Czech intelligentsia for recognition by Brandes. The fortnightly *Ženský svět* (Woman's World) ran an advertisement for the Czech translation of his volume on Søren Kierkegaard in 1904, with the following words: 'The famous author, so well disposed to us Czechs, has written us an uplifting preface to the Czech edition.'⁴¹ The entire preface was published separately by the daily *Lidové noviny* on 21 February 1927, together with his obituary, under a title that translates as 'Brandes's Message to the Czech Nation'.⁴² In the preface, Brandes juxtaposes Kierkegaard with Jan Hus and calls the Czech nation one of the most freedom-loving peoples in the world.

It is also significant that two collections of Czech poems in German translation each contains a dedication to Brandes by the Czech patriot and advocate of Czech sovereign-

forvandlet Bøhmens Udseende og Prags Aasyn. Megen Kraft har ligget skjult i dette Folk, siden den saa hurtigt kunde frembryde. Dets Væsen gjorde paa mig samme Indtryk som en Kirke, hvis Fresker en barbarisk Haand for Aarhundreder har dækket med Kalk. Det er nu, som om Sløret med Et var blevet fjernet, og den oprindelige Billedpragt viser sig pludseligt med sine Former og Farver')

³⁶ Michl, 'Georg Brandes in Böhmen,' 111.

³⁷ 'Dánský hlas o naší Praze,' *Moravská orlice*, 15 September 1894, 3. ('Proslulý dánský kritik literární, Jiří Brandes, kterýž činností svou objímá celý současný svět kulturní [...].')

³⁸ 'Dánský hlas o naší Praze,' 3.

³⁹ 'Jiří Brandes v Praze,' *Lidové noviny*, 21 February 1927, afternoon edition, 1.

⁴⁰ Frederik Schiern, 'Breve fra Prag,' in *Nyere historiske Studier* (Copenhagen: J. H. Schubothe, 1879), 5.

⁴¹ 'Brandesův Søren Kierkegaard v českém rouše,' *Ženský svět*, 20 June 1904, 154. ('Slavný autor, nám Čechům velmi nakloněný, napsal k vydání českému zvláštní nás povznášející přemluvu.')

⁴² Georg Brandes, 'Brandesovo posláni českému národu,' *Lidové noviny*, 21 February 1927, morning edition, 1.

ty, Eduard Albert (1841–1900). They are entitled *Poesie aus Böhmen: fremde und eigene Uebersetzungen aus dem Böhmischem* (1893) and *Neuere Poesie aus Böhmen: Anthologie aus dem Werken von Jaroslav Vrchlický* (1893). They are further evidence of using Brandes's international influence to advance the Czech cause. Brandes clearly only considers the poems of Vrchlický, whom he met personally. There is no evidence of him referring to other Czech writers from the collection, such as Jan Neruda, Karel Hynek Mácha, Ján Kollár (a Slovak writing in Czech), Karel Havlíček, and Karel Jaromír Erben.

The most engaged and open use of Brandes's reputation was by a close collaborator of Masaryk's, Arnošt Kraus.⁴³ In 1905, Kraus was appointed the first Czech professor of German literature at the Czech University of Prague since its founding in 1882. Most important to our essay, Kraus became widely known as an enthusiastic scholar of things Scandinavian, Danish in particular.⁴⁴ He learnt Danish, studied various aspects of Danish culture, and visited Denmark numerous times. In his works, he emphasizes the parallels between the Czechs and the Danes – both, he argues, were small nations whose national cultures competed with the dominant German culture next door. Kraus saw Denmark as a role model for the Czech nation because the Danes, despite being a small nation, had managed to surmount the difficulties they faced following their defeat in the Second Schleswig War (1864). By the turn of the century, they became an internationally respected nation, valued particularly for their economic and cultural strengths. In attempts to emulate this success, Kraus arranged excursions to Danish farms for Czech agricultural workers, wrote books and articles on Denmark, and promoted the Danish model of society to the Czech public.⁴⁵ For him, Brandes represented the epitome of Danish success in the cultural field, an intellectual of a small nation who had achieved international renown.

Kraus corresponded with Brandes and his letters are brimming over with requests to Brandes to participate publicly in the Czech emancipatory struggle. Two appeals by Kraus are typical of his approach to Brandes. In a letter of 11 March 1906, Kraus informed Brandes that he intended to start the *Čechische Revue*, a journal (publishing ten issues a year) with contributions in German, with the aim of informing foreign readers about Czech society and culture.⁴⁶ It was Masaryk who had prompted Kraus to establish a journal with a mission to overcome Czech provincialism and become a platform for Czech

⁴³ On Kraus's correspondence with Brandes see Helena Březinová, 'Arnošt Vilém Kraus zwischen Böhmen und Dänemark – eine Brücke, von der man auf Deutschland herabsieht,' in *Arnošt Vilém Kraus (1859–1943): Wissenschaftler und Kulturpolitiker*, eds. Helena Březinová, Steffen Höhne, and Václav Petrbok (Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), 197–222.

⁴⁴ Martin Humpál, 'Arnošt Kraus zwischen Tschechien und dem Norden,' *Text und Kontext: Zeitschrift für germanistische Literaturforschung in Skandinavien* 26, no. 1 (2004): 36. See also Václav Petrbok, ed., *Arnošt Vilém Kraus (1859–1943) a počátky české germanobohemistiky* (Prague: Academia, 2015), 9–27.

⁴⁵ Jana Lainto, 'A "Danish Model"? Transnational Networks and the Circulation of Danish Agricultural Practices in Bohemia at the Turn of the Century,' in *In the Sign of Self-help and Solidarity: Cooperatives, Cooperative Elites, and Politics in Central Europe in the Second Half of the 19th Century and the First Half of the 20th Century*, eds. Jan Slaviček and Eduard Kubů (Prague: Historický ústav AV ČR/Národní zemědělské museum, forthcoming). See also Peter Bugge, 'Arnošt Kraus' Images of Denmark,' in *Arnošt Vilém Kraus (1859–1943)*, eds. Březinová, Höhne, and Petrbok, 223–38.

⁴⁶ Kraus to Brandes, 11 March 1906, Brandes arkiv, Breve (Kont-Krohg) fra fremmede enkeltpersoner til Georg Brandes, æske 80, Det Kgl. Bibliotek, Copenhagen.

intellectuals to participate in international discussions.⁴⁷ The chief aim of the journal, as Kraus explained to Brandes, was to address two matters: the cultural viability of a small nation and the possibility of co-existing with a large nation bordering it. Kraus then clarified what he expected Brandes to do: 'Both these questions can be viewed from a wider perspective and I would like to encourage big (non-German) spirits from abroad, spirits and leaders coming from small nations, to express their opinion on these matters. Would you be one of them?'⁴⁸

Kraus continuously accentuated Brandes's neutrality, because, thanks to his authority, he was entitled to become a mediator between the German and Czech peoples of Bohemia. And, as has been deftly shown by Nygård, this is exactly the brokering role Brandes consciously adopted.⁴⁹ In another letter, of 21 January 1912, Kraus asked Brandes about the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature and tried to compel Brandes to put forward the name of the Czech writer Jaroslav Vrchlický (1853–1912) because of Vrchlický's immense impact on the evolving Czech culture.⁵⁰ Although both pleas went unheard, Kraus found ways to engage Brandes despite the famous Dane's reluctance.

In his letters, Brandes regularly apologized for not being able to provide the contribution Kraus had asked for, explaining that he was simply too busy.⁵¹ In several instances, then, Kraus made use of Brandes's published writings when they were in concordance with the general objective of the Czech emancipatory movement. Unsurprisingly, he promptly translated Brandes's 'Danskheden i Sønderjylland' (Danishness in Southern Jutland, 1899). Brandes's article was published in Czech by the monthly *Naše doba* (Our times). The title is, however, significantly different from the Danish: in Czech, it is 'Německá a dánská kultura' (German and Danish culture), reflecting Kraus's motivation for translating the article.⁵² Furthermore, he provided his translation with a telling preface in which he, like Brandes in his article, opposes Otto Weddingen's claim that German culture should be a model for both the Danish and the Czech. As his strongest argument, Kraus used Brandes's persona, writing:

It might therefore be interesting to learn opinions on this matter uttered by a voice that is not only Danish but also more competent than any other, uttered by a man in comparison with whom Mr. Weddingen plays the same role as little Denmark face to face with the German Empire, a man, whose whole orientation guarantees that we will not hear any

⁴⁷ Petr Šisler, 'Čechische Revue,' *Lexikon české literatury 1. Osobnosti, díla a instituce: A–G*, ed. Vladimír Forst et al. (Prague: Academia, 1985), 416.

⁴⁸ Kraus to Brandes, 11 March 1906, Brandes arkiv, Breve (Kont–Krohg) fra fremmede enkeltpersoner til Georg Brandes, æske 80, Det Kgl. Bibliotek, Copenhagen. ('Begge disse Spørgsmål kan opfattes fra en videre Synskreds og jeg tænker mig at opfordre Udlandets, de store (ikke tyske) og smaa Nationers anerkendte Aander og Førere at udtale sig derom. Vilde de være den første af dem?')

⁴⁹ Nygård, "The Geopolitics of the "Modern Breakthrough"."

⁵⁰ Kraus to Brandes, 21 January 1912, Brandes arkiv, Breve (Kont–Krohg) fra fremmede enkeltpersoner til Georg Brandes, æske 80, Det Kgl. Bibliotek, Copenhagen.

⁵¹ Kraus's personal papers contain 14 cards and letters from Brandes to him. In Arnošt Vilém Kraus Fonds, Korespondence osobní: Brandes Georg, sign. 197, karton 2, MÚA AV ČR, Prague.

⁵² Georg Brandes, 'Německá a dánská kultura,' trans. Arnošt Kraus, *Naše doba* 6, nos. 7 and 8 (1898–1899): 493–500, 570–76.

statements of national chauvinism. That man is Georg Brandes, whose article was published in the March issue of *Tilskueren*, a Copenhagen arts monthly.⁵³

Of equal significance is the following episode. During 1926 Brandes's sojourn at Carlsbad (Karlovy Vary), the popular spa in west Bohemia, Kraus offered him to arrange a meeting with the Czechoslovak president, Masaryk. As part of his urging, he pointed out that it had been Masaryk who 'forty-four years ago was the first in Prague to talk about you. You would say "der Mann steht seinem Ruhm; sein Ruhm ist bloß sein Schatten."⁵⁴ And, on 8 June 1826, Masaryk did indeed receive Brandes.⁵⁵ This event was obviously meant to achieve the same end as any other public announcement in which Brandes acknowledged Czech culture and statehood.

Indeed, Kraus continued to cast Brandes in the role of an authority legitimizing the Czechs right to autonomy or independence even after the birth of Czechoslovakia, and similar efforts were made by other Czech intellectuals. Evidence of this is a short news item in *Lidové noviny* on 13 June 1926, by the famous writer Karel Čapek (1890–1938), who, like Kraus, was closely allied with President Masaryk.⁵⁶ It was published a week after Masaryk had received Brandes in Carlsbad and Čapek's description of Brandes leaves the impression that Čapek was present, which he may have been, but there is no record of his having been at the meeting. Čapek depicts a spry, dignified elderly Brandes, and claims that he was the greatest of all European critics, someone who remembered poor, sick Jacobsen, hypochondriacal Strindberg, and his old friend Vrchlický.⁵⁷ The point of Čapek's name-dropping as if on the Dane's behalf was likely an attempt to convince the readers of Brandes's importance and give greater resonance to Brandes's tipping his hat to Masaryk at the end of the news item. According to Čapek, Brandes the giant dubbed Masaryk 'king' at the meeting: 'And all of a sudden this doyen of Europe raises his glass to toast the health of a king. You are republicans but you have a king of spirit in your midst. I drink to the health of President Masaryk.'⁵⁸ Čapek's metaphor of the doyen from Denmark dubbing the Czechoslovak president a king is surely the epitome of the Czechs' using Brandes's authority to their ends. It is fair to say, then, that the influence Brandes and other Scandinavian intellectuals, like Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, tried to make use of in international affairs after 1900 was apparently perceived by a considerable number of Czech intellectuals exactly the way the Scandinavians wished it to be:⁵⁹ they were quite

⁵³ Brandes, 'Německá a dánská kultura,' no. 7, 493. ('Proto bude snad zajímavo poznati o téže látce hlas z úst nejen dánských nýbrž i nad jiné povolaných, z úst muže, vůči němuž p. Weddingen, třeba Němec, hraje přec jen tutéž úlohu jako malé Dánsko u přirovnání s německou říší, muže, jehož celý směr zaručuje, že neuslyšíme výroků národního šovinismu; jest to Georg Brandes, jehož článek vyšel v březnovém sešitu kodaňské revue "Tilskueren"')

⁵⁴ Kraus to Brandes, 3 June 1926, Brandes arkiv, Breve (Kont–Krohg) fra fremmede enkeltpersoner til Georg Brandes, æske 80, Det Kgl. Bibliotek, Copenhagen. ('Han var for 44 Aar siden den første i Prag, som talte om Dem. De ville sigte der Mann steht seinem Ruhm; sein Ruhm ist bloß sein Schatten.')

⁵⁵ File 'Brandes Georg, dánský spisovatel,' KPR – protokol A (audience), inv. č. 345, sign. A 691/26, Archiv KPR, Prague.

⁵⁶ Karel Čapek, 'Doyen evropské kultury,' *Lidové noviny*, 13 June 1926, 7.

⁵⁷ Čapek, 'Doyen evropské kultury,' 7.

⁵⁸ Čapek, 'Doyen evropské kultury,' 7. ('A jindy opět tento doyen Evropy pozvedá číši vína na zdraví krále: Vy jste republikáni, ale máte ve svém středu krále ducha. Připíjím na zdraví presidenta Masaryka.')

⁵⁹ Brandes's speech on the island of Mon in 1904 is significant in this respect: 'It is also more important to develop a sense of freedom and justice among the people, not just for its own use [...]. Thus it

widely considered international authorities calling for a just approach to be taken towards small and underprivileged peoples.

Brandes and Eastern Europe

As we have seen, the Czechs again and again enthusiastically accepted and employed the authority of a cultural celebrity from another small nation, a brother and co-fighter in the emancipatory struggle of small nations, to have their cultures internationally acknowledged. And yet, when it came to his area of expertise, comparative literature, Czech intellectuals accused Brandes of not understanding Slavic literatures and Eastern Europe. After all, Brandes was widely perceived to be a representative of Western cultures. To his credit, he tried in his writings to get the literature of the Slavic East included in *Weltliteratur*, but the relationship between the Western cultural impetus and the Eastern in Brandes's understanding is complex and raises several questions. When scrutinized closely, Brandes's view of the Czechs corresponds somewhat with the notion of Eastern Europeans as the Others. In his article 'Voltaire's Public and the Idea of Eastern Europe: Toward a Literary Sociology of Continental Division,' Larry Wolff convincingly demonstrates that the division was first introduced during the Enlightenment. In this period, Voltaire 'produced a certain asymmetry in the implicit relation between "Western Europe" and "Eastern Europe", as the latter was made legible and accountable to the former.'⁶⁰ To make clear what he means by legible, Wolff also employs the categories of an appropriating subject and appropriated object: 'Again, there was a Europe that held certain beliefs, whether true or false, and another Europe which appeared only as an object of regard, an item of news, a point of controversy. There was a Europe as subject and Europe as object, geographically aligned according to west and east, and the former assumed a public persona in which it appropriated the latter.'⁶¹ Wolff gives evidence to support this assumption by focusing on Voltaire's use of 'we' when addressing the reading public of his day, around 1750, and this 'we' included Paris, Basel, The Hague, Geneva, and Dresden but excluded the European Orient:⁶² 'The first person plural, however,

was my ideal that it should be known that, despite the small size of our country, men lived here who felt sympathy for with all wronged individuals or oppressed peoples across the world and who lifted their voices, spoke on their behalf.' In Julia K. Allen, 'Taking the Measure of National Greatness: Georg Brandes's Condemnation of German Imperialism,' *Monatshefte* 108, no. 3 (2016): 326. William Banks's recently published comprehensive collection gives a picture of the scope of Brandes's international activity and attests to his self-understanding as international authority. In Georg Brandes, *Human Rights and Oppressed Peoples: Collected Essays and Speeches*, ed. and trans. William Banks (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020).

⁶⁰ Larry Wolff, 'Voltaire's Public and the Idea of Eastern Europe: Toward a Literary Sociology of Continental Division,' *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 935.

⁶¹ Wolff, 'Voltaire's Public and the Idea of Eastern Europe,' 935.

⁶² Wolff, 'Voltaire's Public and the Idea of Eastern Europe,' 938. Furthermore, Wolff discusses the shift of the North-South axis to a West-East in the late eighteenth century. According to him, 'it was the intellectual work of the Enlightenment to bring about that modern reorientation of the continent which produced Western Europe and Eastern Europe. Poland and Russia would be mentally detached from Sweden and Denmark, and associated instead with Hungary and Bohemia, the Balkan lands of Ottoman Europe, and even the Crimea on the Black Sea.' In Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 5.

defined geographically the perspective from which the Orient was to be viewed, by us, “us, in our northern Occident [...]”⁶³

Exploring Brandes’s works, one can identify traces of him making such a division, although it would probably be an exaggeration to blame him for ascribing to the West an unconditional superiority and dominance. As is well documented, his aim was to import interesting impetuses from Polish and Russian works of literature in favour of *Weltliteratur* as he understood it. Still, in terms of Wolff’s Europe the subject–object dynamics are clear: in Brandes’s Western perspective, the Czechs were an object. The Czechs, nonetheless, largely mirrored this hierarchy realizing that only after Western recognition could their own cultural value be legitimized.

Returning to Pallas’s article published to mark Brandes’s seventieth birthday, we see that he rather harshly judges Brandes’s attitude to the Slavs: ‘To us Slavs, Brandes remained a stranger although his influence on the previous generation was quite remarkable. Brandes did not understand the Slavic literary currents; with just a few remarks he is done with Polish Byronism and Russian Naturalism; in his *Main Currents*, he comes to a standstill with two Germanic branches and a Roman one.’⁶⁴

A similar statement about Brandes’s ignorance about the Slavic cultures appears in the obituary written by the influential critic and professor of literature Arne Novák (1880–1939) and published in *Lidové noviny* on 21 February 1927. ‘Brandes used to bring back from his journeys,’ Novák writes, ‘diaries full of impressions and reflections, sometimes profound, sometimes superficial. And Poland and Russia, the countries in which he travelled in the 1880s, remained incomprehensible to him, which his essay on Mickiewicz and his book about Dostoyevsky also attest to.’⁶⁵ Of course, Brandes’s alleged ignorance of Slavic literatures is not evidence that he thought of Europe as being divided into West and East. Here, the opposite is true: the division is emphasized by the Czech authors. At the same time, their statements attest to Czech intellectuals’ feeling like objects appropriated by the West. Both Pallas and Arne Novák provide evidence that the division was palpable to the Czech intelligentsia.

The notion of an invisible East–West borderline can, however, also be detected in Brandes’s writings. In what follows, we will focus on this aspect and Brandes’s acknowledgment that the literary centres of power are principally in the West. As we have seen, Czech periodicals eagerly quoted Brandes’s descriptions of Bohemia. But the Czech-speaking authors omitted one part of these descriptions. In it, Brandes does not extoll the beauty of the National Theatre (finally opened in 1881) or the Czechs’ successful fight for their language, but presents a stereotypical notion of the Slavs. He writes:

⁶³ Wolff, ‘Voltaire’s Public and the Idea of Eastern Europe,’ 938.

⁶⁴ Pallas, ‘Doslov k oslavám sedmsátých [sic] narozenin Jiřího Brandesa,’ 5. (‘Nám Slovanům zůstával Brandes cizím, ač vliv jeho na minulou generaci byl dosti značný. Brandes neměl porozumění pro literární proudy slovanské, jenom zmínkami odbývá na příkl. polský byronismus a ruský naturalismus; v “Hlavních proudech” ustrnul pouze na dvou germánských a jedné románské větvi.’)

⁶⁵ Arne Novák, ‘Za Jiřím Brandesem,’ *Lidové noviny*, 21 February 1927, morning edition, 2. (‘Brandes si přinášival ze svých cest zpravidla napěchované zápisníky dojmů a postřehů, někdy pronikavých, jindy jenom povrchních, a jmenovitě Polsko a Rusko, kde cestoval v letech osmdesátých, zůstaly mu zeměmi nesrozumitelnými, jak svědčí i jeho studie o Mickiewiczovi a kniha o Dostojevském.’)

For us Northerners, Bohemia still has a certain fairy-tale ring to its name. This is the land from which, according to the ballad, Queen Dagmar sailed [to Denmark]. The land on whose shores, in Shakespeare, you land. The name in its French form, *la Bohême* (*les Bohémiens*), evokes the image of a free Gypsy life [*la bohème*]; it seems to be the term of the old land of the Gypsies or the modern home of the homeless. Yet no other Slavic nation corresponds less to these projections than the Czech inhabitants of Bohemia. Among all the Slavic tribes the Czech is the most domestic, the most industrious, and the most constantly and skilfully striving.⁶⁶

That means, conversely, that all other Slavic nations are less home-loving and industrious, that is, they live more in keeping with the notion of the 'Gypsy life'. Clearly, the devil is hidden in the detail of Brandes's praise. This is manifested in another compliment Brandes pays in his 'Bøhmen' travelogue, this time to the translation skills of Vrchlický.

His graceful suppleness is genuinely Slavic, but it is not an expression of any unreliability, only an expression of the astonishing receptiveness of his nature. Such a high degree of receptivity is usually described as feminine, but probably wrongly so; it is male in the strictest sense, for it is based on an always ready, extremely alert artistic drive to produce. If woman possessed such a heightened susceptibility, women would be the finest art-translators on earth. But in all literatures the art-translators are men.⁶⁷

Besides the gender stereotyping, Brandes implies that Slavs are unreliable confirming the insidious reputation of the Slavs known widely from Herder's description of them in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784–91).⁶⁸ If we looked at Brandes's approach as similar to the orientalizing described by Edward Said, the attributes he ascribes to the Slavs match those of the perceived effeminate, insidious Oriental Other.⁶⁹ No wonder, then, that these passages were omitted when the Czechs reported on Brandes's appraisal of their nation and culture. According to Brandes, the Czechs are the

⁶⁶ Brandes, 'Bøhmen,' 276. ('Bøhmen har for Nordboer endnu en vis Æventyrklang i sit Navn. Det er det Rige, hvorfra Dagmar ifølge Kæmpevisen kom sejlende. Det er det Rige, paa hvis fantastiske Kyster man hos Shakespeare lander. Navnet i dets franske Form: Bohême - Bohémiens - genkalder Forestillingen om et frit Zigøjnerliv; det synes at betegne det gamle Zigøjnerland eller de moderne Hjem-løse Hjemstavn. Og saa svarer intet slavisk Folk mindre til Saadanne Forestillinger end Bøhmens czechiske Beboere. Af alle slaviske Stammer er Czecherne den husligste, den flittigste, den stadigst og dygtigst stræbende Stamme.')

⁶⁷ Brandes, 'Bøhmen,' 285. ('Hans gratiøse Smidighed er ægte slavisk, men den er ikke Udtryk for nogen Upaalidelighed, kun et Udslag af det forbausende Modtagelige i hans Væsen. Man plejer at betegne en saadan høj Grad af Modtagelighed som kvindagtig; men sikkert med Urette; den er netop i streng Forstand mandlig, thi den beror paa en altid rede. yderst letvakt kunstnerisk Frembringel-sesdrift. Besad Kvinden en saadan forhøjet Modtagelighed, vilde Kvinderne være de ypperste Kunst-Oversættere paa Jorden. Men i alle Literaturer er Kunst-Oversætterne Mænd.')

⁶⁸ Herder wrote that the Slavs were cruel and treacherous because of the long-lasting serfdom introduced by the Germans: 'Ist es ein Wunder, daß nach Jahrhunderten der Unterjochung und der tiefsten Erbitterung dieser Nation gegen ihre christlichen Herren und Räuber ihr weicher Charakter zur arglistigen, grausamen Knechtsträgheit herabgesunken wäre?' in Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, ed. Martin Bollacher (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker, 1989), 698.

⁶⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, facsimile ed. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 38–39. Jan Dłask, considering the colonial character of the South America countries, employed the Orientalist perspective of the West – a thought-provoking idea in relation to countries like Bohemia. See Jan Dłask, 'Christer Kihlman's Autobiography "Alla mina söner" (All My Sons) in the Perspective of Orientalism by Edward

least Slavic tribe and hence the most Germanic if we take into account that the attribute of domestic (*huslig*) accompanied by the notion of domestic (*hyggelighed*) were, according to Brandes, the primary characteristics of the Germanic peoples.⁷⁰

Besides this controversial generalizing about a nation, which was typical of Brandes and his times, Brandes's writings about the Czechs contains another component we must consider in the asymmetry between West and East: the notion of catching up with the centres of the world republic of letters. The same dynamic was motivating Brandes's first memorable lectures on comparative literature in 1871 in which he tried to encourage the Danish literary scene to catch up with the French. As Nygård aptly puts it: 'Comparison thus served a critical function in local debates when Brandes attacked domestic cultural stagnation and emphasized the need for Denmark to catch up.'⁷¹ Without knowledge of Czech and therefore entirely dependent on the advice of others and on the handful of Czech books translated into German, Brandes could not of course get a satisfactory picture of Czech literature. The only play he saw at the National Theatre in Prague, František Adolf Šubert's drama about rural rebellion, *Jan Výrava* (1886), Brandes summed up as 'well performed but not excellent; the play[-writing] was talented though a bit outdated in its technique.'⁷² Without understanding what was being said by the characters, Brandes judged the piece as somewhat backward. His understanding of Czechs as culturally underdeveloped when compared with the Danes is expressed in his assessment of the standing of the Czech language in Austrian Silesia. In the section entitled 'Strzebowitz' of the article 'Austria',⁷³ Brandes describes the massive spread of Czech in the area to the detriment of German. Then, he juxtaposes the Silesian situation to the one in Southern Denmark where the Danes, owing to what he sees as their feebleness, have been yielding to the pressure of Germanization. In this context, Brandes reiterates his view that Czech-speaking culture is backward:

It is a little disconcerting that there is so much more expansiveness in Czech than in Danish, considering how much better literature has been written in the latter language than in the former, how much higher the Danes are in culture in general. But here, unfortunately, it is not culture but the primordial force of the race that matters.⁷⁴

W. Said, in *Migration and Identity in Nordic Literature*, eds. Martin Humpál and Helena Březinová (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2022), 64–72.

⁷⁰ Georg Brandes, *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur: Emmigrantlitteraturen* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1877), 256–57. In concordance with Brandes's stereotyping, Joep Leersen identifies the image of home as a key metaphor of Europe, especially the Northwest: 'The domestic centrality of the fireplace, and its architectural location at the inner core of the house-dwelling (as its Latin name, *focus*, suggests) provide a potent auto-image against which all societies stood out as barbarians who cooked their food out of doors, under the open sky. Very deeply embedded in the European self-image lies its opposition to nomadism and camp-fires, its reliance on ordered stable domiciles with a tended fire at their centre and a roof over their head. Against this auto-image, anyone living in encampments with camp-fires stands out as an alien – be he a Bedouin, a Gypsy, a nomad or a refugee.' Joep Leersen, 'The Camp and the Home: Europe as Myth and Metaphor,' in *National Stereotyping, Identity Politics, European Crises*, eds. Jürgen Barkhoff and Joep Leersen (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 136.

⁷¹ Nygård, 'The Geopolitics of the "Modern Breakthrough,"' 19.

⁷² Brandes, 'Bøhmen,' 280. ('Spillet var dygtigt uden at være fremragende, Stykket talentfuldt om end lidt gammeldags i sin Teknik.')

⁷³ Georg Brandes, 'Østrig,' in *Samlede Skrifter*, vol. 11 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1902), 288–90.

⁷⁴ Brandes, 'Østrig,' 290. ('Det er en Smule Beskæmmende, at der findes en saa meget større Udvidekraft i Czechisk end i Dansk, naar man betænker, hvor meget bedre Literatur der er skrevet i det sidste

Apart from Brandes's belief that the Czechs are culturally deficient, it is clear that he believes that the revitalizing impetus for Czech culture, including literature, has to come from outside, preferably drawing from the Western canon. That is why he sometimes criticized the Czechs for not being fluent in French and during his own lifetime for becoming increasingly less fluent in German. This complaint can only be understood as Brandes's conviction that the impetus to improve and develop was to be found in exchange with the West. A young Emil Walter (1890–1964), later a diplomat in Denmark and Sweden and an active translator of belles-lettres, wrote the following report about his visit to the sick Georg Brandes in Copenhagen in 1912.⁷⁵ In the report, Walter wishes the Czechs had a Brandes of their own and then he passes on Brandes's warning to the Czechs that they must not isolate themselves in their nation:

He is fully convinced that we are able to develop because we have proved our viability in a national rebirth that is unparalleled in the history of any other nation. But he thinks that we have to cease being large in pettiness. We are resisting foreign influence without being able to develop our own culture. And this makes us small and isolates us from the world around us, just as our common aversion towards our national adversaries results in a loathing for learning German, the language which – unfortunately – continues to be the only bridge from our island over the German ocean. The Czechs two or three generations before us had a much better command of German than we do. He became convinced of that on his travels to Prague; during the last one, five years ago, he visited Czech and German students.⁷⁶

This belief in the need to catch up with the West was also present in the Czech public. This self-critical stance of a substantial number of Czech intellectuals helps also to explain why Brandes was welcomed so warmly – as a representative of the Western cultural canon.

Conclusion

When beginning our research on Georg Brandes's reception in the Czech cultural milieu we proceeded from the conclusions of two scholars who had looked at the topic before us. Radko Kejzlar and Josef B. Michl each wrote that the impact Brandes's writings had made on Czech culture had in fact been largely insignificant. Based on a comprehen-

Sprog end i det første, hvor meget højere de Danske overhovedet staar i Kultur. Men her er det desværre ikke Kultur, men Racens Urkraft, det kommer an paa.')

⁷⁵ Emil Walter, 'Moje návštěvy u velikých Dánů II.: U Georga Brandesa,' *Zlatá Praha*, 30 May 1913, 450–51.

⁷⁶ Walter, 'Moje návštěvy u velikých Dánů II,' 451. ('Je plně přesvědčen, že jsme schopni vývoje, protože jsme svou životnost dokumentovali faktem národního vzkříšení, jemuž není rovno v dějinách druhého národa. Jen mu připadá, že bychom měli přestat býti velcí v malichernostech. Bráníme se cizím vlivům, nejsouce při tom ještě s to vypěstit svoji vlastní kulturu. A to nás činí malými, to nás izoluje od ostatního světa, stejně jako vespolná nevraživost s našimi národními odpůrci má za následek nechut v učení a špatné ovládní německého jazyka, doposud – bohužel – jediného mostu z našeho ostrova přes německý oceán. Třetí i druhá generace před námi mluvila německy daleko lépe. Přesvědčil se o tom na svých cestách do Prahy, z nichž poslední, asi před pěti lety, platila českým i německým studentům!')

sive analysis of Czech narratives from 1880 to 1927, we can now confirm this claim. Influential Czech-speaking intellectuals like Masaryk, Herben, and Šalda, admired Brandes in the 1880s and 1890s but soon rejected his criticism as superficial and shallow. Surprisingly, neither Kejzlar nor Michl concentrated on how Brandes's symbolic capital was used in the Bohemian Lands. We consider this part of Brandes's Czech reception to be the most important for a general assessment of his influence on Czech culture at that time. The Czechs systematically made use of Brandes's persona and authority to promote the cultural autonomy of their country. They focused on his role as an arbiter and champion of Czechs and accentuated his having come from a small nation. A central proponent of this strategy was Arnošt Kraus. To Kraus and others, Brandes embodied the possibility that small nations could become prominent in the international arena. In this respect, our contribution provides evidence of the international success of Brandes's brokering position as described by Stefan Nygård in his recently published articles. This relationship between the Czechs and Brandes ultimately reveals an asymmetry: on the part of Brandes and of Czech men and women of letters, one sees a more or less exaggerated notion of the West (including Scandinavia) being culturally superior to the Slavic European East.⁷⁷

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