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The transnational turn in American studies has provided new perspectives on ethnic and minority literatures, including the Harlem Renaissance and its representative anthology, Alain Locke's *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925).[1] While such cosmopolitan intellectuals as Locke and Langston Hughes aimed to instill pride in an oppressed American minority, they were keenly aware of global political developments. Yet as Brent Hayes Edwards has pointed out,

> To note that the "New Negro" movement is at the same time a "new" black internationalism is to move against the grain of much of the scholarship on African American culture in the 1920s, which has tended to emphasize U.S.-bound themes of cultural nationalism, civil rights protest, and uplift in the literary culture of the "Harlem Renaissance." (2–3)

Along with Edwards's groundbreaking work on black internationalism across linguistic borders and Paul Gilroy's influential formulation of the "black Atlantic," literary historians such as Michel Fabre and Kate Baldwin have examined the cultural and

political influence of major European powers like France and the Soviet Union on African American writers. Yet little work has been done on the connections (both social and textual) between Europe's *smaller* nations and America's racial minorities. Locke's models of liberation, however, were drawn not so much from Africa, where independence from colonial rule lay decades away, but from nations in Central Europe that had been freed from imperial rule at the end of World War I. In particular, the newly established Czechoslovakia, despite its vulnerability to larger powers, provided Harlem Renaissance writers, especially Locke and Hughes, with an example of a group that had developed self-reliance through cultural achievement.

The most widely noted example of the relationship between the Harlem Renaissance and Czechoslovakia occurs in Locke's introduction to *The New Negro*, in which he compares Harlem to both Prague and Dublin as "nascent centers of folk-expression and self-determination" (7). By collecting the work of established writers like Du Bois and emergent poets like McKay and Hughes, Locke emphasized the parallels between the newly self-confident cultural identity of African Americans (while carefully avoiding any suggestion of political autonomy) and the rise of newly independent smaller nations around the world. Houston Baker explains that *The New Negro* is "a broadening and enlargement of the field of traditional Afro-American discursive possibilities . . . summoning concerns not of a problematic 'folk' but rather those of a newly emergent 'race' or 'nation'—a *national culture*" (73). Locke's study in Europe, particularly at the University of Berlin, increased his awareness of the political movements among the smaller European nations. Aside from his European cultural sympathies, the direct source for his comparison of Harlem and Prague can be traced to the origin of *The New Negro* as a special issue of the journal *Survey Graphic* in March 1925. This illustrated periodical provided a glimpse of foreign cultures for American readers and, before the issue on Harlem, had featured social transformation in Czechoslovakia, which was represented as an outpost of American values. As Clarke Chambers notes, "[w]hatever pertained to the 'folk' moved [the *Survey's* editor] Paul Kellogg to delight. As editor he devoted special numbers of the journal to the Irish Free State, to education and land redistribution in the Mexican countryside, and to the Gypsies" (112). Thus Locke's seemingly tangential reference is a conscious strategy to position African American identity together with other small cultures that were striving for greater respect.

Both Prague and Dublin have become enshrined as centers of European modernism because of their inseparable connections to Franz Kafka and James Joyce. Werner Sollers, in his discussion of the "relationship of ethnic authors to in-group and out-group audiences," suggests that "perhaps even James Joyce's venture into modernism was related to his complex sense of Irish ethnicity; and Franz Kafka's own minority literature was written by a German-speaking Jew in Czechoslovakia, in a situation of not just double but multiple group consciousness" (253). However, both of these great novelists were alienated from the national movements around them: Joyce, of course, spent most of his life in voluntary exile, and Kafka was neither linguistically nor ethnically Czech. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari make these connections explicit in their influential formulation of "minor literature" (1975): "Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses. (This can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language)" (17). They also include Joyce, whose "utilization of English and of every language" as an Irishman "brings about all sorts of worldwide reterritorializations" (19). Scholars of the Harlem Renaissance have previously examined the relevance of the "Irish Renaissance" for African Americans (Chaney 44), but the Czech National Revival has been almost entirely overlooked. Alain Locke was referring to Czech-speakers, not Germans; and in any case he could hardly have been aware that Kafka and Joyce would become icons of twentieth-century literature: Kafka's *The Trial* was published in the same year as *The New Negro*, and Joyce's *Ulysses* had appeared three years earlier. Notably, however, Locke chose to compare Harlem with two European nations that had become independent within the previous decade.

Czechoslovakia's links to American society have been obscured by postwar developments (especially after it fell on the other side of the Cold War "Iron Curtain") but were strong enough during the Harlem Renaissance to appear in other contexts. Although Langston Hughes shaped the image of Harlem in American literature through his innovative "jazz poetry," he did not grow up in Harlem. Rather, he spent his formative years partly in Cleveland, which had one of the largest Czech and (especially) Slovak communities in the United States. Thus his awareness of these ethnic groups came not from Europe, as in Locke's case, but from his personal observation of the struggles (and sometimes cooperation)

between African Americans and the East Central European minorities in American industrial cities. Along with an almost imperceptible reference to Prague in his story "Luani of the Jungles" (1928), Hughes's political poetry of the 1930s and 1940s refers to Czechoslovakia's fall to Nazi and later Communist oppression. As a vocal critic of both racism and capitalism, Hughes was published in Czech even in times of strict Communist censorship, and he directly influenced the modernist Czech poet Ivan Blatný. One of the white promoters of the Harlem Renaissance, who gave Hughes considerable support in his early career, was Carl Van Vechten, whose novel *The Tattooed Countess* (1924) portrays the Czech community of his native Iowa as a "corner of old Europe" in the heart of the Midwest (212). These and other references form an image of Czech Americans as a kind of "model minority" (to use a term coined decades later), distinctive among the Slavic groups that had begun to assimilate into the white American mainstream (Petersen 21). At the same time, Czechoslovakia (whose formation as a nation-state was ratified by American immigrants) was seen as a uniquely democratic, multiethnic, and stable American ally among the chaos of Eastern Europe.

Indeed, Czechoslovakia owed its existence to American support—not only to Woodrow Wilson, whose explicit aim after World War I was to give self-determination to the previously oppressed nations of Europe, but to the Czech and Slovak immigrants in the United States, who showed their support for a Czechoslovak state in the declaration of May 1918 known as the Pittsburgh Agreement. Under the leadership of its founder and president, Tomáš G. Masaryk (whose wife Charlotte was from Brooklyn), Czechoslovakia became the most stable and prosperous nation of interwar Central Europe. Czech literature first attracted international attention through Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* (1920), which introduced the word *robot* to the world. However, the success of this fragile republic remained dependent on the support of Britain and France, which betrayed it in the Munich Agreement of 1938, when British prime minister Chamberlain infamously referred to Germany's aggression toward Czechoslovakia as "a quarrel in a faraway country between peoples of whom we know nothing" (Neville 107). After this event, Langston Hughes wrote the poem "Song for Ourselves" with the shocking first line: "Czechoslovakia lynched on a swastika cross!" (*Collected Poems* 207). As Anthony Dawahare contends, Hughes "thus suggests that both black Americans' and the Czechoslovakians'

sufferings are not isolated—not regional—but interconnected. . . . [B]oth Czechoslovakians and blacks were victimized by a common, racist oppressor that conceived of itself as a master race" (102). After six years of brutal Nazi occupation, the Allies liberated Czechoslovakia, but once again the decision of greater powers—the Yalta Conference of 1945—decided its fate; and with the Communist regime's consolidation of power in 1948, it became part of the Soviet-dominated Eastern Bloc for over forty years. Locke's idealistic image of Czechoslovak "self-determination" thus needs to be excavated from the wreckage of twentieth-century history.

In the introduction to the collection *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem*, Davarian L. Baldwin writes, "A more comprehensive vision of the New Negro experience provides better understanding of what we identify as a global modernity. . . . Decentering Harlem, both as a physical space and as the model for an appropriate 'renaissance,' helps to insist on this movement's both geographical and expressive reach" (4). In his foreword to the same book, Robin D. G. Kelley notes that "*the New Negro was the product of particular historical convergence* . . . a manifestation of the same forces that produced revolutionary upheavals in Mexico, Russia, Ireland, China, Germany, India, Algeria, Egypt, the Arab world under the Ottoman Empire, South Africa, Nicaragua, Brazil, and Trinidad, to name but a few" (1). Notably, while he names at least a dozen European and postcolonial contexts, Kelley does not mention one of Alain Locke's own central examples: Czechoslovakia. In his article "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" (an ironic allusion to Kwame Anthony Appiah's 1991 essay "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?") David Chioni Moore has pointed out "how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are" and "how extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact, at least in these terms" (114). Yet in contemporary American studies, the former Czechoslovakia remains a "faraway country" of which theorists "know nothing," other than the life and work of Kafka. For writers like Alain Locke and Langston Hughes, however, this small Central European country had a political and social relevance, with which they could assume their readers were familiar. The examples discussed below will attempt to bring Prague within the "expressive reach" of Harlem Renaissance scholars.

From Bohemians to Czecho-Slovaks: American Perceptions of the Czechs

During the Harlem Renaissance, just as today, the average American's knowledge of the broader world was relatively limited, particularly with regard to small countries with exotic names. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the confusion is further compounded by a change in nomenclature that was still recent at the time. Before Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, the former kingdom of Bohemia (which also included the region of Moravia) had been under Austrian rule for almost three hundred years. The English term *Bohemia* is derived (via the German *Böhmen*) from the pre-Slavic Celtic inhabitants of the region, while the current connotation of bohemian for free-spirited types comes (via the French *bohême*) from their association with wandering gypsies, or Roma, said to be from Bohemia. Before 1918, the term *Bohemian* was the most common term with a positive or neutral meaning for Czech Americans, whereas *Czech* often carried a negative connotation. The term *Czech* comes from the Czechs' own name for their homeland (*Čechy*), while the distinctive *cz* comes from its Polish spelling. Only in the 1920s did *Czech* become widespread as the counterpart to *Czechoslovak*, a newly created term for the multiethnic citizens of the new republic, whether Czech, Slovak, German, Hungarian, or Jewish. However, most Czechoslovaks continued to refer to themselves by their specific nationality, and Slovaks preferred the hyphenated form *Czecho-Slovak*, seeing it as giving equal status to both nations within the republic (many also consider the frequently used forms *Czechoslovakian* and *Slovakian* to be incorrect). After the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the term *Czech Republic* was officially adopted, and most recently the shorter *Czechia* has been promoted abroad as a counterpart to *Slovakia*, but it is still perceived as artificial and awkward.

These confusingly shifting terms are a suitable symbol for the ambiguous place held by the Bohemians/Czechs among American ethnic groups. Tim Prchal has summarized their most common stereotypes: "Prominent among those in the Czechs' favor are musical proficiency and their tenacity for retaining their original language. On the negative side are their dedication to Freethinking philosophy and its religious skepticism, their volatile and potentially violent natures, and their materialism" (11). At the peak of immigration before World War I, Slavic ethnic groups

were seen as alien to Anglo-Saxon culture, and the ethnic slurs "Bohunk" (Bohemian) and "hunky" (Hungarian, including Slovaks) were widespread into the twentieth century.

The "musical proficiency" of the Czechs was exemplified by the world-renowned composer Antonín Dvořák. While serving as director of the National Conservatory of Music of America in New York (1892–95), Dvořák was searching for folk motifs to incorporate into an American composition. After discovering the African American spirituals from his student Henry (Harry) Thacker Burleigh (who later became an important composer in his own right), Dvořák incorporated them into his *New World Symphony* (1893), long before white American composers had thought of using them as inspiration (Horowitz 96). As Jean E. Snyder remarks, whether the melodies in the symphony "reflect the spirit of African American or Native American music—or the spirit of a homesick Bohemian or all of the above—was a source of intense debate for years after its premiere" (109). While some later musicians criticized Dvořák for imposing European standards on his source material, his dedication to his national traditions (before the Czechs had an independent state) and his openness to other minority cultures made him a significant influence on Alain Locke and the Harlem Renaissance.

The ambivalence between the "negative Czech" and "positive Bohemian" can be traced in American literature of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In his *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889), William Dean Howells uses both terms. First, his narrator (who has moved to New York City from Boston and is alarmed by its multiculturalism) groups "Czechs" not only with other Slavs but also with Asians:

> March noticed in these east side travels of his what must strike every observer returning to the city after a prolonged absence: the numerical subordination of the dominant race. . . . The small eyes, the high cheeks, the broad noses, the puff lips, the bare, cue-filleted skulls, of Russians, Poles, Czechs, Chinese . . . were aspects that he identified, and that gave him abundant suggestion for the personal histories he constructed, and for the more public-spirited reveries in which he dealt with the future economy of our heterogeneous commonwealth. (241–43)

Yet in the same novel, March's colleague Fulkerson suggests asking a "Bohemian" (Czech) editor for help, even if he refers disparagingly to the immigrant's foreign language: "They say some of those fellows—especially the foreigners—are educated men. I know one fellow—a Bohemian—that used to edit a Bohemian newspaper here. He could write it out in his kind of Dutch, and we could get Lindau to translate it" (216).

A few decades later, in Willa Cather's classic *My Ántonia* (1918), the Bohemians were seen as hardworking people who could contribute to American society even if they preferred their ethnic enclaves. In his critique of Cather's racial views (erasing the Native Americans from the Nebraskan landscape occupied by the new immigrants), Mike Fischer claims that the Czechs "were used throughout World War I by American propagandists to underscore the United States government's commitment to the right of self- determination," because they were "the most Western and consequently least threatening of the Eastern European peoples" (41). Yet for many contemporary critics, the term *Bohemian* has almost entirely lost its formerly straightforward ethnic meaning. One example occurs in Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1991). In her extended analysis of the introduction to *My Ántonia* (whose "anonymous narrator figures an ideal reader for the future text," which she calls "a joke worthy of Kafka" [147]) Butler states: "Ántonia is Bohemian, and like other Bohemian girls in Cather's fiction, she belongs to the German-speaking [*sic*] communities derived from a land called 'Bohemia' in the Austrian Empire who settled in Nebraska after the wars of 1848." Following an explanation of Thackeray's use of the term "bohemian" in *Vanity Fair*, Butler continues, "Ántonia is first introduced in Cather's text in a situation of linguistic exile and disorientation, full of hunger to learn English and, in particular, how names refer" (149). Other than the odd phrasing of "a land called 'Bohemia'" (almost as if questioning its existence), Butler misinterprets what the name refers to: while Germans in the Czech lands, including Kafka, were technically Bohemians, the use of the term in the United States at that time referred specifically to ethnic Czechs. When Ántonia is "shouting something in Bohemian" to the narrator Jim, to alert him of a snake, whose symbolism Butler interprets in detail, her panic makes her revert to her native language, which is clearly not German (150). In her subsequent analysis of a story by Nella Larsen, Butler notes that it "belongs to the tradition of the Harlem Renaissance,

and ought properly to be read in the context of that cultural and social world" (173). While Butler's error may seem trivial, it is a useful illustration for the frequently encountered critical stance that the "faraway lands" of Central Europe are interchangeable. Confusing as their names and histories may be, it is precisely for that reason that their cultural contexts deserve the same careful reading as one would take for granted in an American setting.

One should recall not only that ethnic terms like Bohemian/Czech have changed over the past century, but also that as white minorities have assimilated, the American concept of ethnicity has shifted. Until the mid-twentieth century, *ethnic* was primarily used for Caucasian groups who were culturally—and linguistically—distinct from the white mainstream; it is only in the past few decades that it has replaced the term race in reference to nonwhite groups. One early attempt to categorize African Americans as an ethnic group comparable to those of European origin was the work of the Czech American sociologist Joseph Slabey Rouček. In the study *Our Racial and National Minorities* (1937), revised under the more "inclusive" title *One America* in 1945, Rouček and coeditor Francis J. Brown divide the "minority peoples" of America into nine categories, including the "American Negro," as well as a broadly defined "New Immigration" (which covers a diverse mix of Slavic, "Eastern" and "South" European, Jewish, "Asiatic," and "territorials," i.e., Latin American). In Rouček's chapter on Czechoslovak Americans, he points out that the relations between African Americans and Czech immigrants date back to the colonial period. Describing the Moravian brotherhood (a Czech Protestant group, persecuted under Austrian Catholic rule) as an early group of religious refugees, Rouček cites the following claim: "The Moravians were among the first groups in the new world to become interested in Negro education and to make a definite and concrete attempt to organize a Negro school and develop a program of Negro education" (Brown and Rouček, 146). Such interethnic studies, including both racial (nonwhite) and national (non-English-speaking white) minorities, help us to understand the evolution of the term *ethnicity* itself in American society.

New Negroes and New Czecho-Slovaks in the Survey Graphic

In March 1925, the *Survey Graphic* published its special issue "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro," edited by Alain Locke, which would

form the basis of his anthology *The New Negro* (although the contents of the two differed considerably). The anonymous editorial note at the beginning (perhaps written by the magazine's editor, Paul Kellogg) positions it as the latest in a continuing series on ethnic and national groups:

> The Survey is seeking . . . to follow the subtle traces of race growth and interaction through the shifting outline of social organization and by the flickering light of individual achievement. There are times when these forces that work so slowly and so delicately seem suddenly to flower. . . . Such, we believe, was the case with Ireland on the threshold of political emancipation, and the New Ireland spoke for itself in our issue of November 1921; with the New Russia which was to some degree interpreted in March 1923; and with the newly awakened Mexico, in May 1924. If The Survey reads the signs aright, such a dramatic flowering of a new race-spirit is taking place close at home—among American Negroes, and the stage of that new episode is Harlem. (Locke, *Survey Graphic* 627)

As Anne Elizabeth Carroll suggests, "[t]he fact that the Harlem issue appeared in the context of these special issues about movements in other countries and that the editors reminded readers of the parallels emphasizes the importance of the New Negro movement on an international scale" (128). The distinctive appearance of the issue was largely the work of its Central European illustrator, the German American Winold Reiss, whose drawings of African Americans included both prominent and ordinary residents of Harlem. Another contributor was the anthropologist Melville Herskovits, a pioneering figure in African and African American studies, who was technically a Slovak American of Jewish ancestry (his father immigrated from what was then Hungary, now Slovakia).

Although it is not mentioned in the Harlem issue itself, Dale Peterson has pointed out that the *Survey Graphic's* series began with an issue featuring Czechoslovakia, "which like all the others combined contributions by 'natives' and American commentators on the socioeconomic and cultural prosperity of the 'young' nations arising after the war" (227). In this context, Locke's reference to the "New Czechoslovakia" in his article "Harlem"

(carried over unchanged into the expanded *New Negro*) presumably alludes to the country's appearance in the *Survey Graphic*. The issue from June 11, 1921, entitled "Prague: The American Spirit in the Heart of Europe," uses the form "Czecho-Slovakia" rather than "Czechoslovakia." It features the results of a survey conducted by the Y.M.C.A., as well as photographs of "Village Folk" in their regional costumes. As Bruno Lasker notes in his *Survey Graphic* article, "Prague's Window to the West," "A nation has to be both young and enthusiastic for social progress to invite such scrutiny. . . . The new republic of Czecho-Slovakia is such a nation" (337). Lasker describes the "Czecho-Slovaks" as "essentially an artistic people, ready to respond to high ideals and to the call of beauty. As artists, they are not merely impressionable but creative—practical in the sense that a longing to embody their dreams in action is practical" (344). This emphasis on art as a means of defining identity reflects the process of the Czech National Revival, which used culture as the foundation for political liberation. Like the rebirth of other "folk cultures," the National Revival drew on the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (who idealized the Slavs as a peace-loving, hardworking folk). Unlike other "awakening" nations, the Czechs already had a developed literary language, yet the scholars who promoted the concept of a nation based on Czech ethnicity originally published their works in German (Hroch 104).

The *Survey Graphic* also featured contributors from American educational institutions that were significant for the Czech immigrant community, including Herbert Adolphus Miller, then a professor of sociology at Oberlin College. While it is still known today as the first American college to accept both African Americans and women together with white male students, Oberlin also had the first program of Czech studies in the United States. Established in 1885 by a Czech immigrant named Louis Miskovsky, who had studied in Prague under Masaryk, Oberlin's Bohemian department was established for the purpose of training ministers working among the immigrant communities, and it lasted until 1921, when decreasing numbers of immigrants led to its elimination (Manning 39). Herbert Adolphus Miller had become interested in Czech immigrants during his research on racial issues in Chicago. He visited Prague in 1912 and met Masaryk, later helping the future president draft the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence. In his article for *Survey Graphic's* special issue on Prague, entitled "An Essay in Applied Idealism,"

Miller praises Masaryk as "one of the greatest statesmen of the era" and adds

> Czecho-Slovakia is a most important social and political experiment, for it is an enlightened state born out of *the new idea of self-determination*, and it must go through the process of adjusting a dominated past to the responsibility of freedom. Thrust out west of all the other Slavs and lying almost exactly in the center of Europe, it has entered fully into western civilization while in sympathy and understanding it reaches back to the eastern and Slavic world. (357, emphasis added)

Miller concludes in his overview of the country's political and economic situation that "all the restless and constructive attitudes now prevailing in the world are stirring in Czecho-Slovakia . . . and all the questions concerning capitalism are at the forefront, but there is unusual enlightenment in the approach to the problems" (359).

Another contributor to the *Survey Graphic* special issue on Prague was Šárka B. Hrbková, who helped found the program in Czech at the University of Nebraska in 1907. In her article, "Americans of Czecho-Slovak Descent," she explains, "The majority of the western Czechs are on the farms of Iowa, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. . . . Lean years, such as Willa S. Cather describes in *O Pioneers*, gave to the Czech farmer a dogged determination" (367). Indeed, Hrbková's own "dogged determination" for the uplift of her community helped her academic program to flourish until the state of Nebraska banned all non-English programs in the 1920s, including Czech. It was eventually reestablished and is still running today (Manning 41). Her engagement with *Survey Graphic*, furthermore, was ongoing; a month before the magazine's Harlem issue, Hrbková contributed a review of a new book about Czechoslovakia, which she refers to as "this Slav island in Western Europe" ("Cinderella" 606).

Thus, just as the *Survey Graphic* was celebrating the "dramatic flowering" of Czech identity in its homeland, this culture was beginning to wither away in the United States. A week after its Czecho-Slovak issue, the journal published a letter from the Century Dictionary Company. It asked "whether you can tell us the meaning of the slang word bohunk . . . in articles dealing with foreign laborers in the United States, with mining conditions, etc. . . . We have noticed a number of words of the same class (hunky, etc.)

in your publication, but do not remember having seen bohunk" (Century 415). In response, the editors recalled that they had printed an article with the title "From 'Bohunks' to Finns" in a 1916 issue. However, the fact that "hunky" (which referred primarily to Slovaks and others from the former territory of Hungary) was apparently better known than "Bohunk," even to contemporary lexicographers, suggests that the Bohemians (now more widely known as Czechs) had reached a point of successful assimilation in which the old ethnic slurs were falling out of use.

Furthermore, in October 1924, six months before the Harlem issue, the *Survey Graphic* featured a detailed report on the Prague International Management Conference (PIMCO) held in Prague. The editor's note alluded to the "Czecho-Slovak" issue of 1921:

> President Masaryk of Czecho-Slovakia is writing his reminiscences. That should prove to be one of the most interesting human documents of these decades. That his new republic is facing the future in constructive ways was illustrated when the Y.M.C.A. wascalled into Prague (soon after the war) to carry out a survey of the city . . . later interpreted in a special number of this magazine. ("The Gist of It" 67)

Eleanor Bushnell Cooke's enthusiastic report from the conference points out that "President Masaryk had prepared himself for his responsible work in molding the new republic, by research within various countries. In America he had found what he considered the best model for governmental and industrial organization" (82). Cooke notes that the Prague newspapers covered the conference; and in a rare example of the *Survey Graphic* turning its mirror toward the white American male, the article cites a Czech description of the American engineers as "hard, manly in their physiognomies, which are far from the smiling simplicity habitually reigning in an American face" (83). This reminder of Czechoslovakia's "constructive" society and its philosopher-president (then cowriting his memoirs with one of the nation's greatest writers, Čapek) may have influenced Locke, in his introductory essay six months later, to include Prague for "playing a creative part in the world today." (*Survey* 630) In 1930, to mark Masaryk's eightieth birthday, the *Survey Graphic* again devoted a special issue to Czechoslovakia,

referring to it as "the most advanced, most prosperous, altogether the most interesting, of the new states from the World War and the break-up of old Austria-Hungary" and to its president as "one of the great figures—perhaps the greatest—emerging from the welter of our time" ("Eighty Years" 613).

The *Survey Graphic's* Harlem issue begins with two essays by Locke, "Harlem" and "Enter the New Negro." In the first of these, he claims that Harlem "is—or promises at least to be—a race capital. Europe seething in a dozen centers with emergent nationalities, Palestine full of a renascent Judaism—these are no more alive with the spirit of a racial awakening than Harlem; culturally and spiritually it focuses a people" (*Survey Graphic* 629). Anthony Dawahare suggests that Locke "uses the figure of 'awakening' central to nationalist rhetoric. . . . It is not surprising, then, that [he] would need to identify a capital for his imagined national/race community, since nationalist projects always speak of territory and lay claim to a geographical center for their realization" (33). While Prague is presumably one of those European "centers with emergent nationalities," it is only on the following page that Locke makes the explicit comparison mentioned above:

> In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination. That is why our comparison is taken with those nascent centers of folk-expression and self-determination which are playing a creative part in the world today. Without pretense to their political significance, Harlem has the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia. (*Survey Graphic* 630)

Whether or not Locke was directly influenced by Herbert A. Miller's essay on the "enlightened" Czechoslovak state, it seems likely that he is alluding here to the previous issues on "race-spirit," such as the "New Ireland" and "New Russia" mentioned in the editorial note (627). As Dale Peterson points out, Locke's original manuscript uses the spellings *Prag* and *Czecho-Slovakia*, which were corrected to the standard forms in the published version (although he may have been familiar with the hyphenated spelling from the *Survey Graphic* issue on Prague) (156).

More generally, as Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth explain, "Locke builds on the imagery of nineteenth-century Romantic

nationalism[,]strongly motivated by the right of self-determination and Herder's concept of the role of folk culture in the shaping of national consciousness[,] . . . and reaches beyond national boundaries to a more universal perspective" (209–10). In one of the few analyses of Locke's reference to Prague, Michael North has pointed out

> Locke drew a direct comparison between the cultural strivings of African America and the general cultural nationalism of the time. He appealed to the examples of Zionism and Czech nationalism as well as to Irish republicanism. Thus he makes clearer than any other writer of the Renaissance the link between its essential assumptions and the cultural pluralism stemming from Herder. Yet there was a significant difference between Harlem and Prague, unless one was willing to propose what no African-American intellectual of the Renaissance ever suggested, full political independence on American soil. Instead, Locke quite cleverly, and with perfect justification, included America itself within the movement toward cultural independence. (173)

Another contribution to the Harlem issue, "The Harvest of Race Prejudice" by Kelly Miller, includes a more direct but less optimistic comparison to the nations liberated after World War I: "Every minority and suppressed group seeks self-expression. Woodrow Wilson let off the lid of a new Pandora's box when he so eloquently preached this doctrine as the shibboleth of the war. The Negro seeks self-determination also. In Harlem he seeks political self-expression" (711). The "minority groups" in this "Pandora's box," of course, included the Czechs and Slovaks. Locke himself avoids making a blatant link between cultural "self-expression" and the political self-determination enjoyed by the "emergent nationalities" of Europe.

Locke's essay in the *Survey Graphic* is shorter than the revised version he later published as the title essay in *The New Negro*. In his foreword to the book, Locke states that "we are now presenting the New Negro in a national and even international scope. . . . As in India, in China, in Egypt, Ireland, Russia, *Bohemia*, Palestine and Mexico, we are witnessing the resurgence of a people" (x, emphasis added). This list is clearly the one alluded to by Kelley—yet the only territory he does not include in his own

list is Bohemia. The reference to Bohemia does not appear in the Harlem issue and was apparently added later to *The New Negro*. Only a few pages later, in his essay "The New Negro," Locke repeats his claim comparing Harlem's role to the one that "Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia" (7). His shift between "Bohemia" and "Czechoslovakia" reflects the lingering ambiguity between these terms.

Later in *The New Negro*, in his essay "The Negro Spirituals," Locke mentions Harry T. Burleigh, alluding to his collaboration with Antonín Dvořák in his statement, "Even Negro composers have been perhaps too much influenced by formal European idioms and mannerisms in setting these songs" (207). Here he is following Carl Van Vechten's critique of Burleigh for modernizing the spirituals rather than keeping "the *original* manner in which they were sung" (qtd. in Snyder 328). Locke's only direct reference to the Czech composer is also ambivalent: "[the] thematic and melodic contributions from Dvorák [*sic*] . . . [and others] are only preluding experiments that have proclaimed the value of the Negro musical idioms, but have not fully developed them" (210). This ambivalence extends even to Locke's bibliography: in one edition (but not all), Dvořák's *From the New World* appears in his list of music influenced by "Negro Themes or Idioms."

One story in *The New Negro's* fiction section, "Fog" by John Matheus, includes significant references to Czechoslovak immigrants in its naturalistic panorama of characters. The setting is far from Harlem, at a bridge on the Ohio River, where people walking home through the rising fog cannot see whether those ahead "might be Jew or Gentile, Negro or Pole, Slav, Croatian, Italian or one hundred per cent American" (86). (The term "Slav" here may refer to Slovaks, since the two other Slavic groups typical of this region, Poles and Croatians, are listed separately.) Inside a train on the bridge, one of these "true Americans" is complaining about immigrants when he is interrupted by the smell and sound of foreign speech:

> Nich and Mike Axaminter . . . bent over the irate American deluging him with the odor of garlic and voluble, guttural explosions of a Slovak tongue.
> "What t' hell! Git them buckets out o' my face, you hunkies, you!"
> Confused and apologetic, the two men moved forward. (88)

Although not mentioned again by their peculiar surname (which is not

identifiably Slovak), these "hunky" immigrants are clearly the foreigners described sympathetically on the following page:

> The two foreign intruders in the smoker squirmed under the merciless, half articulate antipathy. They asked [for] nothing but a job to make some money. In exchange for that magic English word job, they endured the terror that walked by day, the boss. They grinned stupidly at profanity, dirt, disease, disaster. Yet they were helping to make America. (89–90)

Although George Hutchinson has criticized the story's "crudely stereotyped characters," he suggests that it "links white working-class bigotry with the position of poor whites in the industrial regime—a central point of the story" (405). After a narrowly averted crash unites the diverse characters in a common fear and panic, Matheus suggests solidarity between marginalized groups despite the "fog" of prejudice in American society.

In his *New Negro* essay "The Paradox of Color," Walter White alludes to Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*), in which the robots created to serve humankind revolt and exterminate their former masters, stating, "For years I had nourished the conceit that nothing in or of the theater could thrill me. . . . A few seasons ago my shell of conceit was cracked a little—in that third act of Karel Capek's *R.U.R.* when Rossum's automatons swarmed over the parapet to wipe out the last human being." Those "chills" were only "pleasurable tingles," White declares, compared to the feelings evoked by Paul Robeson's performance in *The Emperor Jones* (361). This leads to his explanation of "this inner conflict of the black man in America—or, more specifically in New York City," in which he claims that New York is

> more free from ordinary manifestations of prejudice than any other city in the United States. Its Jewish, Italian, German, French, Greek, Czecho-slovakian, Irish, Hungarian quarters with their teeming thousands . . . form so great a percentage of the city's population that "white, Gentile, Protestant" Nordics have but little opportunity to develop their prejudices as they do, for example, in Mississippi or the District of Columbia. (362–63)

Although he considers New York "as nearly ideal a place for colored people as exists in America," White concedes that "prejudice appears to be indigenous" as elsewhere in the United States, which can lead to "the loss of that deep spirituality, that gift of song and art, . . . which has given America the only genuinely artistic things which the world recognizes as distinctive American contributions to the arts" (363–64). While presumably not alluding directly to Locke's "new Czechoslovakia," White's reference to "Czecho-slovakian" immigrants (along with a then world-famous Czech writer) shows a similar interest in connections between small nations and minorities.

Ten years after *The New Negro*, Alain Locke again referred to Czech culture in *The Negro and His Music* (1936), crediting Dvořák for taking spirituals from folklore into the sphere of high art. Here he describes Dvořák as *both* Bohemian and Czech (misspelling the latter), describing his work as a cultural hybrid:

> The first highly successful use of such thematic material was by the Bohemian or Czeck [*sic*] composer, Anton Dvorak, who was destined to make a step as vital to the development of native American music as it was to the discovery of the serious musical possibilities of American Negro folk-song. He investigated Indian, Negro and other native American materials, but everyone admits that in his epoch-making Symphony "*From the New World*," produced in 1895, the Negro elements dominate. True, this work is highly composite, there are Indian themes also, with much of Dvorak's own Bohemian style cropping out. . . . However, in the "Largo" of the symphony, we sense the true atmosphere of a Negro spiritual, and in the *Scherzo* or fast third movement, Papa Dvorak, without fully sensing it, was nose close to jazz, for he took his rhythms and tone intervals from the shout type of Negro dance. (106–07)

Locke later calls for Negro music to become "universal" without losing its "unique qualities," comparing Bohemian/Czech composers to Russian and Hungarian ones:

> Within the last century Russian, Hungarian and Bohemian music confronted this same difficulty. But in widening the localisms of Russian, Hungarian and Czech music to a a universal speech, their composers were careful, in breaking the dialect, to reflect the characteristic folk spirit and preserve its rare raciness and unique flavor. What Glinka and his successors did for Russian music, Liszt and Brahms, for Hungarian music, Dvorak and Smetana for Czech music, can and must be done for Negro music. (130)

This presentation of cultural models from Central and Eastern Europe reflects his earlier designation of Prague and Harlem as centers of "folk-expression and self-determination."

Dvořák is also mentioned in two significant novels of the Harlem Renaissance. In Wallace Thurman's novel Infants of the Spring (1932), which mercilessly satirizes most of Harlem's leading figures, the classically trained singer Eustace refuses to sing spirituals, and his "spirited denunciation of Dvorak's inclusion of a Negro folk song in the New World Symphony had provoked not only argument but ridicule" (66). By this time, the Czech composer's contribution to the development of African American music could be perceived as clichéd, if not irrelevant. In Nella Larsen's novel Quicksand (1928), the mixed-race protagonist Helga finds partial acceptance in her father's homeland, Denmark, yet she suddenly decides to return to the United States:

> It was after a concert at which Dvořák's "New World Symphony" had been wonderfully rendered. Those wailing undertones of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" were too poignantly familiar. They struck into her longing heart and cut away her weakening defenses. She knew at least what it was that had lurked formless and undesignated these many weeks in the back of her troubled mind.Incompleteness. (92)

Cheryl Wall has described this allusion to the Czech composer as both "ambiguous" and "central to the novel's cultural critique. . . . On one level, 'New World Symphony' paid tribute to the intrinsic beauty of African-American folk music. On another, as European art music, it existed in

hierarchical relation to its source" (112). Like Dvořák's composition, Helga's search for belonging challenges notions of ethnic purity. Both novels illustrate Dvořák's ambiguous position described by Alain Locke: a figure of European cultural hegemony, but also the symbol of a nation that had preserved its identity despite political oppression. Between these opposing roles, Locke places greater emphasis on the Czech composer's search for a literal "harmony" between the races.

A few references to the Czechs may also be found in another Harlem Renaissance writer, Claude McKay, who had contributed some of the most influential poems to Locke's *New Negro* but soon grew disaffected with the bourgeois pretentions of the Harlem elite and traveled extensively in Europe, including the Soviet Union. McKay's novel *Banjo* (1929), featuring a group of African American, Caribbean, and African dockworkers in Marseille, links the Czechs with other Slavic and Balkan nations: "They went up one of the humid, somber alleys, thick with little eating-dens of all the Mediterranean peoples, Greek, Jugo-Slav, Neapolitan, Arab, Corsican, and Armenian, Czech and Russian" (10). Another notable reference occurs in McKay's recently rediscovered *Amiable with Big Teeth*, which was completed in 1941 but unpublished and forgotten for almost eighty years. In this novel, which satirizes the ineffectual response of Harlem intellectuals to Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, he critiques the blindness of Europe, including Czechoslovakia, to the growing threat of fascism:

> I remember early last year when the crisis became acute and Ethiopia was finding it extremely difficult to get her case before the League of Nations. The Czecho-Slovak minister was the president of the League Council. And when the Ethiopian envoy to Paris kept right on worrying him like a gadfly, one day the Czecho-Slovak minister said, resentfully, that Europe was too busy with important problems to attend to the affairs of backward Africa. The Ethiopian envoy said to the Czecho-Slovak minister: "Africa is Europe's backyard and if an epidemic starts there and Europe ignores it, it will spread to the front yard." (254)

McKay's prescient warning foreshadows the grave existential threat that

Czechoslovakia itself faced in 1938, when its democracy was sacrificed to Hitler's territorial aggression. One point McKay and Locke implicitly agreed upon was the need for solidarity between racial minorities and small nations.

Locke's comparison between "the New Negro" and "the new Czechoslovakia" has been frequently quoted by later critics, often without explanation but sometimes with references to other Central and East European nations. However, these comparisons can be inaccurate, if not misleading, overlooking the differences among the states of the former "Eastern Bloc." Nathan Huggins has explained, "Black intellectuals saw in the Yugoslavs, Czechs, and Irish a clue for their own emancipation and uplift. They, too, were a people to be defined" (83). He suggests, "Harlem was for the New Negro what Dublin was to the New Ireland, Prague to the New Czechoslovakia, and Belgrade to the New Yugoslavia" (58). Amy Helene Kirschke also extends Locke's statement: "Irish writers and poets were important leaders in the independence movement and the revival of the Gaelic language, while in Czechoslovakia and Poland, a new generation of intellectuals broke away from the dominant German cultural traditions" (180–81). Although Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland were all Slavic states newly liberated after the First World War, among them Czechoslovakia was the only fully democratic nation whose form of government was explicitly inspired by the American model. David Levering Lewis, on the other hand, conflates "Czechoslovak" with "Slovak" (which are as distinct as, for example, "British" and "Scottish") in his book *When Harlem Was in Vogue*: "Eurocentric to the tip of his cane, Locke sought to graft abstractions from German, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Slovakian [*sic*] nationalisms to Afro-America" (*When* 117). Again, a small error reveals a major misunderstanding; Locke's "New Czechoslovakia" refers to the republic that had united the Czechs and Slovaks for the first time in history, *not* the Slovak nationalists who called for autonomy from the Czechs (and gained independence as a Nazi puppet state during the wartime occupation of Bohemia).

Alain Locke's reference to the "New Czechoslovakia" is a reflection of the *Survey Graphic's* editorial interest, as described by Martha Jane Nadell, "in ethnic, racial, or national 'types'—meaning groups distinct from the readers of the magazine" (40). As careful as he was to emphasize the cultural rather than political aspect of "folk-expression" and "self-determination,"

Locke's allusion to a foreign state that had liberated itself from imperial rule through ethnic nationalism was not accidental. Czechoslovakia's image as "the most advanced, most prosperous," and "most interesting" of the new European republics, along with the success of Czech Americans, served as a useful model in the optimistic climate of the 1920s. Masaryk's successful "social organization" of the new republic and the world-renowned "individual achievements" of both Dvořák and Čapek showed the need for small nations to justify their independent existence through both cultural growth and interaction with other groups.

Yet just as the achievements of the Harlem Renaissance brought few concrete gains for African Americans, the independence of Czechoslovakia did not bring immediate progress to immigrants of Czech and Slovak origin. Soon after World War I, the Johnson Quota Act of 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 restricted the arrival of immigrants from "newer" groups (such as the Czechs and Slovaks) based on a formula of "national origins" that remained in force for over forty years. Thus the full impact of the "New Negro" can be understand not just through an international perspective, as Edwards and others have shown, but through an interethnic approach—defining "ethnic" in the specific sense of minority groups that were in the process of assimilating into white American society but had not yet fully done so.

Dreams Deferred: Hughes, Van Vechten, and Blatný on Immigrants and Exile

One of the more peculiar works that appeared during the Harlem Renaissance is "Luani of the Jungles" by Langston Hughes, first published in *Harlem* in 1928. This brief story, which David Levering Lewis describes as "bearing the clear imprint of Joseph Conrad," is set on a riverboat sailing up the Niger River (*When* 84). The narrator meets a "strange, weak-looking little white man," later mentions this character's "queer accent," and describes the "vague far-off air about him as though he were not really interested in what he was saying" (Hughes, "Luani" 25). After a first casual conversation about monkeys, their second talk also begins awkwardly in a mix of languages:

> "Good evening," I said.
> "*Bon soir*," answered the little man.

> "*Vous êtes français?*" I asked, hearing his greeting.
> "*Non*," he replied slowly. "I am not French, but I lived in Paris for a long while." Then he added for seemingly no reason at all, "I am a poet, but I destroy my poems." (26)

Only after describing his obsessive love for the African woman Luani, whom he had met in Paris, he reveals his true origins: "I dropped my courses at the Sorbonne that week and wrote my father *in Prague* that I would be going on a journey south for my health's sake" (28, emphasis added). Jeffrey A. Schwarz refers to this character as the "European narrator" (to distinguish him from the American narrator of the frame narrative) and suggests that his namelessness is a reversal of Conrad's portrayal of nameless Africans: "In a sense, the European narrator is 'conquered,' though not violently or corruptly, by Luani and Africa, and the Eurocentrism of *Heart of Darkness* is thus displaced" (134). But after this offhand reference, there is no further mention of his national origin, which seems to serve no purpose in the overall structure of the story.

Most critics have overlooked the passing allusion to the stranger's background; Lewis (repeating the American narrator's initial error) calls him a "Frenchman of an intellectual bent" (*Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* 584). The fact that this "strange, weak-looking" European is not from Paris, as the narrator also originally believes, but the more remote and mysterious Prague seems to serve no purpose in the structure of the story other than to add to his "queer" and "vague" foreignness. Perhaps in portraying a European "conquered" by Africa, Hughes chose to show a character from a "weak" country like Czechoslovakia rather than from an imperial power like France. It should be noted that the poet is never specifically referred to as either "Czech" or "Bohemian"; as a native of Prague, he could also have been ethnically German (and/or Jewish). Had the story been written later, the peculiar writer who sends a letter to his father might have alluded to Franz Kafka, but in 1928, his work was still relatively unknown. Another possibility, given this story's strong intertextuality with "Heart of Darkness," is that the Czech poet symbolizes the Slavic origins of Joseph Conrad, who was born as Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski into a Polish family under Russian rule in what is now Ukraine. Or perhaps like another Central European student in Paris, Vivi, the Romanian musician in Hughes's story "Poor Little Black Fellow" from his collection *The Ways*

of White Folks (1934), the poet represents an alien world where class is far more influential than race in determining human relationships.

For Hughes, however, the Czechs were both exotic, as in the case of the character in "Luani," and familiar, like the immigrants he grew up with. As James Emanuel has pointed out, the protagonist of Hughes's early short story, "Mary Winosky" (written by Hughes in high school but published only decades later), was a Slavic immigrant woman, who spends her life scrubbing floors and leaves $8,000 in savings when she dies (270). "Behind this study in sentimentality, however," notes Hughes's biographer Arnold Rampersad, "is a trenchant narrator" (30). The resilience of working-class Central Europeans may have reminded Hughes of the ability of African Americans to survive against huge obstacles. The name "Winosky" is most likely Polish (although the correct spelling would be "Winoski"), like Hughes's best friend in high school. In his autobiography *The Big Sea* (1940), Hughes recalls Cleveland's Central High as

> very nearly entirely a foreign-born school, with a few native white and colored American students mixed in. By foreign, I mean children of foreign-born parents. Although some of the students themselves had been born in Poland or Russia, Hungary or Italy. . . . My best pal in high school was a Polish boy named Sartur Andrzejewski. . . . And the whole family had about them a quaint and kindly foreign air, bubbling with hospitality. (30)

Hughes makes a telling slip when he describes "children of foreign-born parents" (his classmates born in the United States, including his "best pal" Sartur) as "foreign," reflecting their marginalized status in American society. He adds that his understanding of prejudice was partly shaped in this interethnic environment: "From the students I learnt, too, that lots of painful words can be flung at people that aren't *nigger*. *Kike* was one; *spick*, and *hunky*, others" (32). Along with the racial slurs for Hispanics and Jews, *hunky* (derived from "Hungarian" but widely applied to Slovaks, who were Hungarian citizens at the time) was still common enough in 1940 for Hughes to use it without explanation. In Thomas Bell's novel *Out of this Furnace*, first published a year later, the Slovak American protagonist suffers from feelings of inferiority before realizing as an adult that the epithet

hunky can be worn with pride (Sabatos 83).

Carl Van Vechten (a prominent bohemian, in the social sense) is remembered today mainly for his evocative photographs of leading African American cultural figures and for the controversy caused by his novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926), especially its provocative title. His most lasting impact on American literature was through his friendship with Langston Hughes, whom he first met in 1924, the year his novel *The Tattooed Countess* was published. For Van Vechten, whose family had African American and Czech immigrant servants, both groups offered an escape from the dullness of his native Cedar Rapids, opening his eyes to the beauty and sensuality of life. As he recalled in an interview, "I was born in a town in Iowa where at least half the population is of Slavic origin and I was brought up on Bohemian lullabies. When our cook was in good humor she sang lusty Czech airs" (qtd. in Bernard 11). For this reason, Van Vechten's upbringing in the heart of the Midwest is oddly similar to that of many Central European intellectuals who grew up with Czech nannies. Even Sigmund Freud notes in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*Die Traumdeutung*, 1899): "I must have understood Czech in my earliest childhood, for I was born in a small town in Moravia which has a Slav population. A Czech nursery rhyme which I heard in my seventeenth year printed itself on my memory so easily that I can repeat it to this day, though I have no notion what it means" (183). According to James L. Rice, Freud's native Freiberg (today in the Czech Republic) "was the scene of his first love, superimposed upon the more profound first love of his mother—and his Czech nanny" (48). For the bisexual Van Vechten (who later married a Russian actress, Fania Marinoff), the "lusty" Czech immigrants of his childhood also symbolized sexual awakening, and the exotic foreignness of its hometown's Czech neighborhood was one of its few cosmopolitan features.

In Van Vechten's *The Tattooed Countess*, set in a thinly disguised Cedar Rapids called "Maple Valley" in the 1890s, a high school student named Gareth has an affair with Ella, a wealthy widow in her fifties, who has returned from Italy. As Leon Coleman suggests, "The impelling reasons for Van Vechten's flight from the provincialism of Cedar Rapids to the sophistication of life in New York were revealed or perhaps lightly concealed" in this novel (67). Ella finds the town hopelessly dull until she and Gareth take a walk through its Czech neighborhood:

> They passed rows of cottages, painted in gay colours, small stores, flaunting signs in the Czech language, which seemed, Ella thought, to contain a great many V's and Z's. . . . I had no idea, Ella exclaimed, that Maple Valley boasted anything as curious as this. It's like a corner of old Europe. Why aren't the residents proud of this quarter instead of those stupid water-works? (Van Vechten 212)

It is the "bohemian" countess who discovers the value of the town's Bohemian quarter, urging her young lover to see things differently: "How can you expect a person who does not appreciate the beauty of this lake, or of your Bohemian village, to appreciate the beauty of sex?" (242). This immigrant district, proudly displaying its foreignness, is still known today as Czech Village (and is home to the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library). In *The Big Sea*, Hughes defends Van Vechten from the anger caused by *Nigger Heaven* by referring to the earlier work: "Certainly in the novel he had treated the Negroes of Harlem much better, for instance, than he had treated his own home folks in *The Tattooed Countess*. But I doubt if any of the more vociferous of the Negro critics had ever read *The Tattooed Countess*, so, naturally, they didn't know that" (270). Hughes, however, understood the title as ironic and Van Vechten's Harlem as "sympathetically and amusingly" described, much like his view of the Bohemian village had been (271).

After Langston Hughes traveled through the Soviet Union in the 1930s, his poetry began to reflect his socialist convictions. In "Song for Ourselves," he attacks the West for allowing Czechoslovakia to be "lynched on a swastika cross! / Blow, bitter winds, blow!" He suggests that it is only one of many countries that have been victimized by fascism and "Left to die slow! / Czechoslovakia! Ethiopia! Spain! / One after another!" (*Collected Poems* 207). Anthony Dawahare proposes that "Hughes may be drawing on the popular equation made by black Communists that the Nazis were not all that different from southern landowners and politicians. . . . This antinationalist or internationalist poem represents just how much Hughes's political sensibilities had grown in a decade" (102–103). The most infamous atrocity during the six-year Nazi occupation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was the brutal extermination of the village of Lidice in 1942, as a retribution for the assassination of Deputy Reich

Protector Reinhard Heydrich in Prague. Hughes joined the international Save Lidice Committee, and his 1943 poem "Shall the Good Go Down?" asks "All over the world / Shall the good go down? / Lidice? Were they good there?" (*Collected Poems* 278). At the same time, Hughes expressed his frustration with the privileging of European suffering over the everyday problems of African Americans. In his undated World War II–era poem "Message to the President," Hughes addresses Roosevelt: "I hear you talking about freedom / For the Finn, / The Jew, / And the Czechoslovak— / But you never seem to mention / Us folks who're black!" The common destiny of the Czechoslovak and the black as victims of oppression is ironically highlighted by the rhyme, but he concludes the poem with a call for "No more segregation in the U.S.A," and a warning: "when you mention the Finns, / And the Jew, / And the Czechoslovak, / Don't forget the 14 million / Here who're black" (590–92).

Prague appeared in Hughes's journalistic writings for the *Chicago Defender* as well, both during and after the war. In the July 1943 article "If Dixie Invades Europe," he described Europeans as more enlightened on racial issues, despite the temporary aberration of Nazism. While Europeans before Hitler never "paid much attention to Negroes one way or another, except maybe to stare discreetly," white Americans "still look at us as if we were out of place" after three hundred years (De Santis 145). He sees the only hope of avoiding the spread of American racism through liberated Europe "in the possibility that the Russians may meet the Allies half-way—so that part of occupied Europe will be red instead of Jim Crow." He then compares Prague to other European capitals as a warning for the future, rather than a model to emulate: "Berlin, Prague, and Copenhagen were all nice cities, racially speaking, before the spread of the Fascist powers and the coming of war. When we liberate those once charming cities, it would be a shame for our armies to promulgate there our own fascist-like racial policies toward colored peoples" (146). In fact, Hughes's ironic prophecy came true in 1945, when American soldiers liberated western Bohemia but allowed the Red Army to liberate Prague, thus leaving Czechoslovakia within the Soviet sphere of influence. Five years later, Hughes reacted to the spread of Communist power across Eastern Europe with his mock surprise that "all the things they now accuse Russia of doing, our white folks themselves have been doing to us for years. They accuse Russia of denying a free ballot to Poland, Hungary, the Russian folks themselves, and now

Prague" (111). The Czechoslovak republic has once again lost its freedom to a more powerful state, but protesting its fate (or that of its neighbors) seems like hypocrisy to Hughes, when millions of African Americans and Native Americans are denied the right to vote.

In a case of life imitating art, or at least obliquely reflecting it, the poetry of Langston Hughes inspired an actual Czech poet during the Nazi occupation, whose later life in exile was as strange as that of Luani's fictional husband. Vera Kutzinski, in her study of his translations into Spanish, has stated, "Hughes lived and wrote in more than one idiom[,] and . . . his writings have enjoyed active lives in others' words, that is, in languages other than English" (2). This is the case for Ivan Blatný (1919–1990), whom the novelist Milan Kundera has described as "the poet I most admired when I was fourteen" (94). Blatný, like Kundera, was a native of Brno, the second-largest Czech city, and during World War II, he was a member of the Czech literary/artistic Group 42 (*Skupina* 42), which took its inspiration from English and American writers like Eliot and Joyce. His collection *This Night* (*Tento večer*, 1945), particularly "Poem in Someone Else's Flat" ("Báseň v cizím byte"), was strongly influenced by Hughes. In his award-winning biographical novel *Básník* (The Poet, 2014) based on Blatný's life, Martin Reiner notes,

> It was first [the poet Josef] Kainar, and with him Langston Hughes, who sometime in 1944 turned the poet [Blatný] back to his own individual style. As in the case of his "Group 42" writings, it started off as a somewhat wooden imitation of blues variations and repetitions. (My trans.)
> Teprve Kainar a s ním Langston Hughes obracejí už někdy v roce čtyřicet čtyři básníka zpět k tomu, co je mu vlastní. Stejně jako v případě "skupinového" psaní jde zpočátku o trochu topornou nápodobu bluesového varírování a repetic (224).

While postwar Czechoslovak critics considered Hughes an international socialist poet, none of his books had been published in Czech at the time Blatný wrote *This Night*. However, as Miroslav Zvonik explained in his review of a 1957 translation, "Hughes's verse is not new to the people of Czechoslovakia of course; some of it was published before the Second World War, always meeting with a good deal of lively interest" (238).

Blatný apparently did not know English at the time he wrote his Harlem-inspired poetry, although he later emigrated to England and wrote in an experimental multilingual style.

Blatný's intertextuality is most striking in his poems "Second" and "Third," which according to translator Veronika Tuckerová show his "interest in American poetry, the modern city, jazz, and music halls" (Blatný xxv). Julie Hansen has traced references to Hughes throughout Blatný's T*his Night* but explains that the intertextual relationship between the two poets "is not limited merely to allusion, genre or stylization, but can also be discovered in the poem's linguistic and thematic levels[;] . . . the musical quality that gives Hughes's blues poems their name is also present in Blatný's poem." (24) She shows that the opening stanza of "Poem in Someone Else's Flat" alludes to the musicality of Hughes's blues poems: "I'll try to play my despair, / Like in blues [Negro] poems, just a few notes, / My instruments!" In this middle of the poem, he repeats this stanza with a direct reference to the American poet: "I'll try to play my despair!/ . . . like Langston Hughes!" Hansen points out that Blatný paraphrases Hughes's poem "Harlem Night Song" ("Across / The Harlem roof-tops / Moon is shining") by connecting Harlem with Dornych, a neighborhood in Brno: "Like the moon rising over Harlem rooftops / . . . Over the roofs of Dornych" (24–25). This focus on an everyday urban setting reflects Group 42's emphasis on realism. The epigraph of "Second" is a translation of two lines from Hughes's "Homesick Blues" ("De railroad bridge's / A sad song in de air"), along with a reference to Marcel Proust's Albertine. "Third," which describes air raids in Brno near the end of the war, begins with a quote from Hughes: "I'm waiting for ma mammy,— / She is Death," which he repeats three times, and ends by addressing Albertine directly (Blatný 21–23). By keeping the word "mammy" in English, Blatný gives an exotic "blues" quality to the Czech original, but the allusion to Proust firmly grounds his reading of the Harlem Renaissance poet in a transnational modernist context.

Blatný's later destiny, as with many Central Europeans of his generation, was both absurd and tragic. In 1948, while visiting England on a cultural exchange, he decided not to return to Czechoslovakia. Due to his fear of being spied upon by the Communist government, Blatný was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and spent more than four decades in British psychiatric institutions. For decades the staff threw away what seemed to be useless scribbling, until one nurse realized that he was composing poetry

and sent it to the exiled writer and publisher Josef Škvorecký, who printed it in Toronto. Although Blatný published two collections before his death, the majority of his postwar work had been irretrievably lost. Unlike Luani's poet, who destroys his poems, Blatný's writings were discarded without his consent. Yet both Czech writers were trapped in exile: one on the Niger River and one on the coast of Essex, reflecting the destiny of the Czech nation and its deferred dreams of self-determination.

Like Alain Locke, Hughes sees similarities between Czechoslovakia's position in Europe and the African American role in American society, but his comparison is less celebratory than cautionary. Even in the 1920s, before the Czechs were threatened by the rise of fascism, his poet in "Luani" is "strange" rather than inspiring (although his love for an African woman reflects Hughes's view of Europeans as more racially enlightened). While Hughes realizes that Central and East European immigrants were vulnerable to prejudice, he perceives them as "foreign," just as Carl Van Vechten did. While he condemns the fascist victimization of Czechoslovakia, he sees Central Europeans as benefiting from a racist double standard of white sympathy. Nonetheless, the intertextual relationship between Hughes and Blatný shows that Czech writers also perceived the "folk-expression" of the Harlem poet as a valuable model for a minority modernism.

Locke's comparison of the "New Czechoslovakia" to the "New Negro," rather than simply "Eurocentric," adds an interethnic perspective on the forces that were reshaping the interwar world order. Although Prague has been acknowledged as a center of modernism because of Kafka, scholars accustomed to seeing identity through a racial lens have overlooked the broader context of "resurgent peoples" across Central and Eastern Europe. However, the relationship of the small nations to the European powers had parallels to the struggle of African Americans within American society, which were familiar to the writers of the Harlem Renaissance. This "geographical and expressive reach" may help to explain why Langston Hughes places a poet from Czechoslovakia in the heart of Africa, so far away from both Harlem and Prague.

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Notes

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