

**PRAGA MAGICA: PRAGUE AS A PLACE
OF MEMORY AND VISION IN GEORGE ELIOT,
ANTHONY TROLLOPE AND GEORGE SAND**

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ABSTRACT

George Eliot and Anthony Trollope made short visits to Prague in the mid-19th century and were fascinated by such places as the Jewish Quarter with its old synagogue or Charles Bridge with its Baroque statues. They used these motifs in some of their works: Eliot in *The Lifted Veil* and *Daniel Deronda* and Trollope in *Nina Balatka*. Their portrayal of Prague, however, is very much based on the image of *Praga magica*, the Prague of legends, mysteries and magic. This article argues that the shift of focus from the Jewish Prague to the statue of St John of Nepomuk, which appears in *The Lifted Veil* and in *Nina Balatka*, might have been motivated not only by their admiration of the bridge decorations which they saw during their visits but also by the semantically rich motif of the saint's statue in George Sand's *Consuelo*, a novel which was very popular in Britain at that time.

Keywords: George Eliot; Anthony Trollope; George Sand; *Praga magica*; Jewish Prague; St John of Nepomuk; legends

Two major Victorian writers visited Prague and incorporated Prague motifs into their writings: George Eliot and Anthony Trollope. Eliot came to Prague twice; first in 1858, at the outset of her novelist career (her first novel, *Adam Bede*, was to be completed by the end of that year), and then in 1870, at the peak of her fame when she was working on her masterpiece, *Middlemarch*. Trollope visited Prague in 1865. All these stays were brief.

Eliot first came to Prague during a journey across the German-speaking countries she made with her spouse, the critic and philosopher George Henry Lewes, who was intensely interested in German life and culture. This was by no means their first trip to the Continent; having met in the early 1850s, they went to Weimar and Berlin in 1854 after they had decided to live together; Lewes was researching his book on Goethe at the time. In 1858 their journey included Munich, Ischl, Linz, Vienna, Prague, and Dresden, where they stayed for six weeks, working and admiring the beauties of the city. They reached Prague on the morning of 16 July after a whole night on the train from Vienna and spent the day visiting different places including the Jewish Quarter and Prague Castle. George Eliot famously refers to these two locations in particular in her journal: "We saw a lovely dark-eyed Jewish child here, which we were glad to kiss in all its dirt. Then came the sombre old synagogue with its smoky groins, and lamp forever burning.

An intelligent Jew was our cicerone and read us some Hebrew out of the precious old book of the Law” (Cross, 41). They were equally impressed by the Old Jewish Cemetery, adjacent to the synagogue, which Eliot described as “unique – with a wild growth of grass and shrubs and trees, and a multitude of quaint tombs in all sorts of positions, looking like the fragments of a great building, or as if they had been shaken by an earthquake” (40–41). The journal entry reflecting their visit to Prague Castle later that day sounds more ambiguous, however:

After dinner we took a carriage and went across the wonderful bridge of St. Jean Nepomuck, with its avenue of statues, towards the Radschin – an ugly straight-lined building but grand in effect from its magnificent site, on the summit of an eminence crowded with old massive buildings. The view from this eminence is one of the most impressive in the world – perhaps as much from one’s associations with Prague as from its visible grandeur and antiquity. The cathedral close to the Radschin is a melancholy object on the outside – left with unfinished sides like scars. The interior is rich but sadly confused in its ornamentation, like so many of the grand old churches – hideous altars of bastard style disgracing exquisite Gothic columns. [...] Close in front of us sloping downwards was a pleasant orchard; then came the river with its long, long bridge and grand gateway; then the sober-coloured city with its surrounding plain and distant hills. In the evening we went to the theatre – a shabbily ugly building – and heard Spohr’s *Jessonda*. (41–42)

The difference between the way the two scenes are presented is striking: while Eliot basically exalts over the Jewish part of the city, which she finds alluringly picturesque, she is much more critical in her description of its Christian part. The architecture is disappointing; the palace of Hradčany (“Radschin” in her words) is “an ugly straight-lined building”, the unfinished cathedral is “a melancholy object on the outside” while its interior displays “hideous altars of bastard style”, and the theatre is described as “a shabbily ugly building”. The material objects, especially the buildings when studied closely, create negative emotions; on the other hand, the prospects a visitor can enjoy in Prague prove highly gratifying with their magnificence and pleasing aspect. Yet Eliot adds, in the same breath, that this is not only due to their grandeur but also “one’s associations with Prague”. What, then, were her associations with Prague?

We know little, and even less about their sources. Clearly, the couple did not regard Prague as a place to explore thoroughly, as the accounts in their correspondence show. Prague stands midway between two points of interest, Munich and Dresden. The couple stayed in Munich for almost three months and Eliot ended up facing health problems there, though she speaks of them lightly: “First, an attack of Cholera during our last week at Munich – which I reckon among my pleasures because I was nursed so tenderly” (*GE Letters* II, 471). Lewes is slightly more specific about these circumstances in his letter to John Chapman of 23 July: “Munich we left without any regret, unless it was to leave so many kind and illustrious friends. Polly [i.e. Mary Ann Evans], although very popular, did not enjoy Munich [...] Polly saw Strauss¹ the day before we left, and was much pleased with him. [...] She has not been well since we left, and in Munich was for one

¹ Eliot translated David Friedrich Strauss’s extremely long and ponderous *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet*, the project she took over from Elizabeth Rebecca Brabant in 1844 and published, “Strauss-sick”, in 1846. (See Davies, 66, 88).

week in bed, but here at Dresden she seems in capital condition and will I trust continue so" (470–71). One reason for not staying longer in Prague could therefore be that Eliot was still convalescing and longed to get to Dresden, the final point of their Continental journey, as soon as possible. She indeed found Dresden a highly rewarding place, as she writes to her friend Sara Sophia Hennell: "Dresden is a proper climax, for all other art seems only a preparation for feeling the superiority of the Madonna di San Sisto the more" (471).

Another reason, a more plausible one, is that neither Eliot nor Lewes had any friends or acquaintances in Prague. Nonetheless, crossing the territory of Bohemia provided, at least for Lewes, an exquisite aesthetic experience, as he writes from Dresden: "From Vienna we went to Prague – the most splendid city in Germany – where we stayed a day – and then came through the 'Saxon Switzerland' to this place, having had an intoxicating draught of beauty – lakes, mountains, and valleys such as will long live in the memory" (470). But Prague remained, inaccurately, no more than a "city in Germany" for him.

This indicates, as Susan Reynolds argues, that the Leweses (though not married Eliot signed her letters "Marian Lewes" and maintained that they were husband and wife in the eyes of God) were little aware of the Czech national movement and the turbulent events on the Czech cultural scene of the period, the infamous decade of "Bach's absolutism". Similarly, in her leading article "George Eliotová" for the January 1879 issue of *Ženská listy* (Women's Magazine), Dora Hanušová regrets that none of the younger Czech intellectuals approached Eliot during her visits to show her around and explain the character of the current cultural and political activities (see Hanušová, 4). The Leweses made no contact with any notable figures representing Czech culture, philosophy or science and spent their time in Prague merely as tourists. In Eliot's notes, Prague is curiously empty of people: she speaks about the "avenue of statues" on the bridge but not about people walking there or in the streets. Even the figures in the Jewish Quarter were introduced, one feels, as local colour and not as real-life beings. The Prague in George Eliot's journal is the Prague of the past; her associations are those of legend and myth.

It seems Eliot attempted to recreate in her mind *Praga magica*, a city steeped in its own mysteries. Angelo Maria Ripellino characterises this specific attribute as follows: "when I seek another word for mystery, the only word I can find is Prague. She is dark and melancholy as a comet; her beauty is like the sensation of fire, winding and slanted as in the anamorphoses of the Mannerists, with a lugubrious aura of decay, a smirk of eternal disillusionment" (Ripellino, 7). In her notebook, Eliot draws a map of Prague transfigured into this picture when she focuses on three sites which play an important part in Ripellino's account: the Jewish synagogue (whose loft was still believed to house the Golem), the eminence of Prague Castle with its compelling views, and the bridge (not yet called Charles Bridge) decorated with Baroque statues. That is, Jewish Prague, imperial Prague, Catholic Prague; the Prague of the Golem and Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, the Prague of Emperor Rudolf II, and the Prague of John of Nepomuk, martyr and saint. What seems significant in this context is the fact that Eliot calls the Prague bridge, then virtually nameless, the "bridge of St. Jean Nepomuck", connecting it with the legend of his martyrdom.

The bridge and the statue of John then reappear in *The Lifted Veil*, a story Eliot could not resist writing in the spring of the following year, while she interrupted the work on

her second novel, *The Mill on the Floss*. Unlike anything in her literary oeuvre, it takes its formal inspiration from fantastic literature, Gothic fiction, the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, and with its valetudinarian protagonist/narrator, Latimer, anticipates the enfeebled and effeminate young male characters of the fin-de-siècle scene. As such, it has maintained an exceptional, and from the point of view of critical concern even somewhat marginal, position within Eliot's oeuvre from the outset. In her letter to the publisher, John Blackwood, the author refers to it as "a slight story of an outré kind – not a *jeu d'esprit*, but a *jeu du melancolie*, which I could send you in a few days for your acceptance or rejection as a brief magazine story – of one number only. I think nothing of it, but my private critic says it is very striking and original, and on the strength of that opinion, I mention it" (GEL III, 41). She finished the story on 26 April and sent it to Blackwood three days later, calling it "dismal" this time. She also noted in her journal that she had written it because "my head was too stupid for more important work" (60). Blackwood approved that it was "a very striking story, full of thought and most beautifully written" but he also expressed some reservations concerning certain motifs and postponed its publication for a month, adding "so we will have plenty of time to talk it over" (67). *The Lifted Veil* appeared anonymously in *Blackwood's Magazine* in July 1859, unedited.²

The story revolves around Latimer's peculiar gift of clairvoyance which grants him, in the first part, a fantastic vision of Prague and reveals, in the second part, his wife's intrigues threatening his life. It is not necessary to analyse the entire text here; this has been meticulously done by Ian Milner in his article "George Eliot's Prague Story" (PSE XV, 1973); suffice it to concentrate on its Prague motif. After studying in Geneva for three years, the nineteen-year-old Latimer falls severely ill and during his protracted convalescence his father suggests that he will take him home when he is "quite well enough to travel", going through the Tyrol and Austria and showing him many new places. He promises "to go together to Vienna, and back by Prague" (Eliot ME, 7–8). The sentence is left unfinished as the father is called away at that moment, but the last word produces an unprecedented vision in Latimer's mind:

... a new and wondrous scene was breaking upon me: a city under the broad sunshine, that seemed to me as if it were the summer sunshine of a long-past century arrested in its course – unrefreshed for ages by the dews of night, or the rushing rain cloud; scorching the dusty, weary, time-eaten grandeur of a people doomed to live on in the stale repetition of memories, like deposed and superannuated kings in their regal gold-inwoven tatters. The city looked so thirsty that the broad river seemed to me a sheet of metal; and the blackened statues, as I passed under their blank gaze, along the unending bridge, with their ancient garments and their saintly crowns, seemed to me the real inhabitants and owners of this

² Even several years later Blackwood viewed the story as something irregular in Eliot's output and advised the author not to include it in the planned representative edition of her works. "I return 'Brother Jacob' and send with him 'The Lifted Veil.' They are both as clever as can be, but there is a painful want of light about them and my advice is against including them in the recognized series of your works. I remember the Lifted Veil was published when Adam Bede was in the full blaze of fame, and I thought it better not to accept Lewes's kind offer to put your name to it in the Magazine, which I believe no other editor of a periodical would have done. My opinion has not changed yet" (GE Letters IV, 322). His apprehension indicates that he did not think the story worthy of the reputation George Eliot had achieved by the mid-1860s.

place, while the busy, trivial men and women, hurrying to and fro, were a swarm of ephemeral visitants infesting it for a day. (8)

Latimer wonders what kind of experience this was, “minute in its distinctness down to a patch of rainbow light on the pavement, transmitted through a coloured lamp in the shade of a star” (8). He admits that he has never seen a picture of Prague: “it lay in my mind as a mere name, with vaguely remembered historical associations – ill-defined memories of imperial grandeur and religious wars” (9).

His vision is undoubtedly that of *Praga magica*, a locus in which a fantastic past is the only living entity while the present is a mere chimera. Milner, who pays much attention to the difference between Eliot’s journal entries recording her impressions and the image presented in the story, compares the scene with the “ephemeral visitants” hurrying across the Prague bridge and the Dantesque scene on London Bridge in the first part of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. What is also striking, however, is the fact that the depopulated Prague of George Eliot’s journal becomes inhabited by two kinds of beings here, the statues in which Latimer sees “the fathers of ancient children in those tanned time-fretted dwellings that crowd the steep before me” (8), i.e. the phenomena which define the multifarious meanings of *Praga magica*, and the chimeric present-day pedestrians “infesting” the place and bringing no meaning at all, and as such representing the semantic void of modern times. What Eliot meant by her “associations” becomes clearer here – they are the same as Latimer’s.

When the protagonist finally arrives in Prague, he is taken to the same places Eliot and Lewes visited: first to the Jewish Quarter to see the old synagogue and then to the bridge. The synagogue scene does not differ substantially from Eliot’s journal entry:

But, as I stood under the blackened, groined arches of that old synagogue, made dimly visible by the seven thin candles in the sacred lamp, while our Jewish cicerone reached down the Book of Law, and read to us in its ancient tongue – I felt a shuddering impression that this strange building, with its shrunken lights, this surviving withered remnant of mediaeval Judaism, was of a piece with my vision. Those darkened dusty Christian saints, with their loftier arches and their larger candles, needed the consolatory scorn with which they might point to a more shrivelled death-in-life than their own. (23)

The impression is, of course, modified to align with Latimer’s melancholy state of mind and supplemented by Christian-Judaic dualism which roughly corresponds to the dualism envisioned on the bridge.

The Jewish motif, however, only serves as prologue to the actual climax of Latimer’s Prague experience. After leaving the Jewish Quarter he feels “a sudden overpowering impulse to go on at once to the bridge”. Having persuaded his father to let him do as he wishes, he approaches the bridge accompanied by his servant Schmidt: “I had no sooner passed from under the archway of the grand old gate leading on to the bridge, than a trembling seized me, and I turned cold under the mid-day sun; yet went on; I was in search of something – a small detail which I remembered with special intensity as a part of my vision. There it was – the patch of rainbow light on the pavement transmitting through a lamp in the shape of a star” (23). The first part of the story culminates with this discovery proving the veracity of Latimer’s vision.

This light transmitted through a coloured lamp is closely connected to John of Nepomuk, as the lamp stands in front of the saint's statue, the oldest one decorating the parapets of Charles Bridge. The legend of John of Nepomuk played a significant role in the 17th and 18th centuries as one of the instruments of the Roman Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation, principally intended to suppress the popularity of the 15th-century reformer John Hus. In 1683, Jan Brokoff's bronze statue modelled on Matthias Rauchmüller's was erected, almost half a century before the martyr's canonisation. The legend of Nepomuk, the canon of the Prague Cathedral Chapter and Deacon of All Saints, recorded in Václav Hájek's *Bohemian Chronicle* (1541), describes him being thrown from the bridge into the waters of the Vltava in 1383 because he refused to reveal to the jealous King Wenceslas IV what Queen Johanna had told him in the confessional. When the body sank, a miraculous gleam appeared: "You would have seen countless bright lights, as if fire and water had made peace and were flowing together," quotes Ripellino from Hájek (195). Though highly improbable (the real cause of the torture and death of this ecclesiastical dignitary seems rather to have been the controversy between him and the king about the future abbot of Kladruby Monastery), the story of uncompromised loyalty and moral integrity became one of the main arguments for John's canonisation. When his tomb was opened in 1719, the surgeons claimed to have found something red in the mouth that looked like an undecomposed tongue.

The legend bears significantly upon the theme of *The Lifted Veil*. Latimer's desire to hurry onto the bridge predicts the plot of the second part of the story: shortly before his journey he had got acquainted with Bertha Grant, an orphaned young niece of his father's friends, the Filmores, whom his father planned to betroth to Latimer's elder brother Alfred. During the journey, however, Bertha showed more affection for Latimer and he fell in love with her; yet at one moment he experienced another vision in which he saw Bertha as his cruel wife who despised him and wished he would die. Shocked, he wants to see each detail of his vision of Prague in reality, to confirm whether his clairvoyant scenes are accurate and therefore true.

In this sense, the consistency of John of Nepomuk and his loyalty to the Queen makes a motivic contrast with the character of Latimer's and Bertha's unhappy marriage as we witness it in the second part of the story. But on a deeper, political level, the old legend resonates with the current condition of the Czech nation, tongue-tied by the strict measures taken after the March 1848 revolutionary events yet never losing hope, like the light of the lamp, the "rainbow light", symbolizing God's favour just as the miraculous gleam that had accompanied John's death. Considering this, it is doubtful that Eliot was entirely ignorant of the current political situation in this part of the Habsburg monarchy.

There is a moral dimension too onto which this meaning is projected: when Bertha's dying maid, Mrs Archer, wants to disclose her mistress' intention to get rid of her husband by poisoning him, she is silenced by Bertha's constant vigilant presence; but immediately after her death Latimer's friend, Charles Meunier, a surgeon, enlivens her temporarily by blood transfusion and at that moment she gasps out the truth. The dead tongue comes to life and speaks; this "miracle" of modern science, far-fetched and fantastic as it seems, is highly symbolic: truth and moral integrity must never die, they must never be hushed up. This symbolic meaning explains why in *The Lifted Veil* the Christian

aspect of *Praga magica*, *Praga Nepomucensis*, ultimately prevails over the Jewish aspect, *Praga Golemica*.

Eliot and Lewes's second visit to Prague in 1870 was also short, taking two days, this time en route from Berlin to Vienna. From the scanty notes in their correspondence and diaries we can surmise that the stay took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, 6–7 April. Seeing the synagogue again (cf. Haight, 425) might have inspired Eliot to include a Prague motif in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876). The short episode during which one of the characters, Mirah Lapidoth, endowed with an exceptional clarity of vision, faintly echoing Latimer's clairvoyance, manages to flee from her tyrannous father soon after they come to Prague, is presented in the following manner:

It was dark when we reached Prague, and though the strange bunches of lamps were lit it was difficult to distinguish faces as we drove along the street. My father chose to sit outside – he was always smoking now – and I watched everything in spite of the darkness. I do believe I could see better then than ever I did before: the strange clearness within seemed to have got outside me. It was not my habit to notice faces and figures much in the street; but this night I saw every one; and when we passed before a great hotel I caught sight only of a back that was passing in – the light of the great bunch of lamps a good way off fell on it. I knew it – before the face was turned, as it fell into shadow, I knew who it was. Help came to me. I feel sure help came to me. (Eliot *DD*, 168)

The passage recreates the atmosphere of Latimer's vision: Prague is again rendered as a semi-hallucinatory scene, a liminal space between the world of the living and the dead, the magical nature of which helps Mirah achieve freedom from oppressive tyranny. In her late novel Eliot does the same as she has done in her early story, transforming Prague into a specific psychological projection, a mental image of urban space where the present merges into the past, the real into the dreamy, the clear into the blurry – another memorable image of *Praga magica*.³

Compared to the sparse evidence from Eliot's two brief sojourns, we know virtually nothing about Anthony Trollope's 1865 visit to Prague. Nevertheless, what we can say is that his trips to the Continent prompted him to write two short novels, *Nina Balatka*, set in Prague, and *Linda Tressel*, set in Nuremberg. As N. John Hall explains: "In 1865 Trollope determined once again to try an experiment in anonymity. He feared he was overcrowding the fictional market; he also felt, he said, the injustice of praise heaped indiscriminately on well-known writers" (Hall, 285). With these two novels, so different from his other fiction, Trollope attempted to launch his "second identity" and test his market potential. He reflects on his strategies in *An Autobiography*: "I am sure that the two stories are good. Perhaps the first is somewhat the better, as being the less lachrymose. They were both written very quickly, but with a considerable amount of labour; and both were written immediately after visits to the towns in which the scenes are laid" (Trollope *Autobiography*, 205). *Nina Balatka* was begun on 3 November 1865 and finished on 31 December, which indicates that Trollope was in Prague sometime in the second half of that year. He

³ I have briefly outlined this story of Eliot's experience of Prague in my essay "An Unspeakable Journey: Czech and Slovak Reception of George Eliot" for *The Reception of George Eliot in Europe* (2016).

continues: “Of course I had endeavoured to change not only my manner of language, but my manner of story-telling also; and in this [...] I think that I was successful. English life in them there was none. There was more of romance proper than had been usual with me. And I made an attempt at local colouring, at descriptions of scenes and places, which has not been usual with me” (205–206). He concludes, seemingly unequivocally: “Prague is Prague and Nuremberg is Nuremberg” (206).

Trollope offered *Nina Balatka* to George Smith for anonymous publication, first to be serialised in *Cornhill* and then issued in book form, but Smith declined to accept his terms. The manuscript then went to John Blackwood, the publisher of George Eliot’s story. It seems that Blackwood was puzzled by it but also impressed, because he wrote to his London manager Joseph Munt Langford pointing out that Trollope had “thrown a perfectly foreign Prague atmosphere about all his characters so perfectly unEnglish that there is the sort of air of hardness about the story that one feels in reading a translation” (qtd. in Hall, 286). Despite his reservations concerning especially the character of Anton Trendellsohn, Blackwood serialised the novel in *Blackwood’s Magazine* from July 1866 to January 1867 and published it as a book later in 1867.

Not only was *Nina* issued by the same publisher as *The Lifted Veil*, it also holds the same marginal position among the novelist’s voluminous production. In his surviving correspondence, Blackwood does not mention Trollope’s interest in similar Prague locations which he has found in George Eliot, but he must have noticed it. The question is to what extent Trollope’s picture of Prague is authentic. A. O. J. Cockshut quotes his words that “Prague is Prague and Nuremberg is Nuremberg” just to oppose this unduly confident statement: “Perhaps they are, as far as physical accuracy goes. But just as he did not appreciate the depth of his own understanding of English culture, he did not realise his failure to understand other cultures. If he had comprehended his own best achievements, he would not have been satisfied with the superficial foreignness of these two minor works” (Cockshut, 144). James Pope Hennessy expresses his criticism even more bluntly: “The only interest in this dreary tale of bankruptcy and anti-Semitism is to be found in the fact that it was published anonymously. [...] The honest fad was not rewarded, as nobody was particularly interested in *Nina* and her Jewish lover” (Hennessy, 232–33). In the light of these words, it is no wonder that the novel has eluded substantial critical attention.

Its story is simple. *Nina*, the young and beautiful daughter of a bankrupt businessman, Josef Balatka, falls in love with Anton Trendellsohn, the son of Balatka’s former business partner Stephen. Because the Trendellsohns are Jews, the prospect of *Nina* and Anton’s marriage is opposed by Balatka’s rich relatives, the Zamenoy. Moreover, Sophia Zamenoy, *Nina*’s dead mother’s sister, intends to marry *Nina* to her own son Ziska, while Anton is pursued by a Jewish girl called Rebecca Loth. The situation is even more complicated by the fact that Stephen Trendellsohn, to help Josef, had bought all his houses in the Kleinseite (i.e. the Lesser Town, Malá Strana) and allowed him to stay in one of them, while the property documents, the title deeds, are mischievously kept by Karil Zamenoy, Josef’s rich brother-in-law.

The romance is thus set in the atmosphere of intrigues and anti-Semitic prejudice which is reported to be stronger in Prague than anywhere else. Anton “had heard of Jews in Vienna, in Paris, and in London who were as true to their religion as any Jew of Prague

but who did not live immured in a Jews' quarter, like lepers separate and alone in some loathed corner of a city otherwise clean. [...] In Prague a Jew was still a Pariah" (Trollope *NB*, 69). Prague is portrayed as a divided city, not only along the lines of religion but also of prosperity. This allows Trollope to create a specific spatial structure, a triangle the topography of whose apexes represents different social positions of the three families involved in the main conflict: Balatka and his daughter, we learn, occupy a house "in a small courtyard near to the river, but altogether hidden from it, somewhat to the right of the main street of the Kleinseite" (5), the Trendellsohns live in a "high-gabled house immediately behind the synagogue" (9), while the Zamenoy's own "a comfortable modern house in the New Town" (4), in Windberg-gasse (which is probably today's short lane called "Pod Větrovem"). It is notable that Balatka's and Trendellsohn's dwellings belong to the sites of *Praga magica*, while the Zamenoy's live on the outskirts of it.

Some easily recognisable attributes of *Praga magica* are employed to define the character of the places where each of the unfortunate lovers live. Over the house of Nina and her father the royal palace looms large:

Immediately over the little square stood the palace of the Hradschin, the wide-spreading residence of the old kings of Bohemia, now the habitation of an ex-emperor of the House of Hapsburg, who must surely find the thousand chambers of the royal mansion all too wide a retreat for the use of his old age. So immediately did the imperial hill tower over the spot on which Balatka lived, that it would seem at night, when the moon was shining as it shines only at Prague, that the colonnades of the palace were the upper storeys of some enormous edifice, of which the merchant's small courtyard formed a lower portion. (5)

In this image the magnificent royal palace merges with Balatka's house, as if growing out of it, just as the past of the old kings of Bohemia with all their might merges with the present of the powerless, dysfunctional Austrian ex-emperor Ferdinand. Political power is presented in this passage as being always semantically contentless, like the empty rooms of the palace: "Chamber after chamber, you shall pass through them by the score, and know by signs unconsciously recognised that there is not, and never has been, true habitation within them" (6). Faithful to the romance genre, it is love that triumphs over all kinds of power in this world.

The synagogue plays its part in Chapter VII where the son of the Zamenoy's, Ziska, decides to approach Anton at home. The Jewish Quarter is viewed as a secluded area where Christians feel out of place: "Strangers who come to Prague visit the Jews' quarter as a matter of course, and to such strangers the Jews of Prague are invariably courteous. But the Christians of the city seldom walk through the heart of the Jews' locality, or hang about the Jews' synagogue, or are seen among their houses unless they have special business. The Jews' quarter, though it is a banishment to the Jews from the fairer portions of the city, is also a separate and somewhat sacred castle in which they may live after their old fashion undisturbed" (80). The day being Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath, Ziska finds Anton in the synagogue, the centrepiece of the Jewish Quarter:

Though this was the chief synagogue in Prague, and, as being the so-called oldest in Europe, is a building of some consequence in the Jewish world, it was very small. There was no ceiling, and the high-pitched roof, which has once probably been coloured, and the walls,

which had once certainly been white, were black with the dirt of ages. In the centre there was a cage, as it were, or iron grille, within which five or six old Jews were placed, who seemed to wail louder than the others. Round the walls there was a row of men inside stationary desks, and outside them another row, before each of whom there was a small movable standing desk, on which there was a portion of the law of Moses. (84)

Trollope describes the interior of the synagogue as if he himself were the visitor, which he certainly was during his stay in Prague. His strategy resembles that of George Eliot, as he also seems to alter his potential notes only slightly if at all. The synagogue does not appear to create any other impressions than those derived from mere observation. Both Eliot and Trollope's narrators are matter-of-fact; they let the image of the place, only briefly sketched, speak for itself. The *Praga magica* element here is once again its ancient character, the past which inhabits the present, its traditions as well as legends.

The novel employs a simple dynamic which organises the plot; it consists of the movement of all the characters from one of the three loci to another, making their visits for different reasons. As Balatka's house stands on the other side of the river than the other two places, they always cross the single bridge that connects the two banks. The crossing of the river, always on foot, can be understood as a kind of ritual; even the pompous Madame Zamenoy "walked on foot, thinking that her carriage and horses might be too conspicuous at the arched gate in the little square" (54). This gives the bridge its prominent position, with the presiding statue, once again, of John of Nepomuk. And it is this statue that, curiously enough, plays a crucial role in the story of love so despicably crossed by anti-Semitism and egoism.

John's statue is introduced quite early in the novel:

So she walked on again till she reached a spot on the bridge at which she almost always paused a moment to perform a little act of devotion. There, having a place in the long row of huge statues which adorn the bridge, is the figure of the martyr St. John Nepomucene, who at this spot was thrown into the river because he would not betray the secrets of a queen's confession, and was drowned, and who has ever been, from that period downwards, the favourite saint of Prague – and of bridges. On the balustrade, near the figure, there is a small plate inserted in the stone-work, and good Catholics, as they pass over the river, put their hands upon the plate, and then kiss their fingers. So shall they be saved from drowning and from all perils of the water – as far, at least, as the special transit of the river may be perilous. (16)

The almost automatic act which she has carried on from her childhood makes her think about the relevance of religion in her life, now that she is going to marry a Jew, and she, perplexed by her own situation, concludes: "Religion was much to her; the fear of the everlasting wrath of Heaven was much to her; but love was paramount!" (17). John acts here as a protecting presence, saving those who are in the peril of drowning. This is a different role from that revealed in the thematic plan of *The Lifted Veil*, where the saint symbolises loyalty and safeguarding of truth.

John's protective role materialises at the climactic moment of the novel. Nina, desperate that Anton has finally believed all the lies of the Zamenoy's and left her, and also frustrated by her father's recent death, resolves to commit suicide by jumping from the

bridge into the river. She goes there after dark and while trying to pluck courage for the deed, she approaches the statue of John.

The statue of St. John Nepomucene is a single figure, standing in melancholy weeping posture on the balustrade of the bridge, without any of that ponderous strength of widespread stone which belongs to the other groups. This St. John is always pictured to us as a thin, melancholy, half-starved saint, who has had all the life washed out of him by his long immersion. [...] He is a mild, meek saint, teaching one rather by his attitude how to bear with the malice of the waters, than offering any protection against their violence. But now, at this moment, his aid was the only aid to which Nina could look with any hope. (182)

The scene is highly ambiguous. Nina means to drown and yet she hopes that her favourite saint will save her; she even tries to recall whether John's protective power has ever saved a suicide. But what she unconsciously wishes for is to save her love. While she slowly prepares for her suicidal act, the old family servant Souchey and Rebecca Loth find her, crouching on the parapet, and take her back home. When Anton learns the truth, he marries Nina and they leave Prague to live elsewhere, in a more tolerant world. Though Trollope originally thought of a tragic ending to his Prague story, he reserved it for his following experiment in anonymity, *Linda Tressel*.

Though there is an obvious interest in the Jewish part of Prague in both Eliot's and Trollope's stories (not to speak about *Daniel Deronda*, inspired by George Eliot's study of European Judaism and her friendship with her teacher of Hebrew, Emanuel Deutsch, a German historian and specialist in Semitic cultures), it is the legend of John of Nepomuk, a Christian martyr and Catholic saint, that ultimately dominates them. It is highly probable that Trollope found some impetus for his novel in Eliot's story, though we have no direct evidence that he ever read it. The two writers became friends in the early 1860s, after Trollope had assisted in getting Lewes' son Charles Lee placed in the Post Office, and Trollope was often invited to dine with the Leweses at that time. He rarely corresponded with Eliot herself but a note in her journal of 30 June 1862 testifies to his interest in her work: "And this morning I had a delightful, generous letter from Mr. Anthony Trollope about Romola" (*GEL* IV, 45). As Trollope's autobiography shows, he was in fact a regular reader of Eliot's novels, so it is quite legitimate to suppose that he knew *The Lifted Veil*, too. The influence was never admitted, though.

A final question remains: what induced the two English Protestant writers to grant such a central position to the Czech Catholic martyr and his legend? Was it at all possible that George Eliot noticed his statue when she was passing it in her coach on the way to Prague Castle? And how did she learn about the saint's significance for the Czech nation? Moreover, why does she refer to the bridge as "his" in her journal? Further, was Trollope drawn to the statue of John thanks to Eliot's story or did he observe it with a particular interest of his own during his walks on the bridge? We can but speculate, yet one potential answer looms outside the context we have examined so far.

In his essay "The Death of the Author" Roland Barthes asserts that a text is "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (qtd. in Allen, 12). In this way he addresses the problem of textual autonomy; a text in his concept

should not be understood as an independent autonomous unit conveying its unique message (“a single ‘theological’ meaning”) but an assembly of echoes resulting from multiple intertextual relationships.

If we allow the existence of a hypotext (to use Gérard Genette’s term) after which the motif of John of Nepomuk was constructed in the two English stories, I venture to suggest that we should look for it in the work of George Sand. The French novelist was very popular in England in the mid-nineteenth century, especially with female readers, though not without an awareness of controversy. George Eliot had read Sand since the late 1830s,⁴ and in her letter to Sara Sophia Hennell of 9 February 1849 she defends the qualities of the French author’s work against her friend’s criticism:

It is thus with G. Sand. I should never dream of going to her writings as a moral code or text-book. I don’t care whether I agree with her about marriage or not – whether I think the design of her plot correct or that she had no precise design at all but begun to write as the spirit moved her and trusted to Providence for the catastrophe, which I think the more probable case – it is sufficient for me as a reason for bowing before her in eternal gratitude to that ‘great power of God’ manifested in her – that I cannot read six pages of hers without feeling that it is given to her to delineate human passion and its results [...] with such truthfulness such nicety of discrimination such tragic power and withal such loving gentle humour that one might live a century with nothing but one’s own dull faculties and not know so much as those six pages will suggest. (*GEL* I, 277–78)

Linda M. Lewis, when writing on the influence of Sand on Eliot, seems to echo this passage but extends it: “Eliot not only admires her predecessor’s truthfulness, power, humor, moral instincts, and passion, but she also admires Sand’s strong, larger-than-life women, such as Lélia and Consuelo. For Eliot’s other great debt to Sand [...] is her monumental female characters” (Lewis, 142). Patricia Thomson helpfully provides a list of books Eliot read in the 1840s: “*Indiana*, *Mauprat*, *Consuelo*, *Lélia*, *Lettres d’un Voyager*, *Jacques*, *Spiridon*, *Le Meunier d’Angibault* – we know that Marian Evans read these works of George Sand, written before 1847, from actual references to them in her letters” (Thomson, 154). She continues to argue that *Consuelo* especially was strongly influential in the conception of George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, in which the heroine, Maggie Tulliver, seems to bear many features of the titular main character of Sand’s novel. *Consuelo* (originally published in French serially in 1842–43) was also one of the most popular of Sand’s novels in England, including even Queen Victoria among its broad reading public. “Most of its popularity was undoubtedly due to the character of the heroine, the small gipsy-like waif with the short thick black hair, who has a wonderful voice and eventually becomes a beautiful prima donna, whose singing and greatness of soul and sweetness of disposition win all hearts” (164).

We can assume that George Eliot wrote *The Mill on the Floss* with *Consuelo* on her mind, and we should recall that she wrote *The Lifted Veil* while interrupting her early work on this novel. This enables us to extrapolate an affinity between *Consuelo* and Eliot’s story in one specific scene. Towards the end of the novel, while taking a night

⁴ Alexandra K. Wettlaufer writes that “Eliot was first introduced to Sand’s oeuvre in 1839 and by 1847 was an avid reader of her novels” (Wettlaufer, 82).

journey through Prague, Consuelo's coach breaks and makes a stop in the middle of the bridge, just in front of the statue of St John of Nepomuk. The postilion sees this as an ill omen and exclaims: "my horse has stopped at the statue: that is a bad sign. Saint John N pomuck, aid me!"⁵ Consuelo is, however, fascinated by the place and gets out to take a closer look at the scene. She immediately associates the saint's statue with the legend:

The Moldau whirled rapidly under the arches of the steep, heavy bridge, which had been the scene of so many events of Bohemian history. The reflection of the moon played around the brow of the venerated statue. Consuelo gazed at the statue of the venerated doctor, who looked apparently at the waves. The legend of Saint N pomuck is beautiful, and his name is venerated by all who love liberty and independence. A confessor of the Empress Jane, he refused to betray the confessions, and the drunken Wenceslaus, who wished to become possessed of a woman's secrets, unable to influence the doctor, had him drowned beneath the bridge of Prague. Tradition says, just as he sank beneath the waters, five stars floated on the water, as if he had left the crown of martyrdom behind. In memory of this, five stars have been incrustated on the balustrade, at the very spot he disappeared. (508)

Even at this time, the statue is surrounded by worshippers, and Consuelo, moved by the scene, "knelt amid the crowd of women, pilgrims, beggars, and zingari, children of the mandoline, who now did homage to the saint, and their piety was so great, that she could not but reach forth her hand to them. She gave them large alms, and recalled the time when she had been destitute as they were" (508).

Sand fills this brief episode with a number of meanings evoked by the statue and therefore concentrates various issues exposed in her novel into one moment. The bridge is given a historical significance. Yet this historical appeal immediately gives way to the scene's magical aspect with the moonlight mysteriously playing around the saint's brow, which allows the legend to step in. And, compared especially with Trollope's rendering, the legend endows John of Nepomuk with multiple roles in George Sand's version: the saint not only protects people from the dangers of drowning but guarantees political benefits ("liberty and independence") and becomes "the patron of all journeys, of persons in danger, and the protector of fair fame" ("le patron special des voyageurs, des gens en peril, et, par dessus-tout, le garant de la bonne renomm e") (508). There are strong notes of piety and solidarity, but also politically subversive motifs presented with a good deal of irony. While the patron strengthens in his worshippers the awareness of national identity and political hopes, the Austrian sentinel marching mechanically from each gate to the statue and back again take the crowd's hymns to be sung in praise of the Austrian rulers. "They were not such good Latin scholars as the devout people of Prague, and fancied, perhaps, they heard a praise of Francis of Lorraine, the husband of Maria Theresa" ("un cantique a la louange de Fran ois de Lorraine, l' poux de Marie-Th r se", though the English translation actually says here: "Maria Theresa or Francis de Lorraine, her husband") (508). This politically subversive note is intensified by the fact the people also take special delight in cursing the name of King Wenceslas, "this tyrant, the abhorred name of

⁵ George Sand, *Consuelo*, trans. Fayette Robinson (Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson & Brothers, 1870), 507. The original French quotations are taken from the version of the novel available at Project Gutenberg, accessed 2 March 2022, www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/13374/pg13374.html.

imperator, synonymous to them with Stranger” (508). The whole range of meanings culminates in the final part of the episode, contrasting the saint’s integrity with the hypocrisy of those who appeal to him for deplorable reasons: “She [Consuelo] remembered that one evening she had heard the canoness invoke Saint Népomuck aloud, and Albert had said, ‘That, aunt, is well enough for you who have taken the precaution to assure your own salvation by an exemplary life, but I have often seen persons sullied by crime, invoke the aid of this saint, to conceal their hidden offences from man. Thus practical devotees put on the mantle of deceit, quite as often as innocence’” (509). The final note, then, is that of the moral ambivalence of contemporary life.

Neither George Eliot nor Anthony Trollope retained the semantic richness of Sand’s presentation of the John of Nepomuk motif. It is not even certain whether Trollope read *Consuelo*; we know, however, that his mother Frances was an avid reader and admirer of George Sand, albeit not without reservations: “Trollope would have known of his mother’s admiration for George Sand’s genius, qualified by regret that most of her books were unsuitable for family reading” (*Letters of AT*, 1024). He himself approved of the moral impeccability of Sand’s *L’Uscoque* (see Hall, 70). But it is possible that he took *The Lifted Veil* as the principal aesthetic filter for his image of the Nepomuk motif and the Sandean inspiration was mediated in this fashion. Nevertheless, the fact that Eliot uses the French form, St. Jean Nepomuck, when referring to the bridge, exactly the form used by Sand in *Consuelo*, indicates her own literary inspiration. And Trollope’s absurd decision to name the son of a Prague Catholic family Ziska, after the famous Hussite leader and one of the major figures of the Czech Protestant movement, in turn points to his vague knowledge of George Sand’s *Jean Ziska: Épisode de la guerre des Hussites*. These traces of George Sand’s influence may ultimately explain why the two English texts, in their attempt to recreate *Praga magica*, feature a rather curious shift from a Jewish locus to the symbol of the country’s 17th-century Counter-Reformation.

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RÉSUMÉ:

PRAGA MAGICA: PRAHA JAKO MÍSTO PAMĚTI A VIZE V DÍLE GEORGE ELIOTOVÉ, ANTHONYHO TROLLOPA A GEORGE SANDOVÉ

Jak George Eliotová, tak Anthony Trollope krátce navštívili Prahu v polovině 19. století a byli uchváteni takovými místy jako židovská čtvrť s její Staronovou synagogou anebo Karlův most s barokními sochami. Tyto motivy se pak objevují i v jejich dílech: u Eliotové v novele *Zdvižený závoj* a románu *Daniel Deronda*, u Trollopa v románu *Nina Balatková*. Jejich obraz Prahy však vychází z představy Prahy magické, Prahy opředené legendami, tajemstvími a magií. Přítomná studie se pokouší ukázat, že přesun významového těžiště z židovské Prahy k soše svatého Jana Nepomuckého ve *Zdviženém závoji* a *Nině Balatkové* mohl být motivován nejen obdivem k výzdobě mostu, tak jak ji oba autoři zhlédli během svých návštěv, ale i sémanticky bohatým motivem světcovy sochy v románu George Sandové *Consuelo*, který byl v té době v Anglii velmi populární.

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