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ON LOUIS ADAMIČ'S TRANSLATION OF CANKAR'S *HLAPEC JERNEJ IN NJEGOVA PRAVICA*

Nike Kocijančič

The aim of this study is to ascertain whether Louis Adamič in his *Yerney's Justice* — his translation of Ivan Cankar's *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* — tried to reproduce the biblical style which typically characterizes the original; and if not, what the reason for the omission of these stylistic features may have been.

With this aim in mind, all the examples of more or less changed direct quotations from the Bible, allusively used biblical words and typical biblical sentence structure, with their numerous instances of synonymous, antithetic and synthetic parallelisms, were copied from the original and compared with their translation equivalents in Adamič's translation *Yerney's Justice*.[1] This study is a summary of the findings.

By way of introduction, let us determine whether the style of Ivan Cankar's short story was in fact a biblical one. *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* was written and published in 1907, soon after the parliamentary elections in which Ivan Cankar stood as a candidate for the Social-Democratic Party. Thus the concept of the story was undoubtedly influenced by socialist ideas; Jernej is a social, historical and psychological generalization, a symbolic personification of the oppressed rural proletariat, and at the same time an individual. The charm of the story is hidden in this masterful intermingling of allegory (Bratko Kreft talks about parable[2]) and "reality."

If we examine the opinions of literary critics of the stylistic devices that Cankar used in this short story, we see that soon after its publication, *Jernej* was celebrated as one of the best works ever written in the Slovene language. Some critics praised the work for its socialist ideas, the others for its elaborate style. As early as in 1909 Vladimir Levstik claimed that it was not the contents but the

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1 Louis Adamic, *Yerney's Justice*. New York NY: Vanguard Press, 1926.

2 Bratko Kreft, foreword to Ivan Cankar, *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* [= Knjižnica Kondor 114] (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1984) 108.

style which made *Jernej* the best Slovene prose work ever written.[3] Also Ivan Prijatelj in his essay "Domovina, glej umetnik!" — besides acknowledging the political issues of the story — wrote that the success of the story lay in its style.[4]

His style (Levstik talks about *monumentalna enostavnost*[5] and Tominšek about *klasična lapidarnost*[6]) was thoroughly analyzed in 1909 by Venceslav Bele, who concluded that Cankar's style showed undeniable parallels with biblical style.[7] Almost eighty years later, Bratko Kreft compared his language to the language of the prophets and to that of St John's Apocalypse. This, he claimed, was not rhythmic prose, but rather a poem written in a free epic verse.[8] He immediately recognised the source of Cankar's style: "Cankar wrote his 'Bailiff Yerney' as a Gospel parable and a book for the people whose Bible it might be."[9] And in fact the work is full of quotations — both literal and slightly changed — from the Bible, and one can recognize a deliberate attempt by the author to reproduce biblical style, mainly by using parallel structures.

Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica was translated into English twice. The first translation, *Yerney's Justice*, was by Adamič; the second, *The Bailiff Yerney and his Rights*, by Sidonie Yeras and H. C. Sewell Grant in 1930. The latter was published once again in 1968 in Ljubljana.[10]

North American immigrants from Slovenia were not unanimous in their evaluations of Adamič's translation. While his adversaries in *Ameriska domovina* attacked the work, those gathered around *Prosveta* praised it, presenting it as a faithful rendering of the original — in spite of the fact that, as we shall see, this does not correspond to the facts. On November 1, 1926, Ivan Molek wrote

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3 Vladimir Levstik, "Literarno pismo," *Slovan* (January 1909) 11.

4 Ivan Prijatelj, "Domovina, glej umetnik!," *Cankarjev zbornik* (Ljubljana: Tiskovna zadruga, 1921) 26.

5 Levstik, "Literarno pismo."

6 Josip Tominšek, "Ivan Cankar: Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica," *Ljubljanski zvon* (Ljubljana: 1907) 756.

7 Venceslav Bele, "Cankar in Biblija,"*Čas* 3 (1909) 352.

8 Kreft, 117.

9 Bratko Kreft, preface to Ivan Cankar, *The Bailiff Yerney and his Rights*, (Ljubljana: DZS, 1968), XIV.

10 Ivan Cankar, *The Bailiff Yerney and his Rights. Translated from the Slovene*. Sidonie Yeras and H.C. Sewell Grant, with an Introduction by Janko Lavrin. London: John Rodker, 1930. For the 1968 reprint, see n. 9.

in his review that Adamič's translation was "first-class and does great honor to Cankar."[11]

Before trying to see how Adamič treated biblical features in Cankar's short story. we should define what a translation is, or better, what it should be.

Unfortunately one cannot give a definite answer to this question. For example, Vladimir Nabokov claims that the clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.[12] His translations are therefore so close to the source language (SL) in meaning and form that one may argue that they become almost unreadable in the target language (TL). On the other hand, according to Edward Fitzgerald the SL text is perceived as the rough clay from which the TL product is moulded; Fitzgerald strove for a translation which would function as a living entity in the TL and therefore changed the original according to his own criteria and the artistic criteria of his time. A contemporary representative of the TL-oriented translation is Hans J. Vermeer with his so-called 'scopos' theory of translation. Vermeer claims that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting the target language text structure.[13] All that matters is the effect achieved in the TL, it should be as similar as possible to the effect the work has in the SL.

The majority of translation theories may be classified somewhere in between these two extremes. Thus, for example, Susan Bassnett-McGuire provides the following definition of translation:

> "What is generally understood as translation involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be approximately similar and the structures of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so

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11 "Kdor čita Yerney's Justice v Prosveti in pozna angleški jezik, nam mora potrditi, da je prevod prvovrsten in da dela vso čast Cankarju." Quoted in Jerneja Petric, "Adamicevo prevajanje slovenskih umetnostnih del v angleščino," *Slavistična revija* 26 (1978) 427.

12 From *Poem into Poem*, ed. George Steiner, Penguin Books (London: Cox & Wyman, 1970) 25.

13 Hans J. Vermeer, "Scopos and commission in translational action," in *Readings in Translation Theory*, ed. A. Chasterman (Finland: Oy Finn Lectura Ab, 1989) 175-185.

> closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted."[14]

The ideal translation should therefore preserve the meaning as well as the structure of the SL text. But we must acknowledge the validity of the point made by George Mounin, claiming that translation is "une operation relative dans son succes:"[15] there are no ideal translations, "mistakes" and "deviations" from the original may be found in every translation, regardless of how elaborate it is. Eugene A. Nida, sometimes called the father of translation theory, describes the difficulty of the task:

> "One must recognize, of course, that in any transfer there is an inevitable modification in meaning, generally associated with some degree of loss, especially in the degree of impact of the original communication. In fact, the greater the literary quality of the original message, the greater the extent of distortion and loss, for literary quality normally implies the fullest possible exploitation of the genius of the source-language structure. To be able to exploit the genius of the receptor language (TL) to a comparable degree requires quite exceptional skill."[16]

As far as Louis Adamič's translation theory[17] is concerned, one may claim that he was a partisan of the target-language oriented translations, i.e., that he tried to achieve the effect in the TL, which would be as similar as possible to the effect the work had on him in the SL.

Jerneja Petrič wrote on Adamič's "translation theory:" "His 'translations' ... are more or less successful adaptations of original

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14 Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London and New York NY: Methuen, 1980) 2.

15 Georges Mounin, *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963) 3.

16 Eugene A. Nida, "Science of Translation," *Language* 45 (1969) 492.

17 When the term "theory" or "translation theory" is used in this article, it refers to a particular set of criteria behind a given translation, in our case to those that lie behind Louis Adamič's translation of Cankar's *Hlapec Jernej* — criteria which seem to have remained quite constant throughout his work. (As far as his approach to the translation of other works is concerned, see Jerneja Petrič, "Adamičevo prevajanje slovenskih umetnostnih del v angleščino," *Slavistična revija* 26/4 (1978) 436, where she also claims that Adamič had already, at the beginning of his career, created his own approach to translation, an approach which he then applied to all of the texts he subsequently translated.)

texts, which was probably a consequence of his understandably relative mastery of English."[18] However, if one analyzes this text more closely, one notices that the omissions in Adamič's translation are quite **systematic**, so that one may claim that his recourse to adaptation is not due to his meager knowledge of English, but rather to a specific theory of, or at least approach to, literary translation. In his novel *The Eagle and the Roots* Adamič partly revealed his opinion about the freedom of a translator. He refers to Serbo-Croatian but we can apply his words to Slovene:

> "The subjective qualities of the Serbo-Croatian language are so different from those of the English language that a literal translation of words spoken in a tense moment like this would be false. Taking the liberties of the novelist ... I try to give the altercation in self-interpretative equivalents."[19]

He applied the same principle to the translation of *Jernej*; taking the liberties of the novelist, he provided quite a number of self-interpretative equivalents. Since he was, according to Petric, mainly interested in the content and not in the style, his

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18 Petrič, "Adamičevo prevajanje," 417. The quotation is taken from the abstract of her article, where she generalizes her findings and talks about Adamič's translations as a whole. Otherwise in this article Petrič, among other things, analyzes two of Cankar's short stories (*Skodelica kave* and *Ob zori*); she does not treat the translation of *Hlapec Jernej* in detail. She claims that at the beginning of his career the reason for the differences between the originals and his translations was that in the 1920s Adamič was still improving his English as well as searching for a suitable style (423). She therefore explains the omission of biblical style in his translation of *Skodelica kave* (which dates from 1922) as being due to his poor knowledge of English (435). By the time he came to translate *Ob zori* (in 1926 — *Yerney's Justice* also dates from that year) his knowledge of English had improved; but, according to Petič, he was still making some mistakes. As we shall see, on the basis of examples quoted below, the changes made in the translation of *Hlapec Jernej* can hardly be ascribed to Adamič's poor English. Indeed, our conclusions differ from Petrič's argument that Adamic's translation principles as evidenced in *Ob zori*, and which were (in her opinion) applied to all of his translated texts, were that the adaptation of the text should be moderate and that the meaning should remain intact, while translators are entitled to change the language and style of the works according to their tastes (436). It seems, on the basis of a comparative analysis of the original of *Hlapec Jernej* and its translation, that with his omissions and additions Adamič changed only Cankar's style and language, but also his meaning.

19 Louis Adamic, *The Eagle and the Roots* (New York NY: Doubleday, 1952) 330.

interpretations also involved the omission of entire paragraphs, as, for example, the omission of an entire episode of a mother with her blind child[20] or of the initial paragraph, the importance of which was described by Bratko Kreft: "Because of its rhythm and horror, because of its wording, because of its symbols, its visions and its reality, that introduction to Cankar's tale is a warning like St. John's Apocalypse."[21] Cankar's opening paragraph read:

> "Obstrmeli so ljudje na Betajnovi in so plahi povesili glave, zakaj vzdignilo se je na hribu in je stopilo v dolino kakor črna smrt. Velika in tiha senca je stopila v dolino: glava teman oblak, noge silne jagnedi na loki; svetla kosa, na rami sloneča, pa se je bleščala tja do Ljubljane."[22]

We find nothing similar to this passage in Adamič's translation. The reason, we suggest, is his principle that a translator-author can leave out those parts of the work, which are according to him irrelevant for the impact of the entire work of art. The same principle also led Adamič to change the final sentences of Cankar's short story and by so doing to turn Jernej into a socialist martyr. In the preface to his translation of *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* he wrote that Jernej "is a generalized picture of the great lumbering mass of the working class, in its vast ignorance of the forces and mechanism that move the wheels of industry and life." Jernej's final deeds seem to him "symbolical of class revolutions and their consequences."[23] Cankar's call for mercy at the end of the short story does not fit Adamič's understanding of the work; therefore he decides to change it:

...ko so stopili Jernejevi pogrebci iz ognja, so bili črni v roke in v obraz. Tako se je zgodilo na Betajnovi. Bog se usmili Jerneja in njegovih sodnikov in vseh grešnih ljudi! (232)	**A:** ...while the people of the village, his righteous judges and executioners, stood by, their inflamed faces illumined by the furious red blaze that was consuming Yerney and the fruit of his toil. (101)

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20 Ivan Cankar, *Dela* III, ed. F. Bernik D. Moravec, T. Pavček, 2.del:*Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* (Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 1985), 199.

21 Kreft, Foreword to *Bailiff Yerney and His Rights*, XI.

22 Cankar, *Dela* III, 163. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

23 Louis Adamič, Preface to *Yerney's Justice*, iv-v.

We cannot accept that Adamič was not able to translate "Bog se usmili..." because he was able to translate the following:

...ti se usmili mene popotnika tvoje pravice žejnega! (222)	**A:** ...have mercy upon me who am in search of thy holy justice. (86)

Adamič did not only try to alter the meaning of the work; he also found the style of the short story too dull, and for him there were too many repetitions. It is possible that he changed the style intuitively; but, as we shall see, it is more probable that that he was **deliberately** trying to destroy the typically biblical style of the original, laden as it was with parallelisms and quotations from the Bible. We suggest that Adamič decided to translate this work mainly because of its revolutionary meaning and this specific reading of *Jernej* left an impact on the style of his translation. Therefore, he chose more straightforward, colloquial speech than was typical of the original. In order to follow this principle, many sentences had to be omitted. Omissions from the original are so numerous in his translation that we here quote just a few of the most typical examples. All the following are omitted in Adamič's translation:

> Glejte, čudo prečudno: stirideset let je rodila jablan, vrtu čast in gospodar; pa pride tujec... (166)
> Oblagodari hlapca, ki je pravice lačen in žejen, nasiti ga in napoji! (187)
> ... dotakni se s prstom njih oči, do bodo čudežno izpregledale ... (187)
> ... in tudi svojega hlapca ne izkušaj predolgo ... (187)
> ... pride ura, ko boste gledali njegovo glorijo ... (193)
> Morda je še dolga cesta, morda je še težka pot, s kamenjem posuta, z robidevjem zastražena. (200)
> Ne izkušaj Boga! (212)
> Saj nisem dobro slišal, saj nisem dobro razumel; tako niste ravnali, taka ni vaša sodba, sodniki! (215)
> Lažje izkopljete v kresni noči zlat zaklad, nego pravico ob belem dnevu. (218)

Adamič, who (see above) considered Cankar's work to be primarily a proletarian novel, therefore changed it to reflect the

taste of the working class. In his article "What the proletariat reads," he wrote: "And not a few radical workers dislike the proletarian novels in which the authors' artistic mannerisms and tricks obscure what they wish to communicate."[24] In the light of this remark, the following changes of Cankar's style — "loose" although they quite definitely are — seem more understandable:

Bog je blagoslovil Jernejevo delo, da je obrodilo obilen sad, stoteren in tisočeren. (174)	**A:** God has blessed my labor, so that now I've something to show for it. (19)
Opravil si pri meni, pri tej hiši si opravi! (168)	**A:** You're fired! (9)
Pri tebi je pravica, ti si jo poslal, ti potrdil, ti poskrbi zanjo, da se izpolni tvoja zapoved! (228)	**A:** Thou shouldst now see that Thy justice be put into effect. (95-96)
... moja pravica je božja pravica ... (230)	**A:** I want his justice! (98)
Zakaj ne hiše pravice, hišo laži, hinavščine in razbojništva ste postavili. Niste služabniki božje besede in postave, pač pa služabniki satanovi in njegove krivice. Na krivo po sem zabredel, na pravo pojdem. (207)	**A:** But now I see that that's just what you are — brigands, robbers, mockers of justice! You're not the servants of God's word, but rather the servants of Satan and his trickery. (66)

It seems quite obvious that these changes are deliberate, and are not due to his relatively poor mastery of the target language. It

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24 Louis Adamic, "What the proletariat reads: Conclusions based upon a year's study among hundreds of workers throughout the United States," *The Saturday Review of Literature* 20 (December 1934) 321-22; quoted by Jerneja Petrič, "Louis Adamič and his views concerning literature," *Slovenski koledar 82* (Ljubljana: Slovenska izselejenska matica, 1981) 287.

would be difficult to explain the following changes, also, as being due to an insufficient knowledge of English:

Ne pritožujva se, Jernej: kjer so ljudje krivični, tam je Bog pravičen! Dali so nama palico, pokazali so nama nezaželjeno pot - Bog pa nama je odprl dom tako imeniten, kakor ga je dodelil samo popotnikom in romarjem! (193)	**A:** Yerney, we've nothing to complain about; if man is unjust, great Nature still believes in justice and compensation. They give us the pilgrim's stick, they tell us to travel on, but Nature - call it God if you like - gives us a better home. (48)

The choice of "great Nature" and "Nature - call it God if you like" as translational equivalents for *Bog* in the original provide an answer to the question why there are so many deviations from the original in Adamič's translation, why he changed the meaning and style of so very many passages of the work. The cause can hardly be Adamič's poor knowledge of English; on the contrary, it is obvious that he deliberately changed the text, trying to implant his personal outlook on life and the world into Cankar's story.

Having those considerations in mind, we can now understand his "translation" of Jernej's Lord's Prayer, one of the most skilful examples of synthetic parallelisms in *Hlapec Jernej*. Cankar once admitted to his cousin Izidor Cankar that he had worked on this prayer for days[25] in order to achieve the stylistic impact he wanted, and in the end he succeeded in writing probably one of the stylistically most elaborate parts of his work.

Adamič obviously considered these stylistic features redundant and not vital for the development of the story, for he omitted almost the entire passage, keeping only three sentences. The original read:

> Oče naš, kateri si v nebesih... tvoje pravice iščem, ki si jo poslal na svet! Kar si rekel, ne boš oporekel; kar si napisal, ne boš izbrisal! Ne v ljudi ne zaupam, ne v svojo pravico ne zaupam, v tvoje pismo zaupam. Oče naš, kateri si v

25 Izidor Cankar, *Obiski*, Knjižica Kondor 39 (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1960), 8.

> nebesih... neskončno si usmiljen, daj beraču vbogajme; neskončno si pravičen, daj delavcu plačilo! Oblagodari hlapca, ki je pravice lačen in žejen, nasiti ga in napoji! Samo ukaži, pa bo živa tvoja beseda in bo napolnila vsa srca, da bodo spoznala pravico!... Oče nas, kateri si v nebesih...ne izkušaj jih predolgo, dotakni se s prstom njih oči, da bodo čudežno izpregledale; in tudi svojega hlapca ne izkušaj predolgo, ker je že star in nadložen; in potolaži ga, ker je potrt in slab od bridkosti! Oče naš, kateri si v nebesih... (187)

Whereas in Adamič's "translation," the same passage reads as follows:

> **A**: Our Father which art in Heaven... I want justice... I've faith in Thee ... (39)

According to Adamič, a translator can leave out elements of the text, if he/she considers the original long-winded; the application of this principle could be seen in his translation of the Lord's Prayer.

He also often changed the register, apparently wanting to make the language sound proletarian:

Pojdi brez prerekanja; odprte so duri, nizek je prag! (172)	**A:** All right now, drag yourself out of here without any more of your gab! (15)
Postelja res ni bogvekaj, tudi kosilo bi bilo lahko boljše; ampak dokler se nisem potepal in dokler nisem kradel, še takega kosila nisem imel in tudi take postelje ne! Zato sem si reč nekoliko premislil in zdaj se mi ne godi slabo. - Kaj pa ti, očka? Ali si šele na stara leta začel, da se tako pusto držiš? (209)	**A:** The bunk isn't anything to brag about, and the chow, too,could be better, but before I began stealing I didn't even have that. So don't think that I'm kickin'. How about you? You started kinda late, didn't you? (70)

Ne bom prosil in ne bom jokal, moja pravica je božja pravica; kar je sam ustanovil, ne bo razdiral, kar je govoril, ne bo tajil! (230)	**A:** Nothing doing - no more pleading and weeping from me! I won't kneel, I won't weep! I want His justice! What did He make it for if any cop can spit and sneer at it? (98)

We could continue quoting all the very numerous examples of Adamič's deviations from the original; it seems, however, that the above should suffice.

We have not tried to evaluate Adamič's translation. In fact, one has no right to evaluate a literary translation as being good or bad; unless a translator makes crude grammatical mistakes, the only thing a critic may do is to see whether the translator followed the criteria implicit in his/her "translation theory." And one must admit that Adamič was fairly consistent in applying his theoretical principles to his translation.

One may however wonder whether Adamič's *Yerney's Justice* is indeed a *translation* or whether one should call it a *free version* of the short story; the latter is justifiable, since we may claim that he abused his right to be independent, that he upset the balance of power, by treating the original as his own property. Nevertheless, if we consider Fitzgerald's work as translation, then Adamič's translation is legitimate, also.

But how far did he go? In view of the fact that every translation process starts with reading and interpreting, the final form of a translated text is vitally dependent on the translator's reading competence. Thus every translator assumes, according to Lotman,[26] one of four essential positions of the addressee:

1. Where the reader focuses on the content as matter, i.e. picks out the prose argument of poetic paraphrase.
2. Where the reader grasps the complexity of the structure of a work and the way in which the various levels interact.
3. Where the reader deliberately extrapolates one level of the work for a specific purpose.
4. Where the reader discovers elements not basic to the genesis of the text and uses the text for his own purposes.

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26 Juri Lotman, *Struktura khudožestvenogoo teksta* (Moskow: Iskusstvo, 1970).

To sum up: Adamič **deliberately** tried to avoid biblical style in his *Yerney's Justice*. Therefore, according to Lotman's classification, Adamič with his translation of *Hlapec Jernej in njegova pravica* could be put somewhere in between Lotman's third and fourth reader position.

Adamič tried to produce a socialist work, very close to a political pamphlet, which could be seen in his frequent change of register to make the work sound more proletarian, in his omissions of many passages written in a biblical style — as for example, his shortening of the famous Lord's Prayer into only three sentences — and also in his choice of lexemes, e.g., where for *Bog* he used as a translation equivalent 'great Nature.' We may conclude by saying that his translation seems to be a deliberate remodelling of the original so as to create a new short story in accordance with his political and artistic views.

Univerza v Ljubljani

POVZETEK

OB ADAMIČEVEM PREVODU CANKARJEVEGA *HLAPCA JERNEJA IN NJEGOVE PRAVICE*

Avtorica v pričujočem članku analizira Adamičev prevod Hlapca Jerneja in njegove pravice *Ivana Cankarja v angleščini in se osredotoča predvsem na to, ali je prevajalec ohranil značilno biblični slog izvirnika. Primerjalna analiza pokaže, da je Lojze Adamič načrtno spreminjal jezik izvirnika in ga preoblikoval po svojem okusu tako, da je izpuščal paralelne strukture, biblične aluzije in značilno svetopisemsko izrazje. S svojimi posegi pa ni spremenil samo sloga Cakarjeve novele, temveč je posegel tudi v vsebino, kar nam dokazuje predvsem zadnji odstavek tega dela. Na ta način je iz večplastnega dela ustvaril močno politicno obarvano besedilo s poudarjeno socialistično idejo revolucionarnega upora, ki je pri Cankarju ne najdemo. Teza pričujočega članka je, da so Adamičevi dodatki in izpuščanja v njegovem prevodu načrtni in sistematični, saj z njihovo pomočjo ne spreminja le sloga temveč tudi sporočilo izvirnika in ga tako prilagaja svojim estetskim kriterijem in političnemu prepričanju. To naj bi, po avtoričinem mnenju, omajalo uveljavljeno prepričanje, da je Adamičev prevod* Hlapca Jerneja *posledica njegovega pomanjkljivega znanja angleščine.*