Individual decisions in a collectivist ideology: Two Czech translations of I. L. Peretz's short story *Bontshe shvayg*

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This article is focused on Czech translations of Yiddish literature, specifically on two versions of "Bontshe shvayg" (Bontshe the Silent, 1894) by Polish-Yiddish author I. L. [Isaac Leib] Peretz published in the 1960s. The main aims of the analysis are to show: 1) how far the initial norm correlated with the explicit commentaries in the epitexts and peritexts; and 2) to what extent translators Jakub Markovič and Stanislav Taraszka were able to individually shape the initial norms within the frame of a collectivist ideology. Understanding the factors that influenced the translators' decisions can provide insight into the role of ideology in shaping the preliminary, initial and operational norm.

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POLITICAL FRAMING AND PUBLISHING STRATEGIES

The political and social framework for the translation of Yiddish literature in postwar Czechoslovakia was the collectivist ideology of the communist party, which went through periods of repression and liberalization between its rise to power in 1948 and its fall in 1989 (cf. Rupnik 1981; Rataj and Houda 2010; Kocian et al. 2020). Scholarly publications mapping the development of the Czechoslovak communist regime emphasize the difference between the period of 1957–1962, when the first cracks in central communist power appeared, and the period of 1962–1968, when closer contacts with the West were established and communist ideology in general was in crisis (Kaplan 2008, 22–36; Rataj, 158–175 and 176–350). From the late 1950s onwards, the strongly ideological press gradually disappeared, giving way to newspapers favoring journalistic practices that focused more on the interest of readers (cf. Sýkorová 2015, 21–22). The mid- to late 1960s represented the peak of liberalization within the limits of the communist regime, culminating in the "period of thaw" (doba tání), which saw a temporary fading of the symptoms typical for communist ideology, such as the supremacy of the proletarian collective over the individual, maximum control of the individual by the state and the associated rejection of personal freedoms (cf. Rataj and Houda 2010).

In connection with the loosening of restrictions in the political and social domain, the publishing strategies changed significantly.[1] Publishing houses tried to make up for the period of oppression by expanding their editorial program, releasing high-quality foreign literature as well as more titles by new Czech authors, and by publishing in much larger print runs than had been possible until then (Měšťan 2000, 67–71). The progressive liberalization in the 1960s was also reflected in the periodical press, and a significant role in this development was played by the Writers' Union and its cultural-political weekly *Literární noviny* (Jungmann 2000).

Nonetheless, even during what at first glance appeared to be a relatively relaxed period, in which literature, the press, cinematography and cultural life in general flourished briefly within somewhat broader boundaries, society was far from operating on democratic principles. The attitude towards the Jewish community is a good indicator of this. Blanka Soukupová (2010, 40) argues that the "Golden Sixties" did not mean the end of discrimination against the Jewish community by state authorities. The only respect in which the 1960s were truly "golden" for the Jewish community was in the reception of Jewish culture: from the mid-1960s onwards, Jewish art and literature began to become widely known in the mainstream society, and interest in Jewish culture in general grew (64–65). This interest was significantly weakened again after the August 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion and during the "normalization" period of ideological repression in the 1970s.

As interest in Jewish culture and literature grew, so did the demand for more information about the specific subfield of Yiddish culture and literature. In the former Czechoslovakia, Yiddish was regarded as a somewhat exotic language – from the end of the 18th century onwards it was gradually replaced by German (or, more rarely, Czech). As a result, Yiddish, which in the 20th century was no longer used as

a spoken language in Bohemia and Moravia, increasingly took on various connotative meanings. In one sense, Yiddish was the language that embodied Jewish identity, being associated with the vanished world of Eastern European Hasidism on the one hand, and with the secular left-wing political movement on the other. This symbolic charge resulted in the ambivalent status that this language had during the communist regime. Both concepts – Yiddish as a representative of Jewish religiosity and as a representative of left-wing political attitudes – were somewhat problematic for different reasons: the pronounced religiosity of the Eastern European Hasidim was only acceptable to the communist regime if it was interpreted as a manifestation of the "simple" masses, and the left-wing orientation of Yiddish intellectuals and culture-makers was often not the "correct" socialist orientation, so it had to be adjusted in some way. This ideologically-driven perception of the language inevitably had consequences for the way Yiddish texts were dealt with: if the translator and editors decided to publish a literary translation from Yiddish, it was necessary to comment on this text in some way, to justify the selection, to present the author of the source text preferably as an undisputed advocate of communist ideology (sometimes even rightly so), to adjust the problematic themes, etc. The procedures used to "justify" the publication of new translations can be placed on a continuum of explicitness. The most explicit procedures were various types of commentary in the form of paratexts, peritexts, and epitexts, which are discussed in the next section. The less obvious strategies were the operational norms which the individual translators opted for; these methods will be demonstrated in the third section by analyzing two Czech translations of "Bontshe shvayg" (Bontshe the Silent, 1894) one of the best-known short stories by Polish-Yiddish author I. L. [Isaac Leib] Peretz. This tale of a simple man who completely surrenders to his fate and the will of God is available in numerous translations, and became an integral part of the Jewish oral tradition during Peretz's lifetime.[2] It has also been interpreted in many different ways, ranging from romantic-pietistic and Zionist interpretations to Marxist distortions by Soviet critics, who saw it as a harsh criticism of the tsarist regime and figuratively as a critique of capitalist society.[3] Its Czech translations from the 1960s by Stanislav Taraszka and Jakub Markovič show how paratextual comments harmonized the biographical background of the author or his/her work with the ideological precepts of the communist regime.

PARATEXTUAL COMMENTS ON YIDDISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE AS A SPECIAL COMMUNICATION CODE

The vast majority of translations of Yiddish literature into Czech were not published in books but in periodicals, especially Jewish ones.[4] In the 1960s, Stanislav Taraszka and Jakub Markovič were the only two translators regularly translating Yiddish literature into Czech.[5]

Both of them published their translations in the same periodicals, *Věstník židovských náboženských obcí v Československu* (Bulletin of Jewish religious communities in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia) and *Židovská ročenka* (Jewish almanac), adapting the selection of genres to these publication venues: most of the texts

published there were short stories (cf. Krappmann 2021). Taraszkas translations from Yiddish were published in the abovementioned periodicals until the end of the 1970s.[6] Jakub Markovič, whose publishing activities for both periodicals ended with his premature death in 1965, was the only translator to publish several translations from Yiddish in book form in the period between 1945 and 1989. Having grown up as a native speaker of Yiddish in a large Hasidic family in Transcarpathia, Markovič was one of the few Czech translators who translated directly from the source language.[7]

In the paratexts that accompanied the translations in the magazines, attention was paid to the "correct" embedding of the text in the cultural-political context, especially in the first half of the 1960s. A kind of communication code was developed using idiomatized routine formulae (Feilke 2012, 2) and keywords (Hermanns 1982), which was, however, easily recognizable to readers of the time (cf. Krappmann 2024). Phrases used in the paratexts as ideological "ciphers", such as "Vzhůru k lepším zítřkům!" (Towards a brighter future!), "utlačování mas" (suppression of the masses) or "rozbřesk nové doby" (dawn of a new age) had a signaling function: "they activated complex metaphorical concepts, which, however, quickly faded away through rapid usualisation in the totalitarian context. When recipients encountered such repetitive, only minimally varying routine formulations, they immediately became aware of the communication code" (Krappmann 2024).[8] These routine formulations, therefore, probably had only a limited impact on how the (primarily Jewish) readers of these periodicals perceived Yiddish and Yiddish literature.

In the introductory paratext to Taraszka's translation of "Bontshe shvayg" ("Mlčenlivý Bonze") in *Židovská ročenka*, entitled "Věčně mladý Perec, bojovník za pokrok a svobodu" (The eternally young Peretz, fighter for progress and freedom), Peretz's personality has been characterized in accordance with this interpretation:[9]

> I. L. Peretz belongs to the great writers who are constantly experiencing inward stirrings, the restlessness of the eternal search for an artistic form of expression that is in harmony with the feelings and life expressions of the people. The suffering of a people humiliated, endlessly persecuted and hunted by the tsarist regime, as well as a deep longing for liberation, are reflected in Peretz's work in a powerful protest against the oppression of man by man and a demand for the freedom of all people. Peretz is wrapping his protest in various artistic forms […]. ([D. S.] 1960, 147)

Routine formulae such as "protest against the oppression of man by man" ("utiskování člověka člověkem") or "demand for the liberation of all people" ("požadavek po svobodě všech lidí") must be interpreted in the context of communist group language of the period (for political group languages cf. Kämper 2018, 439–454). They play the role of what Fritz Hermanns calls "Abgrenzungsvokabular" (literally "differentiation vocabulary"), referring to expressions and phrases that "make a party standpoint recognizable in a striking way" (1982, 92). Peretz is presented here as a warrior for values which in the routinized rhetoric of the Communist Party have taken the form of largely empty phrases. The artistic literary form is presented as a kind of mere "wrapper" in which the political struggle is enveloped. Following this ideologically adapted view of Peretz's primary motivation

for writing literary works, the Jewish way of life is characterized in similarly routinized phrases as "backward and outdated" ("zpátečnický a zastaralý"): "To all the forms of artistic creation used by I. L. Peretz, he gives his restless spirit of rebellion and protest against the backward and outdated ways of Jewish life" ([D. S.] 1960, 147).

Another translation of Peretz's story appeared in Markovič's anthology of Yiddish literature *Rozinky a mandle* (Raisins and almonds, 1968), published at the height of the reform movement within the Communist Party. Jakub Markovič's preface to the collection contains far fewer routine formulae and has an overall informative character. In less than eleven pages, he attempts to introduce the reader to the development of Yiddish literature and outline some of the basic problems associated with its translation. After outlining the historical development of Western and Eastern Yiddish, Markovič examines the specific motifs and topoi[10] of Yiddish literature, discussing the elements of humor, afterlife and antiheroism which, according to him, characterize Yiddish literature. He also looks for reasons for the idealization of the vanished world of the *shtetl* and analyzes how the emphasis on religious education and scholarship influenced the development of Eastern Yiddish literature. While introducing the three "fathers" of Yiddish literature, Mendele Mocher Sforim, Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz, Markovič discusses the fundamental challenge facing translators of Yiddish literature:

> [W]hen translating from Yiddish into a European language, the translator encounters a number of specific problems that do not arise when translating from other European literature, where a certain cultural affinity can be assumed. The role of cultural and social commentator is imposed on the translator. (1968, 14)

Discussing the selection of texts for the anthology, Markovič points out that the role of "cultural and social commentator" can hardly be fulfilled in some cases, so that some texts simply cannot be translated satisfactorily: "The selection was made more difficult by the specificity of the Jewish cultural tradition, which meant that sometimes an excellent story had to be omitted from the translation because it simply would not be comprehensible to our readers without an extensive commentary" (18). According to Markovič, however, it is not only cultural and social differences and "the problem of accessibility of the material, because the Nazis destroyed all Jewish libraries in occupied Europe during the Second World War" that represent an insurmountable obstacle for the translator, but also specific literary aesthetics: "Often the undertone, the mood, the tonality plays a crucial role here, which eventually becomes the main carrier and commentator of the story" (14). He sees this specific "tonality" as the main reason why some of the original Yiddish texts "would simply not work well in translation" (18).

The strategies that Jakub Markovič and Stanislav Taraszka used to translate Peretz's short story will be discussed in more detail below, as their individually chosen operational norms caused very different interpretations. Furthermore, the analysis will consider how the message communicated by the two target texts differs and to what extent it correlates with the statements in the paratexts.

TWO TRANSLATIONS OF PERETZ'S "BONTSHE SHVAYG": CRITICAL SATIRE OR PRAISE OF CHASSIDIC PIETY?

The main character of Peretz's story, Bontshe Shvayg, is a prototype of the suffering Jewish little man, afflicted by severe plagues which he bears quite resignedly without a murmur or protest. After his death, he appears before the heavenly tribunal by which he is to be judged. The defense lawyer (*melits yoysher*) recites to the court everything that Bontshe Shvayg had to endure during his life. When the prosecutor (*kateyger*) is supposed to take the floor, he has to state after a short hesitation that he has nothing to present: "Rabosay! er hot geshvign! vel ikh oykh shvaygn!" [My lords, he has been silent all this time, I will be silent too!] (Peretz 1920, 15). Bontshe's reaction to the subsequent request that he should wish for whatever comes to his mind corresponds exactly to his earlier surrendered attitude during his lifetime: he merely wishes for "ale teg in derfri a heyse bulke mit frishe puter" [hot bread rolls with fresh butter every day in the morning] (17). Hearing this simple wish, the angels bashfully bow their heads, the accuser, in contrast, bursts out laughing. The enigmatic final scene allows for two different interpretations. On the one hand, the narrative has been interpreted as the celebration of the pietistically devoted, extremely modest attitude to life, and Bontshe is seen as a religious figure of the ascetic saint (Wisse 1971, 22). In this interpretation, the figure of Bontshe can be linked to the concept of the spiritual master, the "lamedvovnik", which was a concept particularly widespread in Hasidic circles.[11] On the other hand, the story has been perceived as a parodic critique of the passive attitude towards life, culminating in the absurdly simple last wish (Pinsker 1971, 64–65). In this interpretation, Bontshe is perceived as an anti-hero, unable to think outside the confines of the ghetto. Anita Norich sees in this story "Peretz's exploration of the radical passivity and lack of volition of Eastern European Jews, so overwhelmed by the mundane, by anti-Semitism, or by strictures within their own community that they have lost all power of imagination" (2007, 116).

In his comprehensive study of the Job motif, Bruce Zuckerman, who clearly subscribes to the second line of interpretation, attempts to explain the reasons behind the perception of Bontshe as a saintly figure. Zuckerman emphasizes that the expectations of the Jewish readers are strongly conditioned by sobering historical experiences. Both after the pogroms in Eastern Europe in the 1880s and to an incomparably greater extent, after the wartime experience of the Shoah, Jewish readers identified with the figure of the suffering, mutely silent Bontshe. This perception blocked interpretative approaches that emphasized the satirical undertone of the story. Zuckerman himself interprets the narrative as a negative appeal to readers, namely: one should not endure unjust "punishment without protest" and one should not enthusiastically accept every little "favor from the ruling authority" without questioning it (1998, 65). On the other hand, he concedes that such great moral principles become invisible to the eyes of survivors who "can perhaps receive some comfort in identifying with someone who suffered as they did but somehow seemed to endure, someone whose silence seemed much the same as their own silence" (1998, 67). In the commentaries on this short story, both directions of reception can be observed, sometimes even contradictorily within a single paratext. In a memorial text on the 35th anniversary

of Peretz's death, it is claimed on the one hand that the characters in his works are "the embodiment of protest [!] against the cowardice, willingness to compromise and low, despicable endeavors of such figures as Bontshe Shvayg"[12] (D. S. 1950, 187) – in this passage Bontshe Shvayg is thus presented as a cowardly, "despicable" figure. On the other hand, in the very same paratext, the author explains that Peretz "shows in works like […] Bontshe Shvayg […] the heroically uplifted hope and unfaltering optimism of a simple Jew and his deep confidence in the ultimate victory of justice"[13] (187).

This text was reprinted ten years later, in 1960, in the *Židovská ročenka* as the introductory paratext to Taraszka's translation – the only change the editors decided to make was the elimination of the first sentence quoted here, in which Bontshe is described as a despicable type of character; the contradiction thus disappears. In particular, the interpretation of Bontshe as a figure who is actually heroic in his poverty and oppression, which is consistent with the communist ideal of proletarian struggle, probably contributed to the fact that the Czech translation of the story was published twice in a relatively short time interval: 1960 and 1968. This retranslation was (and still is) an unusual situation in relation to Czech translations of Yiddish literature. Stanislav Taraszka and Jakub Markovič used very different strategies in their translations, and it can be assumed that their decisions had an impact on the interpretation, perception and reception of the target texts.

THE IMPACT OF DIFFERENT TREATMENTS OF THE OPERATIONAL NORM

The following case analysis is intended to support the thesis that Taraszka's translation strategies tend to support the first, pietistic interpretation of Peretz's story, while Markovič, with his tendency towards a colloquial and straightforward style, emphasizes the grotesque element and thus implicitly promotes the second interpretation approach. In a certain sense, this initial thesis refers to the theoretical approaches developed between the 1950s and 1970s by Jiří Levý and the founder of the Nitra school of translation studies Anton Popovič, both of whom more or less explicitly based their work on Prague functional dynamism. Regardless of their differing formulations, they both took the view that one and the same text can fulfill different functions; in the translation process, the trigger for the choice of the predominant strategy is the individual, socially and historically conditioned interpretation of the source text.

From the first two stages of processing the source text – understanding and interpreting the original (Levý 2012, 50–63) – Markovič and Taraszka take different paths, which leads to divergencies in the re-stylization (63–77) and thus in the application of the operational norms that mainly "determine what would more likely remain intact despite the transformations involved in translation, and what would tend to get changed" (Toury 2012, 82). These divergences take shape in the way that the two translators handle the main character's name and the title of the story. "Bontshe" is the Yiddish Polish variant of the name Benjamin (Binyomin), "Shvayg" goes back to the imperative form *shvayg!* (Be silent!). Taraszka paraphrases the telling name as

a noun phrase consisting of a phonetically adapted proper name preceded by a qualifying adjective – "Mlčenlivý Bonce" (the taciturn/silent Bonce).[14] However, this results in a slight modification in the implicit characterization of the figure through the telling name. The attribute "mlčenlivý", which roughly corresponds to the English adjective "taciturn" or "silent", rather indicates a noble character trait. Markovič, on the other hand, tried to preserve the slightly ironic character of the proper name on a formal level and opted for the somewhat more expressive and colloquial solution "Bonče Mlčoch" (the approximate English equivalent would probably be "Bontshe the clam", as in the English idiom "silent as a clam"). The main strategies of the two translators can therefore already be surmised from their translational treatment of the title: what is already indicated here is Taraszka's tendency towards an elevated lexical register, often with an archaizing undertone, and Markovič's striving for linguistic naturalness, which is often reflected in the choice of colloquial and connotatively marked linguistic devices on various levels.

These strategies are not only played out at the lexical level, but also at the level of the syntactic structure of the two target texts. We will take a closer look at a passage that clearly demonstrates the different ways in which the two translators deal with more complex sentence structures.

ST[15]
volt Bontshe a matseyve gehat, volt efsher iber hundert yor an altertums-forsher zi gefunen. (1920, 8)

TT (Taraszka)
Kdyby byl Bonce měl pořádný náhrobek, je možné, že sto let po jeho smrti by naň byl přišel některý archeolog. (1960, 149)
[If Bonce had had a decent tombstone, it is possible that an archaeologist would have found it a hundred years after his death.]

TT (Markovič)
Kdyby Bonče měl náhrobní kámen, snad by na něj za sto let narazil nějaký archeolog […]. (1968, 63)
[If Bontshe had a gravestone, perhaps an archaeologist would come across it a hundred years later.]

Taraszka substituted the structure of the Yiddish sentence consisting of the main clause and the conditional clause signaled by the double fronting of subjunctive verbs *volt – volt* with a more complex structure; by translating the lexeme efsher (perhaps) with the main clause "je možné" (it is possible), he created a sentence structure that also contains a subject clause in addition to the conditional subordinate clause. Furthermore, Taraszka attempted to achieve a purely formal adequacy in the target language by using the subjunctive past perfect in the two subordinate clauses, which seems somewhat archaic in Czech. The elision of the preposition and the pronoun ("naň") also has a strongly elevated and archaizing effect. Markovič has dispensed with the past perfect tense and the elevated pronominal form and has not decondensed the structure of the sentence structure.

The clearly more "flowery" syntactic style in Taraszka's translation is directly linked to the choice of lexical register, as is shown in the following passage – the characterization of Bontshe:

ST
er hot keynmol nisht ibergerekhent, vifl pud last es kumt oys oyf a groshn. Vifl mol er iz gefaln bay yedn gang far a drayer, vifl mol er hot shir-nisht di neshome oysgeshpign, monendik zayn fardinst. (1920, 13)

TT (Taraszka)
Nikdy nepropočítával, kolik centů jeho břemene připadne na jeden haléř jeho mzdy, kolikrát se zhroutil při pochůzce, za kterou dostal trojník; kolikrát skoro vydechl duši, když se dožadoval mzdy. (1960, 152)
[He never counted how many quintal of his burden came to a penny of his wages; how often he collapsed on an errand for which he received a little coin (trojník); how often he almost breathed his last when he demanded his wages.]

TT (Markovič)
Nikdy nepočítal, kolik metráků připadá na jeden groš nebo kolikrát cestou upadl či kolikrát málem vyplivl duši, než se domohl výplaty. (1968, 67)
[He never counted how many hundredweight came to a penny, how many times he fell on the way or how many times he came close to spitting out his soul before he got his wages.]

In Taraszka's translation, both the strategies on the morphosyntactic level, such as archaic genitive attributes ("centů jeho břemene", "haléř jeho mzdy"), and the strategies on the syntactic level, such as the immediate sequence of two hypotactic constructions on the syntactic level contribute to a very flowery narrative style. This corresponds to the selection of unmarked, or even stylistically elevated expressions and phrases: "cent" (quintal), "břemeno" (burden), "haléř" (haller), "trojník" (a type of coin), "vydechnout duši" (breath one's last). Markovič has opted for a clearly simpler syntactic style that imitates spoken language. He also adapted his choice of the lexical register to this decision, which is why he translates "pud"[16] with the colloquial expression "metrák" (a strongly colloquial expression for quintal), and has Bontshe almost "spit out" the soul, not "breathe out" it ("skoro vyplivl duši"/"málem vydechl duši").

Markovič's tendency to preserve the markings of the spoken language in the target text is also reflected in the fact that, unlike Taraszka, he takes over all passages from the source text in which the heterodiegetic narrator addresses the anonymous audience in the imperative form:

ST
es iz dray teg nokh bontshes toyt, fregt dem kabren bekheyrem, vu er hot'n gelegt! (1920, 8)

TT (Taraszka)
Hrobník už tři dny po Boncově smrti nevěděl, kam nebožtíka pochoval. (1960, 149)
[Three days after Bonce's death, the gravedigger no longer knew where he had buried him.]

TT (Markovič)
Tři dny uplynuly od smrti Bonče, a zkuste se zeptat hrobníka, kam Bončeho uložil! (1968, 63)
[Three days have passed since Bontshe's death and try asking the gravedigger where he had put him!]

The less colloquial, elevated style of Taraszka's translation is evident not only in the elaborate syntactic structures, but perhaps even more strikingly at the lexical level. This can be seen in the transfer of expressively colored lexemes, which frequently occur in the initial text in the form of Hebraisms: in the scene in which the narrator critically remarks that a dead horse rather than the passing of Bontshe Shvayg could arouse the pity of passers-by, Markovič translates the lexeme of the Hebrew component "neveyle" as "zdechlina" (the carrion), while Taraszka opts in a neutralizing way for "padlý kůň" (the fallen horse). In the scene in which Bontshe waits for the heavenly tribunal after his death, two angels bring "a gingoldenem fotershtul oyf redlekh" (1920, 9) for Bontshe. While in Taraszka's translation the angels "přivážejí do ráje zlatou lenošku" [bring a golden armchair to paradise] (1960, 150), in Markovič's translation they "tlačí do ráje pro Bončeho křeslo na kolečkách z nejryzejšího zlata" [push a wheelchair of purest gold to paradise for Bontshe] (1968, 64). The image of a wheelchair in Markovič's translation gives the scene a grotesque quality, just like in the source text, while Taraszka's throne-like golden armchair rather emphasizes the solemnity of the situation. Hebraisms are used not only to highlight the expressive character of a lexeme, but also to denote specific cultural concepts, which Markovič considers to be one of the reasons for the untranslatability of Yiddish literature. Taraszka refers to a circumciser, who is reported as having once botched Bontshe's circumcision, as an "operatér" (surgeon), while Markovič preserves the Yiddish Hebraism in Yiddish pronunciation – "mojl". When "Avram Ovinu", the forefather Abraham, greets Bontshe in heaven by stretching out his right hand and pronouncing the Jewish greeting "sholem aleichem" – "di rekhte hant oysgeshtrekt tsum breytn 'sholem aleykhem'", Taraszka eliminates the phrase and replaces it with a general, somewhat elevated description of the welcoming ceremony. In contrast, Markovič has Abraham greet the newcomer with the genuinely Yiddish "šolom alejchem" (1968, 64, 65).

The difference between the strategies of the two translators is particularly evident in the use of lexemes and phrases from the religious sphere. The passages in which the heavenly Court is described are introduced with the description of the shofars' sound: "der groyser shoyfer fun meshiekhs tsaytn hot geklungen in ale ziben himlen" (1920, 9). In Taraszka's translation, it is a "pozoun" (trombone) that resonates in all seven heavens, an instrument that is generally familiar in the Christian tradition (1960, 150). In Markovič's translation, on the other hand, it is the Jewish "šofar" (1968, 64). The subsequent scene in which Bontshe is to appear before the court: "bontshe iz "nisbakesh gevoren beyeshive shel mayle!" (1920, 9) is interpreted very differently in the two translations. In Taraszka's translation, Bontshe "byl povolán k nebeským zástupům" [was summoned to the heavenly armies] (1960, 150), while in Markovič's translation, "se [Bontshe] laskavě vyzývá, aby se dostavil před nejvyšší soudní stolici!"

[(Bontshe) is respectfully requested to appear before the Supreme Court] (1968, 64). The term "kise-hakoved" (1920, 9) is then consistently translated in Taraszka's metaphysically tinged translation as "trůn Božího Majestátu" [the throne of the Divine majesty] (1960, 150), while Markovič consistently uses the sober expression "soudní stolice" [court chair] (1968, 64). The translation of the term "av-bes din" (1920, 16) also corresponds to general strategies of both translators: in Taraszka's translation the court is presided over by "Nejmilosrdnější Otec soudu" [the most merciful Father of the court] (1960, 154), in Markovič's translation simply by "předseda soudu" [the president of the court] (1968, 68). The decision that the court finally reaches – in Yiddish "psak fun bes-din-shel-mayle" (1920, 9) – is translated by Taraszka in the sense of the overall metaphysical metaphor as "výrok nebeského soudu" [the verdict of the heavenly court] (1960, 150), while Markovič remains in the semantic field of sober jurisdiction with the term "výrok nejvyšší stolice" [verdict of the highest court] (1968, 64). When the advocate then describes Bontshe's endured suffering in drastic detail, the procurator shies away from this and warns him to be brief: "Nor on mesholim!" (1920, 11). Translating this passage, Taraszka and Markovič also adhere to their respective preferred strategies; Taraszka's accuser admonishes the advocate to omit "parables" – "Prosím, bez podobenství!" (1960, 151), while Markovič's procurator calls for a defense "bez řečnických obratů" [without rhetorical figures] (1968, 65). The subliminal secularization of the scenes in Markovič's translation allows for a slightly sarcastic undertone, which is not at all perceptible in Taraszka's translation.

The only moment in which Markovič briefly departs from the sober juridical tone is the last sentence in the final scene. However, this makes the message of his translation all the more satirical. In this scene, Bontshe is asked what his greatest wish would be after the favorable verdict has been reached. To the astonishment of everyone present, as already mentioned, he wishes for nothing other than a fresh buttered roll every morning. Taraska translates the scene in his typical elevated style – he has the judges call on Bontshe in a sentence with a biblical tone: "Vol a vezmi si, co chceš: neboť budeš brát jen z toho, co ti náleží!" [Choose and take what you want: for you shall take only from what is yours!] (1960, 154). The reaction to Bontshe's answer is that the angels lower their eyes in shame and the Prosecutor begins to laugh. By consistently translating the term "kateyger" as "Žalobce" (Prosecutor), Taraszka maintains the constellation of the sublime heavenly court; thus the laughter of the accuser can be interpreted in this constellation as one of recognition – he has fulfilled his task with ridiculous ease, the costs for the heavenly rich are absurdly low: nothing stands in the way of interpreting Bontshe as an ascetic hero whose modesty puts even the heavenly court to shame. Markovič in comparison achieves a completely different final impression by very unobtrusive stylistic means: in contrast to Taraszka, he has the judges address Bontshe in a colloquial formulation that contains no allusion to the biblical tone: "Bereš tedy jen to, co je *tvoje*!" [You take only what is yours!] (1968, 69, italics in original). Alongside the angels, who "lower their heads in shame" in response, it is not "the Prosecutor" who begins to laugh, but "the devil" who "chuckles" – "ďábel se zachechtal". The fact that Markovič translates the expres-

sion "kateyger" as "ďábel" has the consequence that the image of the sublime, serious heavenly court fades away and is suddenly replaced by a much more "down-to-earth" concept. The uninhibitedly joyful reaction of the devil, combined with the decidedly colloquial tone, lends the scene an almost burlesque quality. In Markovič's translation, nothing prevents the interpretation of Bontshe as a real Jewish anti-hero, whose incomprehensibly modest reaction is exposed in satirical exaggeration.

CONCLUSION

The two Czech translations of I. L. Peretz's short story "Bontshe Shvayg", separated by eight politically significant years, provide a good insight into the extent to which the initial norm applied in each case and how the resulting operational norms can influence the interpretation and thus the perception of the text. Markovič and Taraszka opted for very different strategies: Taraszka chose a more complex syntactic style and a corresponding, stylistically high lexical register. On the pragmatic level, Taraszka emphasizes the religious component, so that his translation has a clearly metaphysical undertone. Markovič opted for a colloquial register on both the syntactic and lexical levels; moreover, his translation appears significantly more "sober", preferring legal vocabulary to metaphysical attributes. He presents the final scene of the story in a folksy burlesque tone, which tends to steer the perception in a satirical direction. The strategies chosen by Markovič pave the way for interpretations in which Peretz's story "Bontshe Shvayg" is perceived as a parodically exaggerated critique of the passive attitude to life, while Taraszka's stylistically elaborate translation with metaphysical undertones resists such interpretations.

In the case of Taraszka's translation, a certain discrepancy can be observed between the introductory paratext interspersed with routine formulae and the initial norm applied by the translator. While I. L. Peretz is presented in the paratext as a fighter for progress and against the "retrograde and outdated" way of life of the religious Eastern Jews, the metaphysical and pietistic tone resonates very clearly in Taraszka's translation. This contradiction may be caused by the use of a routinized ideological code in the paratext, which, however, could be easily identified as such by the readers of the time. The message implicitly communicated in the target text had very little to do with this code. In the preface that Markovič wrote to the translations in his anthology, Peretz is described as "the most European" (nejevropštější) of the three founders of modern Yiddish literature, who, unlike M. M. Sforim and Sholom Aleichem, was not "the favorite of the masses" (miláč[ek] mas), but a "hero of the intelligentsia" (hrdinou intelligence; 1968, 13). In this context, the subliminal satirical and critical undertone in Markovič's translation of the short story seems completely understandable to the reader.

One cannot but agree with Jakub Markovič that in translating Yiddish literature, "the role of cultural and social commentator is imposed on the translator"[17] (1968, 14) even more intensely than in translating, for example, German, French or Polish literature. One can also subscribe to the claim that "[o]ften the undertone, the mood, the tonality, plays a crucial role". By comparing the two translations of "Bontshe Shvayg", I have tried to show here to what extent the translator, directing the lan-

guage like a conductor tuning music into harmony, is able to navigate the perception of the text, sometimes even despite the contradictory information given in the ideologically tinged paratexts.

NOTES

[1] Publishing strategies are part of the preliminary norm in Gideon Toury's theoretical concept of descriptive translation studies (cf. Toury 2012, 82).

[2] In one of his essays, David Neal Miller (1974, 41) recalls his literate but not well-read grandfather, who knew the contents of the story nine years after its first publication (1894) from the accounts of other readers.

[3] An excellent summary of the contradictory reception of Peretz's work is provided by Adi Mahalel in his book *The Radical Isaac: I. L. Peretz and the Rise of Jewish Socialism* (2023).

[4] Even today, the production of book translations from Yiddish is negligible.

[5] The other authors dealing with Yiddish literature, such as Hana Náglová, Dagmar Hilarová or Jiřina Šedivá, have done so more occasionally, often focusing on short forms, mostly poetry, and sometimes using other foreign-language translations as a basis.

[6] Taraszka also worked as a translator from French and German.

[7] After a very eventful life, which included a temporary emigration to Israel before World War II, fighting in North Africa in the Czechoslovak units of the British army, and persecution during the communist regime, Jakub Markovič suffered a severe heart attack in 1956 and had to give up his physically demanding job at the Motex factory; from then until his death, he concentrated entirely on translating Yiddish literature into Czech. I owe the biographical information on Markovič to an e-mail exchange with his daughter Andrea Peer, who lives in Israel.

[8] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the present author.

[9] This text was published in identical wording ten years earlier in *Věstník* on the occasion of the 35th death anniversary of I. L. Peretz.

[10] The expression "topos" is used here in the broader sense as a term for a literary commonplace with a culturally specific meaning.

[11] The term is derived from the Hebrew letters Lamed/l and Vav/v, whose numerical value adds up to 36. According to this concept, there are at least 36 holy people in the world at any given time who are *tzadikim* (a kind of spiritual masters). According to Jewish mysticism, these holy people work in secret – nobody knows who they are, even they themselves may not know about their special mission. It is for the sake of these 36 hidden saints that God preserves the world. The figure of Bontshe bears striking traits of a *lamedvovnik*, regardless of whether it is portrayed in a serious manner or satirically distorted.

[12] "Postavy v Perecově uměleckém díle jsou ztělesněním protestu proti zbabělosti, ochotě ke kompromisům, a nízkým opovrženíhodným snahám druhu lidí Boncze Szwajga."

[13] "V dílech […] Boncze Szwayg […] ukazuje Perec co nejvýrazněji heroicky vzpřímenou naději, nezlomný optimismus prostého žida a jeho hlubokou víru v konečné vítězství spravedlnosti."

[14] It is not entirely clear why Taraszka decided to phonetically modify the name by replacing the affricate *tsh* with *ts*. One could perhaps consider the influence of the English translations, in which the main character's name was transcribed as "Bontzye" (1906, trans. by Helena Frank as "Bontzye Shweig") or "Bontsia" (1951, trans. by E. T. Margolis as "Silent Bontsia").

[15] The Yiddish excerpts were transcribed according to the current YIVO transcription standard.

[16] There is also a difference between the lexeme *pud* in the source language and the two equivalents in the target language on the denotational level: the Russian borrowing *pud* denotes a different (much smaller) weight unit (16, 38 kg) than the Czech terms *cent* or *metrák* (100 kg). However, since the term is used in a figurative turn of phrase, the denotational difference is not significant.

[17] "Překladateli je vnucována role sociálního a kulturního komentátora."

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