

## Translation as a scholarly dialogue

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### Translation as a scholarly dialogue

Translation. Dialogue. Culture. Historicity. Humanities texts. Transfer. René Descartes. Jean-Paul Sartre. George Steiner.

This study is based on the concept of translation being a dialogue between the author and translator, between the source text and the mode of translation, and between two intellectual environments in two cultures. The translation of texts in the humanities is an academic activity, a type of scholarly dialogue which translators enter at several levels – by the gesture of selecting the text to be translated, by the ways of transferring the text to the receiving environment, and by choosing the method of translation. In relation to the choice of texts for translation, this article discusses the effect of the historical context of the receiving environment, the translator's relationship to relevant scientific disciplines, and the receptibility of the text in the receiving environment. These will be demonstrated through an analysis of both Slovak and Czech translations of the work of René Descartes (1954 and 2016) and Slovak translations of Jean-Paul Sartre (1964) and George Steiner (2022), while considering the different periods of their creation.

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Insights about the function and nature of dialogue as a verbal and cognitive act, or as a confrontation of attitudes and opinions, are not new in the history of either translation or literature. Dialogue happens through language expression in written form: in its essence, it is “the principle of contradiction and conflict (gr. *Agôn/ἀγών*): on the basis of a common subject matter, it is intended to create an argumentative confrontation that provokes action and enables the disclosure of [...] [the participants of the dialogue] through words, but also semantic progress” (Triaú 2024, n. p.). If we define dialogue as “scholarly”, referring to texts of an epistemic nature (in the case discussed here, the study of the humanities), this assumes an intellectual exchange taking place between two cultural spaces and intellectual traditions, which makes demands on the translator and the recipient for a correct and consistent understanding of the epistemic text. Related to this requirement is an orientation to the receiving cultural, scientific, and intellectual context and knowledge of this context, which influences the formulation of the translation text and is an active element of the dialogue on the side of the translator, who thus contributes to the scholarly discourse. It also opens the dialogue to the third member of the translation metacommunication: the reader, who is often confronted with otherness in the sense of the way of thinking, reasoning, stereotypes in thinking and in language, which has its own conventions and established ways of expression. This is where commentaries, explanatory notes, supplementary translations of texts needed for clarification, references to other texts, etc. have their function.

The thinking of two conceptually and temporally distant French philosophers, Michel de Montaigne and Jean-Paul Sartre, may serve as an example. Montaigne understood the work of translation as a participation in dialogue, as a process of bringing knowledge of the author and the text, as a type of inner conversation with the author, necessary to fix and implant the idea in the mind of the translator. The search for its language expression only completes the initiated dialogue. Before Montaigne published his famous *Essais* (1580), he translated *Theologia Naturalis* (1436), by the Catalan physician and philosopher Ramon Sibiuda (1385–1436) – which was barely readable by that time – reproducing it in the form of an elegant and *explained* humanistic text. Montaigne described his translation method by stating that the author and the translator are bound together by an interpersonal relationship, with each being indebted to the other as writers. He perceived translation as the reincarnation of the author of the past in living and contemporary language (Compagnon 1984, 42).

Sartre argues for the notion of dialogue in his essay “An Explanation of *The Stranger*” (1947) when he writes that “dialogue is a moment of explanation, of signification of meaning; to give it a privileged place would be to admit that things have meaning”<sup>1</sup> (2010, 145). If we apply Sartre’s words in the context of the topic of the present study, to admit translation-dialogue is to admit that translation reveals explanations, marks meanings, and has a privileged place in culture.

George Steiner explains the hermeneutic motion in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (1975), discussing the appropriation and transfer of meaning in four steps in the context of translation: an act of trust (in the meaningfulness

of the text), an act of aggression (“hacking” the text, contradictions), the embodiment (appropriation of the text, assent), and the restitution of the text (Steiner 1998, 296). Here, the work with opposites is present as well, when tension is created between the author and the translator as participants in the dialogue.

## DIALOGUE

To clarify the etymology, the word “dialogue” comes from the Greek verb *dialegomai* (διαλέγομαι) – I converse.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, dialogue may be understood as a conversation which, in the search for truth, brings us through the word to the essence of an idea. For a conversation in the Socratic mode, as a way of arousing the need to think, dialogue can be internal and silent. Direct interaction between the speakers is not required for it to take place; it is enough that the author encourages thinking. This could also correspond to translation, which we understand as an exchange of ideas by transferring them into another language and culture, on the condition that we want to understand and comprehend the original/source text. We seek its truth, and the translator’s ambition is to offer the truth of the translation.

The problem is also seen in this way by Antoine Berman, whose hermeneutic traductology involves the idea of the fundamentally conflicted nature of translation. The translation is essentially “an open work, a dialogue, a creolization of cultures, a divergence from the original”, but it is also “broken”, full of contradictions that cause differences between languages [...]. The aim of Berman’s traductological project is not to deny or abolish “the constant presence of contradictions”, [...] but to overcome them by revealing *the truth* of translation. (Cosculluela 2009, 66)

It is in the encounter of different cultures, traditions, time-spaces, linguistic structures, and differences in doxa where the agens of argumentative confrontation (*agôn*) should be activated in translation, and this agens can be a paratext that helps to reconstitute the content. It cannot be a matter of mitigating of the conflict by “creolizing” cultures, as Anton Popovič (1975) understands the term in literary translation, encouraging a kind of compromise in the sense of balancing losses and gains in translation, moving between exoticization and naturalization, or between historicization and actualization. The translation of epistemic texts should preserve the character of argumentative confrontation for the sake of “semantic progress”, since the original can introduce new concepts of thought into the receiving environment, whose understanding can be aided by paratexts and parallel texts as additional interpretations. In this sense, the naturalizing and actualizing translation operations to which Berman refers are indirectly applied.

Scholarly dialogue is influenced by the gesture of selecting a text for translation. The translation enters the research environment as a missing link of knowledge or as a text bringing new knowledge, so the translator’s particular scholarly interest is also relevant. The selection of texts for translation is influenced by institutional practices and strategies in various publishing houses and their specific academic series with a systematic focus on humanities texts, as well as scholarly or cultural journals that can prepare/anticipate or compensate for book translation. The openness, relevance, and character of scholarly dialogue are influenced by the conditions of the transfer

of academic knowledge – on the one hand, free choice and creation, on the other hand, the obstacles, restrictions and enforcement of a certain type of literature, depending on the environment in which the translation activity takes place. Historical conditioning and the nature of the social, cultural and translation situation play an important role. Important factors include the continuity of the production of the translation and the original scholarly discourse; the openness of the receiving environment (existing translations on the topic in general and by the author in question); the appropriateness of the target language for expressing concepts and notions in a meaningful way (the developmental stage of the language, special vocabulary and means of expression, abstract lexical system, etc.).

History has shown that society, academia, and culture are not willing to create the conditions for dialogue in all circumstances. Totalitarian societies are particularly aware of the subversive side of translation and condemn its existence.

### MODEL SITUATIONS OF SLOVAK TRANSLATIONS OF HUMANITIES LITERATURE

For much of the second half of the 20th century, the cultural and translation space of the former Czechoslovakia found itself in such a situation. For over 40 years, from the adoption of the Press Law in 1949 (which nationalized private publishing houses and created a state-controlled publishing sphere under the pressure of ideological interventions), until 1990 (when censorship was abolished and the private sector was restored), the intensity of state interference in cultural affairs, under the influence of communist ideology, changed every decade. The repression of the 1950s was followed by a period of relative freedom in the so-called “golden 1960s”, followed by the reimposition of hardline ideology in the “normalization” period of the 1970s and 1980s.

In his 1975 open letter to Gustáv Husák, then general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Václav Havel responded to the devastating consequences of normalization in almost all spheres of life:

How much greater still may be the long-term effect of the vacuum in the humanities and in the theory and practice of the social sciences? Who dares measure the consequences of the violent interruption of the long processes of self-knowledge in ontology, ethics, and historiography, dependent as they are on access to the normal circulation of information, ideas, discoveries, and values, the public crystallization of attitudes? (1987, 23)

Havel uses the powerful and alarming image of cultural activity “being estranged in large measure from its proper substance through its *total emasculation as an instrument of human, and so of social, self-awareness*” (17). He writes not only of the cultural police (whose forms of censorship included the destruction of books in typesetting and removal of books from libraries and bookstores), but also of the thwarting of literary and scholarly *possibility* in general:

For even those other countless flashes of knowledge which never illuminate the path ahead for society as a whole have their deep social importance, if only through the mere fact that they *happened*; that they *might have* cast light; that in their very occurrence they fulfilled a certain range of society’s potentialities either its creative powers, or simply its

liberties; they, too, help to make and maintain a *climate of civilization* without which none of the more illuminating flashes could ever occur. (22)

This lack of continuity and fragmentation in the reception and dissemination of scholarly, intellectual, and cultural material was also characteristic of the Slovak (and more generally Central European) cultural space to varying degrees. It also reflects an underestimation of the power of culture and an attempt to manipulate it. For Havel, dialogue is encoded as a possibility of a free exchange of intellectual contents. It is not only access to study sources, it is also ongoing public confrontations, the natural circulation of information, ideas and knowledge. Behind all this there are translations as well.<sup>3</sup>

The historical conditionality is behind the various situations of translation in the Slovak cultural space. Three model situations can be documented from the 1950s, the 1960s, and after 1989. Translations into Czech also play a role in them, considering the still persistent situation of the complementary function of the more numerous Czech translations reciprocated in Slovakia, given the linguistic proximity and passive bilingualism between Czech and Slovak.

### RENÉ DESCARTES: *LE DISCOURS DE LA MÉTHODE (ROZPRAVA O METÓDE)*

During the 1950s, a decade marked by increased ideological pressure, translations were published mainly of classical philosophers and later Enlightenment writers (Voltaire, French encyclopedists, P. H. D. von Holbach, John Toland, etc.), with editors emphasizing the materialist and anti-religious line in philosophical thought. The culmination of this tendency was the publication of the 1962 anthology *Francúzski osvietenci o náboženstve* (The French Enlightenment writers on religion). Although the texts were translated by Ján Žigo directly from the French, the selection was compiled on the basis of the Russian edition *Francuzskiye prosvetiteli 18. veka a religii* (Moscow, 1960). Thus the anthology is introduced by an editorial text written in the spirit of Marxist-Leninist ideology and scientific communism, in which the authors justify their intention to point out the groundlessness of religion in human life. Such an ideological accompaniment or curatorship of “Soviet science” was common in Czechoslovakia and other communist countries in the 1950s and early 1960s.

René Descartes's *Le Discours de la méthode* (Discourse on Method, 1637) marked a linguistic turning point in philosophical writing, which from the perspective of the past centuries complicated the work of translators. Descartes himself was not a problematic author, as he was one of the philosophical “classics”. However, his first translation in Slovak was preceded by a pamphlet by the Soviet writer Vasiliï V. Sokolov – *Descartesova filozofia a ideologický zápas v súčasnom Francúzsku* (Descartes's philosophy and ideological struggle in contemporary France, 1951). Anton Vantuch's translation of *Le Discours de la méthode (Rozprava o metóde)* was published in 1954, together with Július Špaňár's translation of the Latin treatise *Regulae ad directionem ingenii (Pravidlá na vedenie rozumu* [Rules for the Direction of the Mind], 1701).<sup>4</sup>

Vantuch translated Descartes from the 1902 edition, which preserved the historical orthographic conventions and morpho-syntactic forms with minimal changes. His translation oscillates between historicization and actualization of the text, mostly preserving the atmosphere and partly also the simplicity of the French language, historicizing the translation in accordance with contemporary ideas and knowledge, often expressed by figurative names and descriptions. It is the historicizing principle that seems to be important when reading the translation; although it helps to understand the aging of aesthetic structures, the shifts in the French language, and the historicity of the text, it does not contribute to comprehensibility. Descartes's use of first-person singular and Montaigne's emphasis on self-knowledge suited the translator's nature to such an extent that the translation followed the idea of dialogue with the reader as Montaigne intended. Vantuch interpellated the reader at the beginning by replacing the French indefinite personal pronoun "on" (one) with the noun "the reader", and then translates the other expressions "on peut imiter", "on trouvera" with the periphrasis "among the examples worthy of following" and the second person plural "you will find".

The Slovak translation includes footnotes that focus on the interpretation of historical events, brief biographical notes of the persons mentioned in the text, and clarification of the time-space coordinates and intertextual connections in Descartes's work. However, they deal with the problem of language, the transition of concepts and expressions from earlier stages of the French language, and from Latin to the new language of science. In translating, Vantuch has followed only the commentary of the French edition and has not produced an updated critical edition of the translation, which would have been necessary in terms of confronting contemporary ideas about scholarly phenomena and their expression in language. The translation can be considered annotated, but not yet scholarly. The decisive factor was the underdeveloped tradition of translating philosophical texts into Slovak. To explain this, it should be added that in Slovakia, epistemic texts were still read in Latin and in the original languages until almost the end of the 19th century; there was no need for translation, since the circle of percipients was only a small group of scholars.

If we take a closer look at the translation of *Le Discours de la méthode* in the Czech context, we find that there was a Czech translation of this work as early as 1882. From the commentary in the most recent Czech translation by Karel Šprunk (2016), it is clear that it was created in comparison with the earlier Czech translation by Viera Szathmáry-Vlčková (1933, 1947), two German versions (2001 and 2013) and one English translation (1981). Šprunk's commentary is based on a comparison of commentaries from all editions, and the translation creatively builds on the previous ones, creating a network of comprehensible insights and a more refined expression. There are no more recent translations in the Slovak language, only reissues of old translations in the original version. The translation of Descartes thus remains at the level of knowledge of the late 1980s (see note 4).

After 1989, Slovak philosophy returned to Descartes and to the rehabilitated Cartesian philosopher Juraj Cíger, who had a dialogue with Descartes pro domo. New translations of Descartes, however, did not stimulate this effort, unlike in the Czech

context. The translations have not been continued, the secondary literature on Descartes refers to foreign language versions of his work, and the Czech compensatory translation also plays its role as a reference for Slovak scholars.

### JEAN-PAUL SARTRE: ŠTÚDIE O LITERATÚRE (STUDIES ON LITERATURE)

The second model situation is represented by the reception of Jean-Paul Sartre in the Slovak translation space of the 1960s. Sartre's dialogue with the literary community and philosophers was disrupted by the official form of socialist culture. The reception of his work was manifested in the unsystematic translation of mainly dramatic and prose works, mainly published in the 1960s, when he had basically stopped writing fiction. The question of philosophical attitudes and the relationship to Marxism was problematic, and therefore the dialogue with Slovak intellectuals and philosophers was not open. Sartre's visit to Czechoslovakia in November 1963, when he met with a small circle of journalists, translators, writers, and philosophers in Bratislava, was very important. A selection from his works was published the following year in Anton Vantuch's translation as *Štúdie o literatúre* (Studies on literature, 1964), although the volume had most likely been prepared long before that.<sup>5</sup> It consists of an annotated selection of texts taken from *Situations I and II* (1948) and from the journal *Les Temps modernes*, as well as the essay "Baudelaire", arranged in chronological order.<sup>6</sup>

The philosopher Dagmar Smreková sees the following key moments in terms of the Slovak reception of Sartre's work:

1. The interest in Sartre in Slovak philosophy was an expression and part of the sensitivity of some Slovak intellectuals to the current in Western European thinking and culture in general and the desire to know existentialism closely.
2. This trend was also related to the developing discussion of the philosophical problem of man in our country.
3. Finally, Sartre also attracted attention in our country because he underwent a certain development of thought during the two post-war decades and, as a left-wing intellectual, he espoused Marxism. (Smreková 1996, 69)

These three theses can be accepted in a general sense. It should be added, however, that Sartre was perceived by official culture as a representative of the left-wing intellectuals, a committed member of the Communist Party of France, a "Marxist", and a sympathizer of Soviet communism until 1956, when he criticized the government's intervention in the Hungarian counter-revolution. He also denounced the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, shortly after which he signed the French petition to grant political asylum to his translator Fedor Ballo, who was then working at UNESCO in Paris.

The complicated and contradictory personality of Sartre as an existentialist philosopher and Marxist writer was perceived by the Slovak intellectual sphere immediately after World War II. In the latter half of the 1940s, the philosopher and art historian Marián Városov published an essay entitled "Pohľad na súčasnú francúzsku filozofiu" (A view of contemporary French philosophy), in which he analyzes the philosophy

of existentialism ([1946–1947] 1993). In this same period, the cultural journal *Slovenské pohľady* published Marcel Girard's essay "Jean Paul Sartre a jar existencializmu vo Francúzsku. Panoráma francúzskych časopisov" (Jean-Paul Sartre and the spring of existentialism in France, 1946).<sup>7</sup> The Czech translations of the first two volumes of *Les chemins de la liberté* (*The Roads to Freedom*, 1945–1949), published in 1946 and 1947 as *Cesty k svobodě: Věk rozumu* (*The Age of Reason*) and *Cesty k svobodě: Odklad* (*The Reprieve*) were also being read in Slovakia at the time.<sup>8</sup>

However, Sartre first entered Slovakia as a writer and representative of literary existentialism thanks to the literary historian and translator Jozef Felix, whose translated excerpts from *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*, 1943) were published as *Muchy* in *Slovenské pohľady*, also in 1946. The following year, Felix translated Simone de Beauvoir's play *Les Bouches inutiles* (The useless mouths, 1945, Eng. trans. *Who Shall Die?*) as *Neužitečné ústa* for the Slovak National Theater, where he worked as a dramaturge, and he wrote a comprehensive study on existentialism for the bulletin accompanying the performance. In the 1950s, there was only one Czech translation of Sartre, the play *Georges Nekrasoff* (1957, trans. by Antonín Jaroslav Liehm). In the 1960s, translations of Sartre's works such as *The Flies*, *Nausea*, *The Wall*, *Words*, *Hurricane over Sugar*, and various plays appeared in Czech.

Sartre became known in Slovakia in the 1960s mainly as a playwright, thanks to Fedor Ballo's translations of *Le diable et le Bon Dieu* (*The Devil and the Good Lord*, 1951, Slovak trans. *Diabol a pánboh*, 1965) and *Les mains sales* (*Dirty Hands*, 1948, Slovak trans. *Špinavé ruky*, 1968), as well as Ján Sedlák's translation of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (*The Condemned of Altona*, 1961, Slovak trans. *Altonskí väzni*, 1968). Ružena Jamrichová's translation of the prose collection *Le Mur* (*The Wall*, 1939, Slovak trans. *Múr*, 1966) also appeared during this period.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the translations of the plays were not published in book form, but in a series published by the DILIZA agency, which had an editorial office focused on dramatic literature.<sup>10</sup> It published translations in cyclostyle form, available to professional and non-professional theater companies as texts for internal use (without legal deposit). In rare cases they also found their way into public libraries, but they were not freely available in bookstores.<sup>11</sup>

The 1960s in Slovakia marked a shift from socialist realism in literature, and socialist reality was questioned. Philosophy began to turn its attention to the problem of humanity, becoming interested in anthropology, existentialism, and phenomenology. The discussion with Sartre on existentialism and Marxism led to the image of Sartre being an orthodox leftist and eschatological visionary; the facet of dogmatic Marxism had already receded into the background. In a 2002 issue of the journal *Kritika & Kontext* devoted to Sartre's 1963 visit, several of its participants agreed that the visit of Sartre and Beauvoir had been a sign of the easing of the political situation in Czechoslovakia.<sup>12</sup> Sartre was not one of the personalities who had been welcomed there before, as his philosophical works and political positions were too independent and unpredictable, although as Agneša Kalinová stated, "he was no longer attacked as fiercely and unequivocally as he had been in the first postwar years", when he considered himself an existentialist, not a Marxist (Bžoch et al. 2002, 8–9). The philosopher



Ján Bodnár expressed his disappointment at the visit, “since Sartre found it necessary to stress his Marxist worldview and to prove that a truly great novel can only be written on the basis of socialist reality” (10). Sartre’s attitudes towards the end of the Stalinist cult of personality and the revival of the debate on Marxism in Western Europe were consistent with the liberalizing discourse of the time in Slovakia. However, what was surprising was his insistence on the thesis of the great novel of socialist reality, and his statement that such a novel should not shy away from anything of the harsh experiences and bitterness of its protagonists, while learning from the formal practices of literature such as that written in the West.<sup>13</sup> The significance of Sartre’s visit was summed up by the critic and translator Jozef Bžoch: “the 1960s opened the door – at least for a while – to relative freedom, and Sartre appeared in this door with his philosophy of man, which had an undeniable impact on the thinking of the time and on Slovak literature as well” (18). Before this door was slammed shut again, this decade brought translations of Sartre the philosopher, albeit in a modest way, through Anton Vantuch’s 1964 translation *Štúdie o literatúre*.<sup>14</sup>

The selection of the texts in Vantuch’s translation is based on the dominant features of Sartre’s literary activity of the late 1940s and 1950s. The selection does not directly refer to Sartre the philosopher, but presents such topics as his founding participation in the journal *Temps modernes*, the situation of the writer and literature in the postwar decade, his political involvement, his polemic with Albert Camus, and his literary-critical and art-historical studies. Some of the materials are presented in the form of an integral text, such as “Manifest revue ‘Les Temps modernes’”, “Vysvetlenie ‘Cudzinka’” (An explanation of *The Stranger*), “Prejav na kongrese pre odzbrojenie v Moskve roku 1962” (Speech at the Congress for Armaments in Moscow in 1962), and “Július Fučík: ‘Reportáž spod šibenice’” (Július Fučík: “Report from below the gallows”). The others are excerpts presented with connecting texts: “Situácia spisovateľa v roku 1947” (The situation of a writer in 1947), “Čo je to literatúra?” (What is literature?), “Znárodnenie literatúry” (The nationalization of literature), “Baudelaire”, “Polemika s Albertom Camusom” (A polemic with Albert Camus), and “Benátsky väzeň” (The prisoner of Venice).<sup>15</sup> The connecting texts by Vantuch explain the contemporary French political, social, and literary context related to the text and summarize the omitted passages.

*Štúdie o literatúre* ends with an anonymous editor’s note (“Poznámka redakcie”) that comments on the selection: “Many important critics (Faulkner, Mauriac, Joyce and others) could not be included in the selection because of the lack of Slovak translations of the works to which they refer” (1964, 232). Many of the works and authors to whom Sartre specifically refers in the translated texts had not yet been translated, including Camus’s *L’Étranger* (*The Stranger/The Outsider*, 1942), *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 1942), and *L’Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*, 1951).<sup>16</sup> From this point of view, a translated selection of Sartre’s studies should not have been published at all. The editor’s note suggests the potential for translation to be a dialogue, but one that should be conducted in the sense of “not talking about something we don’t know”. The translation vacuum of the 1950s is evident here, but there is also an aspect of the compilers’ internal discussion present, which may be a passable thing from

Sartre's work. The dialogue is flawed, lacking parallel texts. In the "dialogue", which is aimed more at the receiving environment than at the author, the debate on Sartre is conducted primarily from the point of view of literary criticism and the aesthetic problems of literature: from the point of view of one "current of criticism that also notices non-aesthetic criteria" (1964, 232), by which we mean the philosophical and political perspectives. The translator, who is an expert on Sartre and French literature, enters the dialogue only with the selection, but his intention encourages reading between the lines. At the end of the translation there are further explanatory notes, which are of a rather strictly factual nature (an alphabetical list of names and background information).

The editor's note, which introduces Sartre the writer and philosopher, relies on the controversial perception of him at the time: the entire paratext, together with the explanatory notes, bears the marks of camouflage. Its aim was to confuse the attention of the cultural police and the censors, to avoid their intervention. Sartre's portrait unfolds through ambivalent rhetorical questions directed towards his political attitudes and his relationship with Marxism. The use of rhetorical questions expresses a degree of uncertainty and doubt that allows a direct opinion and position to be avoided. Responsibility is delegated to a virtual participant in the dialogue:

Sartre is not really one of those authors who can be easily defined based on familiar categories. Does his development since *Being and Nothingness* (1943) provide sufficient guarantees of the sincerity of his adherence to Marxism? How can one explain his clinging so tenaciously to the notion of a freedom undetermined by anything, his astonishing desire to act, to change, to intervene, to take a stand, his persistent efforts to win an audience, to influence them, to impress them? (227)

Then we read two more passages addressed initially to the external observers of the dialogue, that is, the cultural police, and then to the readers of the translation:

Sartre opted for dialectical materialism, the philosophy that alone explains the universal connectedness of everything. The following years are only years of constant convergence, which was not even disturbed by the discussion – not polemic – of the Hungarian events of 1956. [...]

The selection of Sartre's literary essays in Slovak translation is placed in the reader's hands in the hope that it will fulfil its mission properly – it captures the main features of the development of this complex and profound author, it is an overview of one current of criticism that also notices non-aesthetic criteria, and it is the first comprehensive contribution to the knowledge of a work that has been much discussed in this country recently. To know – and then to evaluate. To know in order to be aware, in order to agree or disagree. (232–233)

It is questionable to what extent it was possible for Jean-Paul Sartre to be known in a wider circle of readers, and for his work to be evaluated based on its defective form. The final question is also ambiguous. Behind the entire edition of this selection, however, resonates a call to dialogue, even if in doubt. In terms of George Steiner's trust in the text of the original, in the meaningfulness of the text, the act of trust and aggression is infused with the knowledge that translation can

at some point emphasize the subversiveness of the text under given historical conditions. Trust in the text is undermined, but not in terms of what the original says, but in terms of how the text may sound in the receiving environment.

### GEORGE STEINER: *LESSONS OF THE MASTERS (LEKCIE MAJSTROV)*

After 1989, the publishing field in Slovakia was reorganized, and the paradigm of the translation situation rapidly changed. The selection of texts for translation was differentiated by the actual requirements of the receiving environment. One way to overcome the lack of key materials caused by the ideological criteria of the previous regime is the publication of earlier texts that were missing in the corpus of the humanities and belles-lettres. However, it is equally essential to publish translations of contemporary and relevant scholarship, which could have a greater effect on current research and education. Given the situation of non-translation in earlier decades, the work of translators is complicated by the fact that the impact of the original makes great demands in the response of translation: it often requires scholarly research on the topic, targeting the reader as well as the imagination and working with the receiving metalanguage.

A relevant example in this context is the translation of George Steiner's *Lessons of the Masters*, a series of lectures written in 2001–2002, when he was a visiting professor at Harvard University.<sup>17</sup> Steiner presents the paradigm of the didactic archetype of teacher/student in its historical and cultural particularities, up to its threat and possible extinction. He explores the nature and significance of the pedagogical process in its various forms from ancient times through the beginnings of Christianity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Modern Age. Steiner's arguments rely on scholarly fields and phenomena such as the history of philosophy, the history of literature, science and art, religious studies, Judaism, the function of language and translation, the status of the humanities, the significance of religious experience, and the relationship between culture and literacy. This sets the limits within which the translator must grasp and comprehend the text. He or she should be a partner to the scholar who is a literary comparatist, as well as to comparatists within religious studies, philosophy, linguistics, translation studies, and many more. However, Steiner's text has no visible scholarly attributes and moves in a plurilingual space: the original text is written in English, but it also touches on Greek and Latin, French, Italian, and German, as in its explanation of the concept of "master" (*magister*, *maître*, *maître à penser*, *Meister*).

Martina Ivanová, the translator of the Slovak edition *Lekcie majstrov* (2022), is present in the book not only through the translated text, but also through the concluding study and extensive apparatus of notes. In the afterword, she reflects on the characteristic features of Steiner's text, highlighting the key points on which she builds her method of translation, which she names and justifies. This appears to be both a method of translation and a method of broader content transfer. The translator identifies the genre characteristics of the text as lecture and essay. The texts are not primarily scientific in their form, but didactic, reflecting the vivid nature of thinking and contact with the reader. Steiner extensively uses intertextuality, quotations, and

references to various works and personalities. The quotation practice in Steiner is obviously vigorous; as Ivanová notes, there is a lack of precise bibliographical grounding, and in many places neither the origin nor the author of the quotation is obvious. The loose quotations (or Steiner's own translations from the literary works he reflects on) are very closely related to the way he presents his arguments. However, the translator clarifies the unquoted fragments in the footnotes by referring to the source of the quotations or to possible allusions in Steiner's interpretation, in this sense carrying out supplementary and exploratory literary research. The apparatus of notes also provides a more detailed description of the personalities about whom Steiner writes. The exceptions are persons and works who are part of the cultural collective memory, or persons and works that are characterized in the text in a general way. Another area in which the translator must intervene is the relevant terminology of the various fields of the humanities. The footnotes contain brief definitions and explanations of Steiner's terms and concepts for which the receiving language has no equivalents. The final area addressed by the translator is Steiner's linguistic polyphony. In the notes, Ivanová provides a loose translation of the foreign-language fragments quoted, or supplements existing Slovak translations of these texts.

An important step in translation and in the formulation of a translation strategy is the identification of the type of Steiner's interpretation and argumentation as exoteric-esoteric. The translator works with the passage on the interpretation of Plato's teachings, where the exoteric version of knowledge (intended for a wider audience) and the esoteric version of knowledge (intended for a small circle of insiders) are applied. The reader can perceive the text through the visible part – the text itself, or he or she can also focus on the spaces “behind” or below the text. The reader can follow only the textual line, or the textual reality becomes a starting point to explore context and information that leads him or her to other texts and expands the possibility of dialogue.

The conclusion of the general part of the afterword characterizes the type and form of epistemic transfer and the possible approach to it regarding the doxa of the receiving environment, i.e. regarding the area of the Central European education and the world of knowledge. Ivanová thus also determines and justifies meta-transfer as her principle of rendition which can be deduced from the formulated poetics of translation and the specific notes or commentaries on the text. The different steps of thinking about the nature of the translation, which Ivanová herself admits can be controversial, show that with regard to the reader and the intelligibility of the text, she has chosen a method which has led to the exoteric form of reading. In this way, the translator has shifted the ratio of the exo-eso in the original.

Ivanová has transformed a loosely reflective and argumentative mode of interpretation into a more rigorous and overtly scholarly text, for example by pinpointing quotations without scholarly attributes, thus filling in and completing even the unfinished parts of the text to be precise with respect to the reader. This translation method also includes a commentary of a scientific nature in the apparatus of notes. The translator discusses the need for compromise and reasons her methods. The question is whether the author's original intention is undermined. The translator put herself

in the position of a responsible mediator, giving herself the task to produce a “responsible” and clearly explained translation. In order to transfer the information as accurately as possible, she must understand the text as fully as possible and formulate it in the receiving language in such a way that the reader would also understand it. However, the question remains: who is the reader, what is his or her educational background, and what kind of reader did Steiner have in mind when he wrote the lectures?

## CONCLUSION

The three described model situations of translation of a humanities text perceived as a (scientific) dialogue illustrate the three ways in which translators engage in dialogue with the author and the reader, and the extent to which they are allowed to do so.

In the case of the 1954 Slovak translation of René Descartes, the object of translation is a philosophical text of cultural heritage. Since Vantuch’s translation *Rozprava o metóde* lacked a sufficient tradition and distinct method of translating philosophical texts, the dialogue does not take place to a sufficient extent for the reader. Because of its historicity and antiquity, Descartes’s treatise is the type of text that can open up to the reader to a greater extent with each of the new translations, taking into account the sequence of previous versions, the current state of the doxa. It is an exegesis, and thus an improvement in the sense of Berman’s understanding of the translation project. This is how the Czech edition of 2010 was carried out.

The personality of Jean-Paul Sartre was perceived in the Slovak cultural space in a controversial and heterochronic way, in a movement between the possible and the impossible, between acceptance and rejection, between ideological pressure and the pursuit of free knowledge. Vantuch’s 1964 translation *Štúdie o literatúre* consists of a selection that is built on camouflage and reading between the lines. By omitting passages, the author’s speech is taken away, replaced by enthymeme. The dialogue with Sartre takes place in several directions – translations of prose and drama, attempts at philosophical engagement, commenting on or analyzing texts that were not translated in the 1960s, that is, indirectly. If we accept the view that a book is translated because there is a conviction of its necessity, that it will enrich thought or a scholarly discipline, in the case of the translation of Sartre’s literary-critical and philosophical work, the 1960s were not about specific originals, but about the overall phenomenon of existentialism. It was primarily about strengthening contact with it, about knowledge of and continuity with Western European thought and culture, as suggested by Dagmar Smreková.

The translation of George Steiner’s *Lessons of the Masters* was created in completely different social and cultural conditions than the previous two translations. It exemplifies translation as a hermeneutic and practical exercise of language that overcomes the diversity of cultures and worlds of knowledge in time and space. However, in doing so, it encounters the consequences of the situation that Václav Havel so precisely named: the thwarting of literary and scholarly *possibility*, the consequences of a political situation that prevented the natural circulation of information, ideas,

knowledge, and values. Translation overcomes this deficit by intensifying the dialogue with the author, with the contents of the text and with the reader. It responds to the author's challenges by searching for the transmitted knowledge and contexts of the dialogue and scientifically rigorously processing this knowledge and contexts; at the same time, it guides the reader with this input, but also leaves him or her with the possibility of autonomous thinking prompted by the author's speech.

Translated from the Slovak by Zuzana Močková Lorková

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> “Le dialogue, en effet, c'est le moment de l'explication, de la signification; lui donner une place privilégiée, ce serait admettre que les significations existent”. In this reflection, Sartre refers to dialogue as part of a literary text (Camus's novel *The Stranger*), but the overlap in meaning is evident. Unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are by Zuzana Močková Lorková.
- <sup>2</sup> The prefix dia- means “through”, “via, between, to different sides”, or “because”; the verb legō (λέγω, I say) leads to the polysemous noun logos = “word”, “reason”, “thought” (and others).
- <sup>3</sup> Significantly, during the transitional period of the Velvet Revolution, public and political discourse called for the opening of dialogue; this demand was heard even from crowded squares.
- <sup>4</sup> Špaňár later published a translation of Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy* from Latin (Bratislava: Pravda, 1987) with an introductory study by Juraj Cíger (1914–2005), a Slovak philosopher and psychiatrist who had to leave the Slovak Academy of Sciences for political reasons. With his wife Viola Cígerová, from the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, he published a translation of *Meditations on First Philosophy* from the French, but only after 1989 (the second edition is dated as 1997; the date of the first edition could not be found). In 1967, Cíger had prepared a monograph called the *Enigmatic Descartes*, which was not published until 1999 (Martin: MS).
- <sup>5</sup> At that time, the printing of the book itself took two years, and the titles were planned ahead of time.
- <sup>6</sup> The selection was published in the series “Library of Aesthetic Education” (Knížnica estetického vzdelania), edited by Juraj Klaučo at the Slovak Publishing House of Belles-Lettres (Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry). Between 1961–1969, the series published about 30 titles by authors such as Lion Feuchtwanger, Sergei M. Eisenstein, Roman Ingarden, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Le Corbusier, Henri Bergson, Kazimir Malevich, Václav Zykmund, Arthur Miller, and others. It was a small edition: the number of pages ranged from 150 to 300; the print run of each title ranged from 600–5,000 copies. Sartre was published in an edition of 2,000 copies at a length of 200 pages.
- <sup>7</sup> Girard, a professor of literature and diplomat, worked at the French Institute in Prague in 1945–1951. He wrote his essay at the request of the journal editors.
- <sup>8</sup> *Věk rozumu* (*The Age of Reason*) was published in Slovak only in 1994 in a translation by Michal Bartko.
- <sup>9</sup> The first translation of the novel *The Wall* was published in *Slovenské pohľady* in 1963, No. 6 (trans. by Vladimír Halenár). A new translation by Vladimíra Komorovská of the entire collection was published in 2011, with an afterword by Jozef Felix first published in 1966.
- <sup>10</sup> The theater and literary agency DILIZA was transformed in 1969 into the Literary Agency LITA and was managed by the Ministry of Culture. The agency had a monopoly on copyright for Slovak and foreign literature.
- <sup>11</sup> The only book edition in that period was the anthology *Moderná francúzska dráma. Giraudoux, Salacrou, Camus, Sartre* (Modern French drama), which includes Sartre's play *The Flies*, translated by Felix (Giraudoux et al. 1965, 237–313).
- <sup>12</sup> In the special issue dedicated to Sartre and de Beauvoir (1/2002); the participants in the dialogue were Jozef Bžoch, Michal Nadubinský, Agneša Kalinová, Milan Hamada and philosophers Elena Várossová and Ján Bodnár (Bžoch et al. 2002).

- <sup>13</sup> Kalinová further comments on Sartre's attitudes as follows: "This must have seemed acceptable to me at the time, although today I find Sartre's determinism unbearable when he posits the past, present and future of the Soviet bloc as something fundamentally positive over and above the perspectives of the world in which he lived as a free man. And that was his reasoning that a truly great novel can only be born where socialism is supposedly being built!" (Bžoch et al. 2002, 17–18)
- <sup>14</sup> In addition to Oldřich Kuba's Czech translation of *Critique de la raison dialectique* (*Marxismus a existencializmus*, 1966), Slovak excerpts from *L'Être et le Néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (*Bytie a ničota*) and *Critique de la raison dialectique* (*Kritika dialektického rozumu*) translated by M. Krajčovič were included in *Antológia z diel filozofov: Pragmatizmus, realizmus, fenomenológia, existencializmus* (Anthology of the philosophers' works: Pragmatism, realism, phenomenology, existentialism; Bodnár 1969). There were also philosophical reflection on existentialism by Slovak philosophers (Bodnár 1965, 1967; Zigo 1967), as well as translations of György Lukács, Roger Garaudy, and Adam Schaff, but these source texts were few and came too late.
- <sup>15</sup> The bibliographical entries at the end of the book accurately indicate the omitted pages and the sources from which they were translated.
- <sup>16</sup> They were published in Slovak translation successively in 1992, 1993, and 2004; Sartre's *L'existentialisme est une humanisme* (1946) was published in Slovak in 1997 (*Existencializmus je humanizmus*, trans. by Ján Švantner).
- <sup>17</sup> Steiner's book *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) was translated into Slovak by Zuzana Vajdičková as *Smrť tragédie* (2011), and several other translations are available in Czech: *After Babel* (*Po Bábelu: Otázky jazyka a překladu*, 2010, trans. by Šárka Grauová), *In Bluebeard's Castle: Some Notes Towards the Redefinition of Culture* (*Na Modrovousově hradě: Několik poznámek k redefinici kultury*, 2020, trans. by Michal Kleprlík), *My Unwritten Books* (*Knihy, které jsem nenapsal*, 2019, trans. by Michal Kleprlík), *Real Presences: Is There Anything in What We Say?* (*Skutečné přítomnosti: Je něco v tom, čo říkáme?*, 2019, trans. by Ondřej Hanus, Sylva Ficová, and Michal Kleprlík), *Errata: An Examined Life* (*Errata: Prozkoumaný život*, 2011, trans. by Lucie Chlumská and Ondřej Hanus), *Language and Silence: Essays 1958–1966* (*Jazyk a ticho: Eseje o jazyce, literatúre a nelidskosti*, 2023, trans. by Michal Kleprlík).

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