

Myslenie v pohybe:
humanitné a spoločenské
vedy v preklade

Thought in Motion:
Humanities and Social
Sciences in Translation

IGOR TYŠŠ
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(eds.)

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and humanities

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Thought in motion: Humanities and social sciences in translation

IGOR TYŠŠ – FLORENCIA FERRANTE

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The history of humanistic and social scientific inquiry is inseparable from the history of its translation. While past translation studies scholarship heavily favored literary texts, recent global histories show that the flow of knowledge relies on translation at almost every juncture. In this issue of *WORLD LITERATURE STUDIES*, we step away from traditional distinctions between literary and non-literary texts to explore how translation in the social sciences and humanities functions as an intellectual intervention. We consciously frame this intervention as “thought in motion”. By choosing “thought” over “ideas”, “paradigms”, or “concepts”, we embrace the active, evolving, and sometimes messy process of intellectual work. “Thought” captures the human element behind the theory. Similarly, using “motion” rather than “circulation” emphasizes the dynamic, transformative, and occasionally resistant journey of these texts across borders. It is not a mechanical distribution of data, but a complex trajectory where meaning is constantly negotiated. By bringing discourses, disciplines, historical narratives, and intellectual fields into existence, translation brings thoughts into being within new cultural and institutional contexts. Recognizing that concepts are tightly bound to specific realities, we intentionally opted for methodological open-endedness. Our goal was to acknowledge diverse traditions of science and knowledge-making, revealing how translation intervenes to establish new realities rather than acting merely as a neutral carrier. This issue brings together articles originally presented at the conference “Humanities in Translations – Translations in Humanities” (May 14–16, 2025, Bratislava). The contributions address the history of social sciences and humanities translation through several distinct lenses. They examine the embodied practice of translating the humanities, the shifting boundaries between literary and historical writing, and the ways historians translate and deploy sources to build counter-narratives. Furthermore, the authors explore how translating the social sciences and humanities helps constitute and structure cultural and disciplinary fields. By foregrounding the critical role of terminological choices and the often-overlooked impact of indirect translations and reception, these papers also demonstrate how social sciences and humanities translation continues to shape our intellectual landscapes.

On translation and its history in the social sciences and humanities

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On translation and its history in the social sciences and humanities

Social sciences. Humanities. Translation. History. Micro case study.

This article explores the role of translation within the social sciences and humanities (SSH), as well as some theoretical and methodological challenges of historicizing SSH translation. Moving beyond traditional literary-focused translation studies, we argue that disciplinary fields and their categories are not essentialist but culturally and temporally contingent epistemic constructs. Consequently, providing a rigid definition of SSH translation is both problematic and, perhaps, unnecessary. Through a series of what we call micro case studies, we posit that the study of translation within the SSH can be understood at least in three distinct ways: as a heuristic lens, as a documented practice, and as an internal (trans)disciplinary issue. We conclude that translation within the SSH is better approached as a flexible, unstable and open-ended historical phenomenon, and we advocate for an entangled perspective to historicize it.

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As two translation historians and non-native English speakers, we are exploring the role, function, and position of translation in what has been called “knowledge transfer” within the social sciences and humanities (SSH). Rather than delineating our field of inquiry by listing which disciplines fall into the former and which into the latter – as almost every author in this issue does – we begin by defining our positionality. Hailing from vastly different intellectual geographies – from the Slovak tradition of translation studies to the comparative and historical corridors of Latin America – we inherently approach this topic from two distinct worlds of thought. Moreover, writing about translation in a non-native language for an international audience inherently presupposes an act of self-translation. It requires reshaping ideas, modes of articulation, argumentative structures, and tone to meet the expectations of an international academic journal. Thus, the very act of writing about translation requires translation.

This dynamic becomes even more complex outside the traditional purview of translation studies, a discipline rooted primarily in literary studies, spearheaded by literary scholars, and historically focused on literary texts. Although major theories of non-literary translation have significantly influenced the field (with Skopos theory being the most notable example; cf. Pym 2014) and various non-literary translation activities have been explored, translation specifically within the SSH lacks systematic investigation. Moreover, unlike literature – a common specialization among translation scholars – disciplines such as philosophy, historiography, or sociology require a certain amount of specialized domain knowledge to fully comprehend the specifics and historicity of their discourses. Therefore, as translation scholars tackling these areas, we risk having to translate ourselves discussing translation in fields we do not fully fathom. Interdisciplinarity is, indeed, a form of epistemic translation. Consciously or unconsciously, we are forced to “translate” familiar concepts into these less charted territories, and vice versa.

This study is structured as a mosaic of micro case studies and methodological reflections, interconnected rhizomatically and discursively rather than vertically or hierarchically. It is a conscious assemblage of echoes, fragments, discrepancies, and common grounds, built on the premise that these very fragments of research do not merely represent gaps in a historical record, but can actually help generate useful theoretical arguments. Its explanatory logic relies on the principle of *extrema tanguntur* – the idea that extremes meet – aiming to illustrate just how intricate and entangled the proverbial can of worms becomes when discussing translation within the SSH.

DEFINITIONAL SPACES RUNNING TOO WIDE

This epistemological precarity – the discomfort of operating outside our disciplinary specialization and the resulting difficulty in clearly identifying our object of study – is directly reflected in the discursive strategies translation scholars employ when attempting to define SSH translation. Because we often rely on familiar paradigms to map these uncharted territories, historical definitions of this field have struggled with precision.

A very telling case is how this area of translation has been defined in Slovakia throughout the years. Although the so-called foundational works of Slovak translation studies do not overlook the issue of translating texts from the SSH, definitions of this type of translation remain limited to basic questions stemming from the period's understanding of the specificity of scientific discourse. This discourse was determined primarily by aspirations toward scientism and terminological precision and equivalence (Ilek 1977), a Marxist understanding of the SSH (Popovič 1978), or idiosyncratic attempts at definition through proprietary, largely hermetic conceptual-methodological systems (Miko 1977). It can be argued that while earlier theorists identify the fundamental problem areas related to non-literary translation, they merely skim the surface of these phenomena and generalize where greater precision is needed. This is due to a lack of empirical data regarding the corpus composition of this text type and actual translation practice (a deficit they themselves acknowledge), as well as a historically conditioned understanding of science that was strongly – if not strictly programmatically – influenced by Marxism. Within these outlined contours, their attempt to ground the theoretical modeling of specialized translation issues in the theory of literary translation or the theory of literary translation communication (Popovič 1983) can be understood as a historical necessity.

While it cannot be said that Slovak translation studies in the subsequent period ignored questions related to the translation of specialized or so-called social science texts (cf. the bibliography by Veronika Čejková in Vajdová 2013, and among larger monothematic works, e.g., Truhlářová 2018), these efforts remained entirely fragmentary. Further systematic attempts to grasp this issue more integrally only emerged after 2019. In December of that year, the seminar “Translation of social science texts” took place at the Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, after which a research team began to form, alongside a comprehensive methodological-theoretical base initiated by Katarína Bednárová. The result of this renewed interest in the systematic understanding of the translation of so-called socio-humanistic texts (Bednárová 2024) is the *Slovník prekladateľiek a prekladateľov: vedy o človeku a kultúre* (Dictionary of Slovak translators in the humanities and social sciences; Bednárová, Kusá, Rybářová 2024). The initial outcome of this renewed interest, the anthology *Preklad vo vedách o človeku a dialóg kultúr* (Translation in the human sciences and the dialogue of cultures, Kusá and Rondzиковá 2020), already signaled how problematic the inherited umbrella term “translation of social science texts” – dating back to the foundational period of Slovak translation studies (1978) – proved to be during subsequent reflections and discussions. For this reason as well, the editors of the anthology de facto refrained from providing a precise definition of this quasi-concept, offering instead only “working coordinates” (9). From a typological perspective, they broadly describe this type of translation as a subgenre of specialized translation, the subject of which can be a literary text, or within which expressive and literary linguistic devices may be variously represented and utilized. From a content perspective, in their view, “texts related to the humanities and/or social sciences”¹ fall within the scope of the term translation of social science texts (9). From both a thematic and stylistic standpoint, they note that social science texts can thus be viewed

as borderline types of texts, since paradigms of various disciplines and different styles can intertwine within them. Last but not least, the concept of translating social science texts encompasses historically variable text types that reflect changes in the position and status of the sciences within them. This case of effectively giving up a rigid definition using inherited paradigms clearly demonstrates that if old categorizations fall apart, new ones cannot simply be built upon their ruins.

A similar definitional and conceptual problem is faced by translation historians working within the domain of philosophical thought. Crucially, until quite recently, “the history of philosophy and the history of translation have remained independent theoretical endeavours” (Castro 2014, 81–83). This does not mean, of course, that scholars have not discussed the translation of philosophical texts, but rather that historiography of philosophy has not systematically interrogated the translated status of many texts that constitute the “philosophical flatlands” for canon formation and for the emergence of hegemonic historiographical narratives (Castro 2014). This can become a major epistemological and methodological shortcoming when historians of both translation and philosophy have to deal, for example, with postcolonial philosophical traditions that are frequently (as their own practitioners admit) unoriginal or imitative by nature.

It is generally accepted that the urge to philosophize is universal; that there is a natural, essentially human need to make sense of the world and of ourselves by asking fundamental, ontological questions. It is also generally accepted that the answers to these questions – as well as the ways in which they are expressed and conceptualized through models, systems, myths, etc. – vary greatly across space and time, since philosophies are linguistically and culturally bound. As scholarship has consistently shown, this is but one of the many challenges that the translation of philosophy must address.²

However, this clash outlined between the universal and the particular (or culturally bound) lies at the very core of the problematic definition – and perhaps of the mere existence – of a distinct Hispanic American philosophical thought. Following the end of four centuries of colonial rule, Latin American intellectuals, seeking to define their cultural and political identity, began to pose a series of daunting questions: Is there, or can there be, a Hispanic American philosophy? If a particular Hispanic American thought exists, how can it be characterized? What, precisely, makes a philosophy “Hispanic American”? Furthermore, what is it that binds any philosophy to its specific circumstances? Is it the topics, the questions, the system, the methods? The answers to these questions were, of course, diverse and complex, and it is beyond the scope of this paper and the expertise of the authors to account for them in detail. What interests us now regarding this fundamental Latin American philosophical debate is that it clearly reveals the sometimes unescapable relationship between the definition and understanding of philosophy (its scope, its nature, its uses, etc.) and cultural identity and socio-historical and political conditions (Ruiz Sotelo 2020; Arpini 2024; Porciello 2025).

It was famously argued in that dispute that an original Hispanic American philosophy does not exist since it traditionally applied European philosophical systems

and models, and hence failed to concern itself with the needs and nature of American peoples – a philosophy of domination. It was also stated that an authentic Hispanic American philosophical thought would only be achieved once the structural economic and political dependence of the continent on Western hegemonic powers was definitively broken. According to this view, then, as long as such structural dependence remained, no authentic philosophical thought could ever be produced in “Nuestra America” (Salazar Bondi 1968). Simultaneously, however, another complementary perspective emerged: for a Latin American philosophy to be truly authentic, it must incorporate an awareness of this very dependence and of its peripheral condition and must remain conscious of its epistemological and structural constraints. An authentic Latin American philosophy should be produced from within the situation of dependence and oppression, evolving – as in the work of Enrique Dussel – into a “philosophy of liberation” (1975, 1984).

This fundamental philosophical Latin American postcolonial debate tells us, among other things, that unoriginality, (in)authenticity and imitation – which entail forms of reception, appropriation, and translation – can become the defining features of a philosophical tradition, as long as it is conceived of as a situated *praxis*, a form of criticism rooted in the structures and concepts it intends to question and dismantle. The theoretical and methodological call to “merge the narratives” of translation and philosophical historiography might be “the best way to tell a story that is neither a translation history nor a history of philosophy, but a story of philosophy in the making” (Castro 2014, 92; 2018).

HISTORICIZING SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES TRANSLATION

Definitions of SSH translation – or even of ostensibly clearer subsets like the translation of philosophy – span a vast spectrum. One might argue that instead of fixating on *what* is being translated (which disciplines fall into this purview, which genres are included, or how much definitional leeway exists), the focus should shift to *how* the translating is done. Or, in the context of methodological reflections such as ours, how translation must be conceptualized to fit the myriad contexts and applications within the SSH. As the aforementioned and following cases illustrate, translation within the SSH can be understood (at least) in three distinct ways:

- As a **lens** applied by scholars to understand the histories of various SSH disciplines. These scholars need not be translation scholars themselves; in fact, it is an even greater testament to the significance of translation when it is “discovered” by figures like Dimitri Gutas (1998). This strand is essentially historiographical in nature, as it addresses how disciplines emerge by way of translation, and how their fields and intellectual allegiances are forged. When translation operates as a lens, it is the primary key used to unlock historical understanding.
- As a **documented practice** encompassing linguistic policies, networks of agents, a variety of discursive genres, communication media, and linguistic and translational strategies. Often applied from the standpoint of cultural his-

tory, this approach has been essential to make sense of how ideas, practices, and concepts traveled in space and time, establishing global connections and sometimes unexpected circulations that potentially constitute languages and peoples.

- As an **internal disciplinary or transdisciplinary issue**, where scholars engage in theoretical discussions about translation to address concerns specific to their own field's identity or specificity. Essentially, this reflects how experts in different disciplines, such as sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu (see Bielsa 2024), historians (see Woodsworth 2021 for a counterexample), or philosophers, define translation according to their own methodological needs or received ideas. They often use the concept of translation to evaluate the circulation of ideas, but typically do so without fully acknowledging the actual mechanics of the translation process. Philosophers, for instance, frequently discuss translation as a means of addressing internal concerns related to disciplinary identity, the history of philosophy, or even academic life (e.g., Bednárová 2020).

However, even after “opening up” translation itself, the way forward is not always clear. Since translation is a social practice, it must be viewed in light of the agencies and networks involved in its production, operation, and impact. Therefore, our following micro case studies illustrate further potential methodological pitfalls in this regard.

MEDIATING PROFESSIONS, AGENTS, NETWORKS

When researching the translation of SSH texts, the figure of the translator requires explicit scholarly attention. Translators in this domain are rarely mere linguistic conduits; rather, their socio-professional profiles often reveal them to be historically significant actors who actively shape intellectual discourse. As demonstrated by a recent large language model-based (LLM) macro-analytical study of the *Slovník prekladateľiek a prekladateľov: vedy o človeku a kultúre* (Bednárová, Kusá, and Rybárová 2024), this specific translation field in Slovakia is deeply shaped by a complex sociology and underlying power structures (Tyšš 2026, forthcoming).⁴

The findings of this analysis revealed that the SSH translation field is heavily influenced by the Matthew Effect (Merton 1968) in the form of academic privilege. Institutional affiliation and accumulated symbolic capital disproportionately amplify a Slovak SSH translator's visibility and their chances of entering the historical record. The field operates on the principles of a “Guild”, where entry into historical consciousness is frequently mediated by what the LLM tool itself called translation “dynasties”. Within these structures, symbolic capital is either inherited or institutionally assigned, with editorial power serving a crucial gatekeeping function. Translators here do not act merely as performers, but rather as “Curators” – experts who identify valuable intellectual artifacts abroad and prepare them for local display.

Furthermore, the analysis exposed a sharp conceptual dichotomy between “Architects” and “Builders”. Academics and institutional elites are predominantly inducted into the dictionary as Architects; their contribution is evaluated based on the de-

sign of foundational conceptual and theoretical structures, even when their overall volume of translated work is low. Conversely, freelance translators and non-academic actors are perceived as Builders, whose inclusion in the canon is legitimized almost exclusively by the massive scale of their output (Tyšš 2026).

These findings confirm that the persona of the translator cannot be bypassed in the study of SSH translations. To ignore their socio-historical profile would mean overlooking the institutional habitus and structural barriers that directly dictate which texts penetrate the target culture and how they are inscribed into its history.

DE-CENTRALIZED PUBLICATION CULTURES

To illustrate further methodological challenges and show the potential of another rather under-researched area in SSH translation history, that of periodical research, we can turn to a micro-case study of *Revue svetovej literatúry* (Review of world literature). Established as the premier Slovak journal dedicated to mediating foreign literature, it operated as a crucial cultural bridge during the Cold War. Examining its output between 1965 and 1970 offers a particularly valuable empirical lens. This specific timeframe represents a highly sensitive and historically significant era in Czechoslovakia, capturing the dramatic transition from the cultural and political liberalization of the 1960s – which culminated in the Prague Spring – to the subsequent onset of “normalization” and renewed ideological censorship.

Against the backdrop of these shifting political paradigms, a quantitative probe into the journal’s content dismantles the assumption that it was merely a space for primary artistic texts. Empirical data reveals that the category of “Articles, essays” consistently dominated the journal’s output throughout this period, accounting for nearly half of all published entries and peaking at an impressive 50.6% in 1970.⁵ Coupled with a massive surge in critical reviews from 1967 onward – which routinely comprised over a third of the content – it becomes clear that the journal profiled itself primarily as an intellectual, critical, and current affairs platform. Conversely, the relative share of primarily literary texts such as poetry and prose saw a steady decline. Consequently, a closer look at the 33 most extensive texts (15 pages or more) in the analyzed corpus from 1965 to 1970 fundamentally disrupts the traditional perception of this periodical as an exclusively belletristic platform, highlighting instead a surprisingly substantial and deliberate investment in socio-humanistic translations. A significant portion of this selection consists of texts with profound socio-humanistic, philosophical, and culturological implications. The fact that the editorial board did not hesitate to sacrifice valuable and limited magazine space for long-read formats testifies to a programmatic effort to substitute for the absence of a broader discourse in the humanities within the domestic environment. Space was given to key contemporary thinkers – from the Frankfurt School neo-Marxist Theodor W. Adorno (1970) to the French Jesuit and visionary Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1968), the Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (1969), the analyst of technological and geopolitical trends Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber (1968), and the critic of popular culture Susan Sontag (1969).

The publication history of these translations fully demonstrates the specific nature of the periodical medium – its dynamism and ability to react almost immediately to current global intellectual currents, in stark contrast to the more cumbersome book production. While *Revue svetovej literatúry* published the radical essays of Susan Sontag, the writings of James Baldwin (1966), or the philosophical diary of Witold Gombrowicz (1970) at the time of their greatest global acclaim, the book reception of these works in the Czechoslovak environment was delayed for decades. The first Slovak book translation of Baldwin was not published until 1978, the works of Sontag and Gombrowicz had to wait for official publication until the 1990s after the fall of the regime, and Servan-Schreiber’s highly influential *The American Challenge*, for example, was never published in book form. Periodicals thus functioned in this era as the fastest (and for many authors the only) transfer of intellectual innovations for a long time.

The urgency and timeliness of periodical production also played a strategic role in the socio-political context of the late 1960s. In the power vacuum at the turn of the decade – when preventive censorship had already fallen, but the repressive normalization apparatus had not yet managed to fully institutionalize its control mechanisms – *Revue svetovej literatúry* managed to introduce texts with exceptionally strong subversive potential. It is significant that in 1969, the essay “Kňaz a šašo” (“Kaplan i błazen”, 1959; Eng. trans. “The Priest and the Jester”, 1962) by Leszek Kołakowski was published, just a year after he was expelled from his native Poland for critiquing Marxist philosophy. Similarly, the penetration of texts by Teilhard de Chardin, whose unorthodox works later circulated in Slovakia exclusively in samizdat and exile publishing houses (or in Czech translation within later dissident circles), or the introduction of the critical theory of Western Marxism (Adorno), prove that extensive magazine spaces did not serve merely for literary updates. They became a temporary, power-tolerated asylum for the inconvenient yet formative ideas of contemporary Europe.

ENTANGLEMENTS AND RELATIONALITY

Over the last few decades, relationality has emerged as a central tenet in translation studies, serving as both an epistemological framework and a methodological toolkit. It has been interpreted through a diverse array of approaches – ranging from systemic theories to cultural sociology, from translation norms to network theory, from social network analysis to translator agency. This centrality of relationality has been recently acknowledged and consolidated in a special issue of the journal *The Translator* (Cantó-Milà et al. 2025), which presents relationism as a “new paradigm”. In this view, “relations generate social meanings, identities, possibilities for action, imaginaries, structures, and materialities” (5): translation itself is thus best understood as an embedded social practice and a process of distributed agency.

While this recent issue focuses primarily on applying relational sociology to translation studies research, its theoretical underpinnings align somewhat closely with another productive framework recently adopted by translation history scholars working with SSH texts, in this case of a political and ideological nature: the *his-*

toire croisée (which we translate in English as “entangled history”) toolbox. Another recent special issue published in the journal *History of European Ideas* (Mannucci, Mucignat, and Perovic 2025) as a corollary to the large-scale project “Radical Translations: The Transfer of Revolutionary Culture Between Britain, France, and Italy (1789–1815)”, posits that translation offers a unique vantage point for assessing how transnationalism functions empirically as a historical practice, since translation was a form of revolutionary communication that connected and “crossed all sorts of national, political and social divides” (1238). To account for the translation network emerging from their archival and archaeological research, and to move beyond the “diffusionist model” of circulation of ideas that still prevail in many historiographical accounts on that period, the editors rely expressly on the entangled history framework as a way to offer a multi-scalar perspective – across space, time, and various media and social actors – on how translation encompassed transnational encounters “from below”. Interestingly, according to the editors this perspective offers a “geopolitically scoped” counter-narrative to the centrality of nation-states and empires in the spread of all kinds of cultural products, practices, actors, and ideas.

The choice to make use of the entangled history toolbox, however, is not justified solely by the complex, multi-layered materiality of translation, which naturally calls for a multi-scalar approach connecting the global to the local. One may indeed wonder if translation history scholars have not been making precisely this point for quite some time now, using different and not necessarily relational, connected or entangled theoretical frameworks. What is, by contrast, a distinctive feature of the *histoire croisée* toolbox is its emphasis on reflexivity. As the editors underline, “every researcher is called upon to explain and justify how the choice of one set of entanglements might preclude others. This requires a reflection not just on what is being entangled but also the ways in which our own conceptual frameworks constitute our objects of study” (1242).

We believe that this last point, which can seem speculative or vague if not properly contextualized, is of great consequence for an inherently interdisciplinary field such as the one we are dealing with. Interdisciplinarity can be, for contemporary research, both a beacon and an enigma. As curators of the present issue, we made a point – when possible and when we saw fit – to address out-of-field reviewers (i.e., not scholars of translation studies) to assess some of the papers presented. We can safely say that, on occasions, when the issue of reflexivity and researcher’s positionality is not properly addressed or conveyed, misunderstandings can arise. When disciplinary traditions are very strong, academically powerful and deeply geographically and linguistically rooted, it is not always easy to work “from the outside” and establish forms of methodologically and epistemologically entangled dialogues.

Furthermore, in addition to its inherent interdisciplinarity, SSH translation history should rely on a flexible, open-ended set of definitions regarding what translation is and how it functions historically (which is not how translation is usually viewed by out-of-field experts); it can question what defines or delimits a disciplinary field; it problematizes the depth of knowledge required to cross disciplinary boundaries, and how “out-of-field” concepts are inter-epistemically (and linguistically!) translated

to accommodate specific conceptual and methodological needs. The “entangled history” toolbox calls precisely for the integration of these (and other) questions and concerns into the historical narrative, in order to produce a coherent and self-aware interpretation of the findings and results. As its theorists state, the inquiry always shapes the object, and the characteristics of the object necessarily influence the parameters of the inquiry (Werner and Zimmermann 2003); it could be in the interest of the researcher and of his or her investigation to make room, if necessary, for this dialectic.

CONCLUSION

The inception of the present authors’ collaboration might sound like the setup to a joke: an Argentinian and a Slovak walk into a conference. While co-editing this issue and tackling the various methodological and conceptual challenges presented by the articles, we began – as historians often do – tossing cases and examples at one another to prove our points. Our disparate intellectual histories, educational paths, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds provided plenty of extreme differences, frequently revealing gaping holes in each other’s knowledge; nevertheless, strong commonalities also emerged, fostering productive dialogue and generating key new insights for our research. The disparate fragments we shared became the very foundation of our arguments. Serving also as an introduction to this special issue, the present study does not strive to offer a definitive, closed conclusion to the question of SSH translation. Instead, it deliberately presents a series of fragmented reflections – not as a scattered assortment of unrelated thoughts, but as a purposeful, open-ended mosaic. This special issue is partly the realization and result of dialogue, both among us and with the authors who participated.

Instead of rigidly defining what the humanities and social sciences *should* be and which disciplines that definition *should* encompass – merely so that we translation historians can finally write our histories about translation’s significance within them – we propose applying translation in all its multilayered phenomenology, considering its openness, contingency, distributed agency, and, indeed, its vagueness. This approach entails viewing translation simultaneously as a lens for understanding SSH histories, as a documented practice potentially shaping those histories, and as an (albeit reductively understood) issue in the debates in the various SSH disciplines, constantly adapting to the positionality, objectives, and agendas of the person doing the actual thinking (about translation).

NOTES

- ¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the present authors.
- ² This point has been made definitely by Barbara Cassin in the monumental *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: dictionnaire des intraduisibles* (2004), then *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (2014).
- ³ We use the term “Hispanic American” to make reference to a specific geographically and linguistically bound philosophical thought because many authors who participated in this debate do so, most notably Salazar Bondi (1968, 13–14).

- ⁴ To uncover these hidden patterns of canonization, the research employed the AI model NotebookLM. The choice of this specific tool was deliberate. Unlike standard large language models, which are prone to “hallucinations” when analyzing historical data, NotebookLM operates on the principle of strict grounding in the uploaded source documents. Using manually redacted entries containing only data pertaining to the translators’ biographies and professional trajectories together with a instruction file explaining necessary context and used abbreviations, NotebookLM used in this way made it possible to transform this semi-structured “flat” data into a dynamic database. Through the method of algorithmic “scaled close reading”, the model successfully identified the implicit profiling rules that determine who warrants inclusion in the canon.
- ⁵ This specific categorization into “Articles, essays” was established retrospectively by bibliographer Peter Kerlik (2005), whose comprehensive bibliography of the journal served as the primary dataset for our distant reading analysis. It is worth noting that these categories represent the bibliographer’s subsequent systematization rather than the original editorial rubrics of the journal.

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Translating the humanities and social sciences: Increased visibility, shifting boundaries

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Translating the humanities and social sciences: Increased visibility, shifting boundaries

Status of translation. Teaching humanities and social sciences translation.
Research on humanities and social sciences translation. Shifting boundaries
between translation genres. Autoethnography.

This article examines the characteristics and challenges of translating the humanities and social sciences. It reviews developments in teaching and research in social science and humanities translation, underlining various approaches or methodologies that can shed light on this area. The article also proposes an autoethnographic analysis of the author's practice as a translator, illustrating the research involved in producing a precise and readable target text. It goes on to offer some reflections on shifting boundaries between genres of translation.

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Once portrayed as a subsidiary art, translation has gained credibility with the emergence of the discipline of translation studies. An enhanced body of knowledge, including the history of translation, has increasingly shone the spotlight on translators. And yet, not all forms of translation have received equal attention, with more focus on works of literature or else sacred texts. Short shrift has often been given to work in the humanities and social sciences, whose translators and even authors have in many cases remained anonymous.

This article reviews developments in teaching and research in social science and humanities translation and sets out some of the approaches or methodologies that can shed light on this area. In addition, I draw on my own practice, offering an auto-ethnographic account that aims to illustrate the complexities of translation and delve into the shifting boundaries between genres of translation.

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

The secondary status of translation has long been conveyed in metaphorical language, often emanating from the pens of translators themselves or, more significantly, of well-known writers who were also translators. In the dedication to his 1697 translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, John Dryden, for one, depicts translators as "slaves" who "labour in another man's plantation" and as "drudges" who are merely doing their "duty" (quoted in Lefevere 1992, 24). This kind of rhetoric preceded Dryden and continues to this day. Discourse on translation has been embroidered with a host of metaphors, evoking translators who merely follow in the *footsteps* of so-called original writers.

The contemporary American author Paul Auster, who worked as a translator as a young man and maintained an interest in translation throughout his life, called translators the "shadow heroes of literature" (2007). Not unlike Dryden, however, he puts these words in the mouth of his fictional translator: "I felt like someone who had been sentenced to a term of hard labor on a chain gang" (1989, 90).¹

The field of translation studies has grown exponentially since the mid-20th century, as have undergraduate training programs and teaching at the master's and doctoral levels. With greater awareness of the important role that translation has played in the circulation of ideas, the status of translation has improved. Translation is now regarded as a fundamental driver of cultural evolution. At the same time, however, innovations in machine translation, and now artificial intelligence (AI), have had an adverse effect, relegating translation – in the minds of the wider public – to a merely mechanical operation which can be performed by something as simple and omnipresent as a mobile phone.²

In short, translation has been and continues to be underappreciated despite the advances to which we have referred. Translation scholars have generally focused on literature and sacred texts, ignoring the breadth and complexity of the social sciences and humanities. Translators, consequently, tend to remain in the shadows – sometimes to an even greater degree if they are engaged in the translation of the humanities and social sciences.

There are concrete indications, on the other hand, that the tide has turned among academics, with a growing interest in this specific field of translation. One example

is a research report published under the direction of Gisèle Sapiro (2014). Another is a special edition of the Canadian translation journal *TTR*, co-edited by René Lemieux and Patricia Godbout in 2024. Further examples can be found in this issue of *World Literature Studies*, which is based on the papers presented at a conference in Bratislava in May 2025. With a variety of voices from Eastern, Central, and Western Europe, as well as North America, with insights into multiple languages including some Indigenous ones, the conference initiated a timely and wide-ranging discussion of the past, present and future of translating social sciences and humanities, which will ultimately lead to further reflection and new publications.

THE QUESTION OF VISIBILITY: NAMING THE TRANSLATOR

Some translators have remained invisible quite simply because they are not named. It may seem mundane to quibble about whether translators are mentioned and, if so, where their name appears, but these questions, arguably, have symbolic implications.

The following observation by writer and book reviewer Leah Rachel von Essen raises the problem of the translator's invisibility. Although it pertains to translated literature, it is also relevant for our purposes: "Translated literature is on the rise, which is wonderful – but we have to make sure we are honoring the translators who work on each book. Too often, translators are considered 'invisible' contributors to the book, hidden on title pages or even in copyright sections" (2021, n.p.).

The picture is somewhat brighter in Canada, which has been described as a "paradise" and a "promised land" for translators (Delisle 1998, 360–361). Literary translators, who launched the Literary Translators' Association of Canada as early as 1975, have worked tirelessly to achieve recognition, through fair contracts and access to copyright, among other accomplishments. As a result of their advocacy, the translator's name tends to appear on the cover of a translated work of literature. In the humanities and social sciences, on the other hand, the situation is murkier.

One recent example is a book titled *Doing Democracy in "Third Places": Youth Citizenship Education*, published by a major – and bilingual – academic publisher, the University of Ottawa Press (2025). The translation from French to English is by Carmen Ruschensky, who is not only a certified translator but also holds a doctorate in translation studies. The names of the two co-authors, along with a collaborator, appear on the cover of the book; on its website, the publisher lists the co-authors, several contributors, and even an illustrator, but not the translator – whose name is provided only inside the book (Gaudet and Caron 2025).

To cite a recent setback in our alleged "paradise", the Canada Council for the Arts, which has funded literary (book) translations since 1972, made a controversial decision in 2018 to stop funding the translation of nonfiction. Translation grants were henceforth reserved for texts that were strictly "literary". Ironically, the Canada Council also administers Canada's most prestigious literary awards, named for the Governor General (and referred to as the "GGs"), in which there are several categories in both English and French: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's literature, and drama, as well as translation into both languages. Within the category of trans-

lation, all genres are considered, including nonfiction, for which there are no longer Canada Council grants.³

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES TRANSLATION: TEACHING AND RESEARCH

It is clear, nonetheless, that progress is being made with respect to humanities and social science translation. This manifests itself in different ways. First, some translation schools – although not all of them – include humanities and social sciences translation in their curriculum.

At Princeton University, the late professor David M. Bellos gave a course called “Thinking Translation” that was required in the undergraduate Certificate in Translation and Intercultural Communication. The description states:

Translation is at the heart of the humanities, and it arises in every discipline in the social sciences and beyond, but it is not easy to say what it is. This course looks at the role of translation in the past and in the world of today [...]. It aims to help students grasp the basic intellectual and philosophical problems raised by the transfer of meanings from one language to another (including in machine translation) and to acquaint them with the functions, structures and effects of translation in intercultural communication. (Princeton University 2025)

This overview encourages critical thinking about the impact of translation and sets the stage for hands-on translation.

To give another example, students in Concordia University’s master’s in translation studies (*Traductologie*) are offered a choice of practical seminars from literary to scientific and technical translation. Among the options is a seminar in translating social sciences and humanities, which I taught in 2012 and 2013. Heartened by the fact that a distinct course on this topic existed, I set out to devise a pedagogy specific to the field. I assigned practical assignments drawn from different disciplines; in some instances, I invited the author of the original text to discuss the translation process with the students. Students were also required to analyze the choices they had made in their translations. It was important, therefore, to provide theoretical material that would give them the tools to do so. This proved to be more difficult.

By this time, a vast amount of scholarly material had been generated in translation studies. Yet many of the giants of the field had taken a literary approach, building on examples from literature rather than the human and social sciences. George Steiner’s *After Babel* (1975) opens with a discussion of writers like Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and Dante, Susan Bassnett’s *Translation Studies* (1980) makes use of examples such as the Old English poem “The Seafarer”, and Gideon Toury’s descriptive translation studies is grounded in polysystem theory, which emphasizes the interplay of cultural and literary elements. Antoine Berman examines the Romantic literary movement in Germany in *L'épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique: Herder, Goethe, Schlegel, Novalis, Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Hölderlin* (1984; Eng. trans. *The Trial of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, 1992), although he does include thinkers such as Humboldt and Schleiermacher among the literary figures he discusses. When works of literature are

not the focus, sacred texts are, such as the Christian Bible in Eugene Nida's work, or the Hebrew Bible in the case of Henri Meschonnic.

It was not easy, therefore, to find suitable background reading for my students. In my bibliography, which I gave them at the time, I included a well-known essay by Immanuel Wallerstein (1981), which lays out what the author calls some "ground rules" (89) and, as he says, "reiterates some homespun truths" (97). I also used a second text, by Michael Henry Heim and Andrzej W. Tymowski (2006), who offer what they call a set of "guidelines" resulting from the Social Science Translation Project, which had involved specialized translators, university social scientists, editors, and journalists. Some helpful appendices are included, one of which reprises a fundamental question raised by Wallerstein: what kind of translator is best suited to this kind of work – a well-trained and seasoned translator, or else a subject-matter expert? Heim and Tymowski cite Wallerstein, who 25 years earlier had advocated

the creation of a body of translators specialized in the social sciences and trained in both translation techniques and social science. [...] [These translators] do not now exist. Most translation in the social sciences is done either by social scientists who are not very good as translators, or by translators with a primary background in literature rather than in social science. The results are by and large appalling... (Wallerstein 1981, 89; quoted in Heim and Tymowski 2006, 26)

I would argue that the group of specialists envisioned by Wallerstein still does not exist. The best we can do is train translators to be well-read generalists with the ability to do the specific research required to translate accurately.

In my course, students were also introduced to the question of retranslation, which has both practical and theoretical implications, using H. M. Parshley's now-notorious translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949; Eng. trans. *The Second Sex*, 1953) as a case study. In addition to Parshley's "Translator's Preface", students read the paratexts associated with Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier's revised version published more than a half century later: Judith Thurman's introduction and Borde and Malovany-Chevallier's "Translators' Note" (Beauvoir 2009). The translation of this seminal work has been the subject of numerous studies, which have emphasized the limitations of the original translation, its grievous errors at the hand of a man unfamiliar with philosophy – in particular, existentialism and nascent feminism – who was compelled by the publisher to bowdlerize the original text. While the new translators, on the other hand, restored the expurgated passages and translated more accurately, they are said to have sacrificed readability in favor of unidiomatic literalism. This interesting and complex case can shed light on the involvement of multiple actors in the translation process, and the requirement of translators to yield to the demands of other actors such as editors and publishers.

APPROACHES TO INVESTIGATING HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES TRANSLATION

The case study approach is just one of the ways of examining translation in the humanities and social sciences. With time, there has been a proliferation of studies on this subject. The following is a selection of approaches that are worth considering.

One useful perspective has been to address the transfer of important concepts, or in some cases the barriers to their transfer, as in the work of Barbara Cassin and her collaborators (2004). The humanities and social sciences are built on concepts that often defy translation, and scholars have written about their untranslatability, non-translation, and the absence of “universals”.

Another approach entails focusing on the translator. There has been a growing emphasis on the person of the translator in translation studies, previously missing from a field largely dominated by linguistic perspectives and text-based approaches – so much so that Andrew Chesterman (2009) saw fit to baptize the new subdiscipline “translator studies”. From *Translators Through History* (Delisle and Woodsworth [1995] 2012) and Jean Delisle’s collections *Portraits de traducteurs* (Portraits of [male] translators, 1999) and *Portraits de traductrices* (Portraits of [female] translators, 2002), up to the more recent collection edited by Klaus Kaindl, Waltraud Kolb, and Daniela Schlager, specifically titled *Literary Translator Studies*, the person of the translator has been placed at the “centre of scholarly investigation” (Kaindl 2021, 9).

In translator studies, investigators have typically stressed translators of literature, such as Constance Garnett, the translator of over 70 volumes of Russian literature. But this path can also help us understand the translation of works in the humanities and social sciences. In some cases, literary translators have also contributed to social sciences translation. One of the portraits in Delisle’s anthology of women translators (2002), for example, is of Eleanor Marx, who is known for her translation of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, but has also been recognized for her rendition of her father’s *Das Kapital*.⁴

Harriet Martineau is another figure who made an important contribution to the discipline of sociology through her work as a translator. Known as a social theorist and social activist, she has been recognized for her translations of Auguste Comte, who coined the term *sociologie* and is considered to be the father of sociology. Daniela Schlager, one of the co-editors of the volume on translator studies mentioned above, dedicates a chapter to Martineau in the collection (2021, 199–214).⁵

The translation of important thinkers has also led to the transfer of entire movements of thought, such as the one known as “French Theory”, which provides fertile material for investigators.⁶ Without translation, French Theory might not have massively influenced new audiences. In this case, translation was instrumental in circulating the French ideas, as well as reframing the school of thought based on its national origin.

TRANSLATORS’ MEMOIRS

When translators comment on their own work, whether in prefaces, notes, or memoirs, they naturally become more visible, giving themselves a space to reflect on their practice, the type of texts they translate, and the choices they have made. These texts can be viewed as a kind of “creative-critical research” as Delphine Grass and Lily Robert-Foley point out. Previously relegated to the margins, “invisible or couched in shadows, speaking only through the voice of another” (2024, 1),

the translator acquires a voice through their memoir, and at the same time sheds light on the process of translation.

Having reviewed some of the ways in which we can deepen our understanding of humanities and social science translation, I would now like to turn briefly to my own experience as a translator. In the spirit of writing a “microhistory” of translation, as advocated by Jeremy Munday (2014),⁷ or creating what has been called a translation memoir, I have taken an autoethnographic approach, using personal narrative combined with theoretical frameworks to make sense of my own work.⁸

As in all specialized fields, the various subdisciplines of the humanities and social sciences each makes use of terminology. Experts within each discipline employ a specialized language – labelled “jargon” in some cases – and articulate specific and distinct concepts. This relates to the question touched on earlier, raised by Wallerstein and later signaled by Heim and Tymowski: is it enough to be an experienced translator, or do you have to be a specialist in the material you are translating? I believe that it is possible for teachers to share techniques and tactics with students. With time, trainees will be able to recognize what they do not know and will learn to research the terminology and concepts specific to the field they are working in. I base this conviction on my own work, which led me to tackle specialized areas with which I was unfamiliar at the outset, but which ultimately resulted in translations meeting the dual criteria of accuracy and readability.⁹

In recent years, I have translated two works of nonfiction and two novels. The first major work of nonfiction I translated was Pierre Anctil’s *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* (2017; Eng. trans. *History of the Jews in Quebec*, 2021). Next, I took on the translation of Marc-André Éthier and David Lefrançois’s *Mondes profanes: Enseignement, fiction et histoire* (2018; Eng. trans. *Bringing History to Life: Teaching Fact and Fiction*, 2025). During the same period (2021–2025), I also translated the Romanian-Canadian Felicia Mihali’s novel *Le pays du fromage* (originally published in Romanian as *Țara brânzei* [Land of cheese], 1999; French trans. 2002; Eng. trans. *A Ramshackle Home*, 2023) and the Lebanese-Canadian Abba Farhoud’s novel *Le bonheur à la queue glissante* (1998; Eng. trans. *Happiness Has a Slippery Tail*, 2025).¹⁰ This has given me an understanding of the similarities and differences between the two types of translation.

TRANSLATING PIERRE ANCTIL, *HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN QUEBEC*

Anctil is an award-winning historian who has also translated poetry, memoirs, and journalistic and archival material from Yiddish to French. Translation has been vital to his work as a researcher and scholar, enabling him to draw on English, French and Yiddish sources. The remarkable confluence of translation and historical scholarship enriched his output as a historian, but it also had a bearing on my own task as a translator. I conducted my research of relevant terminology not simply by consulting print and online reference books like dictionaries and other terminological material, but also by reading sources in English referred to by the author. When in doubt, I prefer to consult an expert, in this case the author. Anctil is not just proficient in English,

but as a translator, he has an understanding of translation problems. We engaged in extensive discussions, which – interestingly – sometimes resulted in the author’s realization that the original was unclear or even incorrect. Translators can sometimes be good editors.

Texts in the social sciences and humanities often blend scientific analysis with literary expression. Rhetorical devices, metaphorical language, and stylistic nuances are introduced and shape the reader’s interpretation. Inspired by the poetry and colorful memoirs of the Yiddish-speaking population in early 20th-century Montreal, Anctil has perhaps been more inclined than other historians to couch his historical narrative in a literary voice, and to make more frequent use of stylistic flourishes than the average social science and humanities scholar.

It is important to note, though, that rhetorical or literary elements are not simply embellishments; they can in fact be integral to the argumentation in many humanities texts. To support this proposition, we can refer to an earlier study of metaphor, which argues that metaphors are not merely decorative or ornamental, but can also be “theory-constitutive” (Boyd 1979). It is also true that different languages and academic traditions have divergent conventions for blending scientific analysis with literary elements.

I offer a small sample of the translation. In the following excerpt, the author has drawn on the memoirs of the editor of a Montreal daily newspaper published in Yiddish, the lingua franca of the Jewish population of the day. The editor recalls that their offices were overrun by people seeking all kinds of advice and preventing the newspaper staff from getting on with their real work. The effect is theatrical or cinematic in that the reader can visualize the scene and even hear the chatter – the kind of writing, in short, that is more characteristic of literature than a work of social science:

Sans cesse, les immigrants font irruption dans la salle de rédaction ou dans les bureaux de la direction, pour y réclamer des conseils [...]. Ils [les journalistes] étaient sans cesse distraits dans leur travail par les demandes des uns et des autres ou plongés dans des dilemmes cornéliens touchant la réunion de familles éloignées par la distance ou affectées par la désertion de maris adultères. (Anctil 2017, 112)

Immigrants continuously burst into the newsroom or the editorial offices, seeking advice [...]. They [the newspaper staff] were continuously distracted from their real work by these kinds of demands, or else drawn into the moral dilemmas of families who wished to be reunited with loved ones in distant lands or of women deserted by adulterous husbands. (Anctil 2021, 89)

When translating from French to English, it has been important to capture the stylistic elements, while bearing in mind that Anglo-American academic writing tends to favor clarity and concision over literary embellishment. Thus, translating the humanities and social sciences requires more than linguistic fluency; it demands sensitivity to the interplay between style and substance. The ideal translation maintains the author’s intellectual depth while adapting rhetorical features to suit the expectations of the target audience.

TRANSLATING MARC-ANDRÉ ÉTHIER AND DAVID LEFRANÇOIS, *BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE*

A collection of essays written by different people in divergent styles, Éthier and Lefrançois's *Bringing History to Life* had enjoyed some success and had already been reprinted in a second French edition. The book's premise was compelling: popular media such as video games, historical fiction, re-enactments, and graphic novels can be used to teach history, provided that students learn how to distinguish fact from fiction. This pedagogical approach fosters historical thinking, which leads to the development of sound critical thinking about societal issues in general.

Written in French, there were naturally numerous references to material in the French language, which had to be translated into English. But because of the subject matter (American feature films, for example), there were many references to material that was originally in English and had been translated into French for the publication. It was important to track these down so that citations were quoted from the original works, rather than being my translation of a translation. I read as much as I could in English, as I had done with the Anctil translation, so I could familiarize myself with the concepts and thereby come up with the most appropriate terminology and expressions in English.

The essays in the book covered different historically themed media: from films and television series to video games such as *Civilization*, *Assassin's Creed*, and *Minecraft*, to name only a few examples. Other chapters dealt with museum exhibitions, historic sites and monuments, and built heritage. Although I enjoy visiting museums, in addition to being a consumer of historical literature, I was unfamiliar with much of the content: in particular, I had never played a video game in my life. In addition, the writing was sometimes repetitive, and not always clear. As I completed each chapter, I sent a list of questions to one of the co-editors, who responded promptly and courteously. However, as he was not fully proficient in English, he could not provide precise terminology or phraseology; instead, he paraphrased the unclear sections in French.

The two books of nonfiction deal with history – which falls within both humanities and social sciences, and which cuts across a range of fields, from the arts to more “scientific” or number-heavy areas like demographics. Even the scholarly apparatus – including notes, references, and bibliography – requires a kind of “translation” since the format, right down to capitalization and punctuation, changes from one language to another.

SHIFTING BOUNDARIES

From my experience in translating fiction, precise terminology also matters in literature. In Mihali's *A Ramshackle Home*, which takes place in Romania, I was frequently on the hunt for *le mot juste* to describe the architecture of the dilapidated house in question and document the variety of weeds that had taken over the abandoned garden. Farhoud's *Happiness Has a Slippery Tail*, which recounts the experience of Lebanese immigrants to Quebec, required research on certain aspects of Lebanese culture, including Arabic proverbs. In translating such works, it is important

to conduct the research required to transfer the substance set out by the original author (by translating the concepts, using appropriate terminology, and conveying as much factual material as can possibly be carried across linguistic and cultural borders). But it is equally important to convey the author's tone and artistry. Examples such as these serve to blur the way in which texts are categorized. Previously, "scientific" texts were viewed as essentially "communicative" or "informational", and their meaning thought to be more important than capturing the style or aesthetics of the text. Literary texts, in contrast, were to have an "expressive" function, with less attention paid to what could be deemed research.

In *History is a Contemporary Literature* (2018), which purports to be a "manifesto" for the social sciences, Ivan Jablonka makes a case for historiography that unashamedly incorporates the skills, creativity, and imagination of writers. Inventiveness, according to the author, comes into play from the outset, reflected in the way data is collected and interrogated. Writers have always been at the forefront of historical research, showing that the habits, customs, and lives of ordinary people can be the focus of the historian's attention. Literature, Jablonka goes on to argue, can still occupy a place among the heuristic techniques available to historians. However, he draws the line at invented and unproven facts.

There is an argument to be made, finally, for regarding all translation – whether of social sciences and humanities texts or of literary ones – as involving both research and creation. This can help to upend the long-standing view of translation as a subordinate art or craft – one that persists in academic circles where the practice of translation is undervalued in relation to more conventional forms of scholarship.

NOTES

- ¹ In this case, interestingly, the translation is not literary but instead about the reorganization of an office. The translator is doing it for the money, although he derives pleasure from its challenges.
- ² Declining enrolments in translation schools, in Canada at least, have been attributed to the AI effect.
- ³ *History of the Jews in Quebec* (2021) was not eligible for a Canada Council translation grant, although I did obtain (less generous) funding from the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. In 2022, I received a GG from the Canada Council for this translation, which they had not funded.
- ⁴ See also Apter 2008.
- ⁵ Much work has been done on women translators recently, moving away from viewing women as subordinate and thus engaged in the inferior activity of translation, to affirming the significance and power of translation. See Brown 2022.
- ⁶ See Cusset 2008, for example.
- ⁷ Munday proposes that a "microhistory" of translation and translators be undertaken to provide insights into the "conditions, working practices and identity of translators and [...] their interaction with other participants in the translation process." This kind of "small-scale" investigation is fruitful because it can "shed light on the bigger picture of the history of translation" (2014, 64–65).
- ⁸ When asked whether translation theory can "help" to make translating easier, my reflex is to answer that it cannot; on the other hand, theoretical concepts can help to describe the translation process. I have attempted to do so in a "translator's note" (Woodsworth 2021), in an article, about the same translation, foregrounding the unique profile of the author as "translator-historian" (2021), and in a related piece specifically labelled a translation "memoir" (Woodsworth 2024).

- ⁹ In my early years as a professional translator, I worked at the Department of National Defence, where I dealt with a vast variety of technical subjects – ranging from battleships to chemical and biological warfare, from marching bands to lawsuits and regimental dinners.
- ¹⁰ As an immigrant to Canada (of Hungarian descent), I have been interested in what is called *littérature migrante* – literature by and about immigrants. Canada is home to significant numbers of New Canadians, who sometimes write in their mother tongue and then self-translate their work into one of the official languages (Felicia Mihali, for example, wrote in Romanian and then translated her work into French); alternatively, some elect to write directly in either French or English (as did Abba Farhoud, for example). Their writing, in all cases, bears the traces of their background and contains occurrences of multilingualism, which contributes to the challenges faced by the translator.

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Translation and the making of history: The objectification of Mao Zedong

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Translation and the making of history: The objectification of Mao Zedong

Objectification. Translation and history. Translation and knowledge.

Translation of Mao Zedong. Academic paratext and translation.

This study looks at translations of Mao Zedong produced as part of the Mao Writings Project (MWP) at Brown University in order to explore how translation, as a step in the production of global historical knowledge, transforms authors and their texts into historical objects. As the MWP's editors and translators instrumentalise Mao for their own historical purposes, the historical narratives that Mao sought to establish in his writings are undermined and even supplanted, and what he says, in both substance and style, comes to reflect the sensibilities and priorities of his translators.

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Umberto Eco famously said that “the language of Europe is translation” (1993; quoted in Wolf 2014, 225). The same could easily be said of world history. Our knowledge of the world beyond the limits of our own language abilities is always, one way or another, mediated by translation. History itself is increasingly seen as a form of translation: if the past is “a foreign country” (Burke 2005, 3), then understanding it necessitates an “act of translation” (Alonzi 2023, 1). On a more practical level, translation is a necessary step in the transfer of knowledge about events, people and ideas from one language context to another. This is a topic in which there has been growing interest. A recent volume on the role of translation in the transmission of scientific knowledge – to which the present special edition might be deemed complimentary – notes Mona Baker’s observation that the role of translation as “a core mechanism for the production and circulation of all forms of knowledge” has “received relatively limited attention in translation studies to date” (Baker, quoted in Sumillera et al. 2020, 1). The present paper contributes to this growing literature by considering translation as a ‘core mechanism’ in the creation of historical knowledge. It explores translation’s embeddedness in historical processes by looking at the translations of Mao Zedong produced by the Mao Writings Project (MWP) at Brown University in the 1970s and 1980s.

This paper argues that translation in the service of history can operate as a form of objectification, which I term historical objectification. Historical objectification refers to the process by which a historical subject – an actor from history possessing their own autonomy – becomes a historical object. The term ‘objectification’ has its origins in feminism and the concept of sexual objectification (Nussbaum 1995, 249) but has evolved into a term that describes any process by which a “target” – normally a human being – is made into “a tool for one’s own purpose” (Gruenfeld et al. 2008, 112). In her seminal paper on the term, Nussbaum details several concepts associated with objectification, three of which are relevant for the concept of historical objectification. The first, *instrumentality*, describes how an ‘objectifier’ treats an ‘object’ as “a tool of his or her purposes.” The second, *inertness*, describes how the object is treated as “lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.” Finally, *violability* describes how the objectifier “treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into” (1995, 257). This paper shows how, in the pursuit of their scholarly goals, the editors and translators at the MWP treated Mao and his writings as inert, violable and instrumentalisable.

Objectification is often seen as a purely negative phenomenon, an “instrument of subjugation whereby the needs, interests, and experiences of those with less power are subordinated to those of the powerful” (Gruenfeld et al. 2008, 111). While Nussbaum sympathises with this perspective, she allows that objectification “has features that may be either good or bad, depending upon the overall context” (251). My view of historical objectification in translation is not entirely pejorative, seeing both history and translation as vital for the expansion of knowledge. Still, the definition by Gruenfeld et al. is worth reflecting on. In the MWP translations, the ‘powerful’ are the editors of the project who chose how to translate and present Mao’s works. Mao’s ‘needs and interests’ are expressed to a degree in the source texts, but it is unlike-

ly they were considered at any stage of the MWP. The power imbalance between translator and subject, though context-dependent, is real. The needs of the objectifier always supersede those of the object. This does not mean that the editors and translators of the MWP mistreated Mao when they historicised him. The historical process has its own valid ends.

This paper is organized into three parts. The first part provides an overview of the MWP, its origins, and its objectives. The second part looks at the role of paratext in presenting an alternative subjectivity alongside Mao's 'own words', and explores the reframing effect this has on his representation. The third part considers the translated text itself, illustrating how emergence from within a particular disciplinary context affects the way language is used, and therefore how Mao speaks. Taken together, these observations show how objectification occurs: As Mao's voice is mediated by the translator's voice, and as editorial interventions establish a critical perspective on Mao and his work, he is reconfigured – at least in part – as a historical object.

THE MAO WRITINGS PROJECT AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

The MWP was an ambitious scholarly project that sought to compile, translate, and annotate the entire corpus of Mao's works from the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. The project was the brainchild of Michael Y. M. Kau, a professor of political science at Brown University, whose goal was to create a resource for "systematic scholarly research" (Kau and Leung 1986, xxviii). The project began optimistically. The first volume, published in 1986, outlined plans to publish "a comprehensive set of six volumes" which were to be published within two and a half years (xxxi). By the time the second volume was published four years later, in 1992, this had been revised to eight volumes. In the end, only two volumes were published as financial support for the project ran out, along with the energies of the remaining contributors. Despite the project never being completed, the two volumes left by the MWP are impressive achievements, providing new translations of around 750 texts spanning from 1949 to 1957, with extensive notes, cross-references, and comprehensive bibliographic information. The volumes are still found on the shelves of research libraries across the world, and remain informative and usable guides to the writings of Mao Zedong in the early years of the PRC.

In an interview I conducted with Michael Kau (2023), he explained to me the inspiration behind the MWP. Kau had the idea for the project in the early 1970s. At the time, China was still in the throes of the Cultural Revolution, a "chaotic period" in which scholars looking at China from abroad often lacked the resources to fully comprehend what was happening there. Kau was particularly struck by the fact that Chinese political movements in the 60s and 70s "always cited Mao's quotations." Noting the importance of Mao as a revolutionary figure, Kau wanted to know not only the complete and unabridged contents of Mao's writings, but how his writings were being used, and the extent to which they could be considered "political manipulation or propaganda" (2023). The volumes' introduction describes how "texts were invariably selected and edited by the dominant political group of the day to reflect and support its own ideological orientation and policy positions" (Kau and Leung

1986, xxvii). Addressing this inadequacy was a core goal of the project. The project was also motivated by a fascination with Mao, the “revolutionary theorist” who “dominated the stage of China’s Communist revolution and socialist experiment” (xxv). For Kau and Leung, Mao was “the twentieth century’s most powerful symbol of political and philosophical radicalism” (xxv). Understanding Mao and his ideas was seen as the key to understanding “new China”, in which they represented “the dominant political and ideological force” (xxv). This understanding of Mao and his importance no doubt impacted how his works were understood and translated.

When it comes to ideology, the editors at the MWP tend to fall into the trap described by the critical linguist Teun A. van Dijk, wherein “few of ‘us’ [...] describe our own belief systems or convictions as ‘ideologies.’ On the contrary, Ours is the Truth, Theirs is the Ideology” (1998, 2). When I asked Kau whether there might have been any motivating or unifying ideology among participants, he interpreted the word ‘ideology’ as being exclusively applicable to Chinese communists rather than Western academics, replying “there were no political activists who were very pro-Maoist,” since “Western political values are more about academic freedom and independence” (2023). When prompted to consider his own convictions, Kau is candid. He describes his “consistent value orientation” as in favour of “fundamental liberal values” such as personal freedoms and human rights, though he emphasises that he is “not a political activist”. Asked what the main values of the project were, Kau responds without hesitation: “intellectual values” (2023). For Kau, the scholar works in a sanctified space, free from obligations, political or otherwise, to anything but the truth.

Maria Tymoczko has argued against the possibility of such an “in between”, arguing that the necessity of “affiliation and collective action” in all forms of cultural engagement means that translators are “all too committed to a cultural framework” (2014, 201). This comment surely applies as readily to scholars as it does to translators. The MWP was based at an elite American university, a geopolitical and institutional setting that tied the project to a specific cultural milieu. Part of that cultural inheritance was a belief in Enlightenment values, like the power of rational enquiry to illuminate the world. Another part of it, arguably, was a subscription to the “liberal values” espoused by Kau. The MWP was active at the height of the Cold War, in the prosperous northeast of a global superpower embroiled in an ideologically charged confrontation with Communism in Europe and Asia. All of these factors put the editors and translators of the MWP at odds with Mao and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), both intellectually and politically. The present work suggests that Mao’s objectification is more a consequence of the historical process than a reflection of anyone’s agenda, political or otherwise. Still, the ethico-political distance between Mao and his translators cannot be ignored, and forms an important backdrop for this paper’s observations.

PART 1: THE PARATEXT

The MWP translations are nested within layers of paratext, preceded by introductory comments and followed by supplementary notes. Connections between texts

are made through cross-references in notes. The texts are arranged in strict chronological order, and are often given new titles, or reorganised to present commonly excerpted passages in their original context. All of this serves to impose a new order on Mao's works, corralling his writings into a formation that fulfils the vision of the editors.

With its copious annotations, the MWP continues a tradition of many centuries of academic practice. According to Anthony Grafton "footnotes were 'created' as an academic device by historians and philosophers, with the years around 1700 forming a decisive watershed before [their] rapid spread" (1997, viii, 131; quoted in Claridge and Wagner 2020, 70). The use of footnotes in this era had an ethical dimension that, arguably, still resonates today. Demonstrations of a scholar's erudition, rigor, and transparency, they represented "outward and visible signs of inward grace" (Grafton 1994, 57), as records of the scholar's critical reflection on their work.

Another way of viewing scholarly paratext is to see it as an authoritative narrative intervention, or even as a way of 'talking over' historical sources or translatorial source texts. Esther Allen, writing in the context of translation, describes paratext as "a crucial demonstration of [...] authority" (2013, 212). A well-grounded sense of authority is particularly associated with academic translation. A relevant case study is provided in Alison Martin's (2006) paper on the translation into German of George Keate's *Account of the Pelew Islands* by the scientist Georg Forster. In Martin's telling, the most striking thing about the scientist's footnotes is their "destabilizing intent towards the text" (2006, 201), as he uses footnotes to "call key aspects of the account into question" (200), and "impress on the reader the authenticity of [his] knowledge" (190). These tendencies of academic paratext, of elevating the voice of the scholar and destabilizing the text, are well represented in the MWP. The paratext is a place where Mao's voice is absent, and where the MWP's scholars have free reign to (re)frame and supplement his works in whatever way they choose.

In this section, I focus on two categories of paratextual intervention. The first is the provision of contextual information that provides for readers a framework in which to interpret Mao's words. The second is the provision, through various means, of counternarrative, or the inclusion of details that contradict the narratives presented by Mao in his original speeches.

Notes providing context tend to complicate Mao's narratives, dragging his claims through the mire of a complex reality. Mao's preferred ways of viewing or discussing certain subjects, discourses constructed and maintained not just in isolated texts but across the entirety of the Party's communications, are vulnerable to confrontation with inconvenient facts. A good case study into this phenomenon is the "Directive of the CPC Central Committee on Work in Tibet". This was a message Mao sent to the Central Committee of the CCP on April 6, 1952, discussing how Tibet was to be brought under the control of the Party after their victory in the Chinese Civil War. The directive concerns itself with practical, bureaucratic matters, discursively normalising China's occupation, and reflecting a sense that Chinese presence in Tibet was legitimated not only by history, but by the recognition of ordinary Tibetans. This idea is captured in a 1954 internal Party report on Tibet: "Tibet and the motherland

have had a close, inseparable relationship [...] Tibet is one part of the territory of our great motherland” (quoted in Goldstein 2007, 21). Throughout Mao’s directive, he reiterates the idea that Tibetans are receptive to Chinese rule, and a faith in the idea that “the Tibetan masses will gradually draw closer to us” (MWP vol. 1, 256).¹ However, certain facts challenge this narrative. By 1950, Tibet had been a de facto independent state for around 35 years, during which time Tibetan elites had become increasingly “influenced by British customs” and developed a preference for the English language over Chinese (Goldstein 2007, 21). Before Tibet’s ‘liberation’ in the early 1950’s, the Dalai Lama’s government in Lhasa drafted plans to send diplomatic missions to Britain and the United States, among other countries, to request assistance in maintaining their independence (276). These facts reflect that, while Chinese rule was normalised and accepted under Qing and Guomindang rule, there was a nascent Tibetan national identity with the potential to upset Beijing’s narratives.

After a period of uncertainty following the Communist victory over the Guomindang, Tibet was brought under control with the ‘Seventeen-Point Agreement’, a controversial agreement signed by the Tibetan government – under intense “diplomatic and military pressure” (20) – accepting Chinese rule in Tibet. As part of the agreement, a Tibetan Military Region was established, and Tibet was occupied by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). In his directive to the Central Committee, when discussing how the army should proceed, Mao draws a comparison with recent military activity in a neighbouring region, Xinjiang: “Even when our army units under Wang Zhen entered Xinjiang, they focused all their efforts on practicing meticulous and careful budgeting, and on self-reliance and self-sufficiency in production” (MWP vol. 1, 255). Here is the corresponding footnote:

3. In October 1949, the First Division of the First Field Army of the PLA moved in Xinjiang under Commander Wang Zhen (see text Nov 14, 1949, note 4). It carried out Mao’s directive issued in December of that year [...]. PLA troops [...] began to enter Tibet on the mission of “liberating” the region in the spring of 1950 [...]. (257–258n3; emphasis mine)

One intervention here is a clear statement of the fact that the military activities in question were under the command of Chairman Mao. Even though the Chinese military was under Mao’s direct control at this time, the construction “our army units under Wang Zhen” (255) de-emphasises this fact. The contextual note recentres Mao. Mao did not necessarily deliberately seek to downplay his role in the occupation of Xinjiang, but the editors did deliberately choose to highlight it. Also significant are the inverted commas that they place around the word ‘liberating’. *Jiefang*, or liberation, was the official term for China’s occupation of regions like Tibet and Xinjiang. By placing it in inverted commas, the editors demonstrate scepticism towards the official use of the term and imply a different reality: military invasion and occupation. These interventions highlight certain facts about the Chinese military occupation that Mao chose not to. Even subtle editorial interpolations serve to flesh out the narrative for the benefit of the MWP’s readers.

Nearby translation choices, and the contextual information they elicit, contribute to this effect. In the same directive on Tibet, the MWP translates the term *guannei* as follows:

PPH: 新疆和关内汽车畅达 (61)

MWP: Motor vehicles travel freely between Xinjiang and “China Proper.”⁴ (vol. 1, 255)

The translation by itself is interesting, as the phrase ‘China Proper’, – which in the context of the speech obviously does not include Xinjiang – suggests that everything outside is not really China. The appended note provides a fuller explanation of the term’s meaning, history, and implications:

4. Mao uses the term *guannei* here, which we have translated as “China Proper.” Literally the term means “within the passes.” This refers to fortified passes along the Great Wall, such as Shanhaiguan at the extreme eastern tip of Hebei Province and Yanmenguan in northern Shaanxi Province, which have traditionally been invasion routes taken by tribes on China’s northern frontiers. (vol. 1, 258n4)

This information ties the term *guannei* into a historical context where modern Xinjiang was not part of China. Even on its own, the term *guannei* seems loaded with the sense of civilization within and barbarism beyond. Terms like “fortified passes” and “invasion routes” suggest a history marked by violent struggle. The picture this paints of relations between China and Xinjiang, of a central power with a centuries-long history of conflict with the barbarians on its periphery, casts a particular light on China’s presence in Tibet in the 20th and 21st centuries.

One thing that increases the significance of these translations is that the directive on Tibet was featured in Volume V of Mao’s *Selected Works*, meaning it was at one point seen as a key canonical text. This volume received an official translation into English by the Foreign Languages Press (FLP), with the MWP version being a deliberate retranslation. Because of this, one can see what an officially sanctioned version of the translation might look like. The term *guannei*, which the MWP translates as “China Proper”, is translated by the FLP as “the heartland of the country” (73). The difference in sympathy and/or perception revealed by these two translations is clear. The FLP translation conveys nothing of the troubled history discussed in the preceding paragraphs, and it discursively figures Xinjiang as inside rather than outside. Not being a scholarly work, the FLP translation is free of critical paratextual interventions. The text is allowed to speak for itself.

Another destabilising feature of the paratext is the provision of counternarratives that contradict or undermine what Mao is saying. Sometimes this takes the form of an allusion to the existence of multiple narratives. In the directive on Tibet, a note giving a brief account of the PLA’s activities in Tibet ends with two references for further reading. The first is the *Renmin Shouce*, or “The People’s Handbook” (1952), which provides what the note describes as “a PRC description”. The second is H. E. Richardson’s *Tibet and its History* (1962), which is described as “an ‘opposition’ description” (MWP vol. 1, 258n3). The allusion to multiple narratives reminds readers that Mao’s account of events is only one version, and probably, all things considered, not an entirely accurate one.

Elsewhere, Mao’s one-sided versions of events are balanced out with the ‘other side’ of the story, especially when Mao is on the attack against political opponents. Notes on Mao’s barbed comments often unveil messy internecine struggles. For example, in “US Imperialism is a Paper Tiger”, Mao refers to “Right deviation-

ist errors of line” (vol. 2, 87), naming Gao Gang as one of the guilty parties. Via cross-reference, the MWP notes direct readers to a detailed history of the “Gao Gang – Rao Shushi affair” (vol. 1, 542n1) over several notes, including a brief history of the political careers of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi in which the degree of prominence they enjoyed is discussed. Gao, for instance, was a politburo member and chairman of the State Planning Commission (vol. 1, 543n7). The notes claim that Gao and Rao were accused of “lobbying for Gao to become first Party Secretary, vice-chairman of the PRC, and premier of the State Council when Mao was on inspection tours outside the capital”, and of trying to organize a “joint letter asking Mao to relinquish power” (vol. 1, 543n7). The paratextual account suggests that Gao and Rao were purged for posing a threat to Mao and his leadership. One is left with the impression that Mao’s most pointed criticisms are for men who were once his rivals.

This is in stark contrast to Mao’s preferred ‘official’ version of events, which he makes clear in the “Opening Speech at the National Conference of the CPC” (March 21, 1955). In Mao’s telling, the “Gao Gang – Rao Shushi anti-Party affair” was of much broader import: It was “an acute manifestation of the present stage of fierce class struggle in our country,” and its main purpose was to “blaze the path for the restoration of counterrevolution” (MWP vol. 1, 528). The fact that Gao and Rao’s opposition was directed at Mao personally is deliberately occluded. Unlike some of the occlusions discussed in the above section on Tibet, this omission is pointed, deliberate, and politically crucial.

The overall effect of presenting alternative narratives alongside Mao and the Party’s official narratives is to remind readers that ‘official’ does not mean ‘true’. Mao’s demolishing of his political rivals is an exemplary “unequal encounter” (Cunico and Munday 2007, 141). By giving voice to the ‘other side’ in these encounters, the MWP translation undermines the sense of righteousness and authority that pervades Mao’s speeches in their original context. By bringing readers’ attention to the existence of competing narratives, they caution against viewing the version of history presented by Mao as neutral, objective, or even true.

PART 2: THE TRANSLATION

Having looked at the paratextual framing of Mao’s writings, I now move to consider the translated texts themselves. In this section, I look at how the translations produced by the MWP – ostensibly representations of Mao’s voice – are shaped by their academic origins. I start by considering the style of the MWP translations, which affects Mao’s tone and moderates his messages. I then consider the impact of the translations’ emergence from a disciplinary context, reflected in the scope and reflexivity of their language.

The MWP translations have a distinctive style that reflects more the concerns and predispositions of the translators than Mao himself. They show a preference for careful, measured, and neutral language, as well as a pervasive sense of meticulousness. One textual feature that provides an insight into this meticulousness is the use of square brackets, which are frequently used for the purpose of explica-

tion, or for enabling literal translations to function coherently. In a speech from March 1956 entitled “Speed Up the Socialist Transformation of Handicrafts”, in which Mao issues directives on the collectivization of small industry, the MWP translation uses 46 square brackets across two pages (vol. 2, 28–29). As an example of how they are employed, consider the following passage: “The First Five-Year Plan³ set [the goals] low, [and] we suffered some losses. It is not necessary to alter [the plan] at present, but you must get a grip on [this problem] in your work” (28). The ubiquity of these brackets, and their visual impact, strongly establishes the “discursive presence” (Hermans 2014, 287) of the translators, while impeding the natural flow of the text.

The preference for more measured language is harder to demonstrate, manifested as it is across innumerable understated shifts. In the following passages, I focus on two examples where the MWP translation softens the meaning of the original, with repercussions for how Mao’s views and temperament are portrayed.

The tendency towards measured language has a noticeable impact on Mao’s discourse about two defeated rivals, Wang Ming and Li Lisan, in the speech “Reinforce the Unity of the Party and Carry Forward the Party Traditions”, which Mao gave at the first preparatory meeting for the Eighth National Congress of the CPC in August 1956. Wang Ming is the pseudonym of Chen Shaoyu, a leader of a “Returned Students” faction made up of party members who had studied in the Soviet Union (vol. 1, 374n23). Chen was at one point an influential figure within Chinese Communism and was even the General Secretary of the CCP for a period in 1931. However, by the early 1940s he had been stripped of his authority by the Maoist leadership, and became a “leading target of CCP historians”, who “charged him with responsibility for crucial errors in policy during the early 1930s” (Klein and Clark 2014, 127). Mao details Wang Ming’s response to his prosecution, including an attempt to retract a confession:

PPH: 但是, 后头我跟他谈话, 他又翻了[...] (300)

MWP: Yet when I talked with him later, he had changed [his position] (vol. 2, 115)

Here the combination of the explicative square bracket and the neutral word ‘change’ serve to make Wang’s flip-flopping – which Mao is critical of – seem more reasonable. On the very next page, Mao justifies the toppling of Wang and Li by connecting them to a wider social contagion, or as Mao (via the MWP) puts it, they “are not isolated individuals, but rather represent quite a large portion of the petty bourgeoisie” (vol. 2, 116). Mao goes on to condemn said petty bourgeoisie as ‘opportunists’, at one point saying that they are liable to *fakuang*, which might be translated as ‘go insane’:

PPH: [...] 高兴起来可以发狂 [...] (302)

MWP: When they are happy they can be delirious [...] (vol. 2, 116)

Translating *fakuang* as ‘be delirious’ is a very mild choice, particularly when paired with ‘happy’, as the collocation ‘deliriously happy’ in English has pleasant associations with no implication of insanity. This softening of the edges must be understood in the context of a passage meant to permanently condemn a political rival.

The impact of such translation decisions is small when taken case-by-case, but over the course of a text they alter Mao's tone, and, therefore, his message.

The academic context of the project has implications for the translation beyond its style. As discussed above, Tymoczko sees translators as "embedded in and committed to a specific cultural and social framework and agenda" (2014, 199). She defines a translation's "place of enunciation", as "an ideological positioning as well as a geographical or temporal one" (183). This could easily be expanded to include other 'places' associated with forms of enunciation, like subcultural groups or social classes. The present section undertakes such an expansion, considering the MWP's disciplinary and broader academic context as a 'place of enunciation' for its translations. This positionality is reflected in disciplinary preoccupations, and in a heightened focus on the object of their scholarly efforts, Mao Zedong.

I start with an example that shows how the political focus of the MWP's translators causes them to render a statement of Mao's as explicitly political, when originally it was only obliquely so. The translation in question is of *zongpaizhuyi* as "factionalism":

PPH: 还有另外一个东西,叫宗派主义。(297)

MWP: There is another thing; it is called factionalism. (vol. 2, 113)

This decision represents a subtle, but definite, shift in meaning. *Zongpaizhuyi* is more readily expressed as "sectarianism", with the concept of "factionalism" arguably better indicated by *paixizhuyi*.² Terms like 'faction' and 'factionalism' are primarily used in political contexts: In the Corpus of Contemporary American English, the most frequent nominal collocate for 'factionalism' is 'party', and the most frequent adjectival collocate is 'political'.³ The word 'faction' is normally used to describe splits within parties or political movements. To understand the significance of this translation decision, we need to look at the argument Mao was constructing when he introduced the concept of *zongpaizhuyi*. Mao's discussion of sectarianism /factionalism occupies one paragraph in a long speech entitled "Strengthen Party Unity and Carry Forward Party Traditions". Mao's rhetorical approach is to speak in broad, universal terms, as though to invoke the sense of an inviolable natural law, before narrowing his focus to his own political reality. The point of this approach is to confer legitimacy on his political theories. By opting for a context-specific, rather than general, term, the MWP translation fails to present Mao's argument on his terms. One reason for the shift may have been that, as political scientists and historians of China, the translators at MWP were focused on the significance of Mao's arguments in political terms.

A similar shift in focus can be observed in the phenomenon of introduced reflexivity, where translators emphasize the relationship of objects and events to Mao and the Party, often by inserting words like 'we' that relate the contents of a speech back to Mao and his audience. A passage from "Speech at the Second Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee" (November 15, 1956) illustrates how sustained shifts towards reflexivity can alter the focus of Mao's discourse. In one three-paragraph passage (vol. 2, 167), the MWP translation uses the word 'we' nine times. The source-text passage from which it was translated contains only five mentions of *wo* or *women*,

the equivalent terms in Chinese (PPH 322–323). While this is only a small increase, it reflects an observable tendency to take phrases that could be universal in scope and make them about Mao and the Party. In these paragraphs, Mao talks about communists in other countries criticising China’s idea of the “mass line”, saying in response: *meiyou banfa* (PPH 323). This translates, roughly, to “there’s nothing to be done about it,” but the MWP translation makes it reflexive: “there’s nothing we can do about it” (vol. 2, 167). Similarly, when Mao claims that following the ‘mass line’ is something the CCP learned from Lenin and Stalin, the MWP translation is reflexive: “things we learned from them” as a translation of *cong tamen nali xuelai de* (PPH 323). The paragraph ends with a final introduced reflexivity, as the phrase *fenqing diwo* is translated as “distinguish between the enemy and ourselves”. That this is not the only possible translation is confirmed by the translation of the same passage by the FLP, who translate *fenqing diwo* as “make a clear distinction between the people and the enemy” (342). The aforementioned *meiyou banfa* is translated by the FLP as “there is no stopping them” (FLP 342), another passive formulation. These examples from the FLP confirm that the level of reflexivity found in the MWP translation is not inherently present in the source.

For another, perhaps more subtle, example of introduced reflexivity, see below:

PPH: 现在有两个地方发生问题, 一个是东欧, 一个是中东。(318)

MWP: At this moment there are two places that present problems: one is Eastern Europe, and the other is the Middle East. (vol. 2, 163)

In the original Chinese, with *fasheng wenti*, Mao simply states that problems are occurring. The phrase ‘present problems’ states that problems are occurring *for* someone, namely Mao and the Party. This shift between source and target arises because, whereas Mao and his audience were interested in unfolding global events, the MWP translators were interested in *Mao* talking about these events.

In their original contexts, many of Mao’s writings, addressed as they were to Party members, were about the external world. But the goal of the MWP was to produce a set of reference works to help Western scholars understand Mao. This shift in perspective can be detected in the language of the MWP translation, which blurs the line between a text *by* Mao and a text *about* him.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated how translation, as part of the historical process, objectifies source authors and their works. Using the Mao Writings Project as an example, I have shown how academic translators recontextualise, historicize, undermine, and reframe the source author, even as they do that author the service of presenting their work to a new audience. The relation of the translator to the source author is not inherently antagonistic: Mao *is* an object of historical enquiry for many, and it is legitimate to treat him as such. The value of the present study is to ‘go backstage’, exposing the sleight of hand that occurs when a first-person author, supposedly speaking in his own voice, is made to speak by and for somebody else.

When a collection of writings, originally written for a particular context and with a particular goal, becomes – with the help of translation – a historical resource,

the framing is radically altered. The shift in perspective evident in the MWP translation reveals Mao's dual status as both historical subject and historical object. As a historical subject, Mao was a powerful actor who shaped history and said precisely what he wanted. As a translated historical object, he is still a powerful figure, but his exact words are chosen for him. The words no longer serve their original purpose, serving instead the goals of the objectifier, the translator.

NOTES

- ¹ In order to easily distinguish between different sources attributable to Mao, acronyms of publishers are used as follows: PPH for People's Publishing House (Mao 1997a); FLP for Foreign Languages Press (Mao 1977b); and MWP for Mao Writings Project, with Volume 1 (Kau and Leung 1986) or Volume 2 (Leung and Kau 1992) specified in-text.
- ² These definitions are standard in most Chinese-English dictionaries. See entries on MDBG, a popular online dictionary, for *zongpaizhuyi* and *paixi*: <https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary?page=worddict&email=&wdrst=0&wdqb=%E5%AE%97%E6%B4%BE%E4%B8%B%E4%B9%89>; <https://www.mdbg.net/chinese/dictionary?page=worddict&email=&wdrst=0&wdqb=%E6%B4%BE%E7%B3%BB>.
- ³ Source: <https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/>.

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Consonances and dissonances in the Chinese translation of *Ariel* by José Enrique Rodó

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Consonances and dissonances in the Chinese translation of *Ariel* by José Enrique Rodó

Latin American thought. José Enrique Rodó. Chinese reception. Paratexts. Chinese-Spanish translation.

This article examines the 2021 Chinese translation of *Ariel* (1900) by Uruguayan thinker José Enrique Rodó, a seminal text in Latin American intellectual history. Through analysis of the paratexts produced by its translator, editors, and commentators, it explores how *Ariel* is connected with current Chinese intellectual interests. The study addresses the discursive strategies used in the paratexts to emphasize those aspects of Rodó's work that align with the sociopolitical outlook of its promoters in Chinese, while also neutralizing the text's conservative and Eurocentric elements.

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The essay *Ariel* (1900; Eng. trans. 1922), by the Uruguayan thinker José Enrique Rodó (1871–1917), is one of the most influential works in the intellectual history of Latin America. Published originally in Montevideo when the author was not yet 30 years old, *Ariel* articulated an anti-imperialist stance and a critique of Anglo-American utilitarianism that had infused Latin American thought for decades. At the same time, it also contains elements that could be deemed problematic, such as social elitism, a certain form of cultural Eurocentrism, and a negative vision of indigenous populations.

Ariel was translated into Chinese for the first time in 2021 as part of a collection that seeks to introduce the works of modern Latin American thinkers to China. This article analyzes the discursive practices surrounding *Ariel*'s translation to understand how it is *positioned* within the Chinese intellectual context. "Positioning" refers to "the process by which authors or speakers allocate specific features to themselves and to others, thereby locating themselves within the intellectual arena or within the broader sociopolitical or artistic context in which they operate" (Baert 2018, 228). The case of the Chinese translation of *Ariel* demonstrates how Rodó's ideas are positioned for a particular initiative and readership by establishing explicit consonances between the original social context and the contemporary Chinese context. At the same time, the translator employs paratexts to negotiate dissonances, that is, elements of *Ariel* that might be considered problematic by the agents implicated in the translation initiative.

In this analysis, I suggest the analytical categories of "consonances" and "dissonances". Consonances refer to those aspects of Rodó's work that align with the sociopolitical outlook of the Chinese promoters and their intended readership. Conversely, dissonances denote the elements of *Ariel* that might be considered problematic from the perspective of the translator and the collection's agenda. The Chinese translation process thus involves establishing explicit consonances while negotiating the dissonances, such as Rodó's social elitism, Eurocentrism, and disregard for indigenous populations.

To observe such negotiation, the analysis will rely on the close reading of paratextual materials, particularly those produced by its Chinese translator, Yu Shiyang, as well as the collection's editors. As Kathryn Batchelor (2018) argues, paratexts provide a critical framework for translation research, encompassing both terminology and case-based methodology. They raise questions of power and visibility (of the translator, publisher, or author) as well as issues of reception that go beyond purely linguistic equivalence. In this study, I focus on paratexts as they can illuminate how translations participate in the circulation and legitimation of ideas (Bourdieu 2002) in a context of international intellectual exchanges of unprecedented intensity.

RODÓ AND *ARIEL* IN THE LATIN AMERICAN CONTEXT

Born in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1871, Rodó was raised in a well-established family of Uruguayan and Catalan descent. His father, active in intellectual circles, died when Rodó was 15, plunging the family into financial hardship. As a result,

the young Rodó was forced to abandon his studies and take work. Nevertheless, he proved to be a prodigious autodidact, immersing himself in literature (particularly French literature and the emerging modernist movement) as well as in European philosophical currents.

His early intellectual contributions emerged in the field of literary and political journalism and criticism, via the several journals he founded in Uruguay and his collaborations abroad. His growing intellectual prestige brought him to the presidency of the National Library of Uruguay, though only for two months. He also played an important role as a politician, serving intermittently as a member of the Uruguayan Parliament for the Colorado Party, where he advocated for liberal ideas of modernization through civic reforms that would ideally move Uruguay away from traditionalism and “caudillismo”.

He gained increasing intellectual and academic recognition throughout Latin America and Europe, particularly in Spain, where he was appointed a member of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, and in France, where his work was promptly translated. In 1916, amid World War I, he undertook a long-awaited journey to Portugal, Spain, France, and Italy, during which his health began to deteriorate. While staying in Palermo, his condition worsened, and he passed away on May 1, 1917, at the age of 45. Rodó's death was met with widespread mourning across Uruguay and much of Latin America. Intellectual circles paid tribute to him, celebrating his life and work as a leading literary, philosophical, and moral figure. His body was repatriated to Montevideo, where he received a state funeral at the national mausoleum.

Rodó's thought was eclectic, representing an ambitious attempt to reconcile the conflicting forces of tradition and modernization that marked the turn of the 20th century, particularly in Latin America. He is often regarded as a leading figure of the so-called “Generation of the 1900s” in Latin American intellectual history. This generation reacted strongly against the positivist philosophy that had dominated the previous generation's approach to modernization and nation-building. In contrast, the Generation of the 1900s embraced idealism and modernism as tools to redefine Latin American identity and culture, opposing the utilitarian and materialistic tendencies – especially those emanating from North America – that were increasingly influential among elites in the region. As Belén Castro notes, “while other contemporaries close themselves off to the modernizing phenomenon, Rodó takes on the risk of thinking within the whirlwind, in the dizzying rush of acceleration: he is a modern thinker who, without renouncing to some traditional values, acts simultaneously as a conducting agent of the new processes and as a critic of them”¹ (2023, 11). Rodó's stance on positivism combined an appreciation for scientific progress with a sharp critique of its extreme derivation, i.e. utilitarianism (Mellado 2006). He argued that the excesses of the utilitarian spirit, particularly in its Anglo-American form, had corrupted modern civilization. Seeking a balance between classical humanist heritage and the demands of a rapidly modernizing society, he championed the cultivation of virtue, beauty, and intellect as essential to both individual and collective advancement.

These ideas are most clearly expressed in his most famous and enduring work, *Ariel*, which “condenses the philosophical, ideological, and cultural foundations that marked the end of one era and the beginning of another in Latin American thought” (Dussel 2009, 895). Rodó explicitly conceived *Ariel* as a programmatic point of departure for an intellectual movement intended to offer a shared vision for the whole of Hispanic America. Written in poetic prose often characterized by its elusive style, the text takes the form of an exhortation for Latin American youth to seek progress guided by the pursuit of moral, aesthetic, and intellectual cultivation in opposition to mere materialistic concerns. Rodó structures the work around characters taken from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: the old teacher Prospero, who delivers the central exhortation; Ariel, the winged spirit that symbolizes the humanistic ideals of beauty and virtue; and Caliban, who embodies the forces of materialism, vulgarity, and utilitarian thought that Rodó opposes (König 2008). Influenced by Krausism, a central element of Rodó’s philosophical project was the conviction that education could serve as a catalyst for social progress and reform, championing the pursuit of beauty and non-utilitarian values and guiding society toward an ideal that harmonized intellectual cultivation with social progress.

The form of utilitarianism that Rodó targeted was embodied by the United States. *Ariel* was written amid the growing influence of North America, which had intensified after the Spanish-American War of 1898. In the essay, Rodó denounces the utilitarian ethos of US culture (an outlook increasingly adopted by Latin American elites) as the embodiment of destructive, materialistic, and anti-humanist forces. One of the most enduring and frequently discussed aspects of *Ariel* is its prescient warning against US imperialism, a concern that would exert a profound and lasting influence on subsequent generations of Latin Americans until the present day. In contrast to Anglo-American culture, Rodó urges Hispano-American youth to reclaim their own distinctive heritage and to define an independent cultural identity.

For Rodó, Latin America’s cultural identity should aspire to an ideal of vital aesthetics and moral sensibility associated with the Greco-Roman tradition, whose legacy he regarded as fundamental and inspiring. In contrast, he considered other ancient civilizations (such as the “Oriental” cultures) outdated and distant from his ideal (Riobó 2015). Nevertheless, Rodó did not advocate a mere imitation of European culture. As he wrote, “the civilizing Europe, which has indoctrinated us, which has nursed us on its ideas of liberty and justice, the fruit of its experience and its genius, has the right to expect that we, relieved of the overwhelming burden of tradition, will do something more than simply repeat them” (1913, 162). Rodó maintained that the new American culture should be original and self-defined. Yet, paradoxically, in what has become one of the most contested aspects of his thought, he refused to acknowledge the continuity and relevance of the indigenous heritage, which reflects the worldview of the Creole elites and their “Eurocentric modernization proposals” for the region at the turn of the century (Nagy 2023, 91).

Ariel also presents reflections on democracy as a political model for Latin America. Rodó maintains a fidelity to the democratic idea, but warns against its denatu-

ralization into a cult of the utilitarian, vulgarity, and mediocrity as the social norm (Gros Espiell 2001, 79–80). For him, a democratic state must create the conditions for the elevation of the human spirit by providing “all members of the society with the unspecified conditions that will lead to their perfection” (Rodó [1900] 1988, 66). In that sense, Rodó considers that, “[r]ationally conceived, democracy always includes an indispensable element of aristocracy, a means of establishing the superiority of the finest, achieved through free consent” (67). This formulation seeks to reconcile democratic freedom with a vision of meritocracy that would ensure cultural and civic vitality.

The program contained in *Ariel*, or *Arielismo*, has exerted a profound impact, and its ideas have been ceaselessly discussed by generations of intellectuals throughout Latin America since the 1900s, making Rodó a vector of regional integration (Fernández 2021). Yet, over decades of reception, his work has also attracted significant criticism. A common criticism argued that his idealism had become detached from real social and political life and that *Arielistas* had spent too long serving abstract ideals instead of confronting poverty, injustice, and the struggles of ordinary people (Sánchez 1933). Peruvian writer and philosopher José Carlos Mariátegui, although usually considered as *Arielista* in some respects – his ideas were sometimes labeled as “Arielist Marxism” – dismissed Rodó’s views as aristocratic and irrelevant to the region’s contemporary needs (Ferretti 2020). Other critiques focus on Rodó’s Eurocentrism, alleged anti-democratic tendencies, and disregard for indigenous populations. As Adolfo Garcé García y Santos observes, *Arielismo*’s “black legend” “misrepresented, trivialized, and caricatured many of its contents, confused others, and at times discussed postulates opposed to Rodó’s ideas as if they were Rodonian” (2001, 43).

In contrast to those allegations, many generations of Latin American intellectuals have read *Ariel* under a more congenial light. By the second half of the 20th century, *Ariel* had become intertwined with revolutionary movements and had been transformed into a symbol of anti-imperialism and resistance against US influence in the region (Devés Valdés 2000, 39). As shown below, these divergent elements have also shaped the recent Chinese reception of *Ariel*, compelling its translator to contextualize and neutralize certain elements of the text in order to better align it with their editorial perspectives and in anticipation of a critical reading by the intended readers.

THE CONTEXT OF THE CHINESE TRANSLATION

Ariel was translated into Chinese in 2021 as part of the “Latin American Thought Translation Series” (“Lāměi sīxiǎng yìcóng”, hereafter LATTS) that seeks to introduce the works of modern Latin American thinkers to China. Since 2020, besides *Ariel*, this initiative has published other three volumes: *El perfil del hombre y la cultura en México* (1934; Eng. trans. *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, 1962) by Samuel Ramos published in 2020, *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* (1928; Eng. trans. *Six Essays in Quest for Our Expression*, 2003) by Pedro Henríquez Ureña (2022), plus a *Lāding měizhōu shèhuì sīxiǎng shǒucè* (Handbook of Latin American thought,

2024) that compiles texts by different Latin American thinkers. All works are translated directly from Spanish.

Intellectuals in the People's Republic of China have historically shown a strong interest in the cultural production of other contexts, particularly that of Europe and the United States (Wang 2002). However, China's emergence as a geopolitical power, along with the crisis of Euro-American models of sociopolitical organization, has led to a renewed interest among Chinese intellectuals in exploring ways of understanding and organizing reality beyond Euro-American frameworks. The LATTs is an example of increasing Chinese engagements beyond the conventional centers of intellectual production. It also illustrates the central role that translation plays in them.

LATTs originates from the initiative of a group of scholars in the field of Hispanic studies based at academic institutions across mainland China, led by the main editors Teng Wei and Wei Ran, both specialists in contemporary Latin American literature and thought. The translation of *Ariel* was undertaken by Yu Shiyang, an associate professor in the Faculty of Spanish and Portuguese at Peking University and director of its Center for Hispanic Studies.

The field of Hispanic studies in China has traditionally been close to social critique. In the words of one of the editors, "the academic work and lives of our senior scholars in the Spanish language field have been immersed in the emotional structure of the Asia-Africa-Latin America alliance, and their translation work consciously embodies the awareness of Third World solidarity" (Teng Wei, in Teng and Wei 2021; see also Teng 2011). In this sense, in her general introduction to the series, Teng Wei connects LATTs with earlier similar initiatives. As she explains, apart from a few exceptions (translations of dependency theory, revolutionary thought, José Martí, and works by contemporary figures like Eduardo Galeano, often related to social movements and left-wing thought), the introduction of Latin American philosophy and critical theory in 20th-century China remained sparse and unsystematic. Therefore, she presents LATTs as an attempt at supplementing those earlier, fragmented efforts (Teng 2021, i–ii).

LATTs relies also on an advisory committee comprised of academics and specialists listed in the front matter of each publication. The Chinese advisors include scholars from the field of Hispanic studies, as well as other figures with a sustained intellectual interest in issues of the "Global South" and social justice. Notable among these are Suo Sa, known for her sociological work on Latin America, and Lau Kin Chi, a professor of cultural studies at Lingnan University in Hong Kong and an activist focused on Global South relations. The committee further lists two of China's most internationally recognized intellectuals: Wang Hui, a professor of intellectual history at Tsinghua University in Beijing, and Dai Jinhua, a professor of cultural studies at Peking University. The international advisors include academics Walter D. Mignolo, one of the main theorists of decoloniality, and Karina Batthyány, sociologist and executive secretary of the Latin American Council of Social Sciences, as well as figures with strong ties to social activism, notably Gustavo Esteva, an intellectual previously linked to Mexico's Zapatista Army of National Liberation, and João Pedro Stedile, an economist linked to the Landless Workers' Movement in Brazil.

Several members of the advisory board are affiliated with the Global University for Sustainability, an organization created in 2015 and based at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, that operates as “an experimental forum to support alternative forms of knowledge production and circulation that surpass commodified and subservient knowledge models,” according to its Chinese website.² This organization hosts regular forums and produces publications featuring Latin American intellectuals and Chinese academics, including members of the LATTs advisory board (Teng 2021, iii).

Accordingly, the editors underscore the series’ commitment to translating works rooted in intellectual currents like liberation theology, indigenism, nationalism, and Marxism, with “a special emphasis on the translation and introduction of theories and practical experiences that carry out a critique of and reflection on imperialism, capitalism, and globalization” (Teng 2021, vii). Regarding their goals and intended readership, the editors declare:

We want to observe how Latin Americans think about modernization, nationalization, and Europeanization; how they carry out decolonization; how they reconstruct theology; and how they construct cultural identity, etc. We will translate, little by little, the most important and influential intellectual achievements of the past century in Latin America as thoroughly as possible, allowing Chinese academia and general readers to understand Latin American problems, Latin American reflection on these problems, and the various imaginings of solutions. (Teng Wei in Teng and Zhang 2020)

The aforementioned Global University for Sustainability is a key sponsor of the series. Other supporting institutions include the China Public Education Group, a listed company in the education sector; the Contemporary Culture Research Center of South China Normal University (directed by Teng Wei, the collection’s general editor); the Film and Culture Research Center of Peking University (directed by Dai Jinhua); and two commercial publishers: Shanghai People’s Press and Luminaire Books (Teng 2020, viii).

Another noteworthy feature of this translation initiative is its emphasis on diffusion, including the organization of presentations, book clubs, conferences, seminars and other public activities. The editors and translators have also generated paratextual materials for the collection, including a general preface by the editors and introductory essays for each translation in which the translators articulate their interests and the challenges encountered in bringing these works into Chinese. Moreover, they have actively promoted the publications beyond academic circles through commentaries and interviews in cultural outlets, notably the magazine *Pengpai* and the weekly *Shenghuo Zhoukan*. These paratextual sources are helpful in clarifying the ideas that the promoters sought to foreground through translation.

THE TRANSLATION: MANAGING CONSONANCES AND DISSONANCES

The paratextual elements surrounding the translation of *Ariel* include peritexts such as the translator’s preface, as well as epitexts such as articles by the translator or the editors published in the aforementioned cultural outlets. Analyzing the content of these elements allows us to identify which aspects of the work the translator

has chosen to highlight in Rodó's text. As discussed above, *Ariel* also includes certain elements that are deemed dissonant, especially from what may be considered a critical or left-wing perspective. The translator does not refrain from addressing those problematic issues; instead, she points them out and comments on them in order to contextualize and neutralize them, and to highlight the legacy of Rodó's ideas in the history of Latin American social and political movements for justice.

The historical parallels between the experiences of Latin America and China appear to be a significant factor in the interest of the series' promoters in translating works of Latin American thought, and these consonances are explicitly mentioned. In the case of *Ariel*, the translator Yu Shiyang emphasizes the existence of a particular relationship between the two regions, stating:

I have always felt that the dilemmas, inquiries, and achievements of Spanish-speaking America after independence are very similar to those of China since the late Qing dynasty. The issues of cultural hegemony, the dominance of pragmatism and utilitarianism, and the lack of idealism that Rodó reflected on around 1900 could be read in China as issues that are not far removed from our own. Moreover, the situation we [in China] find ourselves in today, more than a hundred years later, can also serve as a powerful warning – provided we know enough about Latin America and do not allow ourselves to be deceived by triumphant and self-indulgent nationalism. (Yu 2017)

As for peritexts, the Chinese edition of *Ariel* includes the translators' introduction plus a set of supplementary translated documents after the proper translated text. These include excerpts of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that clarify the intertextuality of Rodó's *Ariel* with the characters and the themes of Shakespeare's play; the essay "El triunfo de Calibán" (1898; Eng. trans. "The triumph of Caliban", 2005) by the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío; three letters sent by Rodó to the historian Rafael Altamira relating to the message of *Ariel*; the preface to *Ariel* written by the Spanish novelist Clarín (pen name of Leopoldo Alas); a review of *Ariel* by the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno; excerpts of the essay "Calibán" (2004) by the Cuban historian Roberto Fernando Retamar; an article by the scholar Gordon Brotherston (2000) with a critical analysis of Rodó's views of indigenous culture; a chronology of Rodó's work, and the translator's afterword. This array of peritextual materials highlights the central role that *Ariel* played in the cultural and intellectual history of Latin America and the strong influence it exerted beyond the author's country of origin. The paratextual inclusion of the texts by Retamar and by Brotherston, as I will explain later, are particularly relevant for the positioning of the translation, since they are intended to neutralize or at least contextualize the problematic aspects of Rodó's thought (his views on indigenous cultures and his elitist outlook) that may be considered as dissonant within a broader translation project with a strong emphasis on social critique.

The translator's introduction highlights Rodó's critique of modernity, most notably his condemnation of the US-derived utilitarianism and materialism that had started to permeate Latin American elites as appealing ideals. The translator situates Rodó's anti-utilitarianism within the context of late 19th-century Uruguay, when liberal educational reforms led by figures such as José Pedro Varela (1845–1879), the National

Director of Public Instruction, sought to adopt a US-inspired educational model. These reforms introduced frameworks informed by social Darwinism and promoted utilitarianism, positivism, and the pursuit of material wealth as the prevailing intellectual ideals, elevating science and technology above humanistic education (Yu 2021, 18). In response to this trend, *Ariel* is presented as a humanist manifesto directed at Latin American youth, urging awareness of the dangers inherent in the life philosophy being imposed upon them. As Yu explains, Rodó called for the suppression of materialistic aspirations and for the cultivation of an aesthetic spiritual ideal in Latin American societies, standing in deliberate opposition to the vulgarity associated with utilitarianism.

Yu also highlights Rodó's critique of emerging Latin American industrial and mercantile classes and "the utilitarian partisans who serve them," contrasting them with a cultural and educated elite that should, in his view, assume leadership of the region (18–19). Although Yu concedes that Rodó's ideas may appear "classical and ethereal" (12), she nonetheless affirms the "optimistic and constructive spirit of resistance" that *Ariel* inspired in later generations, encouraging them "to resist the United States as well as oppose dictatorship and corruption in their own countries, even triggering waves of university education reform" (30).

Alongside these consonances, some of Rodó's ideas in *Ariel* produce dissonances with respect to the translator's and the editors' outlook. The translator does not hesitate to point out those aspects she finds problematic in this work, which she describes as "conservative" and in which she detects "a racist undertone" (12). In this sense, Yu reproaches Rodó for maintaining an elitist and "quasi-medieval" conception of society in which social position seems predetermined: "[Rodó] defends order, hierarchy, a top-down structure of governance and authority, without mentioning a single word about the natives or the black population, as if they were left locked away at the bottom of society" (27). Instead of silencing it, the translator acknowledges this problem and reinforces her criticism by including as a paratext in the volume the translation of one article by Gordon Brotherston in which he offers a review of Rodó's negative opinions about the cultural legacy of indigenous populations in Latin America (in Rodó 2021, 174–193).

Interestingly, in an article about her experience working on the project, Yu comments on the discomfort she felt with various aspects of *Ariel* and how strange it seemed for her to constantly have to ponder, during the translation process, whether some passages might be taken out of context (Yu 2017). Given this experience, it is interesting to observe how the translator uses her introduction, first, to highlight the problematic and potentially sensitive aspects of *Ariel*, and then to offer a broader perspective on the long-term influence of Rodó's work, drawing on later commentaries by intellectuals who presented *Ariel* as the seed of revolutionary and anti-imperialist impulses across 20th-century Latin America. In this way, the problematic aspects mentioned earlier appear to be neutralized. For instance, Yu quotes Mario Benedetti (1920–2009), who edited a series of articles to commemorate the centennial of Rodó's birth and who concluded that *Ariel's* greatest achievement was "to turn a gaze of admiration [toward the US] into a gaze of vigilance" (Yu 2021, 32).

The translator especially emphasizes the views of the Cuban poet and essayist Roberto Fernández Retamar (1930–2019) on the revolutionary ferment in Rodó's work. To do so, she includes the full translation of the famous chapter "Calibán" by Retamar (in Rodó 2021, 161–173), in which the Cuban poet pays homage to Rodó's text while subverting its metaphors to address the five centuries of conquest and colonization in the Americas. Moreover, in her introduction, Yu also highlights Fernández Retamar's idea that *Ariel* "provided the first launchpad for the revolutionary movement" in Cuba (Yu 2021, 30) and quotes the Cuban poet's statement that, in the revolutionary history of the continent, Rodó stands alongside José Martí (1853–1895) in that both sounded a prescient warning against growing US power (Yu 2021, 32). Thus, the conservative, racial and elitist components of *Ariel* seem to be neutralized (to a certain extent) in view of this anti-imperialist reading and of the longer-term revolutionary and liberating readings of the work.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Chinese translation of *Ariel* and its positioning within contemporary intellectual frameworks in China show that Rodó's work remains relevant, with all its complexities and its problematic views. Through her use of paratexts, translator Yu Shiyang negotiates the tensions between the ideas articulated in the original work and the conditions of the receiving context and its intended readership. Although she critiques certain aspects of Rodó's thought, Yu situates *Ariel* within anti-imperialist and resistance discourses that continue to resonate especially among left-leaning intellectuals in both Latin America and China. Her approach underscores the enduring significance of *Ariel* as a text that warns against the dangers of utilitarianism and imperialism, linking its message to shared experiences of anti-hegemonic struggle in the two regions.

As shown, the circulation of Latin American thought in China contains a deeply political and ideological impulse, reflecting the historical commitment of Chinese Hispanic studies to South-South cooperation. While the LATTS is sponsored by non-governmental and academic bodies, the anti-imperialist and anti-US-hegemonic stance of a work like *Ariel* makes it particularly vulnerable to co-option in a context of geopolitical tensions and contests for influence over the Global South. Therefore, cases like the one analyzed here are relevant for the study of translation dynamics in relation to geopolitics.

On a final note, in a time when AI looms over human translators, understanding translation as including the positioning of the text is also a way to vindicate the work of human translators, since the mechanisms required for positioning are irreducible to artificial translation or text generation systems. Positioning requires a dual understanding, first of the source context to grasp the historical-political weight of texts like Rodó's *Ariel*; and second of the target context, to identify relevant contemporary debates and tropes, thereby activating the translated text's critical potential. This process involves a social immersion and strategic human judgment and critical thinking skills (that AI currently lacks) to ensure the texts function as active agents in the target socio-political sphere rather than mere textual artifacts.

NOTES

- ¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations from languages other than English are by the present author.
² See <https://our-global-u.org/oguorg/zhs/可持续发展全球大学-2/>.

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Skaz, siuzhet, and byt: Notes on Russian formalism in Spanish translation

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Skaz, siuzhet, and byt: Notes on Russian formalism in Spanish translation

Russian formalism. Terminology translation. Intellectual history. Byt. Fabula. Siuzhet. Priem. Motivirovka.

This article discusses the translation history of Russian formalist works in the Spanish-speaking world, examining the channels through which formalist theory was introduced and the challenges of translating its terminology. It follows the trajectory from early indirect translations to direct ones and then analyzes strategies for rendering key concepts such as *byt*, *skaz*, and the oppositions *fabula–siuzhet* and *priem–motivirovka*. The study highlights the importance of Italian mediation in disseminating formalist thought in the Hispanic context, offering insights into the circulation of ideas between non-central cultural zones. The rendering of Boris M. Eikhenbaum's concept *literaturnyj byt* illustrates the difficulties of an effective reception of the key terms of Russian theory.

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A defining feature of Russian formalism was its ambition to establish literary studies as a rigorous science (Pilshchikov 2015, 320). This aspiration is evident in numerous programmatic statements, such as Roman Jakobson's preface to Tzvetan Todorov's anthology of formalist writings, pointedly entitled "Vers une science de l'art poétique" (Toward a science of poetic art, 1965). A key consequence of this ambition was a meticulous attention to terminology and the construction of a logical, argumentative discourse, which stood in stark contrast to the "impressionism" the formalists attributed to earlier criticism.

A prime example of this methodological stance is Viktor Shklovsky's "Iskusstvo kak priem" (1919; Eng. trans. "Art as Device", 1991), which opens by challenging a widely accepted definition: "'Art is thinking in images.' This phrase may even be heard from the mouth of a lycée student. It serves as the point of departure for the academic philologist who is making his first stab at formulating a theory of literature"¹ (Shklovsky 1991, 1). Shklovsky swiftly refutes this idea, proposing instead that art is fundamentally a *priem* – a device or technique – whose primary function is *deautomatization*.

Similarly, Jakobson's essay on artistic realism begins with a critique of earlier art history, which he defines as "causerie" that "knows no precise terminology" (Jakobson [1921] 1987, 19). A third famous example can be found in the opening of Yuri Tynianov's "Literaturnyj fakt" (1924, first under the title "O literaturnom fakte" [On the literary fact]; Eng. trans. "Literary Fact", 2019), where he interrogates established definitions of literature and genre.

Paradoxically, however, Russian formalist terminology is itself far from unambiguous. Key terms often lack consistent definitions across different texts, and the movement produced no comprehensive glossary. Even when definitions appear – such as in the "Index of Literary Names and Terms" in Shklovsky's *O teorii prozy* (1925; Eng. trans. *Theory of Prose*, 1991) – they are strikingly laconic and lack theoretical elaboration. For instance: "Art = a way to experience the making of a thing, to give a sense of the thing as vision, not as recognition; Defamiliarization of the image = a technique of seeing ('non-recognition'); Device – passim – art"² (1925, 179ff).

Furthermore, this terminology was not static; it evolved over time, with the same concepts being redefined by different authors, or even by the same author at different stages. As Peter Steiner highlights in *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics* (1984), many of the movement's central concepts were inherently metaphorical, further complicating their interpretation. Given these intrinsic challenges, the translation of formalist terminology becomes a critical issue.

From a broader perspective the problem of translation in the humanities is deeply intertwined with questions of cultural history, conceptual transfer, and the migration of theories. While the transnational circulation of the formalist paradigm is partially documented, its history remains incomplete. This study focuses on one underexplored avenue: the translation of formalism in the Hispanic world. By addressing this gap, it aims to enrich both the global history of formalist thought and our understanding of the center-periphery dynamics inherent in translation of literary theory.

This article is divided into three parts. First, we discuss translations and editions of formalist texts in the Spanish-speaking world, with special attention to intermediary sources. Second, we analyze strategies for translating core formalist terminology, including terms such as story–plot (*fabula–siuzhet*), device–motivation (*priem–motivirovka*), *skaz* (a narrative technique often based on oral stylization), and *byt* (everyday life, in contrast to literature and art). Finally, we examine the peculiar history of the Spanish translations of Boris M. Eikhenbaum’s article “Literaturnyj byt” (1927; Span. trans. “El ambiente social de la literatura”, 1972; Eng. trans. “Literary Environment”, 1971).

RUSSIAN FORMALISM IN THE SPANISH-SPEAKING WORLD: TRANSLATIONS AND EDITIONS

The Western reception of Russian formalism is a complex, multilayered history, fundamentally transnational in character. French structuralism – significantly shaped by intellectuals such as the Bulgarians Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva, and the Lithuanian Algirdas Julien Greimas – played a central role in its global reception, alongside the contributions of Slavic émigrés such as Roman Jakobson, René Wellek, Victor Erlich, Ladislav Matejka, and Krystyna Pomorska. German, Italian, and North American scholarship also proved decisive in translation, disseminating and reinterpreting formalist thought (Erlich 1955; Todorov 1965; Lemon and Reis 1965; Shklovskij 1966; Striedter and Stempel 1969, 1972; Matejka and Pomorska 1971; Jameson 1972; Bann and Bowlt 1973; Di Salvo 1973; Hansen-Löve 1978; Steiner 1984). Recently, the comprehensive volume edited by Michał Mrugalski, Schamma Schahadat, and Irina Wutsdorff (2023) has provided a fundamental reassessment of these transnational dynamics.

In the Spanish-speaking world, this reception was conditioned by the absence of a consolidated Slavic studies tradition and the region’s relative distance from the main routes of academic migration in Europe and the Americas. This placed it at a disadvantage compared to countries like France, Italy, Germany, or the United States. In Spain, this situation was exacerbated by the isolation of the Franco regime (Guzmán Tirado 2024, 16). In Latin America, the institutionalization of Slavic studies was even more delayed, and with the exception of centers in Cuba and Brazil, such programs remain underdeveloped to this day (Gomide 2024; Puñales-Alpízar 2024; Belousova and Méndez 2024; García Bonillas 2024). Consequently, formalist thought often circulated through intermediary languages, and since the source language of translation was frequently unspecified, reconstructing its precise pathways remains problematic.

Despite these limitations, a considerable corpus of formalist texts became available in Spanish from the 1970s onward. The most influential was the Spanish translation of Tzvetan Todorov’s *Théorie de la littérature* (Literary theory, 1965), published as *Teoría de la literatura* by the Argentine press Ediciones Signos (1970). This short-lived but influential Buenos Aires publisher was later absorbed by the Ibero-American press Siglo XXI Editores (García 2011, 149). The translation was prepared by Ana María Nethol, an Argentine scholar who studied literature at the Universi-

dad Nacional de La Plata and later pursued graduate studies in linguistics at the Sorbonne (for more biographical details, see Reta 2022). With more than ten reprints, this volume has remained the most widely circulated and cited reference on Russian formalism in the Spanish-speaking world. It is noteworthy, however, that the Spanish translation did not entirely supplant the French anthology, which continued to exert influence. In 1984, José Domínguez Caparrós observed that “to grasp the essentials of the literary theory of the Russian formalists, one must set aside the Spanish version of the anthology that T. Todorov translated and edited in French” (276).

That same year, *Formalismo y vanguardia: Eikhenbaum, Tinianov y Chklovski* (Formalism and the avant-garde: Eikhenbaum, Tynianov, and Shklovsky, 1970; 2nd ed. 1973) appeared in Madrid. This compact anthology, prepared by the Marxist intellectual group Equipo Comunicación, brought together three texts available in Todorov’s collection (“Teoriia formal’nogo metoda” [Theory of the formal method, 1927] by Eikhenbaum, “Art as Device” by Shklovsky, and “O literaturnoj evoliucii” [On literary evolution, 1927] by Tynianov) along with one additional essay by Tynianov (“O kompozicii ‘Evgeniia Onegina’” [On the composition of *Eugene Onegin*, 1921–1922] first published partially in an Italian translation in 1967, first fully published in Russian in 1974). The source languages of the translations are not specified, but it seems clear that the source for the first three essays was Todorov’s anthology (as the edition reproduces his *notes du traducteur* and frequently uses French transliteration for proper names and literary texts). Tynianov’s article on the composition of *Eugene Onegin* was, in turn, rendered from Vittorio Strada’s Italian version published in *Strumenti critici* in 1967: the Spanish text reproduces Strada’s notes, including their typos. The translations were prepared by Agustín García Tirado (Eikhenbaum, Shklovsky, and Tynianov) and Juan Antonio Méndez (Tynianov). The Spanish formalist scholar Cristian Cámara Outes demonstrates the group’s considerable difficulties in integrating formalist thought into their theoretical program, largely due to the dominance of Jakobson’s structuralist reinterpretation of Russian formalism during this period (on the group’s history and publishing activity, see Barreiro and Albarrán 2025; on their reception of formalism, see Cámara Outes 2026).

Subsequent Spanish publications included books by Tynianov, Vladimir Propp, and Boris Tomashevsky. Tynianov’s *El problema de la lengua poética* (1972; *Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka*, 1924; Eng. trans. *The Problem of Verse Language*, 1981), translated by Ana Luisa Poljak³ for Siglo XXI, was produced from the Italian version. Although this is not explicitly stated, the Italian title appears in the edition alongside the original Russian one (López Arriazu 2010, 17). Propp’s *Morfología del cuento* (1971; *Morfologiia skazki*, 1928; Eng. trans. *Morphology of the Folktale*, 1958, 2nd ed. 1968), translated by Lourdes Ortiz, is explicitly identified as a translation from French. Finally, Tomashevsky’s *Teoría de la literatura* (1982; *Teoriia literatury*, 1925; Literary theory), translated by Marcial Suárez, does not specify its source language but clearly derives from Italian: the translation closely follows the syntactic and lexical choices of Maria di Salvo’s Italian version (1978), includes her notes, and uses the Italian transcription for Russian citations. (In her influential article on Toma-

shevsky as *formalist oublié*, Catherine Depretto cites only the Italian and German translations, apparently unaware of the Spanish edition; 2018, 14n2).

The recourse to Italian intermediaries is particularly noteworthy. Italian Slavic studies were strong, and the political ties between the Italian Communist Party and the Soviet Union made Italy a crucial conduit for Russian culture – as exemplified by Vittorio Strada’s delivery of the *Doctor Zhivago* manuscript to Feltrinelli for publication (1957). Moreover, the Italian intellectual scene of the 1960s fostered close collaboration between leading structuralists (Umberto Eco, Cesare Segre) and Slavists (Remo Faccani, Vittorio Strada), who knew each other well within structuralist circles. In 1969, Eco and Faccani published *I sistemi di segni e lo strutturalismo sovietico* (Sign systems and Soviet structuralism), a landmark volume of translations that facilitated the dissemination of Russian formalist and structuralist thought across Romance-language academic contexts (on formalism in Italy, see Larocca 2016).

The importance of Italian translations extended beyond mere availability, reflecting broader ideological affinities. As Paula Barreiro López and Juan Albarrán Diego demonstrate, the members of Equipo Comunicación relied heavily on Italian materials and sustained an intense dialogue with Italian Marxism, engaging key figures from Antonio Gramsci to Galvano della Volpe and Armanda Guiducci (2025, 295, 301n7). This reliance was substantial: nearly 25% of Comunicación’s publications were translations of Italian volumes, most published by Editori Riuniti. The brothers Juan Antonio and Alberto Méndez, members of the group from its beginning, had studied in Italy and maintained direct contact with Riuniti editors (Albarrán 2025). The ideological climate is vividly illustrated by the cover of the second edition of *Formalismo y vanguardia* (1973), which features an image of Lenin surrounded by soldiers and red flags. While not always regarded as a central hub in global cultural exchange, Italy played a pivotal role in transmitting Russian theoretical thought to the Spanish-speaking world.

In the 1990s, Emil Volek, a Czech Hispanist who went into exile after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 (for more biographical details, see Belousova 2021, 198, 208–212), published his two-volume anthology *Antología del formalismo ruso y del grupo de Bajtín* (An anthology of Russian formalism and the Bakhtin group, 1992; 1995). As Volek explains, the project aimed to “deliver to the Hispanic reader the formalist and post-formalist texts in a cleaner form and grounded in a consistent interpretation of their terminological system” (1992, 14). It is important to note that Volek, as a translator and interpreter of Russian formalism, developed his work in direct contact with Czech structuralism, including its reception of Russian Formalism. Translated directly from Russian, the anthology was an important milestone. Yet, because the project – conceived in the 1970s – materialized two decades later, its impact was limited, as scholarly interest in formalism and structuralism had already begun to wane.

In the 21st century, several new translations have appeared. In 2010, Dedalus Editores (Buenos Aires) published a new translation of Yuri Tynianov’s *El problema de la lengua poética*. Prepared by the Argentine Slavist Eugenio López Arriazu, this edition

was translated directly from the Russian. Beginning in 2017, Cristian Cámara Outes has been publishing direct translations of Russian formalist texts with Ediciones Asimétricas (Madrid), in the special collection *Sdvig. Textos de las vanguardias rusas* (Sdvig: Texts by the Russian avant-garde). Among these publications is a volume of Shklovsky's writings on literature and art, which includes "Art as Device" ("El arte como procedimiento", 2021). The *Sdvig* collection represents a significant and innovative contribution to the ongoing reception of Russian theory in Spain, substantially expanding the corpus of Russian avant-garde texts available to Spanish-speaking readers.

For a comprehensive description of the reception of Russian formalism in the Spanish-speaking world, it is essential to consider not only translations but also the critical studies that shaped the understanding of this theoretical discourse. Spanish intellectuals likely first encountered Russian formalism through Victor Erlich's monumental study *Russian Formalism: History–Doctrine* (1955), translated by Jem Cabannes as *El formalismo ruso: historia-doctrina* (1974). Likewise, Antonio García Berrio's *Significado actual del formalismo ruso* (The current significance of Russian formalism, 1973) played a significant role in disseminating and explicating formalist ideas. The translations of Shklovsky's later works also contributed to this broader intellectual landscape. While we only briefly acknowledge these materials here, they point to promising avenues for future research.

FORMALIST TERMINOLOGY IN SPANISH TRANSLATION

As established in the previous part of this work, the translation of Russian formalist texts into Spanish unfolded in two distinct stages: an initial phase during the structuralist heyday of the 1970s and 1980s, characterized by a reliance on French and Italian intermediary sources; and a second phase, beginning in the 1990s with Emil Volek's direct translations from Russian and later continued by scholars such as Eugenio López Arriazu and Cristian Cámara Outes. This trajectory not only enriches our understanding of formalism in a transnational context but also provides a valuable case study for a paradigm in translation studies that foregrounds the long-overlooked phenomenon of indirect translation. While indirect translation research has primarily focused on literary works (Pięta 2017), its dynamics are equally crucial to understanding the circulation of theoretical concepts. As Alexandra Assis Rosa, Hanna Pięta, and Rita Bueno Maia argue, the study of indirect translation helps illuminate "the complex role of intermediary centres in the cross-cultural transfer between peripheries" (2017, 113). In this part of the article, we analyze several core formalist terms across both indirect and direct translations to explore the implications of this trajectory.

Numerous formalist concepts – such as *ostranenie* (defamiliarization, making strange), *dominanta* (the dominant), *sdvig* (shift), *literaturnost'* (literariness), and *ustanovka* (orientation) – would merit detailed analysis. For the purposes of this study, however, we concentrate on a core micro-system of key terms whose translation poses particular challenges: *fabula* (the story, or the chronological/logical sequence of events), *siuzhet* (the plot, or the artistic arrangement of events as presented

in the narrative), *priem* (the device, or the deliberate deformation of material), *motivirovka* (the motivation or justification of the device), *skaz* (a narrative technique often based on oral stylization), and *byt* (everyday life, in contrast to literature and art).

The first four terms were introduced by Shklovsky and later adopted by Eikhenbaum and other formalists; Eikhenbaum himself developed *skaz* as the principal device of plotless prose and *byt* as a concept that introduces a sociological dimension into literary functioning. His emphasis on *literaturnyj byt* (the literary milieu or environment) further highlights its mediating role between literature and everyday life. Taken together, these terms form a coherent set – beyond the widely known *ostranenie* – and justify our analytical focus, as each presents significant translational difficulties. The primary difficulty in translating them lies in the need to convey their position within a system of conceptual oppositions, without which their meaning remains obscure.

As previously noted, a major challenge in translating formalist terminology derives precisely from this systemic and evolutionary character. It is systemic because the meaning of each term is defined by its position within a network of theoretical oppositions. It is evolutionary because these meanings shifted over the course of the movement’s development. For instance, the fundamental dichotomy between art and life generates a series of subordinate conceptual pairs, as outlined by Peter Steiner (1984, 48):

art	byt (everyday life)
de-familiarization	automatization
teleology	causality
device	material
plot (sjužet ⁴)	story (fabula)

Within this structure, a term like *siuzhet* is unintelligible in isolation; its meaning is contingent on its opposition to *fabula*. This very relationship is itself a specific manifestation of the broader opposition between artistic construction and raw material. Similarly, *byt* in this context signifies more than “everyday life”; it represents the unorganized raw material of experience against which art actively defines itself. This systemic logic extends to other key pairs, such as the relationship between *priem* and *motivirovka*.

Let us now examine how the terms *priem*, *motivirovka*, *skaz*, *fabula*, and *siuzhet* have been rendered in key Spanish translations.

The following table illustrates the translation choices across several key Spanish editions, alongside the corresponding Russian terms and their French and Italian equivalents from Todorov’s anthology and its Italian version (Todorov 1968; the anthology was translated by Gian Luigi Bravo, Cesare De Michelis, Remo Faccani, Paolo Fossati, Renzo Oliva, Carlo Riccio, and Vittorio Strada):

Russian term	<i>priem</i> (device)	<i>motivirovka</i> (motivation)	<i>fabula</i> (story)	<i>siuzhet</i> (plot)	<i>skaz</i> (narrative technique)
Tzvetan Todorov (1965)	procédé	motivation	fable	sujet	récit direct
Italian translation (1968)	procedimento	motivazione	fabula	intreccio	skaz
Ana María Nethol (1970)	artificio, procedimiento	motivación, causa	trama	argumento	relato directo
Agustín García Tirado (1970)	procedimiento	motivación	fábula	tema	relato directo
Marcial Suárez (1982)	procedimiento	motivación	fábula	trama	skaz
Emil Volek (1992)	procedimiento	motivación	fábula	siuzhet	skaz
Cristian Cámara (2021)	procedimiento	motivación	fábula	argumento	skaz, relato oral ⁵

While Ana María Nethol’s Spanish translation of Todorov’s anthology follows the French source closely, it introduces several consequential terminological shifts. The first concerns the rendering of the key formalist concept *priem*. Nethol employs two different terms – *artificio* and *procedimiento* – to translate it. Although both are possible equivalents, in the text they are used indiscriminately and intermixed, to the point that the centrality and terminological coherence of the concept dissipate. Rather than functioning as theoretical terms, they begin to read as merely descriptive words. This inconsistency is particularly striking in the case of Shklovsky’s essay, whose title appears as “Arte como artificio” in Nethol’s translation, even though the term *artificio* occurs only once in the body of the essay, where *procedimiento* is used in all other instances. As a result, the title loses its terminological force and introduces unnecessary confusion.

The second shift concerns the rendering of the French *fable* as *trama*. This choice is problematic because *trama* is the standard term in Spanish literary theory for “plot” – the very concept designated by the Russian *siuzhet* (compare Marcial Suárez’s later translation, which renders *siuzhet* as *trama*, following the Italian *intreccio*).

The third shift involves the translation of *siuzhet* as *argumento*. In Spanish, *argumento* typically denotes a story’s summary or general premise, a meaning that foregrounds narrative content rather than discursive construction. This lexical choice obscures the formal, constructive nature of the *siuzhet*. Consequently, the foundational formalist dichotomy becomes conceptually unstable for the Spanish reader, articulated through terms whose conventional meanings are counterintuitive to the original theoretical distinctions.

The translation of *skaz* as *relato directo* appears to be a literal equivalent of the French *récit direct*. However, a crucial paratextual note from Todorov is lost: the French edition explicitly states, “Nous traduisons ainsi le terme russe *skaz* (N.d.T.)”⁶ (1965, 54). The Spanish version omits this clarification, making it impossible for the reader to connect *relato directo* back to the original Russian concept. This omission is not an isolated incident; Nethol’s translation systematically leaves out several of Todorov’s explanatory notes (Domínguez Caparrós 1984, 274). Moreover, her rendering can easily be mistaken for a simple synonym of direct speech (*discurso directo*), thereby erasing the nuanced specificity of *skaz* as a stylized narrative mode that constructs a distinct “speech mask”. This conceptual opacity is further compounded by the omission of the index included in the French edition, a crucial tool for tracing terminological networks, whose absence further disconnects the reader from the conceptual architecture of formalism. It is difficult to understand the rationale behind these omissions and terminological decisions, which obscure the coherence of the formalist system. In any case, the cumulative effect resembles a game of telephone: the double mediation of translation results in subtle yet significant distortions of the original concepts. This phenomenon may be partially explained by Todorov’s own translational strategy, since he provides the Russian terms only sporadically. By contrast, Italian editions – typically prepared by Slavists rather than literary theorists – include the original terminology in transliteration far more consistently, thereby offering readers a more stable conceptual anchor.

The practical repercussions of these decisions become evident in the translated text. Consider the following passage (Todorov’s lexical choices are indicated in parentheses):

La composición se vuelve diferente si el argumento [le sujet] – combinación de motivos y de sus causas [motivations] – deja de desempeñar el papel organizativo, es decir, si el narrador se coloca delante y se sirve del argumento [du sujet] únicamente para ligar los procedimientos [procédés] estilísticos particulares. El centro de gravedad del argumento [du sujet], reducido ahora al mínimo, es transferido a los procedimientos del relato directo [les procédés du récit direct].⁷ (Shklovsky in Todorov 1970, 159; cf. Todorov 1965, 212)

Here, the consistent use of *argumento* for *sujet* (*siuzhet*) and *relato directo* for *récit direct* (*skaz*) systematically obscures the theoretical relationships. A more nuanced loss occurs with the term *motivirovka*. The French edition translates this as *motivations*, retaining the idea of narrative justification. However, the Spanish version renders it here as *causas* (causes), also in other contexts Nethol uses *motivación*. This shift reduces a sophisticated literary device – the internal *justification* for a narrative device (*priem*) – to a mere logical or psychological *cause*, misrepresenting the formalist concern with artistic motivation by conflating it with an external logic of causality.

Another translation based on Todorov’s anthology – Agustín García Tirado’s – partially reproduces the same problems. The translator renders *skaz* as *relato directo*, again with no explanatory note. He also translates *sujet* as *tema* (theme), a term even further removed from the original meaning than *argumento*. Marcial Suárez’s translation, by contrast, proves more consistent. Because he follows the version produced

by the Italian Slavist Maria Di Salvo, the terminology remains coherent and it becomes possible to reconstruct the underlying system of terms and meanings.

In direct response to the challenges posed by indirect translations from French, Emil Volek made a deliberate decision to retain some of key terms in their transliterated form: *skaz*, *fábula*, and *siuzhet*. This approach, which aligns with Lawrence Venuti's concept of foreignization (1995, 19ff), is explicitly justified in his introduction. Volek argues that

Russian formalism created a terminology that was at times “difficult”, and was thus resisted even in its original context. Many of these terms became internationalized precisely because the proposed translations were inadequate. Therefore, in our version, we have also preferred to retain a group of Russian terms, generally already widely disseminated, rather than seeking a translation that could give rise to misunderstandings. (1992, 14)

His method prioritizes terminological fidelity and the preservation of the original theoretical system over immediate readability.

Cristian Cámara Outes (*fábula/argumento*) navigates the tension between foreignization and domestication by creating more intuitive pairs that strive to avoid the conceptual inversions. His work represents a compromise, seeking to make the theory accessible without fundamentally misrepresenting its core dichotomies.

MULTIPLE TRANSLATIONS OF EIKHENBAUM'S “LITERATURNYJ BYT”

To conclude our analysis, we shift from the central narrative categories to the concept of *byt*, a notion that evolved within the formalist framework. We briefly examine the reception of Boris Eikhenbaum's seminal essay “Literaturnyj byt” (1927), a work that marked a decisive turn in formalist thought by emphasizing the social dimension of literature. The reception of this essay in Spanish follows not so much a linear trajectory of interpretations as a series of isolated and parallel efforts.

To date, three independent translations can be identified – one of which exists in two distinct versions:

- 1a. Emil Volek's translation, first published in 1972 in the Chilean journal *Problemas de literatura* (Eichenbaum 1972);
- 1b. a revised version of Volek's translation, reissued in his 1992 anthology (Eichenbaum 1992);
2. a translation by the Colombian scholar of Russian origin, Marina Kuzmina, published in 2004 in *Literatura: teoría, historia, crítica* (Eichenbaum 2004);
3. a recent translation by Danila Andreev, Spanish scholar of Russian origin, published in 2024 in *Vremennik russkogo formalizma* (Eichenbaum 2024).

The translators propose different solutions to the key term, reflecting the conceptual instability surrounding it. Volek's first translation (1972), *la vida socio-literaria* (socio-literary life), emphasizes the institutional and collective aspects of the concept and the contrast between life and art, central to formalist thought. Two decades later, in his revised version (1992), he chooses *ambiente social de la literatura* (the social environment of literature, possibly influenced by the English translation as “literary environment”), foregrounding context rather than raw material. Kuzmina

(2004) renders the term as a calque of the Russian – *la cotidianidad literaria* (literary everydayness) – thereby highlighting routine and daily practices, though somewhat blurring the formalist distinction between art and extra-artistic life. Andreev (2024) likewise adopts *la cotidianeidad literaria* (literary everydayness) but adds *material socio-literario* (socio-literary material), combining the emphasis on everyday life with explicit attention to the raw social matter against which literature defines itself.

This multiplicity raises an important question: what does it actually signify? In established academic traditions, retranslations typically emerge from sustained critical engagement with a canonical text, often as part of a dialogue that refines or disputes earlier versions. In this case, however, the evidence points in another direction. A close reading of the translations and their paratexts shows that each was produced in isolation, without awareness of preceding Spanish attempts. Kuzmina (Eichenbaum 2004, 305n*) explicitly describes Eikhenbaum’s essay as *olvidado* (forgotten). Andreev (2024, 177n1) discusses the translation problem, but only in relation to the English rendering (literary environment), not to earlier Spanish versions. The essay’s absence from Todorov’s influential anthology meant it was repeatedly “rediscovered” by scholars seeking to fill a gap in the available canon, but these isolated efforts never converged into a shared reception.

The reasons for this fragmentation lie less in theoretical disagreement than in the material limits of circulation. Volek’s pioneering 1972 translation appeared in a Chilean journal that disappeared from distribution after the Pinochet coup, resurfacing only with its recent digitization. His 1992 anthology, though published by the respected press Fundamentos, never achieved the widespread circulation of Todorov’s volume. Kuzmina’s 2004 version, now available online, was originally published in print with limited regional reach. Most tellingly, Andreev’s 2024 translation makes no reference to the earlier ones, a clear indication of their invisibility.

CONCLUSION

This study has traced the trajectory of Russian formalism into the Spanish-speaking world by analyzing routes of circulation and translation strategies for key theoretical terms. The findings reveal a reception conditioned by processes of mediation, adaptation, and uneven transmission, with circulation often hindered by material and political constraints. Three interrelated observations emerge from this analysis.

First, the standard narrative of Russian formalism’s reception – often centered on its French diffusion – requires substantial nuancing. While French structuralism undoubtedly formed the theoretical landscape of Spain and Latin America, the Italian channel proved equally consequential. This reliance on Italian intermediaries stemmed not only from the strength of Italian Slavic studies but also from specific political affinities within communist intellectual cultures. The absence of direct translations from English, despite the prominence of Anglophone formalist scholarship, further illustrates that the routes of theoretical exchange depend on a complex interplay of cultural proximity, intellectual networks, and material conditions rather than linguistic dominance alone. Crucially, this shows that indirect translation does not necessarily proceed from a more “central” language, complicating our understanding of how cultural relations and theoretical lineages are constructed.

Second, the practice of indirect translation, though pragmatic, came at a considerable conceptual cost. The comparison of Spanish translations reveals how strongly mediation determined – and often distorted – the reception of formalist theory. French mediation, especially through Todorov’s influential anthology, introduced a domesticating logic that normalized terminology into familiar theoretical vocabulary, flattening oppositions central to the formalist system. Spanish translators who relied on this intermediary inherited these distortions, producing problematic renderings – *trama* for *fabula*, *argumento* or *tema* for *siuzhet*, *relato directo* for *skaz* – that obscure the conceptual mechanics of the theory. The loss of paratextual notes, omission of indexes, and terminological instability created a “broken telephone” effect, producing a representation of formalism marked by conceptual fragility.

By contrast, Italian Slavist scholarship generally adopted a more foreignizing method, preserving transliterated Russian terms and maintaining relatively consistent terminological networks. When Spanish translations were based on Italian intermediaries rather than on Todorov’s more domesticated renderings, the resulting conceptual transfer tended to remain closer to the original system. This comparison underscores a central point: the choice of intermediary strongly influences the degree of terminological continuity. Whether a translation adopts domesticating or foreignizing strategies directly affects the possibility of reconstructing the original conceptual framework through an indirect translation.

Third, the case of Eikhenbaum’s article on *literaturnyj byt* demonstrates that the availability of multiple translations does not necessarily ensure sustained impact or continuous critical engagement. The prominence of the Todorov/Nethol anthology – from which Eikhenbaum’s essay was absent – meant that the text had to be repeatedly “rediscovered” by scholars seeking to address a gap in the canon, although these recoveries remained scattered rather than forming a consolidated tradition. This suggests that canonical formation in translation depends not only on availability but also on the institutional and material contexts that determine which texts circulate widely and which remain marginal.⁸

NOTES

¹ “Искусство — это мышление образами. Эту фразу можно услышать и от гимназиста, она же является исходной точкой для ученого филолога, начинающего создавать в области теории литературы какое-нибудь построение” (Shklovskij 1919, 101).

² “Искусство = способ пережить делание вещи, дать ощущение вещи, как видения, а не как узнавания; Остранение образа = приём видения («неузнавания»); Прием — *passim* — искусство.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian, French, Italian and Spanish are by the authors of this study.

³ Ana Luisa Poljak Zorzut – better known as Ana Goldar, an Argentine professor who went into exile in Spain in 1975; for further biographical details, see Falcón 2025.

⁴ Steiner’s transliteration is used.

⁵ Cámara Outes has also devoted an article to the concept of *skaz* (2019).

⁶ We are thus translating the Russian term *skaz*.

- ⁷ “The composition becomes different if the *argumento* [le sujet] – a combination of motifs and their causes [motivations] – ceases to play the organizing role, that is, if the narrator comes to the foreground and uses the *argumento* [du sujet] only to link particular stylistic *procedimientos* [procédés]. The center of gravity of the *argumento* [du sujet], now reduced to a minimum, is transferred to the *procedimientos* of direct narration [les procédés du récit direct].”
- ⁸ The authors extend their gratitude to Igor Pilshchikov, Cristian Cámara Outes, Giuseppina Larocca, and Juan Albarrán Diego for their help and comments. We also wish to thank the anonymous peer reviewers and the editors of this volume for their thoughtful feedback.

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A “Jansenist case for translation”: Religious reform and translation practices in 18th-century Italy

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A “Jansenist case for translation”: Religious reform and translation practices in 18th-century Italy

Translation. Religion. Catholic reform. Jansenism. Politics. Entanglements.

In late 18th-century Tuscany, an attempt at wholesale religious reform was carried out by the bishop of a relatively small diocese, Scipione de’ Ricci, with the explicit support of the enlightened monarch he served, Peter Leopold. This article aims to observe and characterize, from the standpoint of translation history, the entanglements between the discourse of translation and that of societal, religious, and political reform within this Italian context. It argues that both the practice and reflection of translation played a central role in mediating a specific devotional culture and religious sensibility, pioneering new uses of vernacular languages for religious communication, and advancing a cultural policy driven by an explicit political and ideological commitment.

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In September 1786, the bishop of a relatively minor Tuscan diocese convened a synod that, according to some scholars, became one of the most significant theological events between the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council (Tempestini 1986, 29; Blanchard 2020, 5). This synod, known as the Synod of Pistoia, was called by Bishop Scipione de' Ricci with the explicit backing of Grand Duke Peter Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine. As an enlightened monarch, Peter Leopold advocated for a comprehensive reform of society, which included a radical religious reform that aimed to reshape various aspects of Church life and doctrine, aligning with a philo-Jansenist, anti-papalist and anti-Jesuit perspective.

It is not possible to provide a complete account of the different facets of the Pistoian Synod, its political, ideological, and theological underpinnings, nor of all the events leading up to it and its consequences, in a few pages.¹ It is important, however, for the purposes of this study, to understand the nature of the bold reforms carried out by Bishop Ricci. First of all, he was furiously anti-papalist, so he sought to empower the local dioceses and the parishes by restructuring the institutional organization of the diocesan clergy, frequently attacking monastic orders. Secondly, he asserted the authority and responsibility of sovereigns in the ecclesiastical sphere, and overtly sustained the power of the Tuscan State to reform the local Church and circumscribe papal power. Thirdly, Ricci was animated by a *Muratorian* theological and doctrinal spirit which sought to prioritize the Christocentric in the devotional life of his flock, so he enforced many radical liturgical and devotional reforms which were unprecedented in any Italian state. This striving for reform of every aspect of religious and devotional life reached its peak with the convocation of the Synod itself, “a unique case in Italy of civil and religious reformist activity supported with equal determination by a Bishop and a ruler”² (D’Afflitto 1986, 10).

Given its great historical relevance, the literature on Italian Jansenism is immense, as is also that concerning the Pistoian Synod and the attempts at religious reform in 18th-century Tuscany. As Mario Rosa (2014) accurately reconstructs, it was 20th-century Italian historiography that first gave rise to different, often conflicting critical interpretations. The movement was studied from diverse perspectives, ranging from a theological and confessional interest in its origins to other approaches that emphasized the connections between the reformist stances of Italian Jansenism and certain tenets of the Catholic Enlightenment and of philosophical and political liberalism (Jemolo 1928; Codignola 1947; Rosa 1969, 1981, 2009, 2014; Menozzi 1979; Passerin d’Entrèves 1952–1954, 1959). Other scholars, such as the Salesian Pietro Stella (1986, 2006), conducted thorough archival work that shed light on previously unexplored material aspects of the movement, including the intellectual networks, epistolary communications, and the editorial policies and strategies of book circulation that fostered the movement in its regional, national, and international dimensions.

In more recent years, new interpretations of Tuscan Jansenism and of the Pistoian Synod were put forward by scholars working mostly from outside the mainstream channels of Italian historiography. According to these recent interpreters, the Synod of Pistoia could be read as a forerunner to one of the most significant events in mod-

ern Catholicism, the Second Vatican Council, as it encouraged vernacular liturgy and Bible reading, shaped a form of religious liberty and sought to highlight the role of the laity and episcopal collegiality in ecclesial infallibility (Blanchard 2020).

Then why should scholars of translation be concerned with an 18th-century Tuscan Bishop and his striving for religious reform? A first answer could be that several aspects of this Jansenist episode in the history of the Italian peninsula are related to the practice or the concept of translation, and so were some of the most groundbreaking (though not completely new) ideas put forward by Ricci and the synod itself. Furthermore, the most recent attempts at reading the Pistoian Synod in the light of the Second Vatican Council have inevitably brought to the fore a number of linguistic and translational issues that had not always been thoroughly considered by previous historiography on the subject: namely, the problem of the implementation of a vernacular liturgy for the Roman Catholic Church and the issue of the intelligibility of the rites and doctrine, with all its linguistic implications. These have opened new research topics such as liturgical translation – which was traditionally overshadowed by the interest in Biblical translation – and translation practices within the Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation.³

The discussion below will examine the linguistic issues and translational concepts and practices that were central concerns for both the Jansenist reformists and their detractors. This analysis aims to characterize, from the standpoint of translation history, the entanglement between the discourse of translation and those of societal, religious, and political reform within this specific Italian context.

ENTANGLEMENTS: TRANSLATION, RELIGION(S) AND CHRISTIAN TRADITION(S)

We have already introduced, albeit indirectly, one of the main features that characterizes translation in Christian tradition, namely the fact that it (almost always) has a political dimension. Especially since, as Matthew Kraus points out, translation in Christian tradition tends to be “prominent during dramatic periods” (2022, 267) such as periods of crisis or transition between different political, cultural, or linguistic regimes (as well as during periods of social and religious reform). Even though the study of translation in Christian tradition has commonly focused on scriptural and sacred texts, during the last two or three decades many scholars have started to consider the relevance of other religious textualities and, more importantly, have begun to think about translation and religion as a pervasive historical entanglement that concerns not merely textual or linguistic operations but also underpins a broad array of cultural and political processes and practices (Rafael 1988; Seidman 2006; Flüchter and Wirbser 2017; O’Connor 2019). This shift in the historical study of translation and religion has had several consequences.

On a methodological level, due to the need to de-essentialize the concept of *Christianity* and the qualifier *Christian*, it may be preferable to avoid the expression *Christian translation* to indicate an object of study: since “Christianity defies essentialization throughout its history, so classifying a translator as Christian should be understood as specific to the translator’s orientation, not as a transhistorical,

monolithic qualifier” (Kraus 2022, 271). In addition to this, it is also important not to overstate the “impact of Christianity in the actual practice of translation” since “Christianity does not motivate the use of a participle instead of a relative clause” (271). This last remark, which seems to contradict millenary statements about strategies and techniques of religious translation, simply states (perhaps a little provocatively) that translation is, first and foremost, a historically identifiable (though deeply unstable and various) set of concepts and practices that intersect, in specific periods and under particular circumstances, different (and deeply unstable as well) conceptions of Christianity. From this perspective, what we can observe as translation history scholars is the entanglement, at some point in time and for various reasons, of the discourse of translation (however defined and characterized) with Christian religious texts, practices, agents, ideas, movements, and so on.

The second consequence of the shift in the study of translation and religion(s) can be said to be a theoretical/epistemological one. To explain this, let us briefly consider some important studies on translation in Christian tradition to understand what they have in common and how we can infer a certain theoretical position from them.

A considerable portion of the scholarship about translation and religion has dealt with the uses of translation in colonial settings, as an evangelization and catechetical tool, as well as an instrument of political, geographical, linguistic, and subjective *re-settlement* (Rafael 1988; Payàs Puigarnau 2010; Valdeón 2014; Durston 2007; Flüchter and Wirbser 2017). All these studies show that the textual practice of translation is inextricable from other linguistic practices, such as the writing of vernacular grammars and vocabularies, bilingual confession books, catechisms, and other catechetical and educational instruments. These authors have also demonstrated that political conquest and religious conversion are both linguistic endeavors on many levels. By the same token, this recent scholarship has also shown that the study of translation and/in Christian tradition needs to go beyond merely linguistic issues of adaptation or equivalence, and that translation practices are better read against the backdrop of other discursive formations that are often perceived as distant, such as geography, topography, art, architecture, bibliography and science.

Another body of scholarship that has tackled the relationship between translation and Christian tradition has focused on the entanglement between Catholic politics, institutions, and infrastructures and the practice and concept of translation, showing that translation is inseparable from the power dynamics and temporal concerns that characterized the Catholic apparatus through history. These dynamics have served very different purposes in time, not least the delimitation of a Catholic identity, often coinciding, especially from the 19th century on, with the revindication of national prerogatives and traditions (Delisle 2005; O’Connor 2019; Ferrante 2024).

What assumptions can we gather from this somewhat schematic state of the art? First of all, the study of the entanglement between translation and Christian tradition is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor, and we need to take into account “a much wider and complex set of assumptions, practices and relationships linking religious institutions, communities, imaginaries, rituals, space, materials and objects with various modes of communication, of which the use of languages is but one”

(Israel 2023a, 11; 2023b). Secondly, we need to make sense of how the discourse of translation *mediated* the category, doctrine, institutions, and practices of Christianity in time, and how the intersection between translation and religion “potentially constitutes texts, languages, and peoples” (11). From an epistemological point of view, it is not surprising that the most recent *Handbook* on the issue of translation and religion(s) resorts to the concept of *discourse*, not explicitly but evidently in a Foucauldian sense, to establish the theoretical underpinnings of the enterprise.

This approach to translation as a mediating discursive formation can be expanded and integrated with the *histoire croisée* toolbox as formulated by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmerman in their historiographical papers. As its theorists state, *histoire croisée* is not a ready-made analytical model to be applied as it is, but rather a set of methodological tools and theoretical assumptions that can be used to postulate associations between “social, cultural and political formations [...] that are assumed to bear relationship to one another” (2006, 31). *Histoire croisée* aims at examining the links between historically constituted formations not as a “rehabilitation of buried reality” (32) but as the postulation of new relationships or historical intersections that can be generative of meaning. From this analytical point of view, intercrossings never present themselves as already given, but they must be postulated by an observer who shapes, at the same time, the space for their understanding: a space of *intelligibility* that is always linked to the epistemic act of observation, the delimitation of the object, and its interpretation. This is why the *histoire croisée* toolbox relies on reflexivity: postulating relationships that are not self-evident or necessarily empirically grounded, it deconstructs the notion of a stable historical archive to unearth, and underlines the fact that any act of historical interpretation is a result of the intersections between what is brought into play by the object and what is construed by the observer. At a methodological level, objects and entities are considered not only in relation but also *through* one another (38), which is one of the purposes of interdisciplinary research: to be able to observe one field of knowledge or discipline through the lens of the other.

It is now possible to advance some preliminary questions: how can we describe or characterize the relationship between the discourse of translation and that of religious reform in this philo-Jansenist Italian milieu? How did the practice and the concept of translation feature the integral reformist operation that the Bishop and the Sovereign intended to carry out? With which other existing discourses and practices was it intertwined? Can we refer those entanglements to a wider set of problematics of which translation was a part?

TRANSLATION AND RELIGIOUS REFORM: PUBLISHING POLICY AND THE PROPAGANDA DEVICE

The troubled episcopate of Scipione de’ Ricci (1780–1791) was characterized, as indicated above, by a strong striving for religious reform, which was part of a broader attempt at societal reform carried out by the grand duke Leopold of Habsburg in Tuscany. The unique significance of this episode of Italian Jansenism lies in its effort to reform the Catholic Church *from within*, at the crossroads of Papal terri-

tories, religious dissidence, and Habsburg reform in Northern Italy (Bolton 1969, ix).⁴ Its ultimate goals were to ensure a more authentic Christian life and devotion for the brethren, a sincere vocation and true pastoral dedication from the clergy, and a strong collaboration between church and state in ecclesiastical matters.⁵

One of the main concerns of Bishop Scipione de' Ricci was, from the outset of his episcopate, the education of both the clergy and the laity, as well as the general reorganization of the diocese of Prato-Pistoia and of the different religious infrastructures (Rosa 2014, 123–133). Considering the core of these concrete preoccupations can show how translation intersects with the different aspects of his reformist enterprise.

As for the clergy, from the beginning of his bishopric, Ricci set out to reform ecclesiastical studies. He implemented a plan of reorganization of the bishop's school and the seminary, and created a new Ecclesiastical Academy for higher studies (Stella 2006, 326–328). His “openly propagandist” (Bolton 1969, 24) program of studies reflected an educational model sensitive to the latest perspectives of the Catholic Enlightenment, a necessary renewal of the scholastic methods through the circulation of Jansenist literature, and the importance of the studies of antiquity as a means to a better comprehension of Christian doctrine, liturgy, and devotion.

Bishop Ricci also changed the economic organization of the ecclesiastical structures and of the livelihood of the secular clergy to minimize temporal and material concerns and allow them to dedicate themselves exclusively to their educational and pastoral function. In this vein, Ricci also substantially rearranged the parish structures to guarantee the presence of a priest even in impenetrable or distant territories that had been without one, highlighting the importance of the participation of the laity in the life of the parish, and the inescapable centrality of the pastoral role of the diocesan clergy (Rauty 1986; Tempestini 1986).

As for the laity (setting aside for now the liturgical and devotional reforms that will be discussed below), Bishop Ricci was convinced that widespread ignorance was the main cause of the decadence of religious life and devotion, so he violently opposed the “preachers who said that the study of religion was insolent curiosity [...] and who by their fine words without meaning kept the people from reading the Scriptures or from any book that might enlighten them” (Bolton 1969, 18; Rosa 2014, 152–154). In an important pastoral letter issued when adopting a new catechism for his diocese, titled *Istruzione pastorale di monsignor Vescovo di Pistoia e Prato sulla necessità e sul modo di studiare la religione* (Pastoral instruction of the lord bishop of Pistoia e Prato on the necessity and the method of studying religion, 1782), Ricci establishes his policy regarding lay education, since he believed that there was “a crying need for proper instruction on the nature of Confession. The people must be instructed by their clergy. They must be given good books, especially the Scriptures. They must attend their parish services” (Bolton 1986, 19).

To advance his ideas and to implement this ambitious plan of reform despite the opposition of his enemies and detractors, Ricci could count on a complex propaganda apparatus that relied on an aggressive editorial and publication policy (Stella 2006, 333–334). Ricci seemed to have “an unlimited faith in printed material as a lever for changing ideas and for the formation of a clergy capable of implementing

the reforms” (Aiardi and Savi 1986, 71) and, as a consequence, he spent great sums of money on books and pamphlets, which he referred to as “a flood of good books”, frequently (though not always) originally in French, and Jansenist in doctrine or outlook.

Ricci collaborated with two official Episcopal printers (Atto Bracali and Vincenzo Vestri) that, between 1780 and 1791 (i.e., the years of Ricci’s episcopate), carried out a systematic publishing activity which was unprecedented in a small diocese such as Prato-Pistoia, and that also testifies to a relationship of patronage between the Bishop and the printers who were to serve his cause. As for the books, pamphlets, and volumes which were to be printed and circulated, Bolton has reconstructed the paths and connections through which the material to be read and translated arrived in Tuscany:

Ricci’s correspondence with the French Jansenists at Utrecht shows that he received literally thousands of books from abroad, especially during the first years of his episcopate. As a rule packages were sent by sea from Antwerp to Genoa or Leghorn. The land route was more costly; this was from Paris to Dijon, Lyon, Turin, Pavia and Genoa. Different friends received the packages and forwarded them after removing what was destined for themselves. [...] Many books were sent in large quantities. Most were destined for the clergy and for the ecclesiastical students of Pistoia, although a certain number were to be translated and then reprinted. Writing to the Archduke’s secretary to ask him to provide printing presses for the sake of propaganda, Ricci says: “I think it necessary to flood the country with good books. I do not tire of bringing Books in but the business, as you see, is too passive. As I have agreed with the Archduke to form a little collection of good books, I shall really need a new printing works.” (1969, 28)

At the receiving end of this well-structured intellectual network, translation was a fundamental stage in the reception of this flood of “good books”, especially for the laity and the common people, which was a central point in Ricci’s editorial and translation policy. The need to translate books and pamphlets into the local languages, other than the usual and most popular catechisms and the few other genres allowed by ecclesiastical censorship (Fragno 2005, 191–259), responded to his conviction that everyone – from the most educated to the *idioti*, from the literate parishioners to their illiterate families, children and women included – should be able to get a closer grasp of the mysteries of the faith. He believed they should understand the meaning of the rites in which they participated and the significance of the Sacraments they received. Ricci repeatedly makes this point in his pastoral letters, private correspondence, homilies, and official statements. This is also why he frequently offers, as a corollary to these reasons, lists of good (translated) books to be owned and read, even out loud on familiar and social occasions. As Ricci himself states in the aforementioned pastoral letter:

[Among the means for properly studying religion] there are even more, and these are good books, the reading of which can be of great benefit to you. The divine Scriptures are a book which all the faithful should always have in their hands. These are also faithfully translated, so that those who do not know any other language will not be left without such important reading. The reprinting of the entire Sacy in our language also offers

great and salutary nourishment to the faithful, who also find in it an edifying explanation of the literal and spiritual meaning drawn from the Holy Fathers and ecclesiastical authors. The Compendium of the History of the Old Testament by the pious and learned Mr. Mésenguy, which is already translated in Vicenza, and the Ecclesiastical History of Racine, which is translated and almost printed in Florence under the auspices of the Religious Sovereign, are two works which form the History of the whole Religion, which is presented to us in an equally satisfactory and edifying way, and I cannot recommend enough to all Christian families to provide themselves with them and to read them daily. (1782, xxii–xxiii)

Here, Ricci not only recommends Bible reading but, more importantly, he advises his flock to get acquainted with the history of religion and religious texts. The importance of the study of the history of religious doctrine, liturgy, and institutions is a central tenet of Catholic Enlightenment. In this view, an accurate historical and philological study of the early Christian Church's texts and practices is an instrument that can shed new light on and restore the meaning of current liturgical practices and religious doctrines believed to have been corrupted or misunderstood over time. In this Enlightened reformist milieu, historical awareness encompasses change, making it acceptable. Historiography thus becomes a path for reform, underscoring the need to translate these materials and make them available to the laity.

As noted above, the lists of “good books” and authors suggested, translated, and published by Ricci were often French Jansenist books, writings from “the Friends of the Truth”. On many occasions, these books and pamphlets had already been condemned by Rome or placed on the Index of Forbidden Books (Stella 2006, 335–337). A striking example is the Episcopal publisher Atto Bracali's expensive edition of the translation of Pasquier Quesnel's *Le Nouveau Testament en français avec des réflexions morales sur chaque verset* (New Testament in French with moral reflections upon each verse, 1695). It was then general knowledge that 101 propositions from this book – a commented French translation of the New Testament – were severely condemned in 1713 by the Papal bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, causing a resurgence of the Jansenist religious movement that led to a violent and long-lasting conflict between religious dissidents and the Curial orthodox positions all over Europe. There was, then, no mistaking this translation intervention for a naive form of religious instruction or communication: it was also, evidently, a political act, an open challenge to Papal authority, and so it was acknowledged by Ricci's detractors and supporters (Stella 2006, 356–358).⁶

Thus, the practice of translation operated on many levels and intersected with various religious, cultural, and political discursive instances. First, translation was an *educational tool* that allowed everyone to access the doctrines of the Faith and to carry out what Ricci saw as a duty for every Christian: the close study of religion and the meaningful participation in the life of the Church and, ultimately, of the parish. Secondly, translation worked as a performative *propaganda device*, a practice needed to instantiate controversial ideological positions, flooding the public and private spaces with very recognizable discourses emanating from the *Republic of Grace* (Blanchard 2020, 72–76). By the same token, translation also served as a *networking*

instrument that highlighted the connections between different geographical and intellectual spaces that shared well-defined doctrinal, ecclesiological, and devotional tenets. Finally, the discourse and practice of translation was a deliberate form of *political intervention*: in this case, a bold translation policy was an open challenge to Papal authority and power.

TRANSLATION AND RELIGIOUS REFORM:

THE VOICE OF THE BRETHREN AND THE LITURGICAL DEVICE

In late 18th-century Italy, the topic of lay Bible reading and, hence, of Bible translation was still quite a contentious issue (Fragnito 1997, 2005; Fattori 2014). However, another very sensitive matter was the possibility, clearly put forward by the Synod of Pistoia and Ricci himself, of implementing a vernacular liturgy or, at least, providing “vernacular aids” during the ceremony of the Mass to allow the participants to follow the different rites and understand their meaning.

This was part of a broader liturgical reform that Ricci implemented during his episcopate and that saw him, once again, on a collision course with Catholic established practices. For Ricci, ignorance was a source of error and sin, and the only way to counter the decadence and corruption of the Christian message and the disengagement and superficiality he observed among the faithful was a closer acquaintance with the original Christian evangelical sources, i.e. the Scriptures, and with the most significant part of Christian life, the sacrifice of the Mass.⁷ As the Final Document of the Pistoian Synod states (Atti e Decreti 1788), all Christians have the *right and duty* to participate in public prayer and the *obligation to understand* the Church’s prayers and ceremonies to unite the voice of the single believer to the voice of the Church (203–205).

It is interesting, once again, to consider different aspects of this attempt to reform the liturgy because it helps us to better understand the web of practices and meanings to which translation belonged. For example, to encourage lay participation, bring them in closer touch with sacramental mysteries, and increase the comprehensibility of the worship experience, Ricci established that in every church there had to be only one altar, which represented, visually, the uniqueness of Christ’s sacrifice and the relationship between the believer and God. By the same token, Ricci called for a rearrangement of the spaces of worship, which had to be grave, sober and minimalist, devoid of mundane solemnity and distractions, luxury and pomp (Romby 1986). Furthermore, sacred images were to be limited, not to be worshipped but with a clear pedagogical function, to eradicate superstition and popular devotions⁸ (D’Afflitto and Roani Villani 1986). The same attempt at a more direct and aware participation in liturgical experience was to be achieved by several linguistic practices involved in the liturgy. First of all, the prayers and the rites of the Church would be translated and compiled in bilingual editions (in Latin and in the vernacular), especially when administering the Sacraments, so the faithful could follow and comprehend every passage of the rites. Secondly, the (Ordinary of the) Mass would be translated, and the Psalms and Hymns would be “reduced into Italian poetry” (Atti e Decreti 1788, 205–206). Another point related to the concept of translation and to the need for

an *intelligibility* of the rites was that, during the Mass, the pronunciation of the Canon (the Eucharistic prayer by which, according to the Catholic rite, the Host becomes the body of Christ) would have to be clear and distinct, out loud, without rushing and allowing everybody to understand every single word. This was opposed to the established Catholic tradition according to which this prayer had to be pronounced quietly, *sotto voce*, as a whisper (128); in fact, traditionally the Canon was not supposed to be heard by the participants in the Eucharistic rite (Bini 2015). Finally, one of the main aspirations of the synod's Liturgical Decrees was the establishment of an entirely vernacular liturgy, as stated in the following controversial passage from the Synod's Decrees:

Persuaded of these principles, the holy Synod desires to remove those reasons by which [these solid liturgical principles] have been in part forgotten: by recalling the Liturgy to a greater simplicity of rites, by expressing it in the vulgar tongue, and by uttering it in an elevated voice. (Atti e Decreti 1788, 131, trans. by Blanchard 2020, 169)

This call for vernacular liturgy, for the use of vernacular aids, bilingual editions, and translations was a scandal to the opponents of the Synod, a "violation of the Arcane" (Blanchard 2020, 173). Unsurprisingly, then, many of these propositions incurred the condemnation of the Papacy.

CONCLUSION

Not many historians have discussed the linguistic dimension at work in the Jansenist attempts at religious reform. One of the few scholars who took an interest in the linguistic problem that this episode in Italian religious history poses is the historian Pietro Stella, who writes in the introduction to his monumental critical edition of the Synod Decrees:

The historical sketch presented leaves important fields in the shadows, such as that of language. It is evident, in fact, that the synod, having been written in Italian, appears for that very reason to be a revolutionary act when compared with the consolidated tradition of post-Tridentine synods, all of which were the fruit of a mentality that reaffirmed Latin as the official language of the church. (1986, v–vi)

While a number of the reforms implemented or theorized by this reformist milieu were actually a reinterpretation of some aspects of French Jansenist doctrine, the generally unacknowledged fact that the Synod Final Decrees were originally written and published in Italian, as Stella points out, is itself a revolutionary act that brought about a number of long-lasting consequences (2006, 347–350). Translation offers a unique vantage point for understanding this revolution. As the Italian linguist and historian Vittorio Coletti (2006) argues, the discourse of translation is where the intellectual debates over the capacity of the vernacular (can it be used for scientific, philosophical, legal or religious communication?) most clearly intersect, historically, the debates over the role of the laity in the religious sphere: who is entitled to understand, listen or read directly the Sacred texts? How much is the laity supposed to grasp of the language and the meaning of liturgy and, more generally, of religious doctrine?

By the same token, the liturgical reforms pursued by Bishop Ricci (one altar, sobriety of the rite and of the music, pronunciation of the Canon, the frequent participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass, and, of course, vernacular liturgy and vernacular or bilingual aids to follow the rites) all tended to underline the need for what we have called the *intelligibility* of the religious experience, and the possibility of an unmediated and more aware relationship between the Word and the individual, which had been, as is well known, one of the central tenets of the main reformist religious movements at least since the 15th century (Taylor 2009, 104–116). As a consequence, translation practices need to be read against the backdrop of other concurrent discourses and practices (educational, economic, political), all of which tended to encourage lay participation in the life of the Church and to enhance the education of both the laity and the clergy, as well as to clearly establish a space of political intervention and resistance to what was perceived as an excessive power of the Roman Curia.

NOTES

- ¹ The literature on the Pistoian Synod and religious reform in 18th-century Tuscany is immense. For a general overview, see Lamioni 1986 and, more recently, Stella 2006 and Rosa 2014.
- ² Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Italian are by the present author. Translations from Italian to English were performed with assistance from the AI-based tool Gemini. The author performed a comprehensive review and revision of the machine-generated text to ensure scientific accuracy, contextual fidelity, and correct disciplinary terminology. The final translated content reflects the author's interpretation and is not solely the output of the AI tool.
- ³ Scholars who have tackled the issue of translation discourses, practices and policies within the Jansenist religious movement, both in the Italian and in the French and/or Francophone contexts, include Weaver 1985, Pieroni Francini 1987, and Caffiero 1989. Other scholars, such as Pietro Stella (2006), have also considered the textual, linguistic, and literary dimension of the movement.
- ⁴ Passerin d'Entrèves (1954, 279–285) points out the “European dimension” of these anti-Curialist and philo-Jansenist attempts at societal and religious reform, especially those that took place in Habsburg territories such as Tuscany, Lombardy and Austria.
- ⁵ For the limits and the ambiguities of the collaboration between the sovereign Peter Leopold and Bishop Ricci, see Passerin d'Entrèves (1953, 359–365).
- ⁶ According to Pietro Stella, when there were doubts or ambiguities regarding the interpretation of the Riccian doctrinal positions as orthodox or heretical, the Roman Congregation would adopt “as proof the indisputable fact that Ricci in his pastoral letters and the synodal acts themselves had promoted the *Réflexions morales* of Quesnel and other writings condemned by the Holy See and notoriously Jansenist” (1983, 29). On the openly propagandist translation policy of Ricci, see also Stella (2006) on the *Raccolta di opuscoli interessanti la religione* (Collection of pamphlets about religion), a multivolume collection of philo-Jansenist pamphlets and books published under the direct supervision of Ricci, and quickly placed in the Index as well.
- ⁷ For a complete and extensive overview of the different aspects of what has been called the “*pietà illuminata*” (enlightened piety) see Rosa 2014, 135–157.
- ⁸ By “popular devotions”, Jansenists referred to religious practices such as the worship of relics, the veiling of sacred images, the multiplication of religious festivities, or the sale of indulgences. They argued that these and other similar practices did not reflect an interior and rational spirituality (“*pietà illuminata*”) but were the result of a superficial and superstitious approach to the faith and an “obscuration” of the true and original Scriptural and patristic teachings. See Rosa 2014.

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Humanities and social sciences translation in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s–1930s

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Humanities and social sciences translation in Soviet Ukraine in the 1920s–1930s

Ukrainization. Translation Theory. Non-literary Prose. Russification. Marxist Ideology. Cultural Renaissance. Genre-specific Strategies.

This study explores the translation of humanities and social sciences texts in Ukraine during the 1920s–1930s, a time of cultural and political shifts. The Soviet Ukrainization policy (1923–1929) drove a surge in translations of scholarly works in pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, and Marxist theory from German, French, and English. Scholars like Oleksandr Finkel, Mykola Zerov, and Mykhailo Kalynovych developed advanced translation theory, with Finkel's *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* (Theory and practice of translation, 1929) emphasizing genre-specific strategies for non-literary prose. The early 1930s reversal of Ukrainization and Stalinist Russification suppressed Ukrainian linguistic autonomy, imposing Russian intermediary translations and branding translators as “nationalist saboteurs”. Despite the repression, these translations enriched Ukrainian intellectual life, even as political terror erased many works from history.

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The translation of scholarly texts in the humanities and social sciences – despite its intellectual and cultural significance – has long remained marginal in comparison with literary translation and scientific-technical translation. Social science texts in particular pose distinctive challenges: unlike natural-science writing, they often contain ideological, conceptual, and terminological complexities; unlike literary works, they demand analytical precision and discipline-specific coherence. In the Soviet Union, the humanities were systematically reinterpreted as branches of the social sciences, since all disciplines were required to align with historical and dialectical materialism, which functioned as the universal scientific and ideological framework. Philosophy, especially dialectical materialism, served as the methodological authority that defined “scientificity” and imposed strict ideological regulation across both the social and humanistic fields, effectively sociologizing the humanities. As a result, the boundary between humanities and social sciences was blurred, and most disciplines were integrated into a unified science of society interpreted through Marxist-Leninist categories (Wetter 1958).

In the Russian Empire, Ukrainian was officially framed as a dialect of Russian, leading to repressive measures such as the Valuev Circular (1863) and the Ems Decree (1876), which banned Ukrainian publications, translations, and cultural activity. Although the Ukrainian People’s Republic ultimately lost the War of Independence (1917–1921), its brief existence compelled the Bolsheviks to recognize Ukrainians as a distinct nation. During this period, an independent Ukrainian state briefly emerged before most of its territory was absorbed into the Ukrainian SSR and the rest divided among Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. On 30 December 1922, the Communists proclaimed the formation of the USSR as a federation of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Transcaucasia. Crucially, the institutional foundations for Ukrainian scholarship – including the Academy of Sciences (1918) and school programs in Ukrainian studies – were established before Soviet rule. Seeking to secure political authority while recognizing national aspirations, Soviet leaders initiated the Ukrainization policy in 1923, expanding the use of Ukrainian in education, administration, and publishing. This policy catalyzed a cultural renaissance during the 1920s: Ukrainian-language schooling grew, book production increased, and translations from numerous languages flourished. The reversal of Ukrainization in 1929, however, brought intensified censorship and the repression of hundreds of Ukrainian scholars, writers, and translators (Pauly 2014).

Between 1917 and 1932, Ukraine experienced a dramatic expansion of translation activity, with hundreds of works rendered from many languages (Kolomiyets 2015, 12–121). The period also saw rapid development in translation theory and administrative, journalistic, scientific, and technical translation. From the mid-1920s to early 1930s, translations of scientific and scholarly literature increased substantially in fields such as medicine, psychology, chemistry, geology, agricultural science, and engineering – primarily from German and English – to meet the growing demand for specialized knowledge in Ukrainian. Even foundational scientific texts became accessible: Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859), translated by Volodymyr Derzhavyn, appeared in Kharkiv in 1936. These efforts reflect the breadth and ambition of Ukrainian scholarly translation during this formative era.

Methodologically, this study adopts Anthony Pym's (1998) concept of translation archaeology, which integrates bibliographic reconstruction with case studies to identify long-term trends, translation frequency, and periods of intensity or decline. Translation archaeology allows translation to be understood as a cultural and historical process, simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, revealing structural patterns that cannot be detected through isolated analysis of individual texts. Existing bibliographies are incomplete: Ukrainian translations of fiction from 1917–1941 are catalogued (Kolomiyets 2015), while scholarly translations are systematically listed only up to 1923 in the *Drukovanyi zvednyi katalog ukrainomovnoi knyhy derzhavnykh bibliotek ta muzeiv Ukrainy. 1798–1923. Vypusk 5: 1920–1923* (Printed consolidated catalogue of Ukrainian language books of the state libraries and museums of Ukraine, 1798–1923; Nehreichuk and Kononenko 2015). No comprehensive listings exist for scholarly translations after 1923. Therefore, the present corpus was manually reconstructed using the catalogs of the following institutions: the Central Scientific Library of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University; the M. Maksymovych Scientific Library of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; the Vernadsky National Library of Ukraine; and the manuscript collections of the T. H. Shevchenko Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Additional materials were sourced from the Hryhoriy Kochur Literary Museum in Irpin and the National Museum of Literature of Ukraine.

This article examines the emergence and development of humanities and social-science translation in Soviet Ukraine during the 1920s–1930s, situating these processes within wider political and linguistic change. It outlines the ideological and institutional conditions shaped by Ukrainization and its reversal, highlights Finkel's 1929 theoretical contribution, and surveys translation across pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, history, political science, Marxism, literary studies, linguistics, and religious or atheistic literature. By considering source languages, mediation practices, and terminology formation, this analysis shows how censorship, ideological regulation, and language planning redefined both the scope and epistemic orientation of Ukrainian scholarly translation.

THEORIZING TRANSLATION OF NON-LITERARY PROSE

The Soviet Union played a pioneering role in developing a theory of scholarly translation, driven in part by the need to render foundational works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin into the many languages of its population. A major milestone in this development was Oleksandr Finkel's 1929 monograph *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* (Theory and practice of translation; Baer and Hofeneder 2025, 319). As Brian J. Baer notes, "Finkel may have been the first to extend translation theory beyond literary and sacred texts to include the category of non-literary prose" (2024, 17).

Finkel drew a sharp line between literary and non-literary genres and insisted on the importance of the latter. He argued that the study of non-literary prose translation is "just as important and reveals equally interesting problems as literary translation, not to mention that at certain times it holds exceptional social significance"¹

(1929, 45). In Chapter 2, “The Translation of Non-literary Prose”, he classifies such texts into scholarly and administrative types – drawing on Charles Bally’s typology – and journalistic texts (*publitsystyka*), thus establishing one of the earliest genre-based translation models (47–48).

Rejecting the assumption that conveying basic content suffices in prose translation, Finkel emphasized that accuracy requires sensitivity to genre-specific linguistic and stylistic features (51). For scientific translation in particular, he warned that imitating foreign syntactic structures produces awkward results and advocated instead for clarity and idiomatic target-language syntax (61, 63). While national linguistic traits should be removed, the author’s individual style must remain visible, allowing the translation to read naturally in the target language while preserving the logic of argumentation. These principles, he insisted, apply equally to administrative and journalistic prose, making their translation no less demanding than that of poetry (76).

Finkel’s monograph appeared during Stalin’s first five-year plan (1928–1932), when industrialization and collectivization created a demand for technical and scientific materials in Ukrainian, requiring translators trained in specialized terminology. Translation also served ideological goals, enabling the regime to disseminate Marxist-Leninist doctrine in non-Russian languages. At the same time, the 1920s marked a cultural revival in Ukraine. Intellectuals such as Mykola Zerov, Maksym Rylsky, Oswald Burghardt, Valerian Pidmohylny, Mykhailo Kalynovych, and Oleksandr Biletsky promoted translation as a means of enriching Ukrainian literature and linking it to global intellectual movements.

These converging needs led to the founding of the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistic Education in Kyiv in 1930, with a branch in Kharkiv, creating an early institutional base for translation studies. Soon after, university-level translation programs appeared (Kalnychenko 2025), and Finkel’s typology entered instruction through methodology syllabi by Mykhailo Kalynovych (Dzhuhastrianska and Strikha 2015) and Mykola Zerov (Kolomiyets 2021), the latter covering non-literary prose, literary prose, verse, technical terminology, and business correspondence (Kolomiyets 2023a). In the 1930s, Soviet scholars such as Dmitrii Usov, Andrei Fedorov, and Yakov Retsker expanded Finkel’s insights, anticipating later Western developments (Baer 2024).

Significantly, from the mid-1930s onward, Ukrainian translation scholarship faced dual marginalization (Hostová et al. 2024, 116). Within the USSR, Stalinist directives curtailed non-Russian intellectual activity by labeling it “nationalist deviation”, hindering institutional development. In Western academia, Cold War epistemologies and Russocentric frameworks limited access to and recognition of Ukrainian work. Together, these forces obscured Ukrainian contributions to the history of translation theory.

PRACTICE OF TRANSLATING NON-LITERARY PROSE

Translation practices of the period transcended the domain of belles-lettres, extending into a broad array of disciplines across the humanities and the social sciences.

1. Translated literature in the field of pedagogy and psychology

In the 1920s and early 1930s, numerous translations of key works in psychology and pedagogy were published, reflecting the growing interest in educational theory and practice.² These included Maria Montessori's *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini* (Method of scientific pedagogy and its practice in children's houses, trans. from Italian by Dmytro Shcherbanenko, 1921); Paul Barth's *Geschichte der Erziehung* (History of education, trans. by M. Hordiyevsky, 1923); Ernest A. Bernhard's *Die seelischen Vorgänge als Bewegungen* (Psychic processes as movements, trans. from German by M. M. Vasylykivsky, 1925, with an accompanying dictionary of psychological terminology); *Educational Tests and Measurements* by Will Seymour Monroe (trans. from English by I. Maistrenko, edited by O. Zaluzhny, 1927); a collection of selected works by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (edited by M. I. Gordievsky, A. G. Gotalov-Gotlib, and V. O. Chudnovtsev, 1928); Jean Piaget's *Le jugement et le raisonnement chez l'enfant* (Judgment and reasoning in the child, trans. from French by A. Myliashkevych and V. Sapizhuk, 1930); Ludwig Langstein's *Das Vorschul- und Schulkind. Seine Ernährung und Pflege* (The preschool and school-age children: Their nutrition and care, trans. from German, ed. by I. A. Lieberman, 1930), and Claude-Adrien Helvétius's *De l'homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son éducation* (A treatise on man: His intellectual faculties and his education, trans. from French by Valerian Pidmohylny, 1932). Other works translated in this period include Pavel Blonsky's *Pedagogika* (trans. from Russian by V. Doha, 1924), and William James's *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (trans. from a Russian intermediary by a group of teachers under M. Bernatsky, 1924). Such cases are notable because Ukrainian educators generally read Russian fluently, making translations from Russian rare. The James volume is especially striking as a collaborative, non-professional translation from an intermediary text, involving atypical, multilayered mediation.

In the 1930s, Ukraine's pedagogical and scholarly sphere was rapidly subordinated to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, replacing earlier methodological diversity with strict ideological uniformity. As a result, translations of psychological literature into Ukrainian ceased entirely from this period onward. At the same time, the few pedagogical classics that continued to appear in Ukrainian – such as a collection of the selected works by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1938) and Jan Amos Comenius's selected pedagogical works in three volumes (1940) – were produced not from the original languages but through Russian intermediary translations. This shift, together with a general decline in humanities translations, reflects the broader Soviet policy of consolidating ideological control and centralizing intellectual production (Kolomiyets 2023b).

2. Translated literature in the field of classic philosophy and history

Interwar Ukrainian translation culture developed along markedly divergent regional and thematic lines, and the following facts are introduced specifically to illustrate how selection of texts to be translated differed across territories. In the western regions incorporated into the Second Polish Republic after the 1921 Treaty of Riga,

translators gravitated toward ancient literature, especially philosophical texts. This tendency stemmed from the continued presence of Latin and Ancient Greek in secondary-school curricula, in contrast to Soviet Ukraine, where classical languages had largely vanished from education. Despite this educational foundation, Ukrainian renderings of Greek and Latin philosophical works remained rare due to the absence of a sustained tradition of translating ancient thought. Even so, several significant Lviv editions appeared, including Tacitus's *Annales* (Annals, 1935) and Herodotus's *Γένεσις Σκυθῶν* (Description of Scythia, 1937). Mykhailo Ostroverkh's Lviv Ukrainian translation of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1934) likewise exemplifies these selective patterns. Many further initiatives never materialized as they were interrupted by repression, war, emigration, or the loss of translators.

In Soviet Ukraine, translations of ancient and Renaissance works were even rarer. Nevertheless, the Neoclassicist milieu undertook several exemplary initiatives aimed at maintaining cultural continuity despite intensifying ideological pressure. Mykola Zerov published fragments of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and works by Marc Antoine Muret in the monthly *Chervony Shliakh* (Red pathway), while Maksym Rylsky produced a 1931 anthology of French classics that included Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art poétique*.

Contemporary Western historiography rarely reached Ukrainian readers directly. A notable exception – though still mediated through another language – was the Kharkiv Knyhospilka edition of Sven Hedin's essays, *Zavoyovnyky Ameryky* (1926), which Yuriy Klen (Oswald Burghardt) translated from the German version *Amerika im Kampf der Kontinente*, not the Swedish original.

Institutional planning expanded in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In March 1930, under the auspices of the Taras Shevchenko Institute's Cabinet of Comparative Studies of Literature, Zerov compiled a priority list of foreign works for the LiM (Literature and Art) Publishing House within the State Publishing Association of Ukraine (Kolomiyets 2023b). His program emphasized Greek and Latin classics, literature of the feudal and early modern periods, and modern French, English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Scandinavian authors. A full translation of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* was planned by Zerov and V. Petrovsky, although ancient philosophy itself was not prioritized.

Ambitious projects to translate Enlightenment thought accompanied these initiatives. A four-volume Jean-Jacques Rousseau edition was planned, combining abridged versions of his major works with a translation by Khrystyna Alchevska, while a two-volume Denis Diderot set was also envisioned. Ultimately, only the Diderot edition appeared in 1933, translated by Valerian Pidmohylny, though even it was issued in a reduced form without the planned theoretical writings on theater. Pidmohylny (1901–1937) was among the most accomplished translators of the period. Beyond Balzac and Maupassant, he produced Ukrainian versions of Voltaire's *Candide, ou l'Optimisme* (1927), Diderot's works, and Helvétius's *De l'Homme* (1932).

Marxist and socialist historiography formed another major axis of translation. Anton Kharchenko translated Mikhail Tugan-Baranovsky's *Sovremennyy sotsializm v svoem istoricheskom razvitii* (Modern socialism in its historical development,

1920). The All-Ukrainian State Publishing House issued Dutch communist theorist Herman Gorter's *Het historisch materialisme* (Historical materialism), translated from the German edition *Der historische Materialismus*, in 1921. Meanwhile, Gorter's *Die Kommunistische Arbeiter-Internationale* (The Communist Workers' International, 1922) appeared in Vienna in a Ukrainian translation issued by the Publishing House of the Ukrainian Section of the Communist Party of Austria, with a dedication to Lenin. Numerous history textbooks were translations, including Robert Vipper's works and Wilhelm Bölsche's *Der Mensch der Vorzeit* (Prehistoric man, 1923).

Soviet class-centric historiography dominated the field, with Mikhail Pokrovsky's *Russkaya istoriya v samom szhatom ocherke* (Russian history: A concise outline, trans. by Maria Iltychna, ed. by Yevhen Kasianenko, 1922) – the only official history textbook in the Soviet state – serving as its primary exemplar. Together with *Ekonomicheskii materializm* (Economic materialism, trans. by Yevhen Hryhoruk, 1923), these works epitomized this paradigm. Even non-Marxist works were framed through Marxist commentary, as seen in the translation from German of Julius Lipfert's *Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit in ihrem organischen Aufbau* (The history of culture in its organic development, 1922).

3. Translated literature in the field of political science and Marxist theory

In the early 1920s, the social sciences in the Ukrainian SSR were shaped by ideological concerns and by Russian prerevolutionary Marxist debates. A notable example is the 1921 Ukrainian edition of *Nauka o obshchestvennom soznanii: Kratkiy kurs ideologicheskoy nauki v voprosakh i otvetakh* (The science of social consciousness: A short course in ideological science in questions and answers), where Mykola Tryrog (M. V. Semenko) translated and introduced Alexander Bogdanov's ideas. Bogdanov's *Nachalny kurs politicheskoy ekonomii* (Elementary course in political economy) likewise appeared in 1922.

By the mid-1920s, translations in political science and Marxist theory expanded significantly. Foundational texts by Marx and Engels were published, including *Der 18te Brumaire des Louis Napoleon* (The eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon, trans. from German by M. and I. Stepanov, ed. by V. Shcherbanenko, 1925); *Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich* (The civil war in France, trans. from German by S. Buda, 1925); *Kritik des Gothaer Programms* (The critique of the Gotha program, trans. from German by S. Vikul, 1929); and *Das Kapital* (Capital, trans. from German by M. Porsch, 1929). These translations marked the consolidation of Marxist thought within Ukrainian scholarship, even as key materials – such as Marx's correspondence with Serhii Podolynsky – remained unpublished in Ukrainian.

Translations on the lives and work of Marx, Engels, and Lenin circulated widely in early Soviet Ukraine, helping the formation of a new propagandistic genre for Ukrainian readership – political biography. Yurii Steklov's *Karl Marks: Ego zhizn i deyatelnost* (Karl Marx: His life and work) appeared in Ukrainian in 1922 thanks to the transnational “Kosmos” publishing association, which also issued Leon Trotsky's *Terrorizm i kommunizm* (Terrorism and communism, 1923). Early translations of Engels and other Marxist theorists were often made directly from

originals – such as Engels’s *Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft* (Socialism: utopian and scientific, 1923) – though this was not always indicated. By the early 1930s, translators increasingly relied on Russian mediating editions.

Philosophical translation was fully aligned with Marxist-Leninist ideology. Priority was given to works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin, including Stalin’s *O Lenine i leninizme* (On Lenin and Leninism, trans. by Andrii Richytskyi, 1924). Many translations used Russian editions or commentaries, such as Boris Gorev’s *Materializm – filosofiya proletariata* (Materialism – the philosophy of the proletariat, 1925), Pavlo Rokhnin’s *Fejrbah i Marks* (1925), and Boris Fingert and Maxim Shirvindt’s *Kratkij uchebnik istoricheskogo materializma* (A short textbook of historical materialism, 1928). Ukrainian editions of works by Bolshevik leaders also appeared, including Nikolai Bukharin’s *Krizis kapitalizma i kommunisticheskoe dvizhenie* (The crisis of capitalism and the communist movement, 1924), Trotsky’s *O Lenine: materialy dlya biografy* (On Lenin: Materials for a biographer, 1924), and Lev Kamenev’s *Istoriya Partii kommunistov v Rossii i V. I. Lenin* (The history of the communist party in Russia and V. I. Lenin, 1923). The 1919 Ukrainian translation of Peter Kropotkin’s *Kommunizm i anarkhiia* (Communism and anarchy) by Serhiy Pylypenko reflects the Ukrainian People’s Republic’s openness to diverse socialist ideas; Pylypenko’s later execution underscores the vulnerability of Ukraine’s revolutionary generation.

An overview of 1920s translations shows that most social-science works were rendered from Russian, with few exceptions such as Karl August Wittfogel’s *Die Wissenschaft der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (The science of bourgeois society), which was translated from German, and Ernest Unterman’s *Science and Revolution*, translated from English. By contrast, psychology and pedagogy relied primarily on German, French, and English sources.

The first collected Ukrainian edition of Lenin’s works (1928–1933, 18 volumes) sought to affirm linguistic independence but was denounced by Naum Kahanovych as “nationalist sabotage” (Kalnychenko and Kolomiyets 2022), prompting campaigns against “nationalist translators-saboteurs” (Kalnychenko and Kalnychenko 2020). Lenin’s works in Ukrainian circulated extensively, with more than 800 editions and 24 million copies issued between 1918 and 1965. These publications served ideological and linguistic functions; they were used, for example, in compiling Ivan Bilodid’s *Slovyk ukrainskoi movy* (Dictionary of the Ukrainian language, 1970–1980), together with translations of Marx and Engels (Hofeneder 2010). Party directives required that all translations of Lenin’s works – and any other political or ideological texts – be produced only with authorization and oversight from party institutions.

4. Translations in literary studies, linguistics, and the arts

Translations in literary studies and linguistics were relatively scarce and mostly originated in the pre-Soviet or early Soviet period. Important examples include Gustave Lanson’s *Méthode de l’histoire littéraire* (The method of literary history, 1919), translated from French by Okhrim Sobolev, and Leonid Bulakhovsky’s outline of the origin and development of language (1925), translated from Russian by

V. Shcherbanenko. The Danish linguist Kristian Sandfeld-Jensen's introductory *Die Sprachwissenschaft* (Linguistics) was translated from German by Yevhen Tymchenko and published in Katerynoslav in 1920.

Hans Gál's *Anleitung zum Partiturlernen* (Guide to score reading), translated from German by Dmytro Zahul in 1925, served as a practical handbook for the analysis of orchestral and ensemble scores.

5. Translations of religious and atheistic literature

In the early 1920s, the Ukrainian church played a central role in cultural nation-building, with the translation of liturgical texts from Church Slavonic into the vernacular emerging as a major priority of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Metropolitan Vasyl Lypkivsky led these efforts, producing a Ukrainian version of the *Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (1920; reprinted 1922) and translations of the *Book of Hours*, *Trebnik*, and *Prayer Book*, often without attribution. A translation commission under Archbishop Nestor Sharaivsky completed a Ukrainian *Psalter* translated by Archpriest Fedot Khoroshiy, published in 1926. Many additional works remained unpublished, and printed liturgical books were destroyed after the Church's liquidation in 1930.

During this period, translations of atheistic literature from Russian expanded, including brochures such as *Obman popov* (Priestly fraud, 1920), *Za skol'ko serebryanikov popy i monakhi predali narod?* (For how many pieces of silver did priests and monks betray the people?, 1921), *O dushe, o zagrobnoi zhizni, o boge i o bessmertii* (On the soul, the afterlife, god, and immortality, 1923), and *Kak nauka podryvaet veru v boga* (How science undermines faith in god, 1924). Heinrich Cunow's *Ursprung der Religion und des Gottesglaubens* (The origin of religion and the belief in god, 1922) and Sergei Minin's *Religiia i kommunizm* (Religion and communism, 1920) promoted Marxist critiques, as did Anton Pannekoek's *Marxismus und Darwinismus* (1920) for émigré audiences.

STATE INTERVENTION IN TRANSLATION METHODS

In the early 1930s, the Bolsheviks decisively abandoned Ukrainization, restricting the use of Ukrainian – especially in scientific and technical fields. The campaign against alleged “nationalist translator-saboteurs” and the broader Russification policies had devastating consequences for Ukrainian cultural life. Many translators, linguists, and scholars who had promoted Ukrainian linguistic autonomy were dismissed, denounced, arrested, or executed during Stalin's purges. From 1932 to the mid-1950s, translation output declined sharply, and many works were translated or adapted using Russian as the intermediary. Ukrainian translations were increasingly stripped of European linguistic influence and infused with Russian vocabulary and syntactic patterns.

During the 1920s, translations of Marx and Engels in Soviet Ukraine were typically made directly from German. By the early 1930s, however, this practice shifted markedly: translators increasingly relied on Russian editions, often without acknowledging the mediating language. Some works even claimed to be translated “from Ger-

man” while drawing primarily on Russian sources. The publication history of Marx’s works between 1923 and 1938 illustrates this transition. Early Ukrainian translations – *Der achtzehnte Brumaire des Louis Bonaparte* (1925), *The Civil War in France* (1925), *Misère de la philosophie* (1923), *Lohnarbeit und Kapital* (Wage labour and capital, 1925), *Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (A contribution to the critique of political economy, 1926), and *Capital*, vol. I (1927) – were prepared directly from German. Into the early 1930s, *Feuerbach* (1930), *Selected Letters* (1931), and *Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich 1848 bis 1850* (Class struggles in France, 1932) continued this approach. Yet the 1930 translation of *The Communist Manifesto* – produced from Russian and only checked against German – symbolized the turn toward relay translations.

This period coincided with intensified repression, including the 1930 Kharkiv show trial of the Spilka Vyzvolennia Ukrayiny (the Union for the Freedom of Ukraine), where 45 Ukrainian intellectuals were falsely accused of plotting independence. Soon afterward, Stalin’s regime regulated not only which texts were translated but how they were rendered. Relay translation from Russian became standard, and earlier Ukrainian versions were revised in hindsight to conform to Russian editions. The campaign peaked after Naum Kahanovych’s 1934 article accusing translators of “nationalistic distortions” and of “falsifying” Lenin’s ideas: “The first edition of the Ukrainian translation of Lenin’s works, edited by Skrypnyk, has been distorted and perverted by the nationalists [...] aimed at separating the Ukrainian language [from Russian] [...] the meaning of Lenin’s works has been falsified” (11).

Kahanovych’s critique institutionalized a rigid translation model that demanded literal, word-for-word fidelity to Russian texts, sacrificing linguistic nuance for ideological purity. His article became a tool for suppressing Ukrainian linguistic autonomy and enforcing party-centered Marxism-Leninism. Although Communist Party materials for publication in Ukrainian newspapers and magazines had long been sent from Moscow in Russian, the 1920s still allowed direct translation from foreign languages. This openness was decisively reversed in the 1930s. The new approach reshaped translation practices and functioned as cultural control, subordinating Ukrainian intellectual life to Soviet ideological demands.

THE 1933 RESOLUTION BY THE COMMISSION OF THE PEOPLE’S COMMISSARIAT OF EDUCATION

Motivated by the Bolshevik policy of Ukrainization, numerous dictionaries were produced in the 1920s to codify and standardize Ukrainian vocabulary for use in education, administration, and scholarly work, reinforcing the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian language. With the onset of Stalin-era Russification in the early 1930s, however, many of these lexicographic works were branded “nationalist”, blacklisted, destroyed, and their compilers persecuted.

In 1933, the education authorities of the Ukrainian SSR created a special commission tasked with suppressing Ukrainian linguistic independence. The 1933 Resolutions of the Commission of the People’s Commissariat of Education marked a decisive shift, aiming to realign Ukrainian with Russian norms. Dictionaries codifying indig-

enous vocabulary were condemned, and terms reflecting Polish, Czech, or broader Western influence were rejected (Rezoliutsii 1933). Native Ukrainian words were systematically replaced with Russian or Russified forms: *teplomir* became *termometr*, *mirilo* became *mashtab*, and items such as *plyn* (“fluid”) were removed for lacking Russian equivalents. Internationalisms differing from Russian usage – e.g., *folha* instead of *folija* – were censured, and borrowings unused in Russian were replaced, for example, *tinktura* was substituted with *kartón*. Polish-influenced terms were targeted with particular rigor. Russian grammatical norms were imposed on shared loanwords: feminine nouns in *-iza/-yza/-eza* were masculinized, and endings in *-alija* shifted to *-al*. Thus, *elipsa* became *elips*, and *protuberantsa* became *protuberanets* (Kocherha 2004). Other substitutions – *psychol’ohija* to *psychologija*, *samostijnist’* to *avtonomija*, *istoriosofija* to *istorija*, *kliasik* to *klasyk* – reflected the broader Soviet drive to erase Ukrainian linguistic distinctiveness.

CONCLUSION

In Ukraine, the translation of humanities and social-science texts in the 1920s–1930s developed within the Ukrainization policy (1923–1929), which initially fostered a cultural renaissance. This period saw expanded translation activity in pedagogy, psychology, political philosophy, social history, and Marxist theory, drawing on German, French, and English sources. Translation theorists such as Oleksandr Finkel, Mykola Zerov, and Mykhailo Kalynovych advanced the discipline, with Finkel’s *Teoriia i praktyka perekladu* providing an early systematic model for translating non-literary prose. The founding of the Ukrainian Institute of Linguistic Education in 1930 further strengthened institutional support for translation studies.

This momentum was halted by the reversal of Ukrainization and the rise of Stalinist Russification, which undermined Ukrainian linguistic autonomy. Translators were increasingly accused of “nationalist sabotage”, leading to persecution, institutional purges, and the suppression of numerous works. Nevertheless, translation activity of the time left a lasting imprint, maintaining links to global scholarship even as Soviet policies reshaped cultural identity.

A defining feature of this period, as Susanna Witt notes, was the ideologization of translation norms, which involved “tying certain approaches to translation to ideologically reprehensible positions and defining the limits of translation discourse” (Darmaros 2018, 501). After private publishers were liquidated in 1930, the state monopolized publishing and required foreign works to conform to Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Relay translation through Russian became obligatory in the social sciences, subordinating Ukrainian scholarship to Russian mediation. Furthermore, “initial norm”, as it was classified by Gideon Toury (1995, 56–61), was reoriented toward the “mass Soviet reader”, prioritizing ideological clarity over fidelity. Translators were compelled to simplify or distort content to ensure conformity, while literalism was promoted not for accuracy but to impose Russian grammatical and lexical patterns on Ukrainian. Linguistic richness was sacrificed to Russified structures, and resistance was condemned as “nationalistic sabotage”, reflecting broader Soviet attempts to control intellectual life.

NOTES

- ¹ All translations from Ukrainian are by the present authors.
- ² In the following discussion, the dates indicated are those of the Ukrainian translations, with informative English titles of the originals included as needed.

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Translating transition: The role of translator's prefaces as mediative paratexts in philosophical translations in 1990s Estonia

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Translating transition: The role of translator's prefaces as mediative paratexts in philosophical translations in 1990s Estonia

Translators' prefaces. Paratexts. Philosophical translation. Estonian scholarly language. Post-Soviet cultural transition.

This article analyzes the function of translators' prefaces as mediative paratexts within the Estonian cultural and literary context of the 1990s, in the so-called transition period, concentrating on translations of philosophical texts published in the *Avatud Eesti Raamat* (Open Estonia Book) series from 1994 to 1999. The emergence of translated texts from diverse cultural contexts necessitates a process of mediation, as these texts acquire new and distinctive significance within the target culture. Consequently, the study focuses on paratexts, particularly in relation to prefaces, with the objective of revealing how translators have expressed concerns regarding terminology, fidelity, and cultural positioning within the framework of Estonia's post-Soviet transition. The analysis indicates that translators' prefaces mediated access to global philosophical discourse and preserved and innovated Estonian scholarly thought during a time of linguistic and cultural reconfiguration.

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The period following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the re-establishment of Estonia's independence in 1991 was marked by significant changes in the entire society, and these changes also affected the situation of translated literature in Estonia, including the translation of philosophical texts. Because of Soviet censorship, numerous culturally significant texts had either remained untranslated into Estonian or had been subjected to partial translation.

This study focuses on analyzing the mediating role of translators' prefaces in the translation of philosophical texts. In accordance with Rodica Dimitriu's (2009) classification of explanatory, prescriptive/normative, and informative/descriptive functions, alongside Anne Lill's (1996) framework for translation commentaries, this analysis delineates the recurring strategies and discursive patterns within a broader context of supporting goals such as preserving Estonian-language humanitarian thinking (Ross 2012). It also integrates the close reading of prefaces with contextualization in Estonia's sociocultural and publishing landscape in the 1990s.

The corpus consists of the prefaces of philosophical translations published in the *Avatud Eesti Raamat* (Open Estonia Book) series from 1994 to 1999. In this article, the term *preface* is used in a wider sense, including not only introductory remarks but also corresponding comments and afterwords (Hartama-Heinonen 1995). The term *scholarly texts* is employed for texts within the humanities, encompassing philosophical works, whereas *scientific texts* are designated as pertaining to the exact sciences (see Holmes 2000).

TRANSLATION, THE PUBLISHING LANDSCAPE, AND CULTURAL POLICY IN THE 1990S ESTONIAN CONTEXT

The study of translation history has experienced significant growth in recent decades, shedding light on the translational dimensions of various epochs. However, in Estonia scholarly focus has predominantly centered on the Soviet occupation period (1940–1991) and the era of the First Estonian Republic (1918–1940; Lange and Monticelli 2012). In contrast, the so-called transition period of the 1990s, which followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has received comparatively less attention.

Peeter Torop (1999, 43) contends that during periods of upheaval, translations frequently merge with the original literature, addressing its challenges and advancing its renewal – thereby sacrificing the distinct literary characteristics inherent to the act of translation. The second half of the 20th century in post-Soviet countries, including Estonia, was a complex time of rapid changes, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of censorship, and the emergence of a free-market economy in Estonia. Those features of the transition period (1990–1999) also influenced the development of literature and translated literature.

When discussing translated literature, it is important to consider the wider scene of translation-theoretical, language-specific, literary, political, and ideological factors (Tarrend 2004, 84). Itamar Even-Zohar (2000), who sees translated literature as a part of a system consisting of several different subsystems in hierarchical relationships, which is also called the polysystem, argues that in certain cases, translated literature may gain a dominant or central position within the literary polysystem. This,

according to Even-Zohar, means that it actively participates in shaping the center of the polysystem.

Upon examining the landscape of Estonian literature and translated works during the transition period of the late 20th century, it becomes evident that the years of Soviet occupation (1940–1991) resulted in significant gaps within the Estonian literary and cultural context. In an effort to swiftly address these deficiencies, there was a marked increase in the prevalence of translated literature (van Doorslaer 2021, 55). Furthermore, the Estonian language – including scholarly discourse – experienced a new flowering. Following the re-independence, a palpable enthusiasm permeated the atmosphere, characterized by a prevailing sentiment that all significant literary and scholarly works, including philosophical works, ought to be translated into Estonian, and that terminology should be established across all pertinent fields in the Estonian language (Ross 2012). Significant transformations occurring within the realms of politics and social life have likewise influenced the dynamics of the book market and the publishing landscape. During the early 1990s, there was a remarkable increase in the number of publishing houses, reaching an unprecedented level. In 1991, the total count of publishers stood at 140; by 2000, however, the number had increased to 638 (Möldre 2005, 228). For a nation with a populace barely exceeding one million, these figures are noteworthy.

Furthermore, the landscape of translation underwent significant diversification, with the 1990s emerging as a pivotal era in which translations in Estonia assumed a dominant role within the broader literary context. At the conclusion of the Soviet era, translations constituted approximately 20% of the published literary and scholarly corpus. This figure quickly rose to 31% in 1997 (245).

During the 1990s, most publishing houses offered books with a wide range of topics. However, certain publishers specialized in specific domains, such as educational materials (e.g., Koolibri and Avita), while others focused on the dissemination of scholarly literature (e.g., Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus and TEA). Philosophical texts of Estonian origin were disseminated, for instance, by Ilmamaa (Möldre 2005, 230), which was one of the publishers of the Open Estonia Book series. Nonfiction, encompassing both scholarly and philosophical literature, experienced publication in larger print runs than fiction.

Translating and publishing translations of scientific and philosophical texts within a nation characterized by a relatively modest readership inevitably necessitates support. During the 1990s, various avenues for funding were available, including those provided by the Avatud Eesti Fond (Open Estonia Foundation) and the Eesti Kultuurkapital (Cultural endowment of Estonia), as well as allocations from the state budget (Eesti Kultuurkapital 1999).

The Open Estonia Foundation provided substantial support for the publication of translations of philosophical works into the Estonian language. In the year 1994, the Open Estonia Foundation commenced a series of translations entitled Open Estonia Book. This series is still ongoing, and it encompasses a range of Western philosophical and sociological texts, as well as works on literary studies and the history of ideas, published in various publishing houses. This series is among the longest

running in Estonia, and it has been instrumental in bringing translations of key texts in history, culture, and philosophy into Estonian (Väljataga 2008).

PREFACES AS MEDIATIVE PARATEXTS

Torop (1999, 42) posits that the loss of specificity of translations can be attributed primarily to the absence of sustained translation criticism, i.e., the lack of conceptualizing and comprehending translations within the literary process. Thus, translated literature can be recognized as an independent text type only when we evaluate, criticize, comment on, and interpret translations through metatexts. Similarly, Jeremy Munday (2001, 152) has pointed out that because of the relative lack of prefaces, much of the work that goes into producing a translation, i.e., the translator's own background and research as well as the actual process of translation composition, is lost.

One approach to conceptualizing translations within the target culture is to examine meta- and paratexts, including (translators') prefaces, while striving to maintain their specificity within the broader literary framework. Elin Sütiste (2009, 910) points out the value of such texts in the process of mediating translations, as they facilitate an understanding of how aware people in the (relevant) culture are of translation-related issues, or how the role of translation is seen, whether the translator and their work are noticed, etc.

The delineation between paratext and metatext is often indistinct. Kathryn Batchelor (2018, 149) distinguishes them by stating that a paratext is a threshold to the text and a metatext is a commentary on the text. Metatext is characterized by Anton Popovič (1976, 227) as a model of a prototext, whereas the prototext provides the basis for this intertextual continuity. He identifies and analyzes many so-called transformations that a prototext may experience in a metatext, e.g., imitative continuity, selective continuity, reducing continuity, and complementing continuity (231–232). On the other hand, paratexts are, as for Gérard Genette ([1987] 1997, i), the liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between the book, author, publisher, and reader: the author's name, the title, the preface, or the instruction. As important paratextual elements, prefaces created by translators are of special importance for translation history and research on translation in general, offering the reader also “a rare moment of direct contact with the translator” (Tahir Gürçağlar 2013, 90).

Genette (1997, 161) defines the preface as every type of introductory (preludial or postludial) text, authorial or allographic, consisting of a discourse produced on the subject of the text that follows or precedes it. For Batchelor (2018, 20), prefaces serve as a means of mediation for making the reader aware of the distance and differences between the original text and its translation.

Genette also argues that in the context of translation, the preface may bear the signature of the translator, suggesting that “the translator-preface writer may possibly comment on, among other things, his own translation; on this point, and in this sense, his preface then ceases to be allographic” (1997, 264). In alignment with this perspective, Babar Khan (2020, 127) indicates that Genette does not only

seem to include translators' prefaces in his paratextual typography but also appears to acknowledge the status of the translator as an author in his or her own right, insofar as the translator comments on the translation. However, Genette (1997, 405) also claims that translations themselves "serve as commentary on the original text" (cf. Torop 1998, 518 – translation itself is already a metatext); thus, in Genette's typology, there is a certain ambiguity concerning translations and (their) paratexts /prefaces (Khan 2020, 127).

ANALYSIS OF THE CORPUS

For this study, an examination was conducted of the translators' prefaces that accompany the philosophical translations published in the Open Estonia Book series. Between 1994 and 1999, translations of 36¹ philosophical titles were published in the series, 17 of them accompanied by a preface written either by the translator of the book or by another Estonian translator, researcher, or writer. Among the 17 prefaces, seven were devoted to an in-depth exploration of issues related to translation, particularly the challenges associated with identifying or developing suitable terminology and content in the Estonian language. These seven prefaces exhibited a range in length, spanning from 2 to 17 pages. Six of them were composed by the translator(s) of the text, and one was a commentary by an expert (a psychology professor). The corpus consists of prefaces to translations of philosophical works by notable Western philosophers, including Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Carl Gustav Jung, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, etc. The translated texts come from different historical periods, intellectual traditions, and disciplinary backgrounds. Hence translators faced highly varied terminological, conceptual, and stylistic challenges. In turn, these challenges formed the content and functions of the prefaces, and as a result, the prefaces analyzed are quite heterogeneous in purpose, depth, and focus.

The inclusion of prefaces in translations, a common practice in Estonia in the early 20th century, declined during the transitional period of the 1990s. As a result, literary translations often did not have prefaces. Even if the translated texts included an afterword or, in some cases, a translator's preface, the translator's decisions or overarching vision were often not clearly articulated (Ojamets and Lotman 2012), which meant that feedback about translations and the language used in translations was insufficient. This observation is also based on research on translations of German literature into Estonian in the 1990s (van Doorslaer 2021).

Nevertheless, an examination of the relatively small corpus of philosophical translations shows some potentially relevant patterns. It suggests that, in the context of philosophical texts, the discourse surrounding translation challenges, linguistic considerations, and terminological precision remains pertinent. In several cases, these subjects were incorporated and highlighted in the prefaces, and the translators themselves explained the challenges and ambiguities associated with their translations of philosophical texts.

Explanatory and informative/descriptive functions of prefaces

According to Dimitriu (2009, 195), translator's prefaces may fulfill three specific functions: (1) explanatory, (2) normative/prescriptive, and (3) informative/descriptive, each of them guiding the researchers' investigations in different ways. Dimitriu defines explanatory functions as a way "translators justify (1.1) their selection of texts and authors, as well as (1.2) the specific strategies they have used in response to translation problems," and informative/descriptive as a way to "provide pertinent translation-orientated source text analysis, highlighting salient points with regard to the authors' originality, and focusing on areas of translation difficulties." Lill's (1996) taxonomy of translation comments similarly reflects these two functions.

According to Lill (1996, 385), an Estonian translator of (mainly) ancient literature, the framework for her preface and comments is derived from the tradition that dates back to the 19th and early 20th centuries, when translations in English, German, and French were often published with comprehensive commentaries based on the specifics of the cultural background of the language into which the work was translated.

Lill articulates the following principles:

- Explaining names, realia, and their historical relationships;
- Conveying important concepts' background, etymology, and meaning variations;
- Justifying Estonian translation alternatives;
- Comparing the translated author's arguments with others and highlighting specific approaches (386).

Thus, for analyzing prefaces of philosophical translations in their cultural and historical context, explanatory and informative/descriptive functions help to explain translation decisions and provide conceptual guidance. In the case of Estonia in the 1990s, the linguistic rebuilding, cultural reorientation, and terminological innovation after Soviet isolation were of great importance. Therefore, explanatory and informative/descriptive functions in the case of (not only) philosophical translations were historically warranted, turning the prefaces into active agents of cultural and intellectual transition.

Explaining names, realia and their historical connections

In his special preface, Mati Unt (1995), an Estonian writer, stage director and the translator of Carl Jung's *Ein moderner Mythos, von Dingen, die am Himmel gesehen werden* (1958; Eng. trans. *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, 1959; Est. trans. *Tänapäeva müüt: Asjadest, mida nähakse taevas*, 1995), articulates the inherent ambiguity of Jung's terminology. This complexity arises from the cultural spaces that are often foreign to Estonians, including Gnosticism, alchemy, and various Eastern traditions. Such factors render the translation process particularly challenging, as it necessitates a careful balance between fidelity to Jung's original ideas and the potential pitfalls of over-explanation or simplification of his language. According to Unt, his translation is not intended for the layperson, as such an approach would not be consistent with Jung's inherently esoteric and hermetic nature (8).

A similar concern with contextualization is expressed by Jüri Allik, an Estonian psychologist, in the preface for the translation of Sigmund Freud's *Triebe und Triebchicksale* (1915; Eng. trans. *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes*, 1925), *Das Unbewußte* (1915; Eng. trans. *The Unconscious*, 1925), and *Das Ich und das Es* (1923; Eng. trans. *The Ego and the Id*, 1927), released in a single volume in Estonian under the title *Nimhinge anatoomiaist* (On the anatomy of the human soul, 1999). In his comments on Lill's translation, Allik (1999) underscores the necessity of grasping the historical and intellectual context that gave rise to Freud's texts and emphasizes the impossibility of understanding Freud without at least minimal knowledge of the historical and intellectual context in which these texts were born. According to him, none of the concepts and terms can be interpreted without knowing Freud's earlier works and, in turn, their historical background (12).

Tiiu Hallap, a philosopher and the Estonian translator of Bertrand Russell's *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (1940; Est. trans. *Urimus tähendusest ja tõest*, 1995), opens up wider philosophical discussions, especially concerning the dichotomy between abstraction and non-abstraction within the context of a scientific worldview. Hallap's introduction to Russell also highlights more extensive philosophical discussions, especially the conflict between abstraction and empiricism.

Revealing the content of important concepts

These principles prominently feature in most of the examined prefaces. For instance, Unt offers the reader a selection of terms, frequently presenting the German original alongside the Estonian translation, and including a concise glossary of Jung's essential concepts; nonetheless, he cautions that even in the case of the glossary, one should remember that Jung's mind and thoughts were in constant motion and change (1995, 10).

Lill's preface to her translation of Aristotle's *Ēthika Nikomacheia* (Eng. trans. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1797; Est. trans. *Nikomachose eetika*, 1996) highlights the challenges inherent in capturing the elliptical conciseness of the Greek text, while also emphasizing the necessity of maintaining consistent terminological equivalents for Aristotle's ethical framework. She notes that many of the terms Aristotle employed in relation to ethics were in a transitional phase, shifting from standard language to more specialized terminology (378).

Hasso Krull, an Estonian philosopher and translator, asserts in his introduction to the translation of Derrida's *Positions* (1972; Est. trans. *Positsioonid*, 1995) that, although Derrida's work is filled with numerous implications and presuppositions that can be easily comprehended only by individuals with a substantial grasp of the philosophical or literary context, providing an exhaustive commentary on all of them appears impractical for him. Krull primarily focuses on issues of terminology, metaphorical expressions, and wordplay, cautioning the Estonian reader regarding the complexities of new philosophical metaphors. He notes, however, that the reading experience may be eased by following Derrida's own advice, which suggests that these substitute concepts complement one another and cannot be fully defined (1995, 8–9).

Similarly, Märt Väljataga, an Estonian poet, translator, philosopher and literary critic and the translator of Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989; Est. trans. *Sattumuslikkus, iroonia, solidaarsus*, 1999), reflects on Rorty's stylistic approach as well as the contentious nature of his writings and ideas. He highlights certain challenges encountered in translation, particularly noting that the term *contingency* in the title bears a significant metaphysical weight, necessitating the creation of a novel term in Estonian (1999, 374).

Justifying translation equivalents and comparing them with alternative options

This principle is particularly frequent. Unt (1995, 7) explains why he chose not to oversimplify the terminology or provide excessive elaboration, asserting that his translation ought to be regarded as a first attempt to only touch the surface of Jung's thought structures and visions in his work. Unt (8–9) provides a comprehensive examination of the potential translations for Jung's notion of *Unbewußte*, explaining his preference for the Estonian term *alateadvus* (unconscious) over other possible alternatives such as *ebateadvus* (preconscious) or *mitteteadvus* (nonconscious).

Lill (1996) stresses the necessity of preserving systematic coherence within Aristotle's conceptual framework and provides a detailed list of Aristotle's fundamental terms, accompanied by comprehensive explanations for the Estonian audience.

Allik (1999) starts his comments on Lill's translation of Freud by acknowledging the myriad of challenges the translator encountered in rendering Freud's terminology. Allik mentions that the terminology of psychoanalysis has become deeply embedded in both the written and spoken Estonian through secondary literature. However, he argues that it carries an English accent, as the English version of Freud has long since overshadowed the German original worldwide. In his opinion, Lill's translation attempts to be faithful to the original, especially in terms of key psychoanalytic terms (11–12).

In a brief preface to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921; Est. trans. *Loogilis-filosoofiline traktaat/Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, 1996), Estonian philosophers Jaan Kangilaski and Veiko Palge emphasize the significance of their translation decisions. They explain that the translation may occasionally exhibit a degree of ineloquence in Estonian; however, they assert, this was a deliberate choice, as they tried to strictly follow a harmonized translation of all terms (203).

Krull (1995) highlights the metaphorical and extended applications of philosophical terminology, explaining his approach to Estonianizing French terms. He explains that this book is the first extended text by Derrida to appear in Estonian, so the equivalents for many French terms had to be developed from scratch. Moreover, he adds that Derrida often employs well-known terms in a broader or more metaphorical sense than usual. Krull also assures the readers that he has Estonianized all French terms without exception.

Among the prefaces examined, it is noteworthy that Hallap (1995), the translator of Russell, has chosen to focus less on matters of translation and terminology. Instead, she directs her attention more towards the author and the philosophical discourse presented within the text itself.

(1) Comparing the arguments of the translated authors with those of other authors and (2) highlighting the characteristics and nuances of the manuscript traditions

These two principles are less common but still visible. For instance, Hallap (1995) situates Russell's metaphoric style within contemporary debates on language, empiricism, and abstraction, and Allik (1999), in his commentary on translating Freud, reflects on the position of psychoanalysis in the broader intellectual landscape, also noting the mediating influence of the English reception. Lill (1999, 362) compares translating Aristotle and Plato, claiming that different approaches are needed, as Plato often uses metaphorical and poetic language for illustrating his ideas. In contrast, Aristotle's language may often be perceived as dry, as instead of a figurative presentation, he is prone to using a theoretical proof method.

It is possible that these two principles are less common because the translators of the 1990s were often operating in a context where it was relatively important to rebuild the basic infrastructure of Estonian scholarly language after decades of limited access to Western philosophical traditions (e.g., Ross 2012). Also, the prefaces analyzed for this article tend to prioritize terminological explanation and contextual mediation over comparative philosophical debate or detailed engagement with manuscript traditions. Thus, it could be assumed that in post-Soviet Estonia, translators were often more involved with establishing conceptual clarity, creating or stabilizing terminology, and ensuring that foundational texts became accessible in Estonian (e.g., van Doorslaer 2021).

Normative/prescriptive functions

In her taxonomy, Dimitriu (2009, 198) also mentions the normative/prescriptive function and characterizes it as akin to guidelines, translation tips, instructions, or models intended for adherence by fellow practitioners, suggesting that this function may not always be readily separable from the explanatory role. In the case of the prefaces analyzed for this article, the idea of fidelity or equivalence is often revealed in how translators justify their strategies, even though most translators do not emphasize absolute fidelity in a prescriptive manner; instead, they employ context-sensitive claims to strive for adequacy and trustworthiness.

However, the prefaces examined in this article propose a translation methodology that transcends the conventional and not-so-straightforward concept of fidelity. The analysis reveals four interconnected practices: conceptual and terminological negotiation, contextual mediation, linguistic development, and metadiscursive transparency. Translators characterize their task as a process of transposing intricate philosophical ideas into Estonian, contextualizing the source text within its intellectual heritage, while concurrently enhancing the expressive capabilities of the target language.

As previously noted, Krull (1995), in his translation of Derrida, emphasizes the significance of "Estonianization". This approach reflects an effort to engage more effectively with the target readership; however, he acknowledges the limitations in addressing all the nuances and implications present in Derrida's work.

Similarly, this notion holds true for Unt (1995) and his rendition of Jung, as well as for Lill (1996) and her interpretation of Aristotle. Allik's (1999, 11–13) remarks on Freud's translation exhibit a somewhat more prescriptive tone, as he notes the excessive influence of English on Freud's terminology in Estonian. He commends the translator, Anne Lill, for her adherence to the German original, resulting in a translation that, while perhaps not immediately recognizable in terms of terminology, demonstrates a systematic and critical engagement with Freud's work, as Kangilaski and Palge (1996) consider it essential to adhere strictly to a standardized translation of all terminology.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that six of the seven prefaces examined centered on explaining terminological choices and justifying the suitability of particular Estonian equivalents. While this appears primarily descriptive, it also reveals that translators orientated themselves toward the source text by foregrounding the difficulties of conceptual transfer. As is typical in philosophical translation, the tension between fidelity and readability becomes a continuous negotiation rather than a resolvable problem.

More broadly, the prefaces published in Estonia in the 1990s fulfilled a distinctly mediating role in a period marked by cultural realignment and the rapid rebuilding of Estonian scholarly language. In the absence of a long-standing practice of extended translator commentaries, the Open Estonia Book series stands out for preserving a space where translators could articulate linguistic, conceptual, and methodological considerations. In Dimitriu's terms, explanatory and informative/descriptive functions predominated: translators clarified etymologies, mapped conceptual fields, and located texts within intellectual traditions, echoing Lill's earlier model of contextualized commentary. These practices show that translators were acutely aware of the linguistic gaps left by the Soviet decades and used prefaces to stabilize emerging terminology and to ensure that core philosophical vocabularies could be integrated into Estonian academic discourse.

Normative or prescriptive elements appeared more sporadically, usually when translators defended systematic consistency or warned against overly metaphorical readings. In this regard, Estonian translators of the 1990s adopted what may be called a practical approach to fidelity – a stance shaped by the transitional context. Instead of aiming for strict literalism, they sought adequacy, understood as producing trustworthy translations, terminologically coherent and usable within the evolving scholarly environment. For instance, when Krull or Unt created or chose Estonian equivalents for Derrida's or Jung's technical terms, their main goal was not to copy them exactly but to come up with phrases that would work well in future philosophical writing. Adequacy, therefore, entailed a balance between honoring the source text and addressing the requirements of a language in the process of reconstruction.

This practical orientation also reflects the translators' role within a broader cultural system. In Even-Zohar's polysystemic terms, philosophical translations from the 1990s did not merely supplement the Estonian intellectual landscape; they actively shaped its center by reintroducing suppressed traditions, supplying conceptual

tools, and making global debates intelligible to local readers. The prefaces could be seen as crucial to this process: by mediating terminology, framing contextual backgrounds, and signaling interpretive challenges, they functioned as thresholds across which foreign ideas entered Estonian scholarly culture.

Overall, based on the analysis, translators' prefaces of the philosophical translations in the 1990s transition period in Estonia reveal translation as a cultural intervention rather than a purely linguistic operation. They illuminate how translators positioned themselves as custodians and renovators of scholarly language and how their prefaces supported the intellectual transition of a society rebuilding its academic infrastructures. In doing so, they testify to the importance of paratextual mediation in small-language cultures and underscore the translator's role as both interpreter and cultural agent.

NOTES

¹ See <https://www.kulka.ee/programm/avatud-est-raamat/programm-tolgitud-raamat>.

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Behind the Iron Curtain: Slovak translations of American philosophy prior to 1989

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Behind the Iron Curtain: Slovak translations of American philosophy prior to 1989

American philosophy. Translation. Slovak language. Czechoslovakia. Communist rule.

The article investigates the translation and reception of American philosophical works in Slovakia from the early 20th century to the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Although translation has played a crucial role in the development of philosophy, Slovak translation studies has focused primarily on literary translation, leaving philosophical translation relatively understudied. Using a quantitative bibliographical approach, the study maps Slovak translations of books by American philosophers based on data from major national library databases and the philosophical journal *Filozofia*. The analysis identifies seven Slovak translations published before 1989, comprising five monographs and two anthologies. Most appeared during the 1960s, a brief period of political and cultural liberalization in Czechoslovakia. The findings demonstrate that the translation and reception of American philosophy in Slovakia were strongly shaped by political and ideological factors, particularly during the communist period, which significantly influenced both the selection and interpretation of translated works.

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Philosophy and translation are commonly regarded as two of the oldest forms of human intellectual practice. In the past, many scholars possessed sufficient linguistic knowledge to engage with philosophical texts written in languages other than their own. As Jonathan Rée observes, the connection between philosophy and translation runs deeper, as “European philosophy has always been written with several languages in mind; and it has to be read, and translated, with multilingual eyes as well” (2001, 231). In the 19th century, when the modern social sciences began to emerge, educated Slovaks frequently pursued higher education abroad. Many were polyglots, proficient in reading and writing in several foreign languages, including Hungarian, German, Czech, and Latin. Consequently, there was little need to translate scholarly or philosophical texts into Slovak. The absence of an officially standardized Slovak language further constrained translation activity, as Slovak was codified relatively late, in 1843, and only thereafter became the basis for national communication and literature. It was only in the early 20th century, particularly after the founding of the first Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, that multilingualism gradually gave way to bilingualism, primarily Czech and Slovak. As a result, by the second half of the 20th century, the reception of foreign-language philosophy had become heavily dependent on translation.

At the same time, modern translation theory began to emerge, when a number of works addressing both theoretical and practical dimensions of translation appeared, including James Holmes’ article “The Name and Nature of Translation Studies” (1972). Since then, the relationship between philosophy and translation has been discussed (see Berman 1992 and Venuti 1998), and the need to establish the mutual dialogue between the fields (Rawling and Wilson 2019). As Rosemary Arrojo (2010) further argues, Western philosophy lacks attention to the practice of translation as well as the philosophical questions it raises. While in the last decade of the 20th century a number of scholars discussed the isolation of linguistic and philosophical studies on translation (Barnstone 1993), an increasing number of relevant publications since the beginning of the 21st century have bridged the gap between these fields (Rawling and Wilson 2019).

Modern Czech and Slovak theories of translation also began to develop in the second half of the 20th century, notably through the works of Jiří Levý, *Umění překladu* (1963; Eng. trans. *The Art of Translation*, 2011); Anton Popovič, *Teória umeleckého prekladu* (Theory of artistic translation, 1975); and Ján Ferenčík, *Kontexty prekladu* (Contexts of translation, 1982), who primarily focused on literary translation. As a result, studies on the translation of non-literary texts were scarce, leaving a significant gap in the theory of translating philosophical works. One of the earliest attempts to map non-literary translations in Slovakia was Jana Rakšányiová’s research paper “K dejinám odborného prekladu na Slovensku” (History of non-literary translation in Slovakia, 1978). Summarizing non-literary book translations published before 1945, Rakšányiová identified a total of 22 philosophical translations from various world languages published over a period of three centuries: 12 translations between 1630 and 1918 and ten translations between 1918 and 1945. As is evident, the number of philosophy translations was very low.

Following the Velvet Revolution of 1989, scholarly engagement with the analysis and translation of philosophical texts in Slovakia remained relatively limited. Contributors to this field include Emma Nežinská (1993) on the poetics and translation of philosophical discourse; Jozef Sivák (2013) on Slovak translations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's works; and Katarína Bednárová (2018) on the work and translations of Anton Vantuch. Two works of contemporary scholarship on the translation of philosophical texts are particularly noteworthy. The first is Bednárová's article "Neúplné poznámky k teórii a praxi prekladu filozofickej literatúry (na Slovensku)" (Partial notes on the theory and practice of translating philosophical literature [in Slovakia], 2020), which examines the distinctive features of philosophical texts and the challenges they pose for translation, situating philosophical writing between literary and non-literary genres. It analyzes the relationship between the philosophical language of the source text and its translation, and considers the role of translation traditions and the reception of philosophical literature in the Slovak context. The second major contribution is *Slovník prekladateľiek a prekladateľov: vedy o človeku a kultúre* (The dictionary of Slovak translators in the humanities and social sciences, 2024), edited by Katarína Bednárová, Mária Kusá, and Silvia Rybárová, which offers an extensive overview of nearly 100 translators of philosophical, sociological, historical, literary, and art-related texts published in Slovakia from the interwar period to the early 21st century. It also documents contributions to the reception and development of socio-humanistic literature, including translations of philosophy.

The 20th century saw major political shifts that shaped cultural production and translation practices. Czechoslovak–American relations, initially cordial after Czechoslovakia's founding in 1918, deteriorated sharply following the 1948 communist coup. During the communist period, the United States was systematically depicted as emblematic of Western capitalist decadence. Such changing perceptions presumably influenced the translation and reception of American philosophy among Slovak scholars. The aim of this article is therefore to map these translations and identify the works that were made available, situating them within the broader social, cultural, and political contexts from the early decades of the 20th century up to 1989. To achieve this, the research addresses the following questions: How many works by American philosophers were translated into Slovak before 1989? Which branches or schools of American philosophy were accessible to Slovak readers during this period? Who were the translators, and which publishing institutions were responsible for producing and disseminating these works? What factors influenced the selection of works for translation, and how did Slovak scholars engage with them?

DEFINING THE CORPUS AND RESEARCH METHOD

The nature and development of Slovak philosophy have always been significantly influenced by foreign philosophical scholars and their work; hence the translation of philosophical texts has had an irreplaceable position in the development of the discipline. Although a few theoretical sources touch on aspects related to Slovak translations of philosophy, existing research remains limited and only partially relevant, leaving significant gaps in our understanding of the actual scope and char-

acteristics of the translated corpus. Philosophy is inherently a multicultural and multilingual discipline, encompassing a wide array of subfields. Many philosophers have also been writers and scientists, producing a diverse corpus of literature that ranges from highly technical, terminology-rich articles to literary works marked by figurative language and elaborate vocabulary. Considering the breadth of philosophical literature, the discussion below focuses only on monographs by individual authors and edited anthologies.

In this context, a quantitative approach becomes especially important as an initial step, providing the empirical foundation necessary to determine what has been translated, how frequently, by whom, and under what conditions. Without such systematic mapping, subsequent qualitative or comparative translation analyses would lack a reliable basis and risk relying on selective or incomplete evidence. As a result, the research draws on the archives and databases of the Slovak National Library, the National Library of the Czech Republic, and the Central Library of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, chosen for the breadth of their collections and their reliability as national repositories. Additional data on book translations are taken from the Slovak philosophical journal *Filozofia* (Philosophy), published from the mid-20th century to the present.¹ The journal features philosophical articles and essays, as well as reviews of Czech, Slovak, and translated works by foreign thinkers. While library databases have inherent limitations, such as incomplete or inconsistent metadata, consulting multiple institutions alongside the journal allowed for cross-checking and improved the reliability of the data.

In approaching this topic, it was essential also to define American philosophy and the scope of the philosophers included. American philosophy encompasses a diverse and evolving body of thought shaped by the cultural, social, and political contexts of the United States. It is pluralistic rather than doctrinaire, with pragmatism as its dominant tradition, founded by Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, who emphasized the practical consequences and experimental verification of ideas (Audi 1999). Beyond pragmatism, American philosophy includes transcendentalism (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau), naturalism (George Santayana), personalism (Borden Parker Bowne), and philosophy of science (Thomas Kuhn), as well as feminist, African American, and Indigenous philosophies (Waters 2004). The intellectual landscape was also shaped by European émigré scholars fleeing Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s, including Erich Fromm and Rudolf Carnap, who became American citizens and integrated European intellectual traditions into the American academic environment, leaving lasting contributions that enriched 20th-century American philosophy.

INTERWAR PERIOD: 1918–1939

The beginnings of Slovak professional translation date back to the 18th century, but the translation of philosophical literature came to the fore only in the 20th century (Bednárová 2024, 350). During the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic, particularly from the late 1930s onward, there emerged a growing demand for translations of texts in the modern social sciences, and this interest led to a growing

number of non-literary translations published in both books and journals. However, within the scope of this study, only one work was translated into Slovak during this period: a summary of John Dewey's work released under the title *Filozofia, veda a výchova* (Philosophy, science, and education, 1924), by Jozef Schützner, a translator and a distinguished polyglot fluent in several languages who specialized in translating foreign-language literature, with a particular emphasis on philosophy and legal studies (Kaščák 2020, 70). However, the text does not constitute a translation of a specific original work, but rather a concise seven-page summary of Dewey's philosophy. As indicated in the header of the first page, it originally appeared as a special issue of the magazine *Ruch filozofický* (Philosophical stir), with the translator noting that the text was selected from Dewey's philosophical work. His principles of philosophy, science, and education and their intersections are summarized, with emphasis on the importance of restructuring philosophy and education in response to societal changes linked to advances in science, industry, and the development of democracy (Dewey 1924, 7).

FROM THE WARTIME SLOVAK REPUBLIC TO EARLY POSTWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA: 1939–1949

The period of the First Slovak Republic (1939–1945) remains one of the most controversial in Slovak history due to the regime's non-democratic, fascist character. During World War II, Czechoslovakia disappeared from the European map, and soon after its re-establishment in 1945, it came under Soviet influence, which imposed ideological and political constraints on science, literature, and translation. In February 1948, Czechoslovakia became a satellite of the Soviet Union, and centralized governance under Communist Party leadership was instituted. The doctrines of Marxism-Leninism and socialist realism permeated cultural and intellectual life, including Czech and Slovak translation production; as Vladimír Biloveský explains, "No other literature had as much space in editorial plans as Russian literature. No other literature was published in such a high number of titles and editions as this one. There were even special editions oriented towards Soviet literature in several publishing houses" (2023, 132). One of the consequences of these political and socio-cultural changes was that no Slovak translations of American philosophy were published during that period.

BUILDING OF SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA: 1949–1970

Following the 1948 coup, the press fell under strict state and party control, serving as a tool of propaganda reinforced by legal measures. During the 1950s, the communist regime in Czechoslovakia extended its purges beyond politics into religion and culture. Intellectual life more broadly was also narrowed, since, as Marian Városová (2016) noted, philosophy ceased to exist as a discipline and was subsumed under ideological imperatives. Translation practices mirrored this tendency, as "from the 1950s onwards, the majority of translation activity in the field of philosophy was concentrated in the Pravda publishing house, which specialized in the translation of political literature and the systematic publication of translations of Marxist and

Leninist philosophy” (Bednárová 2024, 354). In this regard, Itamar Even-Zohar’s concept of culture planning (2008) is particularly relevant. It refers to deliberate efforts by authorities to shape a society’s cultural repertoire by promoting selected texts, artworks, and norms to strengthen group cohesion and collective identity, often at the national level. Translation had long been one of the central tools in this process, especially when directed by the state.

The translation of works by American thinkers was similarly subject to political scrutiny during the communist period. In the 1950s, no Slovak translations were produced, with the notable exception of V. S. Ševkin’s *Pedagogika J. Deweyho v službách americkej reakcie* (The pedagogy of J. Dewey in the service of American reactionism, 1955), translated from Russian by Oľga Pavlovičová and published in Bratislava by Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo. The work presents a critical examination of Dewey’s pedagogical ideas, framing them as instruments of American political ideology. The reception of Dewey’s philosophy in Czech and Slovak scholarship illustrates how political context shaped interpretations of his educational theory. In 1947, a year before the Communist coup, the Slovak philosopher and educator Ľudovít Bakoš reviewed the Czech translation *O pramenech vychovateľské vědy* (1947) of Dewey’s *The Sources of a Science of Education* (1929) in the philosophical magazine *Philosophica Slovaca*, praising Dewey’s profound knowledge of the theory of science, solid understanding, extensive pedagogical expertise, and broad experience in educational practice (Bakoš 1947, 294). By contrast, in the 1955 Slovak translation of Ševkin’s metatext, Dewey is presented as a zealous supporter of American monopolist interests, promoting bourgeois ideology and endorsing the contentious view that education alone could resolve systemic social and economic problems, despite the widespread hardships experienced by the working class in capitalist societies (71).² These contrasting interpretations demonstrate the considerable impact of political circumstances on the reception and framing of Dewey’s philosophy. Bednárová describes the practice of “indoctrination and taming” as a central feature of socialist cultural policy, particularly visible in the ways translations of American literature were mediated for readers. Translated works were frequently accompanied by Soviet-authored paratexts that functioned not merely as protective camouflage enabling the publication of Western texts, but were often created with full ideological seriousness, particularly during the 1950s (2024, 348). The visible shift in scholars’ approach to Dewey’s ideas and works during the communist era in Czechoslovakia may be linked to his critical stance toward both Soviet and American Communism and his defense of Leon Trotsky’s right to a fair trial, despite disagreeing with Trotsky’s rigid ideology (Hickman 2012, 19). Moreover, in 1937 he served as chair of an international commission established to examine Joseph Stalin’s charges against Trotsky, which concluded that the accused was innocent (Hickman 2012, 20–24).

In the early 1960s, processes of political and economic liberalization began to emerge in response to growing public dissatisfaction with existing restrictions. As a result, publishing policies became more flexible, contributing to a gradual easing of controls and censorship within the cultural sphere. The literary community played

a key role in articulating cultural opposition, helping to pave the way for the broader liberalization of 1968, known as the Prague Spring, and fostering a simultaneous flourishing of literature and translation. Within the domain of American philosophy, three notable works were rendered into Slovak. The 18th-century American political philosopher Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791) were translated by Lev Soudek as *Práva človeka: Odpoveď na útok pána Burka proti Francúzskej revolúcii* (1959). Two works by the German-American psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm also appeared in Slovak, namely *Umenie milovať* (1966; *The Art of Loving*, 1956), translated by Slavomíra Krížiková, and *Sny a mýty: Symbolika snov, rozprávok a mýtov* (1970; *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths*, 1951), translated by Ivan Šipoš.

As Bednárová (2024, 354) observes, the translation of philosophical texts in Slovakia became more systematic in the late 1960s, when philosopher Igor Hrušovský initiated the ten-volume *Antológia z diel filozofov* (Anthology of the works of philosophers) to address the acute shortage of Slovak translations of European philosophical works. Published between 1966 and 1977 under Hrušovský's editorship, the series presents a representative selection of Western philosophical thought, spanning antiquity, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and extending to the first half of the 20th century. Of the total ten volumes, only two comprise works of American philosophy. Volume IX, *Logický empirizmus a filozofia prírodných vied* (Logical empiricism and the philosophy of the natural sciences), published by Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry in Bratislava in 1968, includes a selection of works by Rudolf Carnap, the German-American philosopher, translated by Augustín Riška, a former member of the Slovak Philosophical Society and of the editorial board of the journal *Filozofia*. In 1967, Riška undertook a study visit to West Germany, and in 1969 he relocated to the United States, where he chose to remain in light of the unfavorable political developments in Czechoslovakia during the early normalization period. He continued his philosophical work at St. John's University in New York. Consequently, from the early 1970s, Riška was placed on the list of forbidden authors, and his remaining translations were lost (Cmorej 1990, 641). In 1969, Volume VIII, *Pragmatizmus, realizmus, fenomenológia, existencializmus* (Pragmatism, realism, phenomenology, existentialism), was published by the Epona publishing house in Bratislava. The volume presents a selection of works by leading thinkers of the late 19th and 20th centuries, including American philosophers William James, John Dewey, and George Santayana, translated by Slovak scholars Viktor Thieben, Ján Bodnár, Irma Knezlová and Evelína Bodnárová. The publication of the aforementioned anthology marked a significant cultural milestone, signaling an openness to the wider world and to Western philosophy during the brief period of the Prague Spring.

THE PERIOD OF CONSOLIDATION AND NORMALIZATION UNTIL THE VELVET REVOLUTION: 1970–1989

The cultural revitalization of the late 1960s was abruptly curtailed by the Soviet-led invasion in August 1968, which reinstated strict controls over intellectual and artistic life. Under Gustáv Husák (the Slovak First Secretary of the Communist

Party of Czechoslovakia between 1969–1987), extensive purges severely weakened Czechoslovak cultural and intellectual spheres. This impact was evident in the field of philosophy as well, as no Slovak translations of works by American scholars appeared during the 1970s. By the late 1980s, the situation regarding Slovak translations of American philosophy began to improve. Notably, Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), one of the most influential works in the philosophy of science of the 20th century, was translated as *Štruktúra vedeckých revolúcií* (1982) by Ľubica Valentová and published in Bratislava by Pravda. As Milan Zigo (2009, 990) explains, the translation of this work was prepared on the basis of the revised and expanded second edition, and it was published in the former Czechoslovakia almost two decades after the first edition of the book had appeared in the United States. This translation was issued as part of the *Filozofické odkazy* (Philosophical legacy) series, which replaced the Anthologies of the works of philosophers during the era of strict normalization. The series was conceived as comprising three distinct sections: (A) pre-Marxist philosophy, (B) contemporary non-Marxist philosophy, and (C) Marxist philosophy. As Zigo further adds, at that time, Section B undoubtedly represented one of the most significant phenomena in publishing policy in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic within the field of philosophical literature: “What is crucial is that the works published within the series enabled the maintenance of at least minimal engagement with emerging currents in Western non-Marxist thought – engagement that was essential for the development of philosophy in Slovakia, irrespective of whether it aspired to be Marxist”³ (2009, 991). Finally, despite decades of repression, intellectual resistance persisted, ultimately contributing to the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and reshaping the cultural landscape of post-communist Czechoslovakia. As Bednářová clarifies, “the translation space opened up immediately after 1989 and brought a significantly increased intensity of translation activity, making up for the loss caused by ideological manipulation and restriction” (2024, 347).

CONCLUSION

As outlined in the introduction, the central research question addressed by this study concerns how many works by American philosophers were translated into Slovak prior to 1989. The results of the quantitative analysis indicate the existence of seven Slovak translations. In terms of publication type, these consist of five Slovak monographs, as well as two Slovak anthologies containing works by American philosophers translated from English. The most productive period was the 1960s, corresponding to a brief era of political, social, and cultural liberalization. During this time, three Slovak translations were published as monographs, accompanied by two Slovak anthologies containing works by American philosophers in translation.⁴

The second research question examined which branches of American philosophy were accessible to Slovak readers. Slovak translations were highly limited and included only a few works: one by John Dewey representing pragmatism, one by Thomas Paine from the Enlightenment tradition, two by Erich Fromm, and Thomas S. Kuhn's influential contribution to the philosophy of science. This scarcity was only partially mitigated by two anthologies published by the late 1970s, which

featured works by Rudolf Carnap, Wiliam James, and George Santayana. Although more translations of socialist and Marxist American philosophers might have been expected, no dedicated publications have been identified. A notable exception is Ján Bodnár's work written in Slovak *O súčasnej filozofii v USA* (On contemporary philosophy in the USA, 1956), published by Slovenské vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, which discusses several socialist and Marxist American thinkers (Joseph Weydemeyer, Friedrich Adolph Sorge, William Zebulon Foster, John Sommerville, Howard Selsam).

The third research question examined the translators of the books and anthologies, all of whom were highly qualified, with Lev Soudek, Jozef Schützner, Lubi-ca Valentová, and Irma Klezlová proficient in languages, and Slavomíra Křížiková, Ivan Šipoš, Ján Bodnár, Augustín Riška, Viktor Thieben, and Evelína Bodnárová recognized scholars in philosophy or psychology. In most cases, only limited information is available about their translation work prior to 1989, which may suggest that their contributions to translating American philosophical works for Slovak readers were relatively overlooked before the Velvet Revolution. Moreover, the third research question addressed the publishers of the Slovak translations, too. Translations of works by Paine and Fromm were issued by the Osveta publishing house, which was later partially restructured into the Obzor publishing house in Bratislava. Obzor primarily published popular, educational, legal, artistic, and regional literature, as well as works for the Union of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship (Kusá 2024, 382). The translation of Kuhn's work was published by the Pravda publishing house, which primarily specialized in political literature, producing Marxist and Leninist texts and later expanding into ancient, historical, and modern non-Marxist philosophy. As Mária Kusá (2024, 382) notes, from the 1950s onward most philosophical translation activity was concentrated in Pravda, founded in 1945 as the dedicated publishing house of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The final research question considers the factors shaping the selection of works for translation and the ways in which Slovak scholars engaged with them. The issues of center versus periphery, dominance versus subordination, and Western versus non-Western perspectives, which have been central to recent translation studies (Saldanha and O'Brien 2014, 4), are particularly pertinent here. Decades of suppression of Western philosophy in Czechoslovakia marginalized interest in American philosophical works under the prevailing Communist doctrine. Although earlier translations existed, it was only after 1989 that American philosophical works began to receive greater attention in terms of translation and publication. Political considerations, especially following the Communist Party's consolidation of power in 1948, not only influenced the selection of works for translation but also shaped their reception and interpretation by Slovak scholars. Due to space constraints, only a limited number of examples are discussed here; however, a separate study examining this question in greater depth through relevant paratexts and metatexts is planned.

NOTES

- ¹ It has been published since the mid-20th century under successive titles: *Philosophica Slovaca* (1946–1949), *Filozofický zborník* (1950–1952), *Filozofický časopis* (1953–1955), *Slovenský filozofický časopis* (1956–1960), *Otázky marxistickej filozofie* (1961–1965), and *Filozofia* (1966–present).
- ² The definitions of metatext and paratext adopted here are based on Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality (1992, 1997). Genette defines metatextuality as the critical relationship through which a text comments explicitly or implicitly on another text or on itself. Paratextuality refers to the relationship between a text and its paratextual elements – such as titles, prefaces, footnotes, and illustrations – which frame and mediate the reception of the main text.
- ³ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are made by the present author.
- ⁴ The lack of Slovak translations was often compensated for by the availability of Czech translations, since the close relationship between the two languages allowed Slovak readers to understand Czech texts without significant difficulty. Owing to space constraints, however, this study could not address the issue of Czech translations of philosophical works.

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HANY RASHWAN – REBECCA RUTH GOULD – NASRIN ASKARI (eds.): Arabic, Persian, and Turkic Poetics. Towards a Post-Eurocentric Literary Theory

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The volume under review is a unique collection of papers by scholars of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literatures. It features 13 studies devoted to thinking about literature in the Islamicate world, along with an introduction by one of the editors. Although the volume's focus is limited to this particular shared literary sphere, it may also be of interest to all working in general literary theory. In fact, it is the ambition of the editors themselves to reach a wider audience of literary scholars, as the volume situates itself in the discourse of the disciplines of comparative literature and world literature studies. Rebecca Ruth Gould elaborates upon this in the introduction, which serves as a call for a post-Eurocentric literary theory. In this regard, her remark that “even when the canon of world literature is increasingly decolonized, literary theory as such remains Eurocentric” (3) deserves emphasis.

The concept of *balāgha* is central to understanding literature in Arabic, Persian, and Turkic cultures. Therefore, in the first chapter, another of the editors, Hany Rashwan, illustrates the significance of this concept in medieval Arab-Islamic cultures (the word “medieval” should here imply a specific time period, rather than that the category of the Middle Ages is relevant for this part of the world). He points out that the Arabic tradition recognized two rhetorical systems: *khiṭāba* (persuasion via public oral speech) and *balāgha* (eloquence). *Balāgha* has served as the matrix for the production and reception of Arabic, Persian, and Turkic literary texts for over a thousand years. In the next chapter, Lahcen El Yazghi Ezzaher examines the translation

of several technical terms from Aristotle's *Rhetorics* into Arabic, as his work significantly shaped Arabic thinking about literature. Furthermore, Linda G. Jones examines the poetics of *khuṭba*, *khiṭāba*, and *balāgha* as described by Ibn Abd Rabbih of Córdoba.

The next three chapters are devoted to Persian poetics. Leila Seyed-Ghasem looks into the poetics of preposing (*taqdīm*) and postposing (*ta'khīr*) in an 11th-century Persian prose text, *Tārīkh-i Bayhaqī* (The history of Bayhaqī) by Abu'l-Fazl Bayhaqī. Natalia Chalisova focuses on ambiguity in Persian poetics and ghazal poetry. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab elaborates on Persian literary riddles in the work of the 13th-century poet Maj al-Din Hamgar. In the next chapter, Nicola Carpentieri shifts the attention to the Maghrib region. She addresses the topic of aging in the works of Arabic writers, including Ibn Rashiq, Hazim al-Qartajanni, and Ibn Hamdis.

The focus of subsequent chapters is Turkic literary culture. Marc Toutant discusses Central Asian works on prosody and attempts to answer the question of why their authors retained the Persian framework, despite adopting genres specific to Turkic poetry. His article challenges the pervasive power of Eurocentrism in Turkic studies, as evident in attempts to uncover Turkicness in works from the region. Aişe Handan Konar explores the Arabic and Persian concept of imitation (*tetebbu'*) in 16th-century Ottoman biographies of poets. She argues that it is possible to speak about a shared Islamic poetics, as well as minor, regional poetics, such as Ottoman

poetics. Berat Açı also tackles the problem of Ottoman poetics. In particular, he discusses how Sheikh Galib legitimized poetry in the 18th century. Todd Lawson focuses on the ideas about language and figuration in the writings of the early-19th-century Arab scholar Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsa'î.

The last two chapters are devoted to contemporary developments in the literature of the Arab-Islamic region. Haifa Alfaisal examines the shift from a focus on eloquence (*balāgha*) to criticism (*intiqād*) in Arabic literary thought during the 19th and 20th centuries. Her chapter illustrates the complexity of developing a post-Eurocentric literary theory, as Western thought has been adopted in very different ways in Arab countries, often with the support of local traditions and cultural contexts.

In the last chapter, Chiara Fontana demonstrates how a *balāgha*-grounded analysis of modern Arabic poetry might be conducted. She analyzes the poem “Kalimāt fī al-ḥubb” (Love words) by the Egyptian author Naguib Surur. Although not suggested by the author, this study raises the question of whether this important category of Arab-Islamic literary thinking can be applied cross-culturally. Employing it in the analysis of literary works outside of the region would be an interesting exercise in exploring its potential.

Although I read the book as a non-specialist in Arab-Islamic cultures, I believe that the proposal of using the concept of *balāgha* for literary theory and analysis deserves careful consideration. Several scholars have argued in recent decades that the Western conception of literature is not universal. If it is perceived as such, it is only so as a result of the hegemony of Western academia. It has also been repeatedly noted that the study of non-Western literature should consider the conceptualization of literature within its original cultures.

Interestingly, the challenge of non-Western literary theory extends beyond the Western world. The volume demonstrates that literary studies in the Arab-Islamic region also need to reconnect with their intellectual her-

itage. Of course, the question remains how to achieve it. It is not possible to simply discard recent developments shaped by Western paradigms and replace them with approaches deemed traditional or indigenous. This may also explain the editors' cautious approach in presenting their project, since they view the volume as merely a contribution *toward* a post-Eurocentric literary theory and defer its full articulation to the future.

Comparative studies began in the 19th century with the intention of including non-Western materials, but they did so within a Eurocentric and hierarchical framework. Currently, a growing number of scholars are aware of this issue. However, it is not clear how to solve it. Whereas it may be possible to switch between various conceptualizations of literature for the specialist, it seems unlikely for a general reader. It is also an open question whether a general theory of literature that takes into consideration the conceptualizations of literature from other parts of the world is possible. Moreover, in comparative literary studies, it is not entirely clear what we are doing when we engage in comparison, as we lack an established theory to direct our practice. At the same time, developing such a theory seems to depend on the very act of comparing.

The volume's authors appear to be aware of many of these issues, including the fact that the discourse surrounding this attempt at decolonizing literary studies is conducted in English. Nevertheless, a post-Eurocentric literary theory remains a compelling and relevant goal in an increasingly connected world we inhabit. Hopefully, the discussion about the issues raised in the volume will continue with scholars of Chinese and Indian cultures, both of which exhibit rich and long traditions of thinking about literature.

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TIM BEASLEY-MURRAY: Critical Games. On Play and Seriousness in Academia, Literature and Life

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Tim Beasley-Murray is associate professor of European thought and culture at University College London. Previously a faculty member at University College London's School of Slavonic and East European Studies, he has long engaged with Central and Eastern European literature and thought. His scholarship spans literary, historical, and cultural studies, as well as philosophy, across a range of different languages. Notable works include *Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin: Experience and Form* (2007) and the co-edited volume *Anti-Atlas: Critical Area Studies from the East of the West* (2025). His most recent book is *Critical Games. On Play and Seriousness in Academia, Literature and Life* (2025).

In *Critical Games*, Beasley-Murray examines theories of play and games in order to argue that academic life, literary practice, and social relations share an “amphibian” quality, oscillating between seriousness and play. He maintains that ludic structures persist even in domains conventionally regarded as serious such as academia, while literature, often associated with playfulness, carries an irreducible seriousness of its own. Alongside this central tension, the book addresses interconnected themes, such as risk, narcissism, imposture, shame, and moral responsibility, culminating in a sustained reflection on the ethics of play, the moral obligations of authorship, and the convergence of imaginative freedom and reality. Drawing on a wide range of thinkers and literary texts, the book adopts an intentionally eclectic methodology, combining theoretical reflection with

sociological observation, philosophical inquiry, and brief autobiographical anecdotes.

The book is structured into five parts: an introduction, “Part I: The Game of Academia”, “Part II: The Game of Literature”, “Part III: End Game”, and a concluding section titled “Final Whistle”. The introduction establishes the book's theoretical orientation by foregrounding the pervasive presence of game-like structures in academic and cultural life. Rather than offering a linear framework, it unfolds through scenes and digressions that highlight tensions inherent in academia and literary production, noting that the book was written “back to front” as a side project to an initially planned work on Emmanuel Carrère.

“Part I: The Game of Academia” establishes the book's sociological framework. Beasley-Murray conceptualizes academia as a structured, competitive, and rule-bound social field (drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's notion of fields) with a *serious game*-like structure. Academic life is supposed to hold elements of a game, such as participants competing for symbolic capital – reputation, citation, and institutional affiliation – within a hierarchically stratified system. Conferences, seminars, and peer review are described as ritualized performances governed by the logic of the “magic circle” and sustained through Goffmanian masks. The author critiques academic objectivity with the claim that it is a strategic facade that minimizes the risk of losing and conceals personal investment rather than a methodological ideal, and argues that academia operates as

an unstable game with unequal positions and real consequences.

“Part II: The Game of Literature” turns to literature as the domain where play is most visible and complex. Within theoretical reflections, Beasley-Murray draws on many scholars: Jan Mukařovský and the Czech structuralists, or figures such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes. This eclectic section, blending memoir, intellectual history, and literary analysis, examines literature across successive stages of literary play: first, literature conceived as a self-contained “magic circle”, governed by conventions and imaginative freedom; second, narratives in which play escalates and escalates within the bounds of literary form, functioning as a moral playground for ethical risk and transgression; and third, hybrid modes in which literary play spills beyond its formal limits and begins to intervene in real life. These stages are illustrated through various canonical and contemporary Western and Central European literary works, including Slovak texts by Pavel Vilikovský and Jana Juráňová, which foreground questions of moral responsibility and the tangible consequences of literary representation.

“Part III: End Game”, centers on Carrère and exemplifies Beasley-Murray’s focus on ethical risk and vulnerability. Through

personal encounters and a reading of *Un roman russe* (2007), the section examines how narcissism and hubris enable literary games to spill into real life, using Carrère’s partner Sophie as a lens for exploring the dangers of treating reality and others as playthings. Literature here emerges as an ethically charged “magic circle” that demands responsibility for its impact on real people and the world.

Throughout the book, Tim Beasley-Murray emphasizes the continuity between academia, literature, and life, arguing that all forms of play carry real ethical stakes. Intellectual and creative pleasures are presented as integral to serious engagement, while games function as both analytical tools and ethical experiments. *Critical Games* thus offers a compelling account of how the oscillation between play and seriousness structures literature and academia, framing play not as the opposite of seriousness but as the condition through which its ethical stakes become visible.

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OLIVIER LUMBROSO: Dans l'atelier de... Émile Zola [In the atelier of... Émile Zola]

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Olivier Lumbroso is a professor of French literature at the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3, whose literary research focuses on naturalism and the work of French naturalist writer Émile Zola. He is a member of the Didactique des langues, des textes et des cultures (Didactics of languages, texts and cultures) and a researcher at the Institut des textes et des manuscrits modernes (ITEM, Institute of modern texts and manuscripts) and at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique/École normale supérieure (National center for scientific research/École normale supérieure). He is also a director of the literary magazine *Cahiers naturalistes* on naturalism and a codirector of the Centre d'étude sur Zola et le naturalisme (Center for the study of Zola and naturalism) at ITEM.

Lumbroso's publication *Dans l'atelier de... Émile Zola* (2023) presents Émile Zola, one of the greatest French novelists of the 19th century and author of the three cycles *Les Rougon-Macquart*, *Les Trois Villes*, and *Les Quatre Évangiles*. Zola left to posterity thousands of pages of handwritten work, lyrical dramas, short stories, and chronicles. But he was not only a writer; he also left behind works as a photographer and an illustrator: in short, the world of archives. Lumbroso's essay, therefore, revisits the various aspects of Zola's work, some well-known, others much less so.

The book is divided into four chapters, each dedicated to a different aspect of Zola's writings and life. In the first chapter, "Les lieux de la création" (Places of creation), Lumbroso proposes to study the workplaces

of the writer "casanier": "Je suis un homme tout à fait casanier... Hors de mon nid, je suis fini !" ("I am a complete homebody... Outside my nest, I am finished!"); 11, trans. by T. G.). He begins the chapter by introducing important and decisive personal and professional events from Zola's life. Readers have an opportunity to discover Paris through the places where Zola lived and created (not only flats, but also cafés, friends' houses, conference rooms, etc.), as a result of his career evolution and social ascension. The author enriches the reading by adding the exact addresses, photographs of the interiors, and citations from Zola's novels and correspondence to establish the deeper links between his texts and personality. The chapter also encompasses Zola's beginnings as a writer and theoretician of naturalism, explaining his reason for choosing naturalism, his experiences with publishing houses, the purchase of his vacation house in Médan (where the Médan group was formed), not leaving out the period of exile. Among other things, the author also points out less well-known information: Zola's relation to photography, to collecting objects, and his literary meetings on Thursdays.

The second chapter, "Histoire d'une archive-monde" (The story of an archive world), refers to the abovementioned "world of the archive". Zola's pre-texts, manuscripts, photographs, journal articles and correspondence can be consulted on "Gallica" or on "Archiz", the portal of the ITEM's Centre Zola. Summarizing Zola's digitized texts accessible to the wider public, the chapter

serves also as a guide for students or researchers. The chapter also discusses the issue of reception of Zola's manuscripts and novels: the first reception from 1880 to 1890, the period of slow recognition of his heritage from 1902 until 1940, and the period from 1950, when Zola's masterpieces entered university literary research.

In the third chapter, "Dans le ventre des cycles" (In the belly of cycles), an allusion to the novel *Le ventre de Paris* (The belly of Paris, 1873; Eng. trans. *Fat and Thin*, 1888), Lumbroso, thanks to his extensive knowledge of Zola and naturalism, particularly from a genetic perspective, concentrates on Zola's process of writing the novels in the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle and presents various elements that constitute preparatory files (so called *dossiers préparatoires* – extensive preparatory work-notes and research files for his novels). He also comments on the original manuscripts, the family tree, Zola's readings (Taine, Balzac, etc.) and points out the importance and richness of Zola's ethnographical and field research that became a crucial element of his naturalist project. Lumbroso explains as follows: "The ethnographic documentary material from the surveys is intended to become novelistic material" (144). The end of this chapter presents the cycles *Trois Villes* and *Évangiles*, showing the so-called "third version of Zola" ("Troisième Zola").

The fourth chapter, "À l'école de l'atelier" (At the school of the studio), Lumbroso reflects on the epistolary image of Zola ("image épistolaire"; 171) and asks if there is a relation between the genesis of the novels and Zola's correspondence, which becomes a tool to establish a better understanding of Zola's writing style and historical and political con-

text but also a witness of the writer's evolution. Epistolary research reveals how Zola decomposed his perceptions of city and society life and recomposed them into his texts, revealing much information that he wrote about in his letters: struggles with publishing houses, his arguments against antinaturalists, situations that marked his literary creation, his perfectionism in writing, but also the fact that he took on the role of mentor. The chapter also discusses the strategies that enable Zola to constantly reinvent himself. In the part "Le perfectionnement de l'atelier" (The perfection of his craft) Lumbroso states four dimensions of Zola's "autodidacticism" (186): unfailing discipline (rituals and writing habits), a taste for commentary developed at a very early age (many journalistic columns written mainly at the beginning of his career), constant self-evaluation, and finally "his didactics seeks to renew itself, and therefore to experiment" (191).

While the four chapters can be read on their own, regardless of their position within the book, they each give the reader an opportunity to encounter Zola from different points of view: as a collector of trinkets and painting (mainly from Manet, Cézanne, and Pissarro) but surprisingly, not as the owner of many books, as an architect of the text, and as an important moral and historical figure of the Panthéon. Lumbroso shows the lasting value and importance of Zola's texts today and encourages us to reread his masterpieces.

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STILIANA MILKOVA ROUSSEVA: Elena Ferrante as World Literature

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Elena Ferrante as World Literature is the first English-language monograph focused on the renowned Italian author. Across five chapters and an epilogue, Stiliana Milkova Rousseva, an established Ferrante scholar and professor of comparative literature at Oberlin College, unfolds a comprehensively researched, analytically rich, and imaginatively stimulating interlocution not only with Ferrante's most popular Neapolitan novels (Eng. trans. *My Brilliant Friend*, 2012; *The Story of a New Name*, 2013; *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, 2014; and *The Story of the Lost Child*, 2015) but also with her three shorter novels, her children's book, and *La frantumaglia* (2003; Eng. trans. *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey*, 2016), a collection of various texts. The monograph engages with multiple dimensions of Ferrante's writing: from anonymity as resistance to marketing demands, media pressures, and social expectations (Elena Ferrante is a pseudonym) to female subalternity, art theory, and the attitude of wariness that permeates Italian literary criticism with regard to world literature. Milkova Rousseva's expertise in multiple literary traditions (Russian, Bulgarian, and Italian) and command of critical debates in feminist theory, trauma studies, and psychoanalysis enable her to foster a far-reaching comparative discourse, situating Ferrante's works within an intertextual network that exposes, in nuance, their local, global, and glocal concerns.

Milkova Rousseva's multifaceted discussion spans gender/ed authorship, topography, and politics with a focus on the figure of the mother and disgust as a psychosomat-

ic reaction related to feminine experiences of pregnancy (44), insemination as a poisonous injection, and motherhood/birth as a corporal-psychological-spiritual fragmentation. To underscore and expose the inner workings of the last, she examines closely the dissolutions of chronological time that immerse characters and readers into temporal ambiguity and enable Ferrante to attend both to the "repressive past" and the "oppressive present" (57) at the same time. This foundational work is necessary for the construction of a female genealogy of selfhood, creativity, and authorship capable of operating as an alternative to conventional lineages designed to serve the beneficiaries of patriarchy. Thus, Milkova Rousseva both uncovers and constructs a capacious female genealogy embedded in Ferrante's works through intertextual references. Her scholarly breadth enables her to draw on a rich network that includes Elif Shafak, Rachel Cusk, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sibilla Aleramo, Natalia Ginzburg, Adriana Cavarero, Elizabeth Grosz, Marina Abramović, Mara Cerri, and Cindy Sherman among others. Situating Ferrante's texts within numerous literary, theoretical, cultural, and historical contexts, Milkova Rousseva showcases an "intra-textual genealogy of women writers" (155) that runs across novels and between characters, historical figures, and mythological beings. Her accompanying readings of additional texts from the Italian literary tradition (Anna Banti's 1947 *Artemisia*, Elsa Morante's 1982 *Aracoeli*, and others) both illuminate and perform the female literary genealogy of which Ferrante is herself a part.

At the heart of *Elena Ferrante as World Literature* is the complex, multifaceted image of a universal feminine imaginary (“feminine experience, subjectivity, and identity”, 22) brought forth in Ferrante’s works out of what the author calls “the male cage” (126). In delineating the contours and contents of the image, the discussion vacillates among “female”, “feminine”, and “women’s” as among bodies, languages/texts, and socio-political structures, practices, and regimes. The monograph refrains from sharply defining these terms.

While Isabella Pinto and Elisa Sotgiu have put Ferrante’s work in conversation with Italian radical feminism, feminism of difference, and Marxist feminism, Stefania Lucamente has proposed that the tetralogy and Ferrante’s disavowal of particular feminist influences in fact undoes feminism. Milkova Rousseva addresses these alternative conceptions through a careful unfolding of Ferrante’s rich “tapestry of [feminist] theories, images, and scenarios reified in plot and character” (14). She comes closest to a conceptualization of Ferrante’s feminism by drawing on Tiziana de Rogatis’ “feminist storytelling” and, to a lesser extent, on James Wood’s assessment of Ferrante’s work as a kind of “practical *écriture féminine*”. Ferrante’s “literary syncretism” (14), Milkova Rousseva maintains, which is better suited to the reality of feminine experience and its narration, rests on the entanglement of often distant and even contradictory terms and theories, and bears theoretical significance for the feminine imaginary. To articulate its intricate, unsettling nature, Milkova Rousseva utilizes *La frantumaglia* as a map and foregrounds two key terms, *frantumaglia* and *smarginatura*, which center and guide the discussion across a rich thematic terrain. “To be afflicted with *frantumaglia* is to acknowledge – and submit to – the protocols of a universal patriarchy” (28), she explains. As a “theory of feminine experience” (29), *frantumaglia* is simultaneously the fragmentation, disintegration, and psychic and/or physical collapse of the female character

as well as a way to account for the ways in which patriarchal structures and practices precipitate it. *Smarginatura*, on the other hand, is a symptom of *frantumaglia*, though the latter is “both the cause and the effect of suffering” (35), Milkova Rousseva observes, defying in this way not only causality but the expectation of causal identifiability and traceability to a single source.

In its boundary-destroying activity, *frantumaglia* disbands chronological time and language, opening characters to uncontrollable and sometimes explosive sensory experiences. Often, repressive surveillance methodologies inherited from male relatives result in cross-generational trauma that manifests as *frantumaglia*. Even a household run by two women in *The Lying Life of Adults* (2019), Milkova Rousseva notes, is dominated by the portrait of a male, surveilling and judging their every move inside the home and commanding subservience; “The two women’s ostensibly feminine household is only another form of their subalternity”, Milkova Rousseva writes (170). In her view, Ferrante’s most arduous and valuable effort is not to expose disciplinary surveillance but rather to reveal how it can be transformed into a reflective kind of (self-) surveillance that confronts and subverts the patriarchal gaze when the internal surveyor is no longer (an internalized) male. This alternative surveillance, Milkova Rousseva argues, is frequently “collaborative, creative, and mutually constitutive” (59). Each central female character can become an opening into a female experience of suffering, into “the middle of a dizzy spell” (37) that makes possible both profoundly affective friendship and (self-) regeneration/reinvention. Through close reading of *frantumaglia* and *smarginatura* in Ferrante’s writing, Milkova Rousseva articulates Ferrante’s reconfiguration of subalternity into agency as a sustained endeavor to reclaim female genius, authorship, and creativity from its traditional association with maleness.

A significant amount of Milkova Rousseva’s analytical attention is concentrated on

identifying the forms and patterns of subalternity in Ferrante's writing. Milkova Rousseva's insights regarding female liquidity, particularly Ferrante's use of bodily fluids to underscore the brutality of patriarchal society, map possibilities for positive mother-daughter relations, rooted in creativity, shared experience, and intuitive knowledge. Milkova Rousseva focuses on the ways in which these figures expose "the repressive and oppressive collective feminine unconscious" and redefine women's culturally instilled and adopted "raging, murderous, suicidal ancestors" (86). Her scholarly range sustains her nuanced observations regarding Ferrante's use of ancient Greek mythology and especially the persistent figure of the violent, suicidal woman/mother, enraged and seeking vengeance. This analysis makes legible a haunting archetype that can be traced to Mediterranean myth but retains an active potential to possess women today.

To the question of how characters resist and conquer oppressive structures, Ferrante's answer is via creativity – which Milkova Rousseva identifies in Ferrante's works as antithetical to motherhood – and especially through writing. Sewing and writing, cutting and narrating are aspects of "an introspective feminine practice" (33) that centers on the discourse of female experience. Milkova Rousseva repeatedly employs the term "conquer" to refer to its successful outcomes, though she perceptively and indirectly observes that the term has nothing to do with living happily ever after. In a sense, there is no final and definitive "conquest" but rather an ongoing self-reinvention, never fully severed from the possibility of self-loathing, madness, and death. Often such reinvention takes the form of women's becoming agents of "creative violence", as Milkova Rousseva puts it, which short-circuits "the power structures within the symbolic and reconfigure[s] the artistic act as a shared feminine process" (107), expressing the excluded creative female authorship. Milkova Rousseva notes that Ferrante exposes the assumed and often promoted assumption that education can

set human beings free not merely as untrue but as pernicious through the feelings of failure and inadequacy that it produces in her highly educated characters. Education alone is insufficient, she points out, within a system that pits women's creative or intellectual work against an ideal of motherhood according to which a woman must commit to sacrificing her every desire to her children's needs and to homemaking.

Nevertheless, the maternal persists in Ferrante's daughter characters, in their responses to dialect, their complicated relations with their mothers, and their abjection, as shown in Milkova Rousseva's insightful analyses: "The dynamics of appearance and disappearance [of dolls, mothers, daughters, and female friends in Ferrante's texts], desire and disgust, attachment and detachment, are reinvigorated through a new conceptual paradigm. Mothers must be violated (lost, thrown in the cellar, rejected, repelled, abjected) before they can return and be reincorporated in the daughter's bodies and narratives" (86). Similarly, in order to subvert if not to escape the constitutive male gaze, women must descend into the violent underbellies of cities and memories; they must get lost among the architectural mechanisms that spatialize control in order to weave their own threads that will lead them out. Among the variety of interpretative possibilities that Ferrante proposes, Milkova Rousseva points to the powerful image of the interlinked sweaty hands of Lila and Lenù (the Neapolitan novels' main characters) which form a thread that defies the oppressive, ogre-like patriarchal structures and their implicit insistence that there is only one option – to submit, since there is no way out. Resisting neat interpretative solutions, Milkova Rousseva observes that Lila's character both defies (and defeats) the labyrinth and subsumes it within her own labyrinthine depths. Artist, architect, engineer, and builder at the same time, Lila is not unlike Neo, the main character of *The Matrix*, who, ultimately, infiltrates the system, becomes the matrix, and manipulates it from within.

In Chapter 5, “Mapping Urban Feminine Topographies”, Milkova Rousseva studies Ferrante’s spatial poetics, the ways in which “psyche is spatialized” and “topography is interiorized” (87). She delineates the perambulatory subjectivity-construction in Ferrante’s texts, where women reconfigure themselves and the spaces they inhabit through walking and remembering. Milkova Rousseva maps Ferrante’s efforts to articulate these male-oriented and dominated spaces that affect female characters in distinctly negative ways. Because city space in Ferrante’s novels (the working-class *rione* or neighborhood especially) “embodies, enacts, and enforces the forms, rituals, and practices of patriarchal control” (133), Milkova Rousseva writes, to build a feminine city, “a female polis” (134), then, becomes an undertaking of critical importance.

Milkova Rousseva’s subtle work with imagery and deft navigation of feminist theories bring forth analyses that reach far beyond the boundaries of a given text. An insightful instance is an intertextual reading of motherhood between Ferrante’s literary iconography in *L’amore molesto* (1992; Eng. trans. *Troubling Love*, 2006) and a contemporary print, *St. Sebastienne* (1992), by Louise Bourgeois. Through its representation of Christian martyrdom, the latter offers a conception of motherhood as torturous, depleting, and capable of eradicating subjectivity. In an attempt to regain agency and authority over their own narratives, Ferrante’s characters often respond with laughter as well as obscene gestures or movements. Milkova Rousseva examines Ferrante’s attentiveness to socially expected and regulated female body movements and behavior vis-à-vis ways of breaking and subverting these expectations and normative regulations expressed through sonic poetics. She observes that the characters are frequently seamstresses or engaged in dress-making or dressing – cutting and suturing – skills and processes that are entwined with narrating and often with wresting narrative authority from the male-dominated or androgenic right to

narrate. Lila, for instance, cuts herself out of family photographs (125), but what enables her to tell her story, Milkova Rousseva contends, is suturing as a “shared feminine gaze”, a reciprocal gaze created by women that circumvents the male gaze completely (121–122). Against alternative readings (Lucamante’s for instance), Milkova Rousseva convincingly shows that, in the tetralogy, Lila tells her story through her friend Lenù, which can be read as “Ferrante’s theory and practice of feminine, friendship, creativity, and authorship” (129).

Elena Ferrante as World Literature offers much more than a probing examination of the works by the Italian author. The book is also an exploration of what Milkova Rousseva calls “the creation of Elena Ferrante” as a phenomenon of world literature in which translation plays a crucial part. Although the monograph does not redefine the concept of world literature, it offers a compelling illustration of David Damrosch’s conception of the term – Ferrante’s novels have not only circulated well beyond their local point of origin but have also gained in translation. Milkova Rousseva both contributes to and performs the shared foundation that the concept of world literature can provide for understanding texts that appear to stand in national, geographic, linguistic, or historical isolation.

What I appreciate especially about Milkova Rousseva’s discussion is that it does not sterilize the subjects it addresses, from verbal incontinence to corporal fluids, or contain what is meant to be uncontainable in Ferrante’s characters, namely their pluriform female subjectivity that is “somatic, vocal, emotional, sexual” (97). Milkova Rousseva does not shy away from the grotesque, the disgusting, and the profoundly unsettling; on the contrary, she makes them legible through the frameworks that she builds. I find Milkova Rousseva’s ability to bring together readers (herself included), characters, and writer both skillful and thrilling. She astutely bridges the “fictional” and the “real”, questioning their distinction and building a convincing case for the indispensable relevance of the former to

the latter. Through Ferrante's works, Milkova Rousseva offers a conception of identity constructed via suturing – the painstaking and sometimes perilous work with needle and thread – as a “collaborative, creative, and mutually constitutive” (59) endeavor. *Elena Ferrante as World Literature* is a relevant book today not only because misogyny, femicide, and backsliding democracies fortify existing

borders but because it teaches the skills of traversing the boundaries that divide us.

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CHRISTINE BERBERICH: *Brexit and the Migrant Voice: EU Citizens in Post-Brexit Literature and Culture*

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The UK referendum on Brexit in June 2016, as well as the events before it and its aftermath, have been widely discussed in global media and have generated numerous reactions within English-language literary production. However, the majority of critical responses to Brexit have emerged from within Britain itself, remaining predominantly monolingual and relatively homogeneous. Just as in the Brexit vote itself, EU migrants residing in the UK have remained silenced, devoid of a chance to contribute to this critical debate. That changed in 2022 with the publication of *Brexit and the Migrant Voice: EU Citizens in Post-Brexit Literature and Culture* (from Routledge's *Popular Culture and World Politics* series), edited by Christine Berberich. This volume brings together authors to share their analyses of cultural responses to Brexit and gives them a voice to share their views about migrants in the UK, their critical responses to Brexit, and their post-Brexit experiences. The collection presents a "literary journey" (7) across the EU from West to East, briefly engaging with Russia, and concluding with an epilogue in the unique geopolitical space of Gibraltar. *Brexit and the Migrant Voice* provides a platform for a variety of disciplines and perspectives, even though the analyses are limited to the available material on Brexit suitable for the purpose of such collection.

While some contributors engage directly with the effects of Brexit, others address it only peripherally, focusing instead on broader issues related to migration and border studies. The book combines analyses of a va-

riety of cultural productions: literary works, media, journalistic commentaries, and social networks; that represent the perspectives of European citizens and "their attitudes, their fears, and their concerns about Brexit" (i). It should be noted that the main focus of this review is the chapters dealing with literary analyses.

Christine Berberich's previous work on British national identity naturally pointed her in the direction of "BrexLit", as coined by Kristian Shaw in his *BrexLit: British Literature and the European Project* (2018). Due to her personal experience with migration from Germany to the UK, she chose to emphasize her Europeanness, directing her focus specifically on European migrants in this edited collection. *Brexit and the Migrant Voice* aims to bring together "the topics of Brexit with the situation of EU migrants of various origins living and working in the UK" (6). In the introduction, Berberich describes the chaos in the UK in early October 2021 which resulted from Brexit, affecting the lives of both British nationals and migrants who were denied the opportunity to cast their vote on the decision to Leave or Remain in the Referendum. She advocates for EU migrants who have contributed not only to the UK's economy, but also its national culture, yet have remained silenced, excluded from the "national" discourse.

The volume attempts to change "the dominant Anglocentric Brexit discourse" (9) by offering a multicultural and polyvocal discussion of Brexit that alters the predominantly mono-lingual approach to its

representation. Berberich unites together researchers from various countries, regardless of their language, origin, (in)direct experience with migration, the Referendum, or the pre- and post-Brexit politics in the UK. This gives the reader a look at Britain both from within and from outside. Only a limited number of these studied works exist in translation, which points to Britain's limited interest in the discussion of cultural representations of the difficulties of EU migrant workers. The voices and languages of the analyzed material are allowed to flow freely without mediation, accompanied by contributors' translations into English to ensure clarity and accessibility. Several contributors apply Roxana Patras's term *migrature* in their analyses. This hybrid of "migration" and "literature" refers to literary works centred on migrant characters' efforts to establish themselves in Britain, highlighting their economic insecurity, cultural adaptation, and pursuit of social acceptance as both workers and community members.

In the first contribution, Eugene McNulty looks at the reactions of contemporary Irish writers to Brexit haunted by the history of the island. Although the chapter does not deal with specific migrant troubles, some of the analyzed novels touch upon uneasy encounters of the "natives" with the European others. The chosen literary responses explore the possible negative outcomes of Brexit, such as the conflation of political power, the possibility of a "hard border", or the restriction of the free movement. He emphasizes that there exists a cognitive dissonance or disconnect between the discourse of Brexit and the island of Ireland that often shadows the responses of Irish authors. McNulty adds that the understanding of the Brexit narrative as well as of the whole Anglo-Irish history depends on the position from which it is viewed. A specific discussion of these varied perspectives is present in the short analysis of the novel *Backstop Land* (2019) by Glenn Patterson, David Wheatley's poem "Flags and Emblems" and Naoise Dolan's novel *Exciting Times* (2020). McNulty also deals with

the bordering and potential re-bordering of the island as it has recently concerned authors from both sides. He exemplifies these concerns with the 2015 play *Lally the Scut* by Abbie Spallen. The Irish border is the main concern of two other novels in McNulty's analysis – *The Butchers* (2020) by Ruth Gilligan and *Country* (2018) by Michael Hughes. The chapter views the potential re-bordering through a transnational lens, placing the works within a broader European context.

In her own chapter, Christine Berberich talks about the representation of EU migrants in contemporary British BrexLit originally written in English. She names only a few examples as a complete list of currently available Brexit-related fiction would be too long. The examples include Ali Smith's *Autumn* (2016), which was the first direct reaction to the EU Referendum. It was followed in 2017 by Amanda Graig's *The Lie of the Land*, Mark Billingham's *Love like Blood*, David Boyle's *The Remains of the Way*, Douglas Board's *Time of Lies*, and Antony Cartwright's *The Cut*, and later by bestselling authors such as Jonathan Coe, Ian McEwan or Linda Grant. Berberich names the Leave-supporting media as the cause of the "Othering" of EU migrants living and working in Britain. According to the author, the migration to the UK was misused by the Leave campaign to demonize EU citizens and blame them for the housing shortage, the almost dysfunctional National Health Service, the increased crime rates etc. These marginalizing and "othering" tendencies are, thus, present in many Brexit novels written in English. Smith's *Autumn* evokes the ugly mood in post-Referendum Britain full of anti-immigrant sentiments. Other novels use European characters to reaffirm stereotypes and clichés. Berberich shows that EU migrants in contemporary BrexLit are underrepresented, function primarily as static minor characters, and are often marginalized in the binary dichotomy of us versus them. To represent this mentality, Berberich analyses John Lancaster's novel *The Wall* (2019), which can be read as both "a response to, and a logical development of,

contemporary Brexit politics” (41) and opens the question of who should actually be considered a migrant and the “Other”. According to Berberich, this novel has a profound contribution to the understanding of Brexit, as it can put the reader into the position of the emigrant. The chapter calls for a wider representation of Brexit and its effects not only on Britain, but on millions of people of other backgrounds affected by it within a wider European context.

Helena Carrapico examines the everyday lives of European minority groups in post-Brexit Britain, with a special focus on the Portuguese community. She deals with the legal, political, and emotional impact Brexit has had on Portuguese migrants in the UK. However, due to the limitations of Portuguese literary production on this topic, Carrapico assesses the legal status of Portuguese migrants using academic literature and media, specifically the expat Facebook group in which the author carried out a study.

Another analysis of non-fictional material is presented by Rosario Arias, who “considers Brexit from the perspective of the Spanish living in the UK” (65). Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s term “contact writing” (2015), Arias studies blog entries, newspaper articles, and opinion pieces that carry the personal experiences of Spanish migrants who go through the process of disorientation. In the final section, she turns to the issues associated with translation of BrexLit into Spanish and other European languages and criticizes its unidirectionality.

In the next chapter, Sara Alessio writes about Italian migrature and the effect Brexit has had on the rising Euroscepticism in other countries. Alessio attempts to set some defining characteristics of two macro-categories of works engaging with Brexit and its aftermath. These two categories are political fiction and more intimate, psychological fiction. However, the characteristics are rather vague and include general features such as recurring themes, embracing the immigrant’s point of view, Brexit in a wider framework of global phenomena, the London setting, etc. Based

on these attributes, Alessio selects three recently published and still untranslated works for her case studies: Cristina Marconi’s *Città Irreale* (Unreal cities, 2019) as intimate, Alberto Prunetti’s *108 metri: The New Working Class Hero* (108 meters: The new working class hero, 2018) as political, and Marco Varvello’s *Brexit Blues* (2019) as hybrid. Although not all these texts relate directly to Brexit, the in-depth analyses and careful selection of appropriate quotations uncover the commonalities between Italian migrature and British BrexLit. The author recognizes Brexit as just another event in a series of phenomena on a global scale.

Christoph Ehland’s chapter scrutinizes the political commentaries of Jochen Buchsteiner, a London correspondent for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. These articles map the changing attitudes in British politics towards EU and immigration from a distinct German perspective.

The key issue in the contribution by Jopi Nyman is the Finnish responses to Brexit. Although most of this chapter deals with journalism and social media, two brief creative cultural responses to Brexit are analyzed in the end, a fairy tale for adults and a humorous blog post. Like some of the previous contributors, Nyman draws on the ideas of Sara Ahmed together with concepts like bordering, rebordering, or culture of conviviality. He concludes that the Finns see the future affected by Brexit rather pessimistically.

The next chapter looks at Lithuanian Brexit-related migrature which Irena Ragaišienė examines to see how Eastern European migrants have been othered and racialized. Ragaišienė analyzes literary works written in Lithuanian by three immigrant women writers, Julija Miliūtė, Giedrė Biliotavičiūtė and Kristina Baubinaitė, that deal with a variety of themes ranging from fruit picking and work in the hospitality sector to prejudice, stereotyping, organized crime and modern slavery. Miliūtė’s first autobiographical novel *Emigrantai: Ar braškės virsta ferariais?* (2015; Eng. trans. *Do Strawberries Turn into Ferraris?*, 2020), which deals with general

issues of Lithuanian immigrants in Britain, has been translated into English. According to Ragašienė, the selected texts make a valuable contribution to the expanding international canon of BrexLit. However, their interpretation and analysis could benefit from a narrower perspective and more elaborate conclusion.

Joanna Kosmalka's chapter briefly outlines the history of Polish migration to the UK and then examines a variety of responses dealing with expat life before the Referendum and also after Brexit. In her analysis, Kosmalka looks at literary and non-literary works and focuses on the questions of "migration, isolationism, Euroscepticism, nostalgia for the imperial past and a division of society into globalist and nationalist in Britain" (160). The selected Polish authors, such as Agnieszka Dale and A. M. Bakalar, place Brexit in a wider historical and international context viewing it as a crisis rather than "an awful tragedy" (173). These authors explore how Polish migrants fight their invisibility and constant prejudices and navigate the dynamics of binary identities in British society, being in a position of both insiders and outsiders themselves. Kosmalka ends the chapter by positively emphasizing that some Polish migrant authors have caught the attention of international media, which gives them an opportunity to publicly expose their views and be heard globally.

Roxana Patras completes the trio of female Eastern European voices in the volume. Her chapter deals with Romanian migrature, characterized by nostalgia for the homeland and hard labor done for little money in a foreign country. She discusses key themes and recent developments and advocates for the term BrexLit to encompass not only texts written in English, but also those in other languages that have the potential to depict Brexit from a certain distance. Patras analyzes two novels and one collection of short stories: Ioana Baetica Morpugo's *Imigranții* (Immigrants, 2011), Mihai Buzea's *Gastarbeiter* (2017) and Ioana Scoruş's *Freud Museum* (2019). As the years of publication

suggest, the works represent three different moods in the society which corresponds to the structure of Patras's chapter: pre-Brexit, during Brexit (Brexit diaries), and post-Brexit. The authors present an array of migrant characters with their own deep emotions and psyche which is often missed in British BrexLit. Similarly as the previous two contributors, Patras examines how the selected Romanian authors confront and challenge the stereotypes often associated with Eastern European migrant workers.

The last chapter takes the reader to Russia; in this short contribution, the Moldavian literary scholar, poet, and translator Ivan Pilchin briefly analyzes four different voices of Russian political commentators reacting to Brexit.

The concluding remarks of the collection belong to M. G. Sanchez, a renowned Gibraltar writer who has resided in the UK for a long time. His gloomy but poetic epilogue touches upon the stability and continuity of one's identity and existence, a topic remarkably important against the backdrop of Brexit and the growing hostility associated with it. Sanchez contemplates the notion of contested territories and transfers it to the English context to represent how the non-English inhabitants in his hometown are being marginalized and pushed aside.

Some of the analyses address texts that depict more general issues of the lives of expatriates in Britain, while others focus on specific reactions to Brexit. The volume also incorporates contributions that engage with cultural productions predating the Referendum, depicting the events that eventually led to it. The collection consists of diverse interdisciplinary chapters with insightful research objectives related to the life of European migrants in the UK, but some contributions appear superficial and lack deeper critical engagement with the broader sociocultural context, especially for a reader unfamiliar with the issues of European migration to the UK and the effects of Brexit. Some chapters would benefit from more detailed analysis or larger corpora of studied works. However, rather than criticism, this should be seen as

encouragement for further research in this area, which is greatly needed.

A significant number of BrexLit works have overlooked the millions of individuals profoundly affected by Brexit, assessing the event solely through a British lens, representing the British and their problems, concerns, and reactions. However, post-Brexit Britain should seek answers beyond its own borders within a broader European context that encompasses diverse voices and experiences. That is emphasized in *Brexit and the Migrant Voice* which stresses that Brexit has severely impacted not only Britain and its citizens, but also individuals of a wide range of nationalities, including migrants from EU

countries, all of whom should be represented in the critical discourse surrounding this event. Christine Berberich repeatedly mentions that the collection is not intended to disrupt, challenge, or undermine the existing Brexit discourse, but rather to contribute to it, enrich it, and offer alternative perspectives that may provoke a rethinking of certain preconceived notions.

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IVANA KUPKOVÁ (ed.): Vybrané kapitoly z teórie a praxe prekladu vo vedách o človeku a kultúre. Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV, v. v. i., 2025. 303 s. ISBN 978-80-88815-28-0 (print), ISBN 978-80-88815-29-7 (online). DOI 10.31577/2025.9788088815297.



Publikácia *Vybrané kapitoly z teórie a praxe prekladu vo vedách o človeku a kultúre* ako ďalší výstup vedeckého projektu zameraného na preklad v danej vednej oblasti nadväzuje na *Slovník prekladateľiek a prekladateľov: vedy o človeku a kultúre* (2024). Impulzom pre jej vznik boli prednášky o rôznych aspektoch prekladu socio-humanitovedných textov uskutočňované v rámci projektu v priebehu rokov 2023 a 2024. Písomná podoba umožnila ich autorkám a autorom obsah a rozsah prezentovanej otázky rozšíriť a ísť väčšmi do hĺbky skúmanej problematiky. A hoci pôvodne tieto rôznorodé texty spájala iba oblasť skúmania – preklad vo vedách o človeku a kultúre –, keď sa spolu ocitli ako kapitoly jednej publikácie, ukázali sa pri ich konfrontácii prekvapivé súvislosti. Aj vďaka tomu vznikol pomerne kompaktný celok, ponúkajúci čitateľskej verejnosti na jednom mieste informácie, ktoré sa inde nenachádzajú. Môže teda poslúžiť ako učebnica poskytujúca vyučujúcim prekladateľských aj všeobecných filologických špecializácií či filozofie, histórie alebo spoločenských vied základný materiál pre študentstvo, s ktorým možno ďalej pracovať. Publikácia je však určená aj pre vedeckú obec z daných odborov, predovšetkým translológie, a v neposlednom rade i pre prekladateľky a prekladateľov.

Selected Chapters from the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Humanities and Social Sciences contribute to systematic research in the field in Slovakia. In their individual chapters, the authors address problematic and under-researched topics in this area, from its broadest context (reflections on its basic concepts, function, and place; historical publishing context; terminological context) through the transformation of theoretical questions into translation practice or research (intercultural transfer of thinking in literary studies, and also of proper names; the use of discourse analysis in translation studies) to reception contexts (translations of Ancient Greek and Roman literature, non-fiction works by Umberto Eco, and Russian religious philosophy in the Slovak environment). As a valuable source of information, unavailable elsewhere, and of inspiration for further study or research, the book is intended particularly for university teachers and students of translation studies and philology in general, as well as philosophy, history, and social sciences, for researchers in these fields, especially translation scholars, and for translators.



Toto číslo skúma preklad v spoločenských a humanitných vedách ako intelektuálnu intervenciu, ktorá tvaruje disciplíny, kultúry a historické naratívy. Vybrané štúdie metodologicky prekračujú literárnovedné rámce a analyzujú preklad v rozmanitých kontextoch – od náboženských textov v Taliansku 18. storočia, spoločenskovedných publikácií na Ukrajine v 20. – 30. rokoch 20. storočia, americkej filozofie na Slovensku pred rokom 1989 cez Estónsko po páde Sovietskeho zväzu, spisy Mao Ce-tunga v angličtine až po pojmy ruského formalizmu či koncepty latinskoamerického uvažovania. Autorky a autori odkrývajú, ako zásadne paratexty, terminológia, cenzúra a ideológia spoluformovali poznanie naprieč kultúrami.

This issue explores translation in the social sciences and humanities as an intellectual intervention that shapes disciplines, cultures, and historical narratives. Moving beyond literary frameworks, the featured articles examine translation across diverse contexts – from religious texts in 18th-century Italy, publications in Ukraine in the 1920s–1930s, American philosophy in Slovakia before 1989 to post-Soviet Estonia and the international spread of Maoism, Russian Formalism, and Latin American thought. Together, they highlight the critical impact of paratexts, terminology, censorship, and ideology on the cross-cultural dynamics of knowledge production.