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*Bohemica litteraria*. 2024, vol. 27, iss. 2, pp. 97-113

ISSN 1213-2144 (print); ISSN 2336-4394 (online)

Stable URL (DOI): <https://doi.org/10.5817/BL2024-2-7>

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/digilib.81217>

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Access Date: 06. 02. 2025

Version: 20250114

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# The Systematic Conception of Translation in Early Czech Structural Functionalist Theory: the Cases of Vojtěch Jirát (1938) and Vilém Mathesius (1942)

Cristian Cámara Outes

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## ABSTRACT

Despite having been scarcely studied so far, the corpus of texts on translational phenomena published between 1926 and 1948 by authors belonging to the Prague School represents in itself a significant episode in the history of translation theory in the 20th century, and one that definitely deserves more scholarly attention. In this paper, firstly, the theoretical foundations established by Jan Mukařovský for the study of the functions of translations in the evolution of literary systems are analyzed. Secondly, the translational conceptions in two texts by V. Jirát and V. Mathesius are outlined. Finally, a comparison between the ideas of the Czech authors and the proposals of André Lefevere's theory of manipulation is drawn.

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This paper was created with the institutional support of ARC project: The Artist, The Scientist and The Industrialist.

**ABSTRAKT****Systematické pojetí překladu v rané české strukturálně funkcionalistické teorii: Na příkladu Vojtěcha Jiráta (1938) a Viléma Mathesia (1942)**

Korpus textů o translatologických jevech, který publikovali autoři Pražské školy v letech 1926 až 1948, byl doposud jen málo studován; představuje nicméně významnou epizodu v dějinách teorie překladu ve 20. století a rozhodně si zaslouží větší vědeckou pozornost. V této studii nejprve analyzujeme teoretické základy, které pro studium funkcí překladu ve vývoji literárních systémů vytvořil Jan Mukařovský. Poté nastiňujeme translatologické koncepce ve dvou textech Vojtěcha Jiráta a Viléma Mathesia. Nakonec srovnáváme představy českých autorů s návrhy teorie manipulace André Lefevera.

**KEYWORDS**

Theory of translation; Prague school; Czech structuralism; Vilém Mathesius; literary studies.

**KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Teorie překladu; Pražská škola; český strukturalismus; Vilém Mathesius; literární věda.

## **1. Conceptual bases of the notion of system in the translation theory of the first period of Czech functional structuralism (1926–1948): the case of the analysis of “aesthetic value” in J. Mukařovský’s “Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts” (1936)**

In his 1934 article on the occasion of the publication of the Czech translation of V. Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* (rus. or.: 1925), J. Mukařovský begins by pointing out the following: “We must bear in mind its *double physiognomy* [of Shklovsky’s book]: that which it had for the author’s audience and for the science of his time, and that which it acquires today for us in a different socio-cultural milieu and in another evolutionary context” (2000: 56, emphasis added). There are numerous moments in Mukařovský’s texts that point in a similar direction of the displacements of meaning between systems and the need for contextualised, dynamic and differential reading. According to Mukařovský’s aesthetic and literary theory, cultures are internally stratified and conflicting fields, in which multiple instances

dispute each other's evaluations and apprehensions of the meaning of works, both artistic and (as in Shklovsky's case) scientific. These evaluations are therefore provisional at best, and are subject to constant evolutionary reevaluations and reaccentuations. In "Aesthetic Function, Norm and Value as Social Facts" (1936), we can advantageously apprehend this analytical bent of the theory of Czech functional structuralism in relation to the category of aesthetic "value".

In the first moment of the argumentation, the aesthetic value of literary works is not considered in an essentialist way as a transhistorical dimension, given once and for all and susceptible to entering into hierarchical canonical repertoires (such as those that the historiography of 19th century literature struggled to elaborate). Rather, it is seen as the result of a whole series of struggles which, in their mutual interactions, define the specific configuration of a given literary field. According to Mukařovský, the analysis of the "variability" of literary value as a scientific-analytical category belongs to the discipline of "sociology of art":

"Let us take first the variability of aesthetic evaluation at any given time. That immediately places us in the sociology of art. Above all, the work of art itself is far from being a constant: with each shift in time, space or social milieu the artistic tradition applicable at one time—the prism through which a work is perceived—changes, and the effect of these shifts is to alter also the aesthetic object that corresponds, in the mind of a given collectivity, to a material artefact—something created by an artist. So even if a certain work is evaluated equally positively in chronologically separate periods, the object of the evaluation is on each occasion a different aesthetic object, that is, in some sense, a different work. Naturally, such shifts in the aesthetic object are often accompanied by a change in its aesthetic evaluation as well. In the history of art we see all too often that the value of a particular work changes over time from positive to negative, or it might slip from a high, exceptional value to average and vice versa" (2015: 295).

In this fragment we already have a first glimpse of the critical significance that the dichotomy of "artefact/ aesthetic object" will later have, as a kind of firewall of sorts that prevents universal value from being engulfed in conflicting historical differentiability. However, it is the analysis of this dimension of conflictuality in its own terms that is properly the concern of the sociology of art. Indeed, aesthetic value, considered as a category of the sociology of art, is summed up in these "displacements", in the shifts "from positive to negative" and vice versa. In this sense, aesthetic value is the result of multiple struggles

between the agents involved in the configuration of the literary field at each specific moment:

“In any case it is society that creates the institutions and authoritative bodies through which it exerts its influence on aesthetic value by regulating how works of art are appraised. These institutions include the apparatus of criticism, the role of experts, art classes in schools (to which we can add colleges of art and institutions whose role it is to cultivate passive contemplation), the art market and its promotional machinery, surveys held to determine the most valuable work, art exhibitions, museums, public libraries, competitions, prizes, academies, and often even censorship” (IBID.: 298).

Each of these actors has the objective of “influencing the state and development of aesthetic valuation”, which may be exclusive or combined to varying degrees with “their own specific objectives” (IBID.: 298). Taken together, these different axiological instances can be convergent or differ from each other, wholly or partially, and are defined by the correlation of forces at each moment in the system. At a later point in the system, as a result of the resolution of preceding tensions or the introduction of new demarcation lines (social, cultural, political, technological, etc.), the correlation of attractions or repulsions may again change its sign. Aesthetic evaluation is thus an arena of struggle of all against all that never reaches a resolution. At the same time, every society is internally stratified; there is not a single value but several subsystems that generate their own evaluations. Each of these subsystems is in turn defined by heterogeneity and conflict. And the relationships between all these elements are intricate and ever-changing:

“The process of aesthetic evaluation is, then, connected with how society itself evolves, and enquiry into that process makes for a chapter in the sociology of art. And let us remind ourselves of the fact, mentioned in the previous chapter, that within a given society there is no one stratum in the art of poetry or painting, etc., but invariably several (e.g. avant-garde, official, or mass-appeal art or the art of the urban proletariat etc.), and, accordingly, more than one scale of aesthetic value. Each of these lives a life of its own, but they often cross one another’s path and cross-penetrate one another. A value that has become invalid in one may, whether by a rise or a fall, cross into another. Since this stratification corresponds, if not directly or quite accurately, to the stratification of society, the multi-layered nature of art contributes to the complex process of shaping and re-shaping aesthetic values” (IBID.: 298–299).

Thus, the provisional result of the sociological analysis offers something akin to a war of all against all in which the only stable thing is displacement. The literary field is defined by the mutation and transformation of values, the impossibility of pointing to a single scale that encompasses all phenomena, and the appropriation and adaptation of procedures and strategies from one zone to another (with a consequent change of meaning). The analysis reveals the simultaneous coexistence of multiple temporalities and transfers in which the meaning of certain works, but also themes, authors, genres, specific procedures or any other relevant object of analysis is renegotiated. Indeed, if we take a closer look at the critical texts published by the representatives of Czech functional structuralism, we will find that this whole set of movements is always the main subject of detailed descriptive and empirical analysis. What constitutes the actual object of theoretical interest, as we will see later in the texts of V. Jiráť and V. Mathesius, is the so-called “system change”, and thus the variability of meanings of the systematic elements in relation to the variability of the correlations in which they are embedded. In this sense, this article I am examining by Mukařovský can be seen as laying the foundations of the general Czech epistemological perspective. In any case, at least in this first part of the analysis, variability is somewhat paradoxically postulated as an essential phenomenon: “The propensity for aesthetic value to change is, then, no mere secondary phenomenon arising from an ‘imperfection’ in artistic creativity or perception, that is, from man’s inability to attain to the ideal, but is part of the very essence of aesthetic value, which is a process, not a state, *energeia*, not *ergon*. So even without any change in time or space, aesthetic value is a polymorphous, complex activity” (IBID.: 298).

The sociology of art outlined by Mukařovský leads to a theoretical commitment to radical variability. The notion of aesthetic value is subject to radical historicization and fundamentally deontologized. This same result also appears elsewhere in Mukařovský’s theoretical reflection. In the article “Can Aesthetic Value Be Universally Valid?” (1939) he notes: “Identity, as we conceive it, has an entirely dynamic character [...]. With the term structure the art theorist designates a current of forces that flows through time, constantly and uninterruptedly transforming itself” (2000: 227–229). In the article “The Concept of Totality in the Work of Art” (1945), Mukařovský transfers this same outcome for the case of the immanent structure of isolated works of art: “the aspect of totality is not presented to us as a conclusion and completion, but as a certain correlation of components [...]. The structure of an individual work is a becoming, a process, not a static and perfectly delimited totality” (IBID.: 295–298).

However, at this point it is necessary to say that the commitment to radical variability, to groundlessness and transgressive dynamism, is not the final word in the aesthetic reflection of Czech structural functionalism. My personal point of view is that the Czech authors, among them notably Mukařovský, are conducting a restorative dialogue with different nihilistic currents of the epoch, and especially with the positions of Russian formalism. Indeed, at the time, before Roman Jakobson's tenacious falsification of formalist theses from 1934 onwards, no one had any doubt that the formalist doctrine was on the side of a dissolving hermeneutics of suspicion. As far as aesthetic value is concerned, the formalists undoubtedly subjected this notion to a relentless and corrosive critique. In accordance with the hyper-historicist logic triggered by the term of deautomatisation, aesthetic value became equivalent to the qualities of novelty and shock, in what amounts to the study of synchronic systems; and equivalent to "evolutionary signification", in what amounts to the study of diachronic systems, this latter being otherwise connected to the changing energetic struggles in each present.

The Prague authors are conducting a productive dialogue with the formalist theses, brought into relation with other domestic and foreign influences. There is a certain integration of the formalist theses, they are not simply rejected as false, but rather they are displaced to a certain position in a broader dialectical scheme. What is characteristic of the argumentative approach of Mukařovský and the Czech authors who take the cue from him is the commitment to a certain longer path for the substantiation of the aesthetic value as an objective and universal quality of certain works. This argumentative scheme grants a certain analytical effectiveness to formalist negativity, while at the same time overcoming and neutralizing it in a later synthetic moment. This final moment of dialectical synthesis leads to the positive determination of the meaning of works, genres, literary epochs and of poeticity itself as an autonomous sphere and as an anthropological dimension. In a nutshell, this positive overcoming follows from the distinction between the levels of the "artefact" and the "aesthetic object". The structural identity of the work, which opens up the multiplicity of its historical interpretations, is safeguarded in the immanent codification of the verbal artefact. The more historical interpretations a given artefact is capable of withstanding, the greater its intrinsic value. Its codification ensures that it is not limited to a single horizon of reception, but continues to produce relevant meanings beyond its original context of production.

Thus, the epistemological position of Czech functional structuralism could be deciphered as a certain conciliation between identity and difference. Where-

as Russian formalism observes only the action of disintegrating and chaotic forces, “without destiny and without promise” (FOUCAULT, 2001: 52), Czech structuralism posits the existence of a certain stability of the frameworks of literariness, of a certain limitation of the range of interpretative possibilities, and of a certain regularity of the evolutionary diachrony of systems. In my opinion, Czech structuralism thus provides a complete system for the rigorous study of literary and cultural phenomena, including translation, which accounts for variability without falling into essentialist dogmatism on the one hand and pessimistic or ecstatic nihilism on the other. The theses of Russian formalism could have an enriching impact on currents such as cultural studies, postcolonial theory and deconstruction. The theses of Czech structuralism could have a beneficial influence on overcoming the conceptual and methodological shortcomings of lines such as descriptive translation studies, polysystem theory or A. Lefevere’s school of manipulation.

## 2. Translation and system in Vojtěch Jirát’s “On the Translations of *Don Giovanni* at the Time of the Czech Cultural Revival”

In order to demonstrate the above thesis, in this and the following section we will focus on two texts devoted to translation theory from the early period of Czech functional structuralism. Despite having been scarcely studied so far, the corpus of texts on translational phenomena published between 1926 and 1948 by authors belonging to the Prague School is in itself a significant episode in the history of translation theory in the 20th century, and one that definitely deserves more scholarly attention. As Jana Králová explains, it is a clearly distinguishable corpus of texts with common theoretical underpinnings and extraordinary conceptual relevance: “As we have observed before (KRÁLOVÁ, 2006; KRÁLOVÁ – JETTMAROVÁ, 2008) Czech structuralists of the classical period of the Prague School from the 1920’s on had opened up a number of issues that became established in translation studies only decades after (the position of translation in the target culture, the dominant feature, the empirical grounding of studies on translation, their descriptive character, the relation between the synchronic and the diachronic approach” (2011: 119). In contrast to



the dominant linguistic paradigm of the 1940s–1980s, and thanks to the solid doctrinal foundations provided by Prague semiotic theory, these texts exhibit a variety of methodological approaches and a degree of critical acuity that bring them closer to the contemporary scene of translation studies following the so-called cultural turn.

In particular, in this paper I would like to dwell on the specific application of the notion of system and the systematic consideration of translational phenomena by these authors. As I will try to show, translation is envisaged here from a clearly empirical, historical, descriptive, sociological, contextualist, dialectical and functionalist perspective, conferring to the translation facts the consideration of energetic facts of the target systems. In accordance with my interpretative proposal, I will try to observe how these features, which point towards the pole of variability, are combined with the postulation of a structural identity of the texts, which offers anchorage to a plastic unfolding of possible concretizations.

Vojtěch Jiráč's article "On the Translations of *Don Giovanni* at the Time of the Czech Cultural Revival" (1938, pp. 73-90 and 202-212) is divided into two separate parts, both published in issue IV of *Slovo a Slovesnost*, the official journal of the Prague Circle. In this article the author undertakes a comparative analysis of two different, strictly contemporary translations (both were published in Prague in the same year of 1825) of Lorenzo Da Ponte's opera libretto, one by S. K. Macháček and the other by J. N. Štěpánek. Jiráč starts by analyzing the particular structure of the opera libretto and the specific demands it poses. The structure of the opera libretto is (at least) twofold: music and words form an inseparable unity. The structure of the libretto is in addition characterized by its orientation towards a musical "dominant": "It would be wrong for us to look at the structure of a libretto as if it were an exclusively verbal work; it creates a perfect unity only in combination with the music. This orientation towards the music determines its character and is therefore its structural dominant. Even the most literary libretto must take this relationship into account" (1938: 73). In the translation, as a result of the different linguistic structure of the target language, the unity between music and words has to be dissociated. This dissociation can, however, be undertaken with an orientation towards music or with an orientation towards semantics.

Indeed, the comparative analysis of the two translations shows that each of them operates with a different dominant: Macháček exclusively follows the music ("even to an absurd extent"), and Štěpánek tries to fulfill the demands of both music and meaning. As a result of this different underlining, all the

other elements that enter into the composition of the original are deformed differently, thus leading to a different overall configuration. In order to conduct this demonstration, Jirát undertakes a lengthy formal-rhetorical analysis both of the individual translations and of the original Italian, and also of the German translations that serve as an additional term of contrast. This close-reading, in the case of Macháček's translation, focuses on the study of the rhyme structure, the conspicuous absence of syntactic enjambment, the presence of strong versal caesurae and the preponderance of parallelistic constructions. From these findings Jirát concludes that Macháček's translation is driven by the constructive principles of "intonational fragmentarism" and "versal isolation" (1938: 85), which are features that are completely absent from both Štěpánek's translation (with semantic dominant) and Da Ponte's original (also with musical dominant, but much more moderate than Macháček's).

Where does this shaping influence that determines the peculiar structure of Macháček's translation come from? Jirát's answer is fully in line with the theses and analytical habits of Czech functional structuralism: close-reading does not make sense on its own and must be put in correlation with broader historical-systematic contexts. It so happens that the Czech poetic system during the first period of the Cultural Revival (like any poetic system) is characterized by the simultaneous presence of a number of competing tendencies, central and peripheral, conservative or innovative, etc. The formal configuration of Macháček's translation is determined by the dominant tradition at that time in the domestic poetic system, that of the school formed around the poet Antonín Jaroslav Puchmajer (1867–1920), of which it is a particularly extreme and partially aberrant result. The modelling influence of this tradition is so strong that, as we have seen, it overpowers and deforms the very qualities of the original text: "The intonational fragmentariness of Macháček's verse [...] is a repercussion of Puchmajer's poetic tradition. Macháček, contrary to the original, tends to group the syntactic units in separate lines without connectors, whereas in the Italian original the phrases occupy two lines and are in greater semantic correlation with each other" (1938: 84). In contrast, Štěpánek's translation is positioned in a literary current which at that time was only beginning to emerge but which would dominate for decades to come: the Biedermaier aesthetic. In other words, the antagonism between Macháček's and Štěpánek's translations is an expression of the struggles taking place at that time in the Czech literary system. This struggle is expressed in a different transformative apprehension of the original work, which produces two different concretizations. The repercussions are

embedded additionally in different translational traditions, resort to different translational techniques and locate themselves differently within the genre system of the time:

“From the features of the two constructions, the following conclusion must be drawn: Štěpánek and Macháček represent two distinct literary trends – Rococo and Biedermaier – and two lines of translation, that of Kolár and that of the Lumír school: the former opting for a familiar roughness, the latter preferring exquisite generality. Štěpánek translates a play, Macháček a poem. Both solve technical problems in opposite ways. Contradictory are also their respective opinions about the meaning of the libretto. Štěpánek sees it as a verbal construction, albeit with special demands; Macháček basically as a song, albeit with literary ambitions.

The broader results of our research are therefore the following: the libretto, as a partial structure, which comes to constitute a complete unit only with the music, places extra-literary demands on the writer and especially on the translator, which we could call „librettesque“. Every operatic text is a certain compromise between these and the literary demands. The more it seeks to fulfil the one, the more it is indebted to the other. This is why Macháček, whose translation approaches the ideal of the „libretto“, is literarily insufficient. Štěpánek’s translation is superior as a literary work, but less satisfactory as a libretto” (1938: 212).

### 3. The notion of “translatological tradition” according to Vilém Mathesius

In Vilém Mathesius’ text “Notes on the Translation of Blank Verse and on Czech Iambic Verse in General” (1943) we find a type of consideration very similar to that of Jirát, and possibly with a greater degree of methodological and conceptual precision. Here, too, the approach is comparative. Mathesius’ object of study is in fact the metrical structure of Czech iambic verse; the analysis of successive translations of the same play (in this case Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*) offers excellent laboratory conditions for the study of shifts and differences between domestic systems: “it enables to reveal interesting differences between generations, poetic movements and individual poets” (1943: 23). Among the five Czech translations of Shakespeare’s work, Mathesius chooses two for his analysis: Josef Václav Sládek’s translation of 1899, belonging to the influential modernist Lumír group, and Aloys Skoumal’s translation of 1941: “both allow us to see clearly the

differences in the conception of translation between the modernist period of the Lumír group and those that dominate today” (IBID.: 23).

Once again, as was the case in Jiráč, and which is a characteristic feature of the methodology of Czech structuralism, most of the article is devoted to detailed analyses of the respective formal-rhetorical constitution of the texts, both of the original and of the two successive translations. This sometimes fastidious and overwhelming recourse to statistical and quantitative methods of analysis is characteristic of an epoch that was confident that mathematical formalisation would be the key to endowing the human sciences with the longed-for status of scientific positivity. It is also a feature that Czech functional structuralism clearly shares with later ontological structuralism, both French and international, except for the fact that for the Czech authors all these abstruse data and diagrams are not seen as an end in themselves, nor as a springboard from which to plunge, from the centripetal recurrences and parallelisms internal to the text (“projection of the principle of equivalence from the paradigmatic axis to the syntagmatic axis”, according to Roman Jakobson’s laconic formulation), into the abysses of the anthropological-literary absolute. Instead, Prague’s functional structuralism in no way amputates texts from the conflicting synchronic and diachronic contexts in which they are immersed. The feature of “poeticity” or “literariness” is not an essence verifiable in isolated texts (be it Baudelaire’s “Les Chats”, Aeschylus’ *Oedipus*, or Paul Celan’s “Schibboleth”) but exclusively on the basis of certain dynamic contrasts, in the relations between forms. Poeticity is not verified as a property of texts considered in themselves, in a vacuum, outside and before any historical-contextual inscription or correlation. According to Mathesius, quantitative methods of analysis are only a propaedeutic tool that should provide sufficient data to draw well-founded conclusions about the “evolutive significance”, i.e. its historical positioning.

Mathesius examines, among other relevant features, the proportion of masculine rhymes and endings in hyperbaton, and in both cases finds that this is much higher in Sládek’s translation than in the Shakespearean original, even though the linguistic structure and lexical repertoires of the Czech language would favour unstressed syllable endings much more than is the case with English. On the other hand, the proportion of these features is “surprisingly” similar between Sládek’s translation and the blank verse poems of Julius Zeyer, one of the most important narrators and poets of the Lumír group, and a close friend of Sládek. For its part, the presence of these features in Skoumal’s later translation is still quite pronounced, not as disproportionate

as in Sládek's, but still significantly greater than in the original. The tentative conclusion Mathesius draws is the existence of a "translatological tradition", forged by Sládek on the model of contemporary domestic poetry, which continues to operate as a modelling factor in later translations: "the analysis demonstrates, in our view, the persistence and tenacity of the translatological tradition of Shakespearean plays established by Sládek on the model of Zeyer's blank verse" (IBID.: 29).

At this point, in order to corroborate the accuracy of his hypothesis, Mathesius extends his analysis to introduce a new element of contrast. Skoumal's 1941 translation is compared with a translation belonging to the same synchronic system: the translation of Goethe's *Tasso* by Bohumil Mathesius (Vilém's brother), published in 1942. A new thorough metrico-stylistic analysis of the latter translation leads to the conclusion that both translations, Skoumal's and Mathesius', are under the influence of the same tradition of Lumírovian translation, and in particular of Sládek. Both translators concoct different strategies to oppose or resist this tradition, they clearly struggle with it, and although they do not manage to free themselves from it, they point in different directions towards the configuration of a new, differentiated translatological tradition:

"It would seem that we can assert that the current conception of translation is strongly marked by the imprint of the modernist school, represented above all by the model established by Sládek in his translations of Shakespeare. However, perhaps what is most interesting is not this observation as such, but rather the presence of a number of individual efforts to exceed, in various ways and in different directions, the strict frameworks of this predominant translatological tradition" (IBID.: 34).

The notion of "translatological tradition", forged by Mathesius but with antecedents in earlier texts (Jirát in the text quoted above mentioned "translational lines"), was later taken up and developed in his analyses by Jiří Levý. It is my conviction that this is a notion with great analytical potential that has been insufficiently addressed by contemporary translation studies. In the article under discussion, an additional peculiarity is that Mathesius points out that the influence of the modernist trend in the specific field of Czech poetry has been completely defeated by the introduction of other innovative movements. Incidentally, according to Jan Mukařovský, in this transformation of the domestic poetic system played a fundamental role the "transformative influence" of Karel Čapek's translation of an anthology of French contemporary

poetry (MUKAŘOVSKÝ 1936: 253). In other words, according to Mathesius, the modernist influence has disappeared in the poetic system, but lingers on in the translational system. These two different verbal series (poetic system, translational system) are closely interrelated, they influence and refract each other, but nevertheless possess relative autonomy and are marked by different temporalities. However, this should not be understood as a universal rule of translation or of the diachrony of cultural systems in general, of the kind that Gideon Toury and the theory of polysystems strive to establish. For example, Mathesius does not conclude with a dogmatic formulation of the type “the translational system always lags behind its corresponding poetic system”. This concrete result is deduced from the concrete empirical and historical analysis of trends in the Czech literary polysystem of the first decades of the 20th century. The same analysis, applied to other contexts, may produce the same or different results, which cannot be predicted in advance.

#### 4. André Lefevere’s theory of manipulation in comparison with the translational conceptions of Czech structuralism

Both V. Jirát and V. Mathesius show in their analyses a relative indifference to the textual original, considered as just one more element in an equation that includes other modelling variables. According to Jirát, Macháček’s translation has a clear phonic dominance which imposes the foreclosure of a whole series of dimensions present in Da Ponte’s text: “Macháček sought to preserve above all the phonic construction of the original” (1938: 76). Constrained by this fidelity to the phonic aspect, which was dictated by certain tendencies present in the domestic system (Puchmajer), Macháček completely neglects other requirements of a semantic or stylistic nature. This predominant orientation is merely one of the possibilities inscribed in the structure of the original. The original is in fact multiple, it offers itself to a plurality of actualizing readings. Jirát and Mathesius constantly insist on this, and one could even consider that the refutation of a prescriptivist conception of translation as textual equivalence is one of the fundamental polemic-theoretical aims of their articles, at least from the perspective in which these texts have become legible to us

today. Translations are not better or worse according to some kind of absolute criteria, determinable once and for all, but necessarily fulfil specific functions in given contexts: “Macháček here set himself a task of a completely different nature than a strictly literary translation” (IBID.: 78). These functions derive from internal struggles in domestic systems, appropriate the structural constituents of the works and transform them in directions that are multiple and unpredictable beforehand. According to Mukařovský’s description, the systems are not homogeneous and pacified, but internally differentiated and stratified, conflicting and in dialectical mutation. Additionally, it is possible to say that the structural constituents of the original works are only revealed through the translations that expose them: the structure of the work “reveals itself all the more clearly if we compare it with the demands placed by its translation” (IBID.: 73). Translations not only reproduce the original and are not only added to it, but in a certain sense they disrupt and transform it, they reveal aspects of the original that only become legible when they are contrasted with a certain context or a differentiated horizon of reading.

I think it is worth briefly contrasting this set of postulates with the theory of translation as “rewriting” put forward by the contemporary thinker André Lefevere. This is a very clear case in which the theory of Czech functional structuralism easily compensates for the slight conceptual and methodological shortcomings of a later translational doctrine. Lefevere is one of the prominent names within the “invisible school” which, according to Theo Hermans, was instrumental in overcoming the linguistic paradigm of translation studies and establishing the autonomy of the discipline, along with such names as Gideon Toury, Jose Lambert, James H. Holmes and others. Lefevere’s elaboration of the notion of translation as one of the types of rewriting, engaged in the turn towards political and culturalist concerns during the 1990s, had a lasting impact on the shaping of the discipline. Since its initial appearance in 1992, his book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of the Literary Fame* endeavoured to provide an elegant and productive account of the set of socio-cultural conditioning factors involved in the processes of translation, especially with regard to their dimensions of inequality and power struggles. However, there are certain aspects of Lefevere’s theory which, when contrasted with the conceptualisations of Czech structuralism, seem to suffer from insufficient theoretical and problematic elaboration. This concerns above all his conception of the structure of literary works and, consequently, also affects the understanding of the historicity of the readings of these works.

For Czech structuralism, as we have just mentioned, the structural identity of the work is rooted in the material-verbal configuration of the artefact, which promotes a series of diverse concretizations when it enters into contact with different horizons of reading. These new interpretations, however, are potentially multiple but not infinite, they are controlled by the possibilities objectively inscribed in the artefact. To put it briefly, we do not find such an elaboration in Lefevere, and from this we get the impression that, for the substantiation of his literary-theoretical assumptions, he turns rather to the modules of the (outwardly reviled) earlier ontological structuralism or to those of nineteenth-century classical philology. In none of the numerous concrete analyses Lefevere conducts in his book does he ever attempt to deny that the original works possess some kind of stable structure and identity, and that these are recoverable as such for historical reading. The original meaning of literary works is subsequently rewritten in a variety of ways, most notably through translation. For Lefevere, as for the authors of the Prague School, not everything is rewriting. First there is writing, and then (chronologically and ontologically) there are multiple rewritings (in J. Levý's terms: "production and reproduction"). Lefevere bases his methodological conception on the idea that there are on the one hand "realities" and on the other "images":

"In the past, as in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature. *These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with*, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did, and they most certainly do so now. Yet the creation of these images and the impact they made has not often been studied in the past, and is still not the object of detailed study. This is all the more strange since the power wielded by these images, and therefore by their makers, is enormous" (2017: 4, emphasis added).

Lefevere operates with an enlightened, rationalist, positivist and perhaps even Platonic notion, which distinguishes between "images" and "realities", between "doxa" and "truth". This distinction is not questioned at any point in the book and it also has a somewhat elitist bias. "Professional readers" are those who engage with the truth of literature, those who are not limited to the surrogates with which "non-professional" readers deal and have direct access granted to the reality of "a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature". The notion of rewriting thus serves in this book to deal with a specific area of literary production: the area of opinion, of falsifications



and mystifications: “Since non-professional readers of literature are, at present, exposed to literature more often by means of rewritings than by means of writings, and since rewritings can be shown to have had a not negligible impact on the evolution of literatures in the past, the study of rewritings should no longer be neglected” (IBID.: 5).

The least that can be said is that this is a strong epistemological postulate. As is often the case, the influence this book has had is largely the result of a misunderstanding. The terms “rewriting” and “manipulation” have often been interpreted in a deconstructive sense that they do not possess in the original. However, at this point what is important for me to point out is that in the book we do not find an adequate substantiation of the epistemological postulate mentioned, on which the whole edifice rests. That is to say, Lefevere does not explain to us the concrete theoretical conception he resorts to in order to support his conception that literary works, genres, authors and periods possess an intrinsic truth that can be deciphered, and what methodological and conceptual tools are necessary to access this truth of writing. In all these cases we can only suspect that the author is taking into account the conceptualisations of traditional historicist philology.

For example, in the ninth chapter of his book Lefevere studies the reinter-pretative vicissitudes of the figure of the Dutch writer Wilhem Godshalk van Focquensbroch (1640–1670) in relation to the changing nature of the canons, the dominant poetic conceptions and the institutions present at each time in the literary field. Focquensbroch seems to have been extraordinarily successful during his lifetime, then forgotten during the age of classicism, and then revived in the early 20th century, but with a different interpretation of his work: that of an accursed, proto-bohemian poet. For Lefevere, this historical variability of literary value is something that belongs to the analysis of the rewritings, and therefore of the false, the manipulative and the unscientific.

I do not in any way wish to deny that Lefevere’s theoretical proposal is of enormous interest and confronts in an illuminating way aspects that had too often been overlooked. The numerous studies that have taken this system as a theoretical framework for their research in recent decades, with outstanding results in many cases, are a convincing demonstration of this. However, in the light of all the above, Lefevere’s system also suffers from an insufficient, or insufficiently explicit, elaboration of its theoretical foundations. All the best that this system has to offer researchers could remain largely unscathed if only this insufficient theoretical elaboration were corrected. In short, a critical updating

of the conceptual foundations of Czech functional structuralism, with which Lefevere's system is obviously compatible, would be the best way to achieve this.

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