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DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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Silence and Ageing. A Correlation Between Pauses and Dementia[1]

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A large body of research highlights both an increased frequency of and a consistent trend for longer silent pauses in Alzheimer's Disease (AD). It has been shown that such phenomena mostly contribute to lexical retrieval within that condition. In the present paper, we analyze disfluencies in the spoken production of elderly Italian patients with and without AD with the aim of illustrating the correlation between Alzheimer's Disease, Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) and both the duration and collocation of Silent Pauses (SP). We hold the view that identifying a detectable parameter of AD would help diagnosis by making it noninvasive, inexpensive and easier. This research's main finding is that the observation of acoustic parameters' such as SP duration and Speech Rate could effectively help mild AD diagnosis. In conclusion, it became clear that SP longer than 1 second should be particularly addressed.

Keywords: Pathological Speech, Alzheimer's Disease, Silent Pauses, Mild Cognitive Impairment, Clinical Linguistics

1. *Introduction*

Dementia is a broad term for memory loss which applies to a range of conditions, such as cerebrovascular dementia, Fronto-Temporal Degeneration, Hippocampal Sclerosis, and so on. However, Alzheimer's Disease (AD) represents the leading cause of dementia worldwide (Brookmeyer et al. 2007; Govindaraju 2022), by accounting for 60–80% of dementia cases (https://www.alz.org/alzheimers-dementia/what-is-alzheimers, last accessed May 29, 2026). It is a multifactorial progressive neurological disorder with a growing impact on public health in terms of incidence, prevalence, mortality rates and costs of care (Alzheimer's Association 2024). Its exact pathogenesis is not yet fully understood. However, several hallmarks have been identified including loss of brain tissue, death of neurons, ac-

[1] Author contributions. Francesca M. Dovetto: conceptualization, literature review, experimental design, supervision, project administration, interpretation of results, manuscript drafting, and funding acquisition. Francesca Marra: literature review, experimental design, data acquisition, statistical analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript drafting. Assunta Sorrentino: literature review, interpretation of results, and manuscript drafting. All authors commented on previous versions of the manuscript and contributed to the discussion of results. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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cumulation of protein beta amyloid outside neurons. One of the first reliable signs of AD is a decline in discourse abilities (Mueller et al. 2018; Yuan et al. 2021). Taking into account language, AD is associated with conditions such as aphasia and dysarthria (Ferris, Farlow 2013), lexical retrieval difficulties, reduction of lexical richness and subsequent loss of fluency (Visch-Brink et al. 2009; Banovic et al. 2018), both complex syntactic structure comprehension difficulties and a decrease in their production (Kempler et al. 1998; Chapin et al. 2022) and variation in acoustic parameters, such as F0, speech rate and disfluencies (Meilán et al. 2014; Campbell et al. 2021; Mahajan et al. 2021; Dovetto et al. 2024, Dovetto et al. 2025). Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI), on the other hand, is a clinical condition, considered to be AD's prodromal stage (Galvin, Sadowsky 2012). It affects cognitive domains such as memory, attention or language, but not to the extent that it interferes with a person's ability to carry out daily activities. The main impairments concern discourse and pragmatics: compared to healthy controls, individuals with MCI produce less coherent and less informative discourse, with more irrelevant details and incomplete content, although their overall discourse remains more efficient than that of AD patients. Despite these difficulties, they can still produce an adequate number of information units (Drummond et al. 2015, 9). People with MCI due to the onset of AD have biomarker evidence of Alzheimer's brain changes (Alzheimer's Association 2024). Among those diagnosed with MCI due to AD, nearly half develop dementia within three to five years (Glynn et al. 2021; Ward et al. 2013).

Delaying the onset of dementia by diagnosing it in its prodromal stage would be highly desirable (Pastoriza-Dominguéz et al. 2022; Livingston et al. 2017). Likewise, identifying parameters that enable early noninvasive and stress-free diagnosis is crucial. Language may offer a valuable source for such indicators (Zhang et al. 2025; Gagliardi, Tamburini 2025). Moreover, identifying an acoustic parameter, such as silent pause duration, may have useful practical implications: the automatic recognition of linguistic pathological markers would encourage noninvasive and inexpensive procedures.

The main aim of the present study is to contribute to the advancement of research in this direction by providing new Italian data on AD, which remain relatively sparse; indeed, there is a lack of Italian AD accessible corpora, with the exception of that of Beltrami and colleagues (2016), Martinelli and Gagliardi (2023) and Sigona and colleagues (2025). In particular, we will examine whether pauses, both in terms of duration and distribution, may be a valid AD linguistic marker. The present paper will be organized as follows: after an introduction on the role of pauses in both typical and atypical speech, materials and methods of the current research will be presented. Then, the data collected will be discussed. Data so far appear to support the hypothesis that pause-related parameters may also serve as valid diagnostic indicators in an Italian sample.

2. *Typical speech*

When we speak, the message we intend to convey does not rely solely on our words: proxemics, prosody, even hesitation phenomena are crucial (Corley, Stewart 2008, 589; Lickley

2015). However, as they make speech discontinuous, disfluencies have long been thought of as mere errors; relegated to the performance level, "false starts, deviations from rule, changes of plan in mid-course" have long been overlooked (Chomsky 1965, 4). Nonetheless, besides being due to replanning or physiological necessities, phenomena such as silent and filled pauses, repetitions and prolongations constitute a mean to build efficient communication (Dovetto 2010, 64; Bartolomeo et al. 2013, 228; Allwood 2017, 3).

It is necessary to interpret self-monitoring as an integral part of language production (Crocco, Savy 2003, 2) that presents its own constraints (Levelt 1983). Silent pauses often recur at the major syntactic boundaries of the utterance: as a result, the collocation of hesitation phenomena seems to hold its own grammaticality (Goldman-Eisler 1968; Duez 1982).

Gallo and Schettino (2025) argue that prolongations – i.e., the lengthening of sounds beyond their canonical duration, typically characterised by reduced intensity and a more stable, periodic phonation – also serve specific communicative functions. They classify these phenomena into four functional categories: hesitation (a general planning function), structuring (the organisation of information), word-finding (difficulty in lexical retrieval), and focalisation (the highlighting of semantically relevant elements). Their findings show that prolongations associated with lexical search tend to be longer and display lower intensity and fundamental frequency (F0), whereas those related to structuring are characterised by higher F0 and greater intensity (Gallo, Schettino 2025, 165 ff).

Schettino and colleagues (2022, 183) show that, despite some individual variability, Italian and Spanish speakers systematically employ disfluency phenomena, with both shared patterns and language-specific dynamics. In both languages, segmental prolongations are more frequent than filled pauses and are mainly used in word-final position to gain time for general planning and lexical retrieval. Filled pauses, by contrast, tend to occur when speakers need additional time to plan and introduce a new proposition. Moreover, filled pauses are on average longer in duration than prolongations, confirming their more salient role, whereas prolongations function as a more subtle and economical strategy for managing speech.

Obviously, some disfluencies are randomly distributed throughout the text, an ambiguity that can be easily explained when considering their high degree of multifunctionality. Indeed, hesitation phenomena, particularly pauses, may be employed as strategies to avoid error (Hieke 1981). They may have a cooperative function into the management of dialogic exchange (Clark 1994), or reflect underlying processes of planning and lexical retrieval needs (Maclay, Osgood 1959).

3. *Atypical speech*

Atypical pausing arises in many pathologies (Ramig et al. 1995; Shea, Leonard 2019; Yuan et al. 2021). Indeed, both neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative disorders have been found to be linked with disfluency parameters' modifications. In particular, a correlation between silent pause duration and collocation and language pathologies has been highlighted (Gayraud et al. 2011, 13; Schettino et al. 2023).

In the context of developmental disorders, a link has been observed between such conditions and a variation in hesitation-related parameters (Guo et al. 2008; Finneran et al. 2009; Marra 2021). For instance, in their study of hesitation phenomena and bilingualism, Fichman and Altman (2024) show that a higher ratio of long pauses and repetition of content words in bilingual children with Developmental Language Disorder is due to their difficulties in dealing with the planning necessities of storytelling and reflects lower proficiency in the second language.

Considering neurodegenerative disorders, disfluencies' frequency in Parkinson's Disease (PD) has been shown to be linked with poorer motor function (Gooch et al. 2023), while it seems to be due to lexical retrieval difficulties in Alzheimer's Disease (Gayraud et al. 2011). In particular, silent pause duration varies between AD or PD individuals and healthy controls, whilst its incidence appears to vary only in AD (Gayraud et al. 2011; Schettino et al. 2023; Maffia et al. 2023; Dovetto et al. 2024). According to Maffia and colleagues (2023, 126), disfluency in early-stage Parkinson's Disease (PD) can be described by distinguishing between Forward-Looking (planning-related) and Backward-Looking (repair-related) phenomena. While PD patients and healthy controls show similar overall frequencies of disfluency, PD speakers exhibit a greater need for repair, producing more substitutions and bridging repetitions. They also more frequently interrupt words internally, whereas healthy speakers place disfluencies between larger syntactic units. Additionally, PD patients produce longer pauses. These patterns are influenced by cognitive and depression scores, suggesting that disfluency reflects a progressive deterioration of physiological conditions and adaptive speech management strategies.

Now shifting to AD, patients tend to produce more between-utterances pauses than controls, thus showing a greater need for speech planning and memory recall; moreover, pauses in early AD seem to reflect a compensatory strategy for strengthening memory retrieval (Pistono et al. 2017; Pistono et al. 2019). When considering AD pauses in relation to MCI, it seems that there is a gradation in pause duration that is group-dependent: Pastoriza-Domínguez and colleagues (2022) have shown that HC pauses are shorter than MCI's and that MCI's are shorter than AD's. Moreover, the MCI group is itself heterogeneous: pause duration of MCI individuals with encoding memory deficit is longer than that of MCI individuals with only retrieval impairment.

Löfgren and Hinzen (2022) aimed to characterize the pausing profile of individuals with AD by examining the syntactic distribution of pauses. They showed that silent pauses increase in AD and are not restricted to within-clause positions, which are most directly associated with lexical retrieval difficulties. Instead, they seem to be confined to nouns, thus revealing a grammatically specific difficulty related to the referencing of objects.

As a result, several scholars agree on the usefulness of considering silent pauses in AD diagnosis (Khatri et al. 2024; Braun et al. 2024). Khatri and colleagues (2024) proposed that considering both silent pause duration and collocation may help in detecting early AD. Indeed, they have found that incorporating the context in which silent pauses have been produced significantly improves the accuracy of AD classification.

4. *Materials and Methods*

Data discussed below is a sample of the FRA corpus, that is a corpus of semi-spontaneous speech of elderly individuals with and without neurodegenerative disorders developed within the framework of the DISAGE project (*DISease and AGEing – Language Corpora for the Assessment of Spontaneous Speech in Alzheimer's Disease and Mild Cognitive Impairment*)[2].

FRA includes a total of 60 interviews (20 AD, 20 MCI, 20 HC), conducted with native Italian speakers aged between 60 to 85 years, all right-handed and with a minimum of five years of education. The corpus comprises audio recordings collected through structured interviews consisting of three distinct tasks, each designed to elicit different types of spontaneous speech. All participants underwent neuropsychological screening, including the Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE; Folstein, Folstein, and McHugh 1975) and Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices (Raven 1941). Only individuals with mild AD (MMSE ≥ 19/30) and amnestic MCI were recruited (Dovetto, Marra 2024).

4.1 Participants

For the purposes of this research, a subset of the FRA corpus was carefully selected so that the participants were matched for sex, age and education level (≥ 5 years of schooling)[3]. In all, 12 participants were examined, 4 per each group (4 AD, 4 MCI, 4 HC), whose sociolinguistic data are summarised in the table below (Tab. 1). Participants were recruited at the University Hospital "Federico II" in Naples, in collaboration with the Center for Dementia and Cognitive Disorders and the Hematology Unit. Exclusion criteria for the control group (HC) included the presence of psychiatric or neurological disorders, sensory impairments, and scores below the cut-off on the MMSE (23.8, according to Folia et al. 2022) or on the Raven Matrices.

[2] DISAGE is a project co-funded by the University of Naples Federico II and Banca Intesa Sanpaolo. The FRA corpus is the project's main output, developed within the framework of the 'Finanziamento della Ricerca di Ateneo' (FRA, 'University Research Funding') programme.

[3] The wide range of educational backgrounds is attributable to the recruitment setting, namely a hospital environment. Some of the participants were patients undergoing treatment in the ward, while others had been recently admitted for diagnostic assessment, whilst the control subjects were often relatives or caregivers of the patients who were accompanying them to the hospital for a follow-up appointment or their initial consultation. Therefore, as many subjects as possible were recruited to fit the research criteria: we enrolled patients diagnosed with AD or amnestic MCI who did not present other pathological conditions, whose MMSE score exceeded the minimum threshold of 19 points and that were matched for age, sex, background and years of education. This resulted in a heterogenous, yet one-to-one matched, sample. In addition, the subsample presented here represents a small part of the entire FRA corpus, which comprises a total of sixty subjects divided into three groups (AD, MCI and HC) and one-to-one matched across groups.

Table 1 - *Sociolinguistic Data of Participants*

	age	*sex*	*origin*	*MMSE*	*YoE*
AD	70–78 MA 74	2 M 2 F	Campania, Italy	23–26/30 M 24.25	5–13 M 11
MCI	68–78 MA 73.5	2 M 2 F	Campania, Italy	23–30/30 M 26.25	5–13 M 9.75
HC	65–78 MA 72.75	2 M 2 F	Campania, Italy	28–29/30 M 28.5	5–13 M 11

4.2 Materials

Interviews were carried out on the basis of a three-step procedure, which consisted of three language tasks designed to elicit different types of oral production. First, a picture description task was conducted, in which participants described a complex image from ENPA (Capasso, Miceli 2001); follow-up questions were intended to elicit semi-spontaneous speech. Second, a guided conversation was conducted, structured into three sections to elicit discursive speech on familiar topics. Lastly, participants performed a free recall and narration of the fairy tale "Little Red Riding Hood," to stimulate spontaneous narrative production[4].

4.3 Methodology

Audio recordings (44 kHz, 16-bit) were collected using Zoom H4nPro recorders in clinical environments that, while not soundproofed, were adequate for verbal communication. Orthographic transcriptions were manually produced by a trained transcriber following the guidelines of the CLIPS corpus (Savy 2006), and subsequently reviewed by a second annotator. All files were pseudonymized using data masking techniques and accompanied by metadata sheets including demographic and clinical information. Annotations were performed in PRAAT (Boersma, Weenink 2024) across three distinct tiers:

1. G/F tier: interviewer (Giver) and interviewee (Follower) turns.
2. G/F pauses tier: within-turn silent pauses.
3. Inter-turn tier: between-turn silent pauses.

The transcription system faithfully reflects the speakers' linguistic production, including semi-lexical phenomena (e.g., hesitations, repetitions, self-corrections), non-lexical phenomena (e.g., paralinguistic vocalizations), dialectal markers, and pauses.

To test the hypothesis of a correlation between hesitation phenomena and AD, a detailed analysis of disfluencies was conducted. Manual annotation of silent pauses was carried out in PRAAT on a dedicated tier (i.e., Pause Tier). Several threshold values have been proposed in order to distinguish between long and short silent pauses: Hird and Kirsner (2010) set this barrier at 268 ms, Rosen and colleagues (2010) at 323 ms, Angelopoulou

[4] Informants are asked to briefly recall, if they can, the story of Little Red Riding Hood. For a more extensive introduction to the FRA corpus and its methodology, see Dovetto and Marra (2024).

and colleagues (2018) at 338 ms. As a general rule, silent pauses fall into three main groups: short (<200 ms), intermediate (200–1000 ms) and long pauses (>1000 ms) (Campione, Véronis 2002)[5]. For our purposes, all pauses longer than 150 ms were selected via Duration Logger Script (DiCanio 2011).

5. *Analysis*

For the purposes of the present survey, selected disfluencies have been extracted; in particular, all SPs have been drawn by running a duration logger Script (Di Canio 2011) in PRAAT, while other typologies by means of a Colab script designed *ad hoc*. Only four types of hesitation phenomena have been taken into account, the ones upon which scholars seems to agree (Guo et al. 2008): Silent Pauses (SPs), that is the absence of phonation during spoken discourse; Filled Pauses (FPs), that is non-lexical one-syllable fillers; Prolongations (P)[6], that is the hold of vowels or consonants during spoken discourse; Repetitions (R), that is the reiteration of sounds, syllables, or words.

After having labelled our disfluencies according to their typology, we observed how often they occurred in the course of the narrative task under consideration. Then, we looked at different parameters, such as the duration of SPs, location and function of each pause. As SPs were the most frequent type (49%), followed by prolongations (27%), FPs (17%), and repetitions (7%), our quantitative analysis has focused exclusively on SPs, to which the next paragraph will be devoted. In addition, other hesitations will be discussed from a qualitative perspective in the last paragraph of the current section.

5.1 SPs, Speech to Silence Ratio, Speech and Articulation Rate: a quantitative analysis

SPs were selected as the starting point of the analysis, given that they account for 49% of all detected hesitation phenomena. In order to assess the potential of SPs as markers for AD, all SPs produced by the interviewee exceeding 150 milliseconds were investigated. The investigation focused on the average duration of SPs, their frequency and task-specific duration across the three groups (AD, MCI, HC), and the overall speech-to-silence ratio observed in each group. All analyses were carried out using R (R Core Team 2024) via RStudio (RStudio Team 2024).

Preliminary observations indicated that participants with cognitive impairment tend to produce SPs that are both more frequent and of longer duration compared to healthy controls (see Table 2). These findings motivated a more detailed exploration of SPs duration and its variability across tasks.

[5] For a more in-depth discussion of the issue see Pastoriza-Dominguez and colleagues (2022, 113–114).

[6] The prolongations were detected on a perceptual basis.

Table 2 - *Preliminary Observations on SPs*

Group	*SPs occurences*	*SPs mean duration*
AD	417	0.954 s
MCI	575	0.811 s
HC	202	0.659 s

Linear mixed-effects models were used to analyze the data, as the observations were clustered and exhibited variability across units, with unequal numbers of observations per group due to the nature of interview-based, semi-spontaneous speech data; thereby we avoided artificial sample balancing procedures. This approach accounts for the hierarchical structure of the data and the resulting unbalanced design, allowing for appropriate modeling of variability both within and between groups.

We first checked whether speech turns were longer in the healthy group (HC). Pairwise comparisons were conducted on the estimated marginal means (EMMs) to assess differences between groups. No statistically significant differences in turn duration were found among the AD, MCI, and HC groups (all $p > 0.05$; AD vs. HC: $p = 0.2316$; AD vs. MCI: $p = 0.5169$; HC vs. MCI: $p = 0.8237$). However, a descriptive trend toward longer turn durations was observed in the HC group compared with the MCI and AD groups.

Then, we estimated the average duration of all silent pauses produced by each group. The mixed-effects linear model did not reveal any significant differences in the duration of pauses between the groups (all $p > 0.05$; in particular, AD vs. HC $p = 0.3156$; AD vs. MCI $p = 0.7500$; HC vs. MCI $p = 0.7333$), although the estimated mean values suggest longer pauses in the AD group compared with the MCI and HC. Although the mean pause duration showed a tendency to increase from the HC to the AD group, this variation did not reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the sample size was relatively small, which may have limited the ability to detect subtle effects.

A linear mixed-effects model revealed a significant main effect of task on pause duration ($F(2, 1165.77) = 37.85$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that pause duration varied across tasks. However, no significant main effect of group was observed ($F(2, 11.12) = 2.69$, $p = 0.112$), nor was the group × task interaction significant ($F(4, 1166.34) = 1.59$, $p = 0.175$). Overall, these results suggest that while pause duration is modulated by task type, it does not differ significantly across diagnostic groups, nor does the effect of task vary by group.

The analysis of pause frequency revealed significant group differences based on pairwise comparisons of estimated marginal means (EMMs). Specifically, the HC group produced significantly fewer pauses than both the AD ($p = 0.0395$) and MCI ($p = 0.0048$) groups, whereas no significant difference was observed between the AD and MCI groups.

After dealing with SPs' duration and frequency, we investigated the ratio between silence and speech in discourse (See Table 3). Total Pausing Time (TPT), that is total duration of all pauses per sample in second, and Total Locution Time (TLT), that is the amount of time in the sample that contains both speech and pauses, were extracted following Roark and colleagues (2011).

Table 3 - *TPT vs. TLT*

Group	*TPT*	*TLT*
AD	400.737 s	1620.231 s
MCI	475.058 s	3483.225 s
HC	146.015 s	1743.802 s

Then, the ratio between TPT and TLT per group was calculated. The results revealed that SPs accounted about 8% of the total locution time (TLT) in the HC group, 14% in MCI, and 25% in AD.

We then assessed the pause ratio using the Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test; this revealed that the groups do not differ significantly in terms of the pause ratio, but there is a consistent pattern of variation (p-value = 0.063). The result is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level, but very close to the threshold (a strong trend is evident). A direct comparison between the AD and HC groups revealed a trend towards a difference in the ratio of pause time to speech time (Wilcoxon rank-sum test: W = 15, p = 0.057), suggesting a possible greater fragmentation of speech in the AD group compared with the controls, although this was not statistically significant.

Lastly, Speech Rate (SR) and Articulation Rate (AR) were measured. Speech Rate indicates the ratio between the number of syllables actually uttered, including disfluencies in the total duration of the utterance. The total duration of the utterance refers to the overall length of the participant's verbal production, including both speech sequences and silent pauses. It therefore corresponds to the sum of the participant's speaking turns within the analyzed time span (Pettorino, Giannini 2005, 91). AR indicates the ratio of the number of syllables uttered to the time taken to produce them (syll/s) (Pettorino, Giannini 2005; Roark et al. 2011). SR, that is all syllable produced including dysfluencies in the TLT, varies in a significant way between the 3 groups (one-way ANOVA F = 7.163; p = 0.003; F crit = 3.354): it is interesting to note the discrepancy between SR and AR in the AD group, as this highlights how dementigenic patients tend to produce more disfluencies than controls over the total amount of speech produced (see Tab. 4).

Table 4 - *Speech Rate and Articulation Rate*

Group	*SR*	*AR*
AD	3.212 syllables/s	4.942 syllables/s
MCI	4.207 syllables/s	4.810 syllables/s
HC	4.219 syllables/s	4.441 syllables/s

5.2 SPs, FPs, Prolongations and Repetitions: a qualitative analysis

Subsequently, the analysis was extended to the position and function of hesitation phenomena, with the aim of determining whether these features might assist in differentiating dementia-related pathologies from typical aging. To this end, a subset of disfluencies was

extracted from the storytelling task involving the narrative of Little Red Riding Hood. These instances were then categorized based on typology, position, and communicative function, in order to identify potential distributional patterns.

As mentioned before, our classification included four disfluency types: Silent Pauses (SPs), Filled Pauses (FPs), Repetitions (R), and Prolongations (P) (See Tab. 5).

Table 5 - *Disfluency's Tags*

Type	*Tag*	*Example*
SP	<pause dur="0.412s"/>	è andata col paniere nel bosco <pause dur="0.412s"/> e nel bosco ha trovato il lupo
FP	<eeh>	non doveva <eeh> <pause dur="0.734s"/> perdere tempo
R	{<repetition> ... </repetition>}	'{<repetition> *mia*<aa> <pause dur="0.597s"/> *mia* </repetition>}' zia
P	<VV> , <CC>	mi<ii> impegno

Regarding positional criteria, each phenomenon was categorized as either external if grammatical (i.e., occurring at syntactic boundaries) or internal if not (i.e., embedded within syntactic constituents).

Disfluencies were labelled as external when they marked major syntactic boundaries, as in (1):

(1) DGmaB01N, F#98[7]: È amp+ / andata col<ll> paniere nel bosco <pause dur="0.412s"/> e<ee> nel bosco ha trovato<oo> <inspiration> Cappuccett+ <eeh> / <ll>le+ / {<dialect> comm' s' chiamm' </dialect>} / il lupo <pause dur="0.514s"/>

è	and-at-a	co-l	paniere	ne-l	bosco	SP
AUX	go-PTCP.F	INS-DET	basket	LOC-DET	woods	SP

she went with the basket into the woods

e	ne-l	bosco	ha	trov-at-o	il	lupo
and	LOC-DET	woods	AUX	find-PTCP.F	DET	wolf

and into the woods she found the wolf

Here the hesitation phenomenon, a silent pause (SP), marks the boundary between the first clause, [$_{s1}$ è andata col paniere nel bosco], and the second, [$_{s2}$ e nel bosco ha trovato il lupo], in a complex sentence, which clearly states its syntactical nature.

[7] For each example, we have reported its source file (i.e., DGmaB01N) and the conversational turn in which it occurs (i.e., F#98). The file name indicates the type of speech (i.e., DG: dialogic), the group to which it belongs (i.e., ma, mci or ad), the speaker's identifier (i.e., capital letter), the recording number (i.e., 01, 02) and the speaker's origin (i.e., N: Naples). In addition, we first reported the complete utterance as it was transcribed in the corpus; then, the example has been tagged according to the Leipzig Glossing Rules and translated. In the tagged version, the disfluency produced has been indicated by its type, as shown in Table 5.

External disfluencies may separate both independent clauses (2) or main and dependent clause (3):

(2) DGmaL01N, F#50: <mh> <pause dur="4.567s"/> Cappuccetto Rosso era una bambina <pause dur="0.705s"/> <inspiration> andava a scuola

Cappuccetto Rosso	era		una	bambina	SP
Red Riding Hood	be-3SG.COP.IPFV		DET	child	SP
Red Riding Hood was a child					
andava	a	scuola			
go-3SG.IPFV	ALL	school			
she attended school					

(3) DGmciF01N, F#163: nel bosco non ti fermare <inspiration> <eeh> <pause dur="0.240s"/> {<dialect> 'nsomm' a <pp>parlà cu <nn>nisciun' </dialect>}

nel	bosco	non	ti	fermare	FP SP
LOC-DET	wood	NEG	2SG	stop-INF	FP SP
into the woods don't stop					
a	parlare	con	nessuno		
to	talk-INF	COM	anyone		
in order to talk to anybody					

However, not all hesitation phenomena are external. Conversely, many of them fall into a phrase, as the silent pause main $[_{NP}[_{Det}$ mia SP mia] $[_{N}$ zia]] (4):

(4) DGmaL01N, F#48: {<repetition> mia<aa> <pause dur="0.597s"/> mia </repetition>} zia

mia	SP	mia	zia
POSS	SP	POSS	aunt
my aunt			

It seems that some phenomena help lexical retrieval. That is the case of the prolongations accompanied by the filled pause in (5), which both precede the retrieval of a content word:

(5) DGmciQ01N, F#40: e poi alla fine il lupo mangiò<oo> <eh> anche<ee> Cappuccetto

e	poi	il	lupo	mangiò	P FP	anche	P	Cappuccetto
and	ADV	DET	wolf	eat-3SG.PST	P FP	ADV	P	Little Hood
then the wolf also ate Little Red Riding Hood								

Other phenomena seem to cooperate into discourse planning, as that in (6):

(6) DGmciF01N, F#165: corre a casa della nonna <eeh> e<ee> <pause dur="0.143s"/> {<dialect> s' mang' 'a nonn' </dialect>}

corre	a	casa	della	nonna	FP	e	P	SP
run-3SG.PRS	ALL	home	of-DET	grandmother	FP	and	P	SP
si	mangia	la	nonna					
ANTIP	eat-3SG.PRS	DET	grandmother					

he rushes to the grandmother's house and he eats her

In the above example the accumulation of disfluencies can be observed to precede the formulation of the new sentence. Unlike the previous instances, where disfluencies marked the boundaries between utterances, here the speaker uses filled pauses and prolongations to allow for additional processing time during speech. However, in this case too, the hesitation phenomenon marks the utterance boundary and therefore has a syntactic function.

At last, disfluencies may help the speaker in repairing errors, as in (7):

(7) DGmaB01N, F#92: E *<cc>contro il le+ / <eeh> {<repetition> il lupo <pause dur="0.254s"/> il lupo </repetition>}

e	incontra	il	le	FP	il	lupo
and	meet-3SG.PRS	DET	lio	FP	DET	wolf

and she meets the wolf

Here, the interviewee retrieved the wrong lemma, that is lion instead of wolf. That is why the speaker interrupts the flow of speech, gains time by producing a filled pause, and subsequently retrieves the target word.

To conclude, when examining function, between group differences do emerge: indeed, 50% of the phenomena detected in the AD group fulfil the function of lexical retrieval and are therefore non-grammatical (i.e., embedded within syntactic constituents), while in the remaining groups the planning function, signalled by disfluency phenomena of a grammatical nature (i.e., occurring at syntactic boundaries), is of greater importance.

6. *Discussion*

Our results, while not showing statistically significant differences across group (SPs), reveal at least two notable trends. First, the duration of conversational turns appears to vary in a group dependent way, by being longer in HC speakers compared to AD patients. The finding that the conversational turns of HC speakers are longer than those of AD speakers indicates a tendency for the former to have greater confidence in their verbal output; this would appear to confirm their stronger conversational pragmatic skills.

Second, silent pause duration seems to increase in individuals with AD, which implies that it might actually be a valid marker of AD, thus confirming what has been claimed in the literature (Pistono et al. 2016). Clearly, our observations suggest the need for further

analyses, particularly in light of the limited sample size of the subsample of the FRA corpus analysed here. In particular, we believe that it would be useful to more closely examine longer than one second pauses. Given that, for the purposes of this paper, we have examined a subsample of the FRA corpus, we hold the view that the analyses should be repeated on the entire sample within the FRA cohort and supplemented by further analyses of data collected in more controlled settings. Furthermore, our preliminary observations imply that it would be appropriate to particularly address P, that is longer than 1 second SPs, which revealed to be more frequent in patients than controls. Therefore, the option of splitting SPs into three groups according to their length could be fruitful.

Turning now to the relationship between speech and silence, our analyses revealed that Total Silence Time decreases from AD to HC group: indeed, the percentage of silence is greater in AD and decreases progressively from MCI to HC. In addition, SR suggests that AD patients tend to produce more hesitation phenomena than MCI and HC, as well as the frequency of silent pauses increases in the AD group. These findings suggest that silence may represent a compensatory strategy in AD, since Total Pausing Time increases notably in that group.

The collocation of hesitation phenomena further reveals that, since prolongations and repetitions are always internal, they are non-grammatical, whereas SPs and FPs tend to be grammatical. In terms of function, the qualitative analysis of the four types of disfluencies extracted (i.e., SP, FP, R, P) shows that disfluencies in AD support lexical retrieval more than that of MCI and HC groups.

Moreover, disfluencies often correlate to planning necessities and it seems that HC better control their speech, since they do not produce incomplete sentences.

Overall, the narrative task yields informative evidence regarding differences among the three groups, and could represent a valuable tool in supporting the early diagnosis of mild AD, as also demonstrated by Guida et al. (2023) in relation to spontaneous speech in AD. Notably, the descriptive task, which primarily involves naming abilities – despite its widespread use in cognitive assessment batteries – proves least effective in discriminating between the three groups, and in particular in distinguishing pathological from healthy participants.

7. *Conclusion*

The main aim of our research was to make available new Italian data on AD, also in light of the scarcity of accessible Italian AD corpora, with a few exceptions (see Section 1). We maintain that only a large and representative corpus of pathological speech produced by native Italian speakers can lead to reliable interpretations and generalizations of the linguistic data. Accordingly, the relatively limited size of our corpus, together with the wide range of years of schooling considered, should be regarded as a constraint affecting the generalizability of the present findings. The need of new Italian accessible data on AD is particularly pressing, given that the majority of studies – and the corresponding theoretical models – are based on analyses of speech produced by English speakers (a Germanic language), rather than by native speakers of Romance languages such as Italian. Indeed,

we argue that both the type and the occurrence of disfluencies are related to the speakers' geographical background – for instance, a greater tendency towards repetitions rather than vocalizations or prolongations, as demonstrated for regional varieties of Italian by Pettorino and Giannini (2003). At the same time, we consider it essential that the expansion of pathological speech corpora should be pursued in accordance with open-access principles and through transcription and annotation systems that are as comparable as possible, or at least mutually interoperable.

In the present study, in particular, we wondered whether dysfluency phenomena, and their acoustic correlates such as SPs duration, would allow us to discriminate between AD, MCI and HC in order to identify an easy to detect parameter that would help diagnosis by making it effortless, noninvasive, inexpensive and easier. In addition, we explored hesitation phenomena collocation and function too, in order to build up a broader picture on dysfluencies in AD.

It came out that some parameters, such as SPs frequency and SR, could actually help discriminate between AD/MCI patients and control. Furthermore, although our analysis did not yield statistically significant results, it does reveal, at least at a descriptive level, a clear trend: AD tendency to produce longer pauses compared to HC. Bearing in mind the above-mentioned limitations of this study, and in particular the small sample size here taken into account, we believe it is essential to continue working in this direction. Indeed, our preliminary observations also indicate that longer than 1 second pauses should be particularly taken into account, in accordance with previous literature (Dovetto et al. 2024). Clearly, this value (1 sec.) cannot be treated as independent of the specific language under analysis, nor of the broader reflection on the temporal organization of silence, which varies across languages, dialects and also speech styles.

To conclude, silence came out representing a compensatory strategy in AD, since silence ratio decreases from AD to HC. Last, our results also confirm that hesitation phenomena in AD mostly cooperate to lexical retrieval.

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Semantic-Lexical Dynamics in Linguistic Simplification: Semantic Relations in *Leichte Sprache* Texts

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This article investigates semantic relations in linguistic adaptations from Standard German to *Leichte Sprache* (LS), a simplified variety designed for cognitive accessibility. While normative and morphosyntactic aspects are well-documented, the semantic-lexical dimension remains under-researched. Consequently, this study examines synonymy, antonymy, hypernymy, hyponymy, meronymy, holonymy, homonymy, and polysemy within a parallel corpus of twenty standard and LS texts. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches, the research identifies usage patterns and distributional frequencies. Findings suggest a redrawing of semantic rules within simplification strategies and discuss the potential impact of these dynamics on interlingual translation involving other simplified varieties.

Keywords: *Leichte Sprache*, Easy Language, Semantics, Semantic Relations, Linguistic Simplification

1. *Introduction*

In contemporary societies, equal access to information represents a fundamental prerequisite for the active participation of citizens in social, cultural, and political life, as stated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-*Behindertenrechtskonvention* 2008), which codifies information accessibility as a core human right essential for full and equitable societal inclusion. However, the linguistic complexity characteristic of many institutional, legal, and media texts still poses substantial challenges for individuals with cognitive, linguistic, or literacy-related difficulties.

This article positions itself within the expanding research field of linguistic accessibility, in which *Leichte Sprache* [German Easy Language] has emerged as both a normative framework and a practical tool aimed at ensuring inclusion and enabling effective access to informational content.

Despite considerable scholarly attention to regulatory aspects, such as the recommendations issued by Inclusion Europe (2009) and the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2011), as well as to morphosyntactic and typographical features, the semantic dimension remains comparatively underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing the semantic relations employed during processes of translation or adaptation from Standard German to *Leichte Sprache*. These relations are central to achieving an appropriate balance between fi-

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delity to the source content and immediate comprehensibility for the target readership. In this perspective, the present analysis aims to uncover the semantic phenomena that guide the selection and substitution of lexemes. In doing so, it highlights how specific semantic choices influence meaning construction and shape textual usability. The primary aim of the study is to identify recurrent patterns in lexical transformation strategies, focusing on semantic relations (such as synonymy, antonymy, hypernymy, hyponymy, holonymy, and meronymy) as well as the management of lexical ambiguity phenomena, including polysemy and homonymy, which could be systematically employed as a model to follow in order to meet the clarity and transparency requirements, which are characteristic of the *Leichte Sprache*. Indeed, Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework by outlining the linguistic and regulatory foundations of *Leichte Sprache*, including terminological definitions, and an overview of principal simplification rules. Section 3 presents a contrastive analysis of major guidelines, with specific reference to their treatment of semantic aspects and the degree of explicitness with which these are addressed. Section 4 constitutes the empirical core of the article, introducing the corpus and methodology before discussing the results of the analysis. Section 5 offers concluding reflections and perspectives for future research.

2. Leichte Sprache*: definition and main characteristics*

Defined by the regulatory framework of DIN SPEC 33429 – proceeding from the 2023 technical draft to the authoritative March 2025 version – the term *Deutsche Leichte Sprache* identifies a specific, simplified variety of Standard German. While it operates alongside *Einfache Sprache* [Plain Language] within the broader spectrum of accessible communication, *Leichte Sprache* is characterized by a much stricter set of linguistic rules and structural constraints (see f.i. Bock, Pappert 2023, 18–28). This designation reflects a concerted effort within German-speaking countries to prioritize the development of verifiable linguistic instruments, thereby ensuring equitable information access for different target groups.

Far from being a monolithic concept, *Leichte Sprache* (henceforth LS) has historically been encompassed by a mainfold set of definitions: it was typically described either as a particular form of accessible communication (cf. Girard-Groeber, Lichtenauer 2024, 22; Bock 2017, 20), or as a simplified variety of Standard German, systematically reduced in its syntactic and lexical structures to enhance perceptibility and comprehensibility, especially for individuals with cognitive disabilities or reading difficulties (cf. Maaß 2015, 11–12; Bredel, Maaß 2018, 251). Recently, however, a fundamental consensus has been reached with the regulatory framework of DIN SPEC 33429, which grants LS a special, authoritative status by formalizing its structural boundaries and establishing a standardized, verifiable set of rules. A defining feature of LS is its explicit identification of target audiences and their direct involvement in the process of text validation. Although originally created to meet the needs of individuals with cognitive disabilities or limited reading proficiency (Bock 2017, 20–28), LS is now intended for a highly heterogeneous audience that includes functional illiterates, migrants, refugees, and learners of German as a second or foreign language (DaZ/DaF) (Bock, Pappert 2023, 151–170).

Chronologically, the first document outlining LS guidelines was the translation of Inclusion Europe (2009) into various European languages. Its internationalised character results in a broad and highly generalised compendium, which functions more as a precursor to later and more linguistically grounded guidelines. A subsequent regulatory framework is the *Barrierefreie-Informationstechnik-Verordnung* (BITV 2.0), which prioritizes technological accessibility by specifying compliance standards for web and intranet content. While the 2011 revision explicitly recognized LS and sign language as essential instruments for information accessibility, the ordinance is jurisdictionally restricted to the federal level, necessitating distinct regulations at the state level. The rules provided by the Netzwerk Leichte Sprache, which was founded in 2006 and became an association in 2013, have been made available online since 2009. In 2013, and later in 2022, the Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (BMAS) published them for the first time in the form of an information brochure in LS[1]. The most comprehensive and systematised set of guidelines is DIN SPEC 33429 (2025 [2023]) (*Deutsches Institut für Normung: Empfehlungen für Deutsche Leichte Sprache*), which was published definitively in March 2025 following earlier drafts. This document offers the most detailed and nuanced treatment of LS to date, addressing morphosyntactic, lexical, visual, and textual aspects with substantially greater precision than previous *Regelwerke*. It also includes explanations regarding the potential difficulties arising from features characteristic of the standard language.

Academic interest in LS extends far beyond its normative framing. Over the past decade, research conducted at the *Forschungsstelle Leichte Sprache* at the University of Hildesheim and numerous scholarly publications – such as Bock (2019; 2022), Bock, Fix and Lange (2017), Lange (2019), Lindholm and Vanhatalo (2021), Maaß (2015; 2020; 2024), Maaß and Rink (2020), and Bredel and Maaß (2016a; 2016b; 2016c; 2018) – have established this variety as an interdisciplinary research domain positioned at the intersection of applied linguistics, translation studies, and accessibility research.

Within the Italian academic landscape, research specifically focusing on the German *Leichte Sprache* has recently gained momentum, attracting increasing attention from scholars in German studies alongside the already established research on Italian Easy Language (cf. Sciumbata 2022). Despite this broad interest, research still exhibits a notable gap regarding the use and distribution of semantic relations. Prior studies have primarily focused on morphosyntactic and pragmatic features (Bellavia 2024; Di Meola 2024a; Di Meola 2024b; Mollica 2024) or have approached LS from transdisciplinary and metalinguistic perspectives (Crestani 2024a; 2024b; 2022; 2020; Puato 2024a; 2024b), without analysing how semantic relations contribute to meaning construction in simplified texts. A significant exception is provided by Porcaro (2024a; 2024b), who examines metonymy from a simplification-oriented perspective and analyses nominal compounds in terms of their structural variation and semantic loss. The present study expands this perspective by focusing specifically on semantic relations and offering a metalinguistic interpretation grounded in empirical corpus analysis.

[1] Crestani's contribution (2024, 205) offers a comparative overview of the rules established in 2013 and the rules marked as 'new' in 2022, also reporting a personal comment on the innovations adopted or modified.

From a linguistic standpoint, LS is a highly codified variety governed by rules aimed at ensuring maximum linguistic simplicity and reducing both intra- and paralinguistic complexity. Although the *Regelwerke* are characterized by a certain systematic coherence, they differ significantly in their regulatory frameworks. Collectively, the guidelines comprise approximately 120 rules, but only 17 are shared across all major compendia (cf. Puato 2024a, 20). This fragmented landscape has recently been transformed by the introduction of the DIN SPEC 33429, which establishes an authoritative consensus and serves as the primary benchmark for harmonizing these rules. While the specific linguistic prescriptions of this new standard will be analysed in detail in the subsequent sections, it is useful to first consider how Maaß (2020, 75) summarises these rules across different levels:

Tab. 1 - *Rules in common between the various compendiums (Maaß 2020, 75)*

Visual and medial design	1.	Bigger type-size
	2.	Each sentence on a new line
	3.	No word truncation at the end of the line
	4.	Text is left-aligned
Word structure	5.	Short words
	6.	Separation of compound words with hyphens
	7.	No abbreviations
	8.	No passive voice
Vocabulary	9.	Easy-to-understand words
	10.	Preferably no foreign words
	11.	Foreign words are explained where they are needed
Sentence structure	12.	Short sentences
Semantics	13.	No negation
Text	14.	No lexical variation in the text: same designation for same concept
	15.	Relevant information first
	16.	Clear structure: subheadings are used
	17.	Readers are addressed directly

At the layout level, LS uses typography to aid meaning; morphology favors linear, short, non-opaque structures over typical German density favouring hierarchical ordering, importance of information and chronological sequence of events (cf. Di Meola 2024a, 41); the lexicon prioritizes high-frequency, low-ambiguity, denotative terms; syntax demands short, linear sentences without subordination; semantics avoids or reduce negations; and the textual level enforces strict terminological coherence and hierarchical organization (key content, extensive use of headings, direct reader address).

A preliminary review on linguistic rules reveals that existing guidelines place substantial emphasis on morphosyntactic and textual aspects, while the semantic dimension receives considerably less explicit attention. The next chapter therefore seeks to shed further light on how semantic aspects are addressed in LS-guidelines.

3. *Semantics in* Leichte Sprache *Guidelines*

Proceeding in chronological sequence, this section investigates the way distinct LS-guidelines have approached semantic issues: 1. Inclusion Europe (2009), 2. BITV 2.0 (2011), 3. *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2022), 4. DIN SPEC 33429 (2025).

1. Inclusion Europe (henceforth: IE) (2009) addresses semantic aspects in a general and non-specific manner, resulting in a broad and heterogeneous treatment. The section of the document entitled *Wörter* [words] includes rules concerning the lexicon (see Rule 6) as well as pragmatic (see Rule 12) and typographic recommendations (see Rule 14):

   > 6. Verwenden Sie leicht verständliche Wörter, die allgemein bekannt sind.
   > 12. Seien Sie vorsichtig, wenn Sie Pronomen verwenden. Pronomen sind Wörter wie "ich", "du", "sie", "er" oder "es". Man verwendet sie statt einer Person oder einer Sache.
   > 14. Vermeiden Sie zu viele Satz-Zeichen.

   The only references that may be interpreted as pertaining to lexical semantics – albeit not explicitly foregrounded – are those embedded in the formulation of Rules 7, 9, and 10:

   > 7. Verwenden Sie keine schwierigen Wörter. Wenn Sie schwierige Wörter verwenden müssen: Erklären Sie die Wörter klar und eindeutig.
   > 9. Verwenden Sie im ganzen Text dasselbe Wort für dieselbe Sache.
   > 10. Verwenden Sie keine schwierigen Begriffe wie zum Beispiel Metaphern. Eine Metapher ist ein Satz, der nicht wörtlich gemeint ist. Zum Beispiel: "Es schüttet wie aus Eimern", statt: "Es regnet sehr stark".

   These rules require avoiding so-called 'difficult words' (cf. Rule 7) or, when their use cannot be avoided, providing a clear explanatory paraphrase. In addition, Rule 9 calls for the consistent use of the same lexical item to refer to the same concept, while Rule 10 excludes metaphorical expressions, that is, semantic structures whose figurative meaning does not correspond to their literal denotation.
2. BITV 2.0 (2011) likewise refers to semantic phenomena only implicitly, requiring the reader to infer relevant principles from the following:

   > 3. Begriffe sind durchgängig in gleicher Weise zu verwenden.
   > 4. Es sind kurze, gebräuchliche Begriffe und Redewendungen zu verwenden. Abstrakte Begriffe und Fremdwörter sind zu vermeiden oder mit Hilfe konkreter Beispiele zu erläutern. Zusammengesetzte Substantive sind durch Bindestrich zu trennen.

In this case, the document does not explicitly mention synonyms or lexemes but instead refers to *Begriffe* (expressions, terms, words) (cf. Rule 3), which must be used consistently throughout the text, avoiding terminological variation. Moreover, Rule 4 requires the use of simple and familiar terms, discourages abstract or foreign expressions (unless clarified through concrete examples), and prescribes the hyphenation of compound nouns to support ease of processing.

3. The guidelines of the *Netzwerk Leichte Sprache* (2022) (henceforth: NLS) display a more systematic organisational structure, as is already evident from the index. The section *Wörter* includes twelve rules (W1–W12), of which only a few (W2, W4, W12) refer – albeit once more only implicitly – to semantic relations:

> W2. Benutzen Sie Wörter, die etwas genau beschreiben.
> W4. Benutzen Sie immer die gleichen Wörter für die gleichen Dinge.
> W12. Vermeiden Sie Redewendungen und bildliche Sprache.

Rule W2 promotes the use of lexical items that precisely denote their referent, favouring concrete and familiar terms. This principle is exemplified by the recommendation to replace abstract expressions such as *öffentlicher Nahverkehr* with more accessible formulations like *Bus und Bahn*. Similarly, Rule W4 calls for consistent lexical choice. For example, it recommends the continuous use of *Tablette* rather than alternating it with *Pille*. This avoids not only unnecessary lexical variation but also potential semantic ambiguity, as the term *Pille* is strongly associated in everyday usage with a highly specific meaning (the contraceptive pill). Finally, Rule W12 excludes figurative and idiomatic expressions, such as *Raben-Eltern*, on the basis that such forms may be understood literally and therefore lead to misinterpretation.

4. The final document under analysis, DIN SPEC 33429 (2025, 13–14), is the first to introduce specific subparagraphs for each linguistic phenomenon. In this framework, two dedicated sections address the treatment of synonyms and metaphors:

> **5.2.3 Synonyme**
> Unterschiedliche Bezeichnungen, die sich auf dasselbe beziehen, können das Verstehen des Textes erschweren. Daher sollten innerhalb desselben Textes in Leichter Sprache keine Synonyme verwendet werden. Das heißt, Gleiches sollte innerhalb eines Textes immer gleich benannt werden. Dies gilt nicht nur für Substantive zur Bezeichnung von Personen, Dingen, Ereignissen oder Tätigkeiten, sondern auch für Verben und Adjektive sowie Elemente der Satzverknüpfung (siehe 5.4.5).
> **5.2.4 Metaphern**
> Metaphern sind sprachliche Bilder, mit denen Inhalte veranschaulicht werden können. Sie können das Verstehen von Texten erschweren, da sie eine Übertragungsleistung oder ein Erlernen erfordern, damit der Bezug hergestellt werden kann. In Leichte-Sprache-Texten sollten Metaphern vermieden werden. Sie sollten nur in Ausnahmefällen verwendet werden, wenn sie den Nutzerinnen und Nutzern sicher bekannt sind und sich aus dem Text erschließen oder wenn sie abstrakte Inhalte konkret fassbar machen. Sind Metaphern für den Text zentral, sollten sie erläutert

> werden (siehe 5.2.2). Das Gleiche gilt für Ironie. Auch sie sollte möglichst vermieden werden.

DIN SPEC 33429 prescribes the elimination of synonyms within the same text and the almost complete avoidance of metaphors. In contrast to the previous guidelines examined in this section, these recommendations display a higher degree of theoretical awareness, as they recognise that lexical variation and semantic reinterpretation may hinder comprehension. In particular, Rule 5.2.4 highlights a central problem related to metaphor: it requires the reader to undertake an additional cognitive effort in order to translate the figurative meaning into a concrete referential interpretation.

A separate consideration must be given to the two seminal works by Maaß (2015) and Bredel and Maaß (2016a) which engage with the topic in a more comprehensive manner and from a clearly defined linguistic perspective. Maaß (2015, 161) suggests consulting synonym dictionaries and thesauri as tools in the translation from standard language to *Leichte Sprache*. Bredel and Maaß (2016a, 426–479), in addition to dedicating an explicit chapter focused on semantics, mention for the first time some of the semantic relations such as hypernymy, hyponymy and synonymy in connection to grammatical coherence (485–486). The authors refer to semantic connections in relation to the use of lexical co-referentiality either on the basis of encyclopaedic pre-knowledge, or on the basis of contextual knowledge built within the text.

The analysis of the guidelines indicates that the treatment of semantic relations tends to be largely implicit and fragmented, lacking a fully explicit and systematic framework. The main critical issues identified in the LS-*Regelwerke* can be grouped into three thematic areas:

1. Approximate treatment of semantic relations, in particular synonymy and polysemy. Guidelines like IE (Rule 9), NLS (W4), and DIN SPEC 33429 (Section 5.2.3) enforce referential rigidity, mandating the same word for the same concept. This oversimplifies semantics and creates a paradox: inclusive *Leichte Sprache* ultimately adopts the terminological rigidity characteristic of exclusive technical languages. Furthermore, BITV 2.0 (Rule 4) ignores these semantic nuances and overlooks diastratic (sociolectal) variations, failing to clarify if using a concept "in gleicher Weise" (BITV 2.0 2011, Rule 3) applies to the same or different target groups.
2. Unclear demarcation between abstract and concrete concepts. Rule 4 of BITV 2.0 recommends the use of concrete and familiar concepts, avoiding abstract terms. While this serves as a useful practical heuristic, its systematic application remains challenging because concreteness is rarely an inherent, static lexical trait; rather, it frequently depends on the specific usage and contextual environment. Similarly, in NLS (W2), the removal of abstract terms results in the loss of hyperonymic and hyponymic relations that contribute to the conceptual cohesion of the text.
3. Ambiguous management of figurative language. Most guidelines (IE Rule 10, BITV 2.0, NLS W12) strictly prohibit figurative and metaphorical expressions to aid comprehension. Conversely, DIN SPEC 33429 permits well-known or explained metaphors.

> Still, current approaches oversimplify the issue, ignoring that deeply rooted metaphors are often accessible even to speakers with limited language skills[2].

Overall, the restrictive character of the rules may reduce textual variety and naturalness by limiting the range of available semantic strategies. A notable gap in the existing guidelines is the lack of a comprehensive, empirically grounded account of semantic relations in simplified communication. Furthermore, as is common in this field, there remains a critical need for empirical reception studies that document actual comprehension difficulties and assess how these formulations are genuinely processed by the target audience. While addressing user comprehension through cognitive testing falls outside the scope of this specific study, the following section addresses the former gap by presenting the results of a text-based empirical analysis.

4. *The Case Study: Semantic Relations in* Leichte Sprache *Texts*

The main objective of this study is to investigate whether – and how – lexical substitutions in the simplification process follow identifiable semantic patterns, particularly those corresponding to classical semantic relations such as synonymy, hyponymy, hypernymy, meronymy, holonymy, and antonymy, as well as cases of homonymy and polysemy. The study is not purely descriptive but also theoretical: it aims to determine whether simplification in LS texts involves systematic modification of content and whether such modifications can be formalized through stable, recurring categories. Accordingly, the central research question is tailored to this theoretical aim: 'To what extent are classical semantic relations systematically applied as functional simplification strategies in LS texts?' A related, more specific question is: 'Can we identify recurring trends in these lexical transformations that allow us to formalize them into stable, predictable categories?'

To answer these questions, the research focuses on a corpus consisting of ten pairs of texts written respectively in standard German (*Standardsprache*) from [1A] to [10A], and in their simplified version in LS from [1B] to [10B]. The selected texts cover a variety of communication genres and contexts of use, including institutional domain, journalistic articles, presidential speeches and information materials, published by official and reliable sources such as government websites, regional media and portals dedicated to language accessibility. While the corpus's thematic heterogeneity and small size inevitably limit the strict comparability of the simplification strategies, this diversity provides essential qualitative insights into real-world practices that lay the groundwork for future larger-scale studies. The selection was strictly guided by the availability of this dual version, as well as the authority and recency of the sources[3]. The corpus was analysed manually to capture nuanced semantic shifts that automated tools might overlook.

[2] For a more specific overview about metaphorical expressions in the texts in *Leichte Sprache*, cf. Bellavia (2024).

[3] The hyperlinks of the source and target texts can be consulted in the 'Appendix' section of this contribution.

After excluding non-verbal elements, a two-phase analysis was conducted: a quantitative mapping of semantic strategy frequencies, followed by a qualitative examination of specific lexical substitutions (e.g., synonymy, hypernymy etc.) to assess structural semantic shifts.

Extracted terms were systematically documented in analysis tables (e.g., *Schulung*, *Workshop*). Multi-word expressions were reduced to neutral dictionary forms; for example, "Sandra Hubbe hat den Workshop geleitet" became "einen Workshop leiten" and "Sandra Hubbe hat die Schulung gehalten" became "eine Schulung halten". Next sections detail the quantitative results and qualitative reflections on semantic simplification.

The study quantitatively analyzed 232 items (116 pairs of correspondences). A 'correspondence' denotes here any comparable semantic unit, ranging from single words to multi-word phrases. Because text lengths naturally vary, absolute relation counts per text are not used as evaluative criteria. The data is summarized in the following table, which displays the total semantic relations per text pair in the final column and cumulative occurrences per relation type in the final row. The results are based on the 116 total matches, corresponding to the 232 items:

Tab. 2 - *Quantitative assessment of semantic relations*

	Synonymy	*Hypernymy*	*Hyponymy*	*Antonymy*	*Meronymy*	*Holonymy*	*Polysemy*	*Tot. per pair*
1A-1B	2	2						4
2A-2B	7 (-2)	4 (+2)		2				13
3A-3B	6	3	1			1		11
4A-4B	21 (-2)	2 (+2)	1		2	1	1	28
5A-5B	14	2	2	3	1			22
6A-6B	9	5			1			15
7A-7B	3	2						5
8A-8B	5 (-2)	1 (+2)	1		1			8
9A-9B	4	1	1					6
10A-10B	1	1	1			1		4
Tot. Sem. Rel.	72 (-6)	23 (+6)	7	5	5	3	1	116

As shown in the table, the distribution of semantic relations is both articulated and heterogeneous. The most frequent category is synonymy, with 72 instances, accounting for approximately 62.07% of the total 116 correspondences. Hypernymy is the next most frequent relation, observed in 23 instances (≈19.83%). In the corpus, hypernymy often appears as an alternative to synonymy, reflecting the subtle distinction between the two, as illustrated in the following example:

(1) Hamburgerinnen und Hamburger [2A]
die Menschen in Hamburg [2B]

In this specific instance, the relationship can be classified as hypernymy, since the 'people in Hamburg' constitutes the macro-category encompassing 'the citizens of Hamburg', as well as other groups such as tourists, travellers, and foreigners. Alternatively, it could be considered as partial synonymy, in that 'people in Hamburg' shares most of the denotative meaning (people related to the city) but differs in referential extension. In light of the cognitive simplification of LS, for the six instances in which synonymy and hypernymy appear to overlap, we opted to categorize them under the former, while retaining the possibility of reclassifying them under the latter – hence the data entries "*-6*" / "*+6*" reported in the table. Less frequent, yet still noteworthy, are cases of hyponymy, observed in seven correspondences (≈6.03%), in which an inverse process occurs. The remaining semantic relations are distributed more marginally: five instances of meronymy (≈4.31%), five instances of antonymy (≈4.31%), three instances of holonymy (≈2.58%), and a single instance of polysemy (≈0.86%).

We now turn to the qualitative analysis, beginning with the phenomenon of synonymy. In this process, the primary criterion is not perfect semantic equivalence, but enhanced transparency, concreteness, and frequency of use of the selected term. Frequently, the term employed in LS exhibits a more central or prototypical semantic profile. Within the use of synonymy as a semantic strategy in LS texts, however, several distinctive characteristics deserve attention. High semantic equivalence is, in fact, limited to a relatively small number of cases, such as:

(2) Unternehmen [9A]
Firma [9B]

(3) Brand [7A]
Feuer [7B]

In both cases proposed, the type of direct relation allows substitution without any semantic variation either on the referential or on the pragmatic level. Such substitution is possible because the terms share the same referent within the specific context. However, there are no cases of absolute total synonymy, as most lexical substitutions involve variations in register, connotation, or scope of use. Accordingly, direct synonymy constitutes a marginal category in comparison to other, more frequent forms of synonymic relation, which will be examined subsequently.

By contrast, partial synonyms (with medium/low semantic equivalence) are more common. As illustrated by the examples discussed in this study, a frequent trend is to employ non-direct synonymic formulations, in particular:

– Synonymy via morphosyntactic modification occurs when two expressions, although differing in grammatical form or syntactic structure, maintain a substantially equivalent meaning.

(4) junge Mitarbeiter [6A]
die Jüngeren [6B]

In the example (4), the synonymic relation is produced through the transformation of the noun phrase (adjectival modifier + head noun) into a nominalized form of the adjective. The expression *die Jüngeren*, although shorter, is more abstract and less specific than *junge Mitarbeiter*, as it omits crucial information on the referent [the workers]. A further issue concerns the creation of a comparative form which, in principle, requires an explicit counterpart ([the youngest] compared to whom?). In this respect, morpho-syntactic simplification does not necessarily entail semantic transparency for the reader.

– Contextual synonymy or 'functional synonymy' describes a phenomenon wherein lexical substitution relies entirely on pragmatic constraints. While the terms involved lack paradigmatic equivalence in isolation, they achieve functional identity within a discrete context of use. This classification constitutes a non-canonical synonymy, as the substitute used in LS derives its validity from the communicative goal of simplification rather than from primary semantic use. Thus, the selected term often diverges from the direct synonym found in lexicographical resources or corresponds to it only in a marginal sense.

(5) würdigen [4A]
respektieren [4B]

In Example (5), the verb *respektieren* [to respect] does not constitute a direct synonym of *würdigen* [to appreciate, reward, thank] in a strict lexicographic sense; rather, within the framework of LS, it operates as a functional simplification to enhance cognitive accessibility. The replacement mitigates the semantic density of *würdigen*, which implies nuances of recognition or gratitude, in favour of a more concrete and familiar lexeme such as *respektieren*, which in this context takes on the value of 'showing respect' or 'appreciating'.

– Structural synonymy (or synonymic paraphrase) manifests when semantic content is preserved yet reformulated through syntactic reconstruction, typically resulting in a more expansive and cognitively accessible surface structure. Such paraphrastic reformulation in LS frequently necessitates a stylistic transposition from nominal to verbal constructions (denominalization):

(6) Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit [6A]
Diese Menschen wollen dazu gehören. / Und sie wollen sich sicher fühlen. [6B]

(7) Arbeitsort und Arbeitszeit [6A]
wo und wann sie arbeiten wollen [6B]

In this instance (6), the coordinated nominal phrase *Sicherheit und Zugehörigkeit* undergoes syntactic explication, transforming into two independent finite clauses with explicit subject-verb predication. A parallel process is observed in Example (7), where nominal compounds are reformulated through expansive synonymic paraphrasing. Here, the morphological heads (*-Ort*, *-Zeit*) are transposed into interrogative adverbs (*wo*, *wann*), introducing indirect interrogative subordinate clauses – a structure that stands in tension with the prescriptive prohibition of hypotaxis in LS-*Regelwerke*. Re-

formulating abstract nouns into verbs to simplify text is questionable. Nouns carry core meaning and evoke clear mental images, which aids language acquisition (Heine 2017, 408; Koeppel 2013, 125). Conversely, verbs can increase ambiguity. Additionally, verbal structures often create longer sentences and syntactic discontinuity (like verbal brackets), ultimately increasing cognitive load rather than simplifying the parsing process.

– Metaphorical synonymy: It involves the reformulation of metaphorical expressions into more concrete units, while maintaining a certain degree of abstraction. Within this type of relation, the core denotative meaning is preserved, while there is a partial reduction in connotative or figurative nuances.

(8) in Deckung gehen [4A]
sich verstecken [4B]

The source metaphor *in Deckung gehen* [lit. to take cover or to seek shelter] evokes a complex imagery schema associated with defensive positioning, typically situated within a context of danger, urgency, vigilance, and strategic reaction. In the reformulation [4B], this construction is displaced by the more direct and concrete form *sich verstecken* [to hide oneself], which retains the denotative meaning of 'to protect oneself', but significantly attenuates the figurative connotations of the original. This semantic attrition risks reducing the text's semantic density, thereby impoverishing the narrative dimension. Consequently, it would be advantageous to empirically investigate which reformulation genuinely enhances accessibility for the target groups.

Similarly, the identification of 'regular' hypernymy and hyponymy is restricted to a marginal subset of instances within the corpus:

(9) Fassade [2A]
Wände [2B]

(10) Initiativen [3A]
neue Ideen [3B]

Example (9) illustrates a case of hypernymy, wherein the term *Fassade* [front side, facade] functions as a hypernym in contrast to *Wände* [side, wall]. A wall/side is in fact a vertical construction element that separates internal spaces or delimits the building, while a front side/facade is the external side of the building, the visible 'face' that can be considered as a specific type of side/wall. Example (10) represents a case of hyponymy, in which *neue Ideen* [new ideas] constitutes a specific instance of the broader concept expressed by *Initiativen* [initiatives], which could also be read in a synonymic key.

Likewise, for hypernymy and hyponymy there are peculiarities:

– Hypernymy via morphosyntactic modification: it is the most frequent type within the corpus. This phenomenon occurs when one meaning is included in the other, but the relation of superordination or subordination occurs through a modification of the morphosyntactic material. In the context of hypernymy, reductive mechanisms man-

ifest, specifically through the elision of nominal modifiers within compound nouns (Examples 11 and 13) or the segmental truncation of phrasal units (Example 12). Conversely, hyponymic reformulations are characterized by additive processes involving nominal modifiers, thereby engendering the formation of new compound structures (Example 14):

(11) Klimaanpassungsstrategie [2A]
Strategie [2B]

(12) Menschen in seelischer Not [4A]
Menschen in Not [4B]

(13) Giftiger Ölkäfer [10A]
Giftiger Käfer [10B]

(14) Heime [4A]
Pflegeheime [4B]

Specifically, Example (11) demonstrates the reduction of the nominal compound *Klimaanpassungsstrategie* to the simple *Strategie*. This process entails the deletion of the constituent modifiers [*Klima-*] and [*Anpassung(s)-*] thereby retaining the broad semantic reference while eliminating lexical specificity. In Example (12), the phrase *Menschen in seelischer Not* undergoes segmental reduction via the elision of the adjectival modifier *seelischer*, resulting in a construction where the syntactic complexity decreases. A parallel mechanism is observed in Example (13), where the noun phrase is preserved, yet the morphological composition of the head is simplified, inducing a hypernymic generalization (e.g., *giftiger Ölkäfer*). Conversely, Example (14) illustrates a hyponymic shift characterized by an inverse mechanism: the superordinate term *Heime* is semantically narrowed through the adjunction of the nominal modifier *Pflege-*, yielding the determinative compound *Pflegeheime*.

Current LS guidelines lack specific directives on handling hypernymic and hyponymic relations. It remains debated whether specifying concepts for clarity or generalizing them to reduce cognitive load is more effective. Ultimately, the chosen strategy should be carefully calibrated to the target audience's linguistic competence and the text's communicative goals.

– Contextual hypernymy/hyponymy. The semantic relationship of superordination and subordination is established solely within the specific context of the simplification. Consequently, his hierarchical inclusion is driven by the communicative context in the text rather than by systematic taxonomic relationship valid at a global lexical level:

(15) Teilnehmender unserer Studie [5A]
Mitarbeiter [5B]

(16) Flüssigkeit [10A]
Gift [10B]

In Example (15), the term *Mitarbeiter* is not defined lexicographically as a hypernym or synonym for *Teilnehmender unserer Studie*, as the two concepts occupy distinct semantic fields: the former broadly denotes a collaborator or employee, while the latter specifically refers to a research participant. Example (16) shows the opposite: canonically, *Gift* is not a hyponym of *Flüssigkeit*. However, in this specific text, *Flüssigkeit* is concretized as *Gift*. This substitution is heavily licensed by the surrounding co-text. Because the text already establishes the beetle as poisonous, the use of *Gift* effectively narrows the semantic scope of the generic liquid to its specific harmful function.

Regarding meronymy, LS strategies typically prioritize a constituent part of the whole, often due to informational relevance or because the selected element possesses greater perceptual salience for the reader. Conversely, holonymy is employed where an inclusive term is required to facilitate intralingual adaptation. As with the previously discussed categories, these meronymic and holonymic shifts adhere to specific, albeit non-systematic, mechanisms:

– Meronymy / holonymy via morphosyntactic modification encompasses structural reformulations wherein complex lexical units undergo de-composition or re-composition:

(17) Schülerteams [8A]
Schüler und Schülerinnen [8B]

(18) Beingelenken [10A]
Beinen [10B]

Two distinct processes are evident. In Example (18), the compound *Schülerteams* is reformulated into an explicit, coordinated meronymic structure (*Schüler und Schülerinnen*), thereby enhancing referential transparency. Here, the collective concept of 'student teams' is resolved into its constituents (students). Conversely, Example (19) shows a holonomic generalization: the compound *Beingelenken* [leg joints] is simplified by elevating the nominal modifier *Bein-* [leg] to the position of the isolated lexical head *Beinen*.

– Meronymy/contextual holonymy. The part-whole relationship is not established through inherent lexical hierarchy; rather, it is contingent upon the specific communicative context of use:

(19) Team [5A]
Mitarbeiter [5B]

The substitution of the collective term *Team* with *Mitarbeiter* concretizes the referent, shifting from an abstract entity to a more tangible designation. In this instance, the meronymic relation is not intrinsic to the lexicon, but is pragmatically established in the context of simplification: While *Mitarbeiter* denotes the constituent members of the *Team* in this specific context, the equivalence is non-systemic, as a team may theoretically comprise individuals other than employees.

– Meronymy/metaphorical holonymy. This phenomenon manifests when the part-whole relationship coincides with the concretization of a metaphorical expression:

(20) in den zweiten Winter gehen [4A]
fast schon 2 Jahre dauern [4B]

The metaphorical expression in the first instance [entering the second winter] conveys a figurative temporal concept, which is reformulated via an explicit temporal construction [lasting almost 2 years]. Consequently, the core meaning is preserved through a holonymic strategy: as the specific season (winter) functions as a constituent part of the broader temporal unit (two years).
Regarding antonymic forms, five instances were identified within the corpus. Analogously, in these cases, antonymy functions not in a strict lexical sense, but rather structurally. It manifests through expansive explicit formulations wherein the oppositional meaning remains implicit, relying on pragmatic presuppositions derived from the communicative context:

(21) die Hitze reduzieren [2A]
die Luft kühler machen [2B]

(22) schlicht unterfordern [5A]
zu einfach sein [5B]

In the first instance, the opposition is semantic-conceptual: the expression [to reduce the heat] is paraphrased as [to make the air cooler], which is thus translated into an opposite perceptual effect. It would be useful to empirically test whether the antonymic reformulation is associated with a real greater comprehensibility of the message.
In Example (22) the substitution of [to simply under-stimulate] with [to be too easy] represents a structural change: the meaning of 'understimulating' is rendered through a periphrastic formulation that makes the evaluative content explicit in more direct terms. Here too, the antonymic relation is indirect and is based on a process of pragmatic explication.
Finally, the single instance of polysemy identified (Example 23) demonstrates that semantic simplification does not invariably require lexical substitution, as it can rely on standard pragmatic inference:

(23) Opfer des Krieges [4A]
Opfer des Krieges [4B]

Although the term *Opfer* is structurally polysemous, capable of denoting both [victim] and [sacrifice], this ambiguity remains purely theoretical. Driven by standard pragmatic principles of inference, the strong semantic frame of *Krieg* [war] automatically activates the [victim] reading. Consequently, the reader is not consciously faced with a disambiguation task. This illustrates that polysemy is fully permissible in LS when the

surrounding co-text naturally and immediately restricts the meaning, making explicit reformulation unnecessary.

To sum up, corpus analysis reveals that LS reformulation balances simplification with meaning preservation, despite of some semantic loss, adapting to specific contexts rather than following a regular model. While synonymy and hypernymy are the dominant strategies, others emerge based on pragmatic or domain constraints. This distribution provides a preliminary empirical foundation for future research on LS semantic trends.

5. *Conclusion*

The conducted analysis demonstrates that semantic relations in LS texts manifest as a set of flexible strategies oriented towards communicative clarity and the reduction of cognitive load.

Within the parallel corpus of twenty texts (ten Standard German and their corresponding LS versions), the quantitative analysis identified 116 semantic correspondences. Synonymy constitutes the predominant category, accounting for 72 occurrences, hypernymy follows with 23 occurrences, while hyponymy (7), antonymy (5), meronymy (5), holonymy (3), and polysemy (1) represent significantly smaller subsets. In global terms, these data indicate that LS exhibits a predilection for processes of synonymic and hypernymic reformulation.

Qualitatively, the analysis suggests some preliminary trends regarding the structure and application of these relations. Regarding synonymy, the simplification observed within the corpus can be categorized into: synonymy via morphosyntactic modification, contextual synonymy, structural synonymy, metaphorical synonymy. Analogous patterns were observed regarding hypernymy-hyponymy and meronymy-holonymy relations, which rely on morphosyntactic modification, context-dependent simplification, and metaphorical simplification. Regarding antonymy, the analysis revealed that simplification occurs indirectly; rather than using opposing lexical pairs, the text operates on cognitive frames where meaning remains implicit within the pragmatic presuppositions of the discourse. In the only instance of polysemy, the term remained unchanged, with disambiguation functions delegated to the logical-textual context.

Methodologically, applying this analytical model cross-linguistically (e.g., to Italian *Lingua Facile*) could reveal universal simplification principles and help standardize accessibility parameters. Furthermore, while AI tools and LLMs for generating accessible texts already exist, their control over semantic content remains an open question. Understanding how these models process semantic relations is crucial for evaluating and optimizing existing tools to ensure genuine cognitive coherence.

In conclusion, this study has offered a pivotal contribution to contemporary linguistic research, by investigating how simplification processes affect the semantic relations that guarantee text coherence, thus re-establishing a theoretical foundation for LS semantics, grounded in empirical qualitative and quantitative evidence. Ultimately, simplification emerges as a highly pragmatic process of semantic mediation, constantly negotiating between referential precision and communicative accessibility. By identifying these lexical transformations, this study aims to contribute to the fields of lexical semantics and applied

translation studies, offering a structured, text-based foundation for understanding how semantic equivalence is practically managed in simplified communication.

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Appendix

Corpus – Hyperlinks (last accessed April 20, 2025)

1A: https://www.bequa-ggmbh.de/ (news of February 20, 2025)
1B: https://www.bequa-ggmbh.de/leichte-sprache/index.html (news of February 20, 2025)
2A: https://www.hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/senat/presseservice-des-senats/landespressekonferenz/klimaanpassung-in-hamburg-1027086
2B: https://www.hamburg.de/barrierefrei/leichte-sprache/neuigkeiten/2025-02-27-so-will-sich-hamburg-an-das-klima-anpassen-1028096
3A: https://www.hamburg.de/politik-und-verwaltung/behoerden/behoerde-fuer-inneres-und-sport/presseservice/pressemeldungen/hamburger-sportgala-2025-1020014
3B: https://www.hamburg.de/barrierefrei/leichte-sprache/neuigkeiten/2025-02-12-ls-hamburger-sport-gala-2025-1020282
4A: https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2023/12/231225-Weihnachtsansprache.html
4B: https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2023/12/231225-Weihnachtsansprache-Leichte-Sprache.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4
5A: https://www.certo-portal.de/artikel/muss-arbeit-spass-machen
5B: https://www.certo-portal.de/leichte-sprache/artikel/muss-arbeit-spass-machen-1
6A: https://www.certo-portal.de/artikel/hat-die-gen-z-keine-lust-zu-arbeiten
6B: https://www.certo-portal.de/leichte-sprache/artikel/wollen-junge-menschen-nicht-mehr-arbeiten
7A: https://www.ndr.de/nachrichten/mecklenburg-vorpommern/Brand-auf-der-Peenebruecke-Kleintransporter-in-Flammen,peenebruecke140.html
7B: https://www.ndr.de/fernsehen/barrierefreie_angebote/leichte_sprache/Mehr-Nachrichten-vom-20032025,nils4284.html
8A: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/thueringen/ost-thueringen/jena/plastikfreier-kaugummi-schuelerinnen-wettbewerb-jugend-gruendet-100.html (not accessible anymore, April 20, 2026)
8B: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten-leicht/leichte-sprache-schuelerinnen-wettbewerb-jugend-kaugummis-plastik-100.html
9A: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/sachsen/leipzig/leipzig-leipzig-land/kohle-ausstieg-mitteldeutsches-revier-poedelwitz-kaufen-inklusives-hofprojekt-100.html
9B: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten-leicht/leichte-sprache-sachsen-poedelwitz-inklusives-hofprojekt-100.html
10A: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/thueringen/ost-thueringen/saale-holzland/kahla-oelkaefer-giftig-spielplatz-100.html (not accessible anymore, April 20, 2026)
10B: https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten-leicht/leichte-sprache-thueringen-kahla-spielplatz-gesperrt-oelkaefer-100.html

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Arabic-English Translation of Culture-Specific Terms in Legal Documents: A Case Study of Palestine Marriage Documents

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This study tackles the Arabic–English translation of culture-specific items in legal documents. It aims to identify culture-specific elements in Arabic and English Sharia marriage documents, to assess their translation in terms of accuracy and acceptability, and to identify the translation procedures used to overcome translatability problems in legal documents. As a qualitative descriptive study, samples of translated marriage documents were collected from Palestinian sworn translators and certified translation offices. Data were collected manually and analyzed using purposive sampling. The study concludes that lack of understanding of religious concepts and their intended Arabic meanings, the culture-specific nature of some elements that are absent from the target language and culture, and the polysemy of certain items, which appear to have the same meaning while functioning differently, are the main problems encountered by Palestinian sworn translators when rendering culture-specific content in Sharia court marriage documents.

Keywords: Culture-Specific Terms, Legal Translation, Arabic-English, Marriage Documents, Translation Procedures

1. *Introduction*

Translating religious terminology in legal documents is a highly demanding task that requires advanced linguistic competence and specialized domain knowledge (Byrne 2014). Religious texts – such as the Qur'an – exhibit intricate linguistic, cultural, and doctrinal features, making it essential for translators to possess not only mastery of Arabic and English but also a deep understanding of syntax, legal conventions, and Islamic jurisprudential terminology (Khammyseh 2015). Given the sensitivity of these texts, accuracy is paramount; even minor errors may distort legal meanings or religious implications.

A notable example is the Arabic term مهر (mahr), frequently mistranslated as 'dowry'. In English, 'dowry' denotes "money and property brought into a marriage by a bride" (Blackwell 2008, 150), whereas in Islamic law mahr refers to "a mandatory amount of money paid to the bride by the groom before the wedding ceremony" (Al Aqad 2014, 114). This

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discrepancy reveals how cultural and legal divergences complicate translation and may lead to significant semantic loss.

Previous studies (El-Farahaty 2016; Ali 2016; Zidan 2015) attribute such challenges to structural and cultural differences between Arabic and English, as well as translators' limited legal training. These scholars highlight the necessity of understanding culture-bound terminology, system-specific legal concepts, and archaic expressions commonly found in Sharia-based documents. Similarly, Elhajahmed (2017) and Abdelfattah (2011) argue that many translation errors stem from the inappropriate application of translation strategies, leading to loss of coherence or inaccuracy in the target text. Thawabteh and Najjar (2014) further report that candidates for the Palestinian Ministry of Justice's accreditation exam often struggle with syntax, structure, and register, reflecting broader gaps in linguistic competence and professional preparedness.

Despite these contributions, little research has examined the specific challenges faced by sworn translators in Palestine, particularly regarding the translation of culture-specific terms in marriage documents. Existing scholarship largely focuses on university students (Elhajahmed 2017) or accreditation candidates (Thawabteh, Najjar 2014). No study, to date, has systematically addressed the accuracy and acceptability of translating culture-specific Islamic legal terminology within Palestinian Sharia marriage contracts.

Accordingly, this study aims to fill that gap by examining the linguistic, cultural, and legal complexities involved in translating these terms from Arabic into English, as produced by sworn translators in Palestine.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify culture-specific terms in Arabic and English Sharia marriage documents.
2. To assess the accuracy and acceptability of translating these terms into English.
3. To examine the translation procedures used by sworn translators to address translatability problems.

Research Questions

1. Which culture-specific terms can be identified in Arabic and English Sharia marriage documents?
2. To what extent are culture-specific terms translated accurately and acceptably in Sharia marriage documents?
3. How are translation procedures used to overcome translatability problems?

2. *Literature Review*

Legal discourse significantly differs from ordinary language, as it is characterized by higher levels of technicality, specialization, and formulaicity (Tiersma 2000). As Prieto Ramos and Cerutti (2022, 22) note, the law's broad scope – spanning numerous subfields and conceptual networks that regulate almost every aspect of human behavior – contributes to the complexity of legal texts. This complexity becomes more pronounced in translation, especially between Arabic and English, which belong to distinct linguistic families and

operate within fundamentally different cultural and legal traditions. Translating Arabic legal documents – particularly Sharia court records – into English is therefore exceptionally challenging (Altarabin, Al-Hajjar 2022). With the growing demand for such translations, proficiency in Islamic legal terminology has become increasingly essential, particularly in contexts where Sharia courts operate among Muslim communities outside Muslim-majority countries.

Legal language employs precise terminology and distinctive stylistic features that enable efficient communication within the legal profession (Maaß, Rink 2021). Official legal translation is generally performed as sworn translation, carried out by translators certified by state authorities (Mayoral 2000). In Palestine, Article 4 of the Ordinary Courts Formation Code No. 5/2001 designates Arabic as the official language of the courts; therefore, a sworn translator must be appointed when a party does not understand Arabic. The Ministry of Justice administers an annual accreditation exam under the Translation and Translator Law No. 15/1995, with particular emphasis on Arabic-English translation due to English being the most widely used foreign language in the country (Thawabteh, Najjar 2014).

A significant body of research has explored the challenges of Arabic-English legal translation (Mahraj, Hdouch 2020; Alwazna 2019; Agliz 2015; Ali 2016). These studies emphasize obstacles such as lexical ambiguity, archaic or Latin expressions, abstract terminology, culture-specific concepts, and system-bound terms, in addition to the common use of doublets and triplets (El-Farahaty 2016). Addressing these challenges requires translators to possess not only strong linguistic skills but also deep familiarity with the cultural and legal systems underlying both languages. Several scholars advocate for standardizing legal terminology, expanding specialized legal dictionaries, and improving translator training programs.

In the Palestinian context, studies have examined the challenges faced by translation students and professionals across lexical, grammatical, and cultural dimensions (Thawabteh, Shehab 2017; Elhajahmed 2017; Al Aqad 2014; 2017; Amer 2010; El Haj Ahmed 2009). Research has also addressed translation quality through the lens of equivalence (Thawabteh 2014). However, no study has systematically analyzed the translation of culture-specific terminology in Sharia marriage contracts, despite their frequent use in courts and in sworn translation practices.

This gap highlights the significance of the present study, which investigates the challenges sworn translators face when rendering culture-specific Islamic legal terminology in Palestinian Sharia marriage documents into English and evaluates the strategies they employ to address these challenges.

3. *Methodology*

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at (1) identifying culture-specific terms in Arabic and English Sharia marriage documents, (2) evaluating the accuracy and acceptability of their English translations, and (3) determining the translation procedures used to address translatability problems. Data were collected manually from 20 sworn translators who provide translation services for Sharia courts either in their personal

capacity as certified translators or as employees of licensed translation offices across various Palestinian cities. These translators were selected because they are officially accredited by the relevant authorities and because they are responsible for producing English translations of Sharia court documents when required. The corpus consists of Arabic-to-English translations of Sharia marriage contracts, selected because the study specifically focuses on the translation of culture-specific terminology within this document type. Each of the twenty marriage contracts was examined in full, and all instances of culture-specific terms were identified, extracted, and analyzed. Purposive sampling was employed to collect and analyze data representing culture-specific terms in both the source and target texts (Creswell 2009; Saldanha, O'Brien 2014; Kumar 2011). Purposive sampling enables researchers to select texts that exhibit predetermined characteristics, such as Islamic legal terminology commonly used in Sharia marriage documents. As Saldanha and O'Brien (2014, 105) note, qualitative textual analysis may involve selecting coherent passages or texts that illustrate specific linguistic features rather than relying on random sampling. The selected marriage documents possess the key features required for this investigation, namely the consistent use of Islamic legal and culture-bound terminology. Consequently, the collected data provide sufficient evidence for examining the translation of culture-specific terms within Palestinian Sharia court marriage contracts. Consistent with Lopez and Whitehead's (2013) recommendations for qualitative research, a non-probability sampling approach was used because the selected documents share common characteristics relevant to the research objectives. According to Krippendorff (2004), a sample is considered representative in qualitative content analysis if its findings are consistent with what would be expected from the entire population. Data saturation was achieved when the analysis of additional documents ceased to yield new culture-specific terms or translation patterns (McGregor 2018). This was expected, as all Sharia marriage documents in Palestine follow a standardized structure, wording, and set of legal terminologies. Only personal information – such as names, identification numbers, occupations, and dates of birth – varies between documents. Therefore, collecting further translated contracts would not have added new data relevant to the aims of this study. All Arabic terms were transliterated according to the ALA-LC (American Library Association–Library of Congress) system to ensure consistency and accuracy.

4. *Findings and Discussion*

This study analyzes twenty Arabic-to-English translated marriage contracts collected from licensed translation offices and sworn translators accredited by the Palestinian Ministry of Justice. These samples were obtained from translators working across multiple Palestinian cities, including Tulkarm, Jenin, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus.

The analysis proceeds by identifying culture-specific marriage terms, comparing their translational variations across the twenty contracts, and examining each translation using semantic and translation-theory frameworks to assess accuracy, ambiguity, and procedural choices. The discussion below addresses each term individually.

The term *al-maḥkamah al-sharʿīyah* المحكمة الشرعية is translated by the twenty translators as follows:

Table 1 - *Translation of* المحكمة الشرعية *al-maḥkamah al-sharʿīya*

English Translation	*Document No.*
Islamic religious court	20
Shari'a court	3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
Legal shari'a court	1, 5
Shri'a canonical court	7
Religious court	2, 11
Legal court	19

al-maḥkamah al-sharʿīya is translated as 'shar'ia Court'. This term is commonly used to denote official, state-run courts that adjudicate matters of Islamic personal status, particularly those related to family and marriage. Scholars such as Welchman (2000; 2007) consistently adopt this translation, thereby establishing it as the standard rendering in English-language legal and socio-legal scholarship.

As shown above, محكمة شرعية is translated as 'shar'ia Court' by most Palestinian sworn translators. Since *sharia* is an established lexical item in English dictionaries, *sharʿīyah* constitutes a suitable and acceptable equivalent. Nevertheless, in Document No. 7, the equivalent 'Shar'i canonical court' is used. The adjective 'canonical' refers specifically to canon law, which is rooted in papal authority and Christian ecclesiastical tradition. Consequently, combining *sharʿīyah*, which is intrinsically associated with Islam, with 'canonical', which is associated with Christianity, is conceptually inaccurate.

Conversely, rendering *sharʿīyah court* as a 'religious court' is also imprecise. In the Palestinian context, a religious court may refer to Samaritan courts for the Samaritan community in Nablus, or to Islamic or Christian courts. Therefore, it is preferable to refer to *sharʿīyah* courts explicitly by using terms such as *sharʿīyah* courts, Islamic religious courts, or Islamic courts, which avoid ambiguity and ensure terminological precision.

In both translations 'Islamic religious court' and 'Shar'i canonical court' the procedure of 'modulation' is employed. This procedure falls under the oblique translation strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995).

Table 2 - *Translation of mawāniʿ* موانع

English Translation	*Document No.*
Impediments	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18
Obstacles	13

The term *mawāniʿ* (الموانع) denotes circumstances that prohibit the conclusion of a valid marriage, such as foster kinship through breastfeeding, religious incompatibility, or being in a state of *iḥrām* during *ḥajj* or *ʿumrah* (Kitāb *al-Fiqh al-Muyassar* 2004). These imped-

iments are explicitly outlined in the Qurʾān in Sūrat al-Nisāʾ (4:23), which enumerates prohibited degrees of kinship and affinity (Yusuf Ali 1989, 186).

The scope of *mawāniʿ* further includes post-divorce restrictions, whereby a woman divorced three times may not remarry her former husband without an intervening valid marriage. It also encompasses religious constraints: a Muslim man may not marry a woman outside the divinely revealed religions, and a Muslim woman is prohibited from marrying any non-Muslim man (Salem 2003, 76–94; Imam 1996, 98–102).

Mawāniʿ is typically rendered as 'legal impediments to marriage' or 'impediments', aligning Islamic family law with comparative legal terminology (Pearl, Menski 1998; Welchman 2000). However, this rendering risks obscuring the *Sharīʿah*-based nature of these restrictions. More precise equivalents include '*Sharīʿah* impediments' or 'Islamic impediments to marriage'.

Since both 'impediments' and 'obstacles' convey the notion of a preventing cause, they are acceptable equivalents for *al-māniʿ* (Saleh 2011). Nevertheless, inconsistency is observed in the translation of this term across the same documents, where it is rendered differently in identical contexts. The use of 'contraindication', a term specific to medical discourse, is therefore inappropriate in the marriage context.

By contrast, translating *khulūw al-mawāniʿ* (خلو الموانع) as 'eligibility' accurately reflects the absence of prohibitive factors and appears consistently in several documents. This rendering exemplifies 'adaptation' as defined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), whereby interpretive understanding facilitates the selection of a concise and functionally equivalent target-language term.

Table 3 - *Translation of* / *mawāniʿ* / موانع *in document no.12*

Arabic text	*English translation*
مستندات تحقيق السن وعدم الموانع	Documents establish age and no-impediments
حجة خلو موانع للزوجة	Wife's free of contraindication document

In Islamic law (*sharīʿah*), *al-mahr* is defined as the financial obligation that a husband must provide to his wife as an essential component of the marriage contract. It is also referred to as *ṣadāq*, a term that signifies sincerity and genuine intent underlying the marital bond. Other synonymous terms include *mahr* (مهر), *niḥlah* (نحلة), and *ʿuqr* (عقر). Linguistically, *ṣadāq* (صداق) derives from *ṣidq* (صدق), denoting truthfulness and honesty as opposed to deception (Kitāb al-Fiqh al-Muyassar 2004).

According to Salem (2003, 167–168), *al-mahr* is classified into two types: *al-muʿajjal* [immediate] and *al-muʾajjal* [deferred]. The former is payable to the wife before the consummation of marriage, and she retains the right to delay consummation until receipt. The latter may be deferred until after consummation, subject to mutual agreement between the spouses, particularly in cases where the husband faces financial constraints or other valid reasons.

In Palestinian marriage contracts, *al-mahr* appears explicitly in these two forms: *al-mahr al-muʿajjal* and *al-mahr al-muʾajjal* (المهر المعجّل، المهر المؤجّل). In the examined documents, *mahr* is consistently translated as 'dowry'. However, in English legal and cultural usage,

'dowry' refers to the money or property brought by the bride into the marriage, rather than a payment made by the husband (Blackwell 2008), rendering this translation inaccurate.

The Qurʾān employs several terms to denote the concept of *mahr*, including *ajr* (أجر) (al-Māʾidah: 5), *farīḍah* (فريضة) (al-Baqarah: 236), and *ṣadāq* (صداق) (al-Nisāʾ: 4). These are commonly translated as 'bride-gift', 'fixed bride-gift', and 'dower', respectively (Abdel Haleem 2010). By contrast, Al-Khudrawi (2004) and Alkhuli (1990) render them as 'dower' and 'bridal money'. The term 'dower', however, is problematic, as it denotes a widow's legal entitlement to a life estate in her deceased husband's property under Western legal traditions (Blackwell 2008). Consequently, both 'dowry' and 'dower' should be avoided as translations of *mahr*.

A more appropriate strategy is to translate *mahr* as 'bridal money' or 'bride-gift'. Alternatively, the term may be transliterated as *mahr* and supplemented with an explanatory gloss, such as: *mahr*: the financial amount that the husband is obliged to give to his wife as part of the marriage contract, signifying his sincere intention to marry.

The terms *al-muʿajjal* (المعجّل) and *al-muʾajjal* (المؤجّل) denote the two components of *mahr* in Islamic marriage contracts. Western scholarship commonly translates them as 'prompt (or immediate) dower' and 'deferred dower', respectively. Nevertheless, scholars such as Thompson and Yunus (2007) and Ali (2008) emphasize that *mahr* should be understood as a contractual financial obligation owed exclusively to the wife and caution against equating it with 'dowry', due to the latter's distinct cultural and legal connotations in English.

Table 4 - *Translation of / khulū mawāniʿ* / خلو موانع

Arabic text	*English translation*	*Document No*
عدم الموانع	Eligibility	4, 7, 9, 10, 20

The term *al-muʿajjal* (المعجّل) denotes the portion of the *mahr* that is payable prior to its due time. In Islamic marriage contracts, *mahr* is customarily expected before the consummation of the marriage or at the marriage contract session itself; accordingly, this portion may be characterized as an advance payment. While 'immediate' and 'prompt' are generally acceptable translations, they do not explicitly specify the temporal requirement that payment occur before consummation or at the time of contract conclusion. To convey the intended legal and cultural meaning of *al-muʿajjal* accurately, it is therefore preferable to employ a translation that clearly indicates this timing.

By contrast, 'down-payment' is an inappropriate equivalent, as it implies a commercial transaction and frames marriage as a purchase arrangement. Such an interpretation is incompatible with the legal and ethical foundations of Islamic marriage and risks objectifying the woman as an exchanged commodity. Consequently, this option should be excluded from the range of acceptable translations. According to Al-Khudrawi (2004, 292), *al-muʿajjal* may be rendered as 'prompt', while Alkhuli (1990, 107) suggests 'prompt' or 'hastened' as possible equivalents.

Table 5 - *Translation of* / المعجل / *al-mu'ajjal* /

English translation	*Document No.*
Advanced	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18
Immediate	5, 11
Paid dowry	16, 19
Prompt amount	9
Down-payment	10, 20

The terms 'deferred', 'postponed', and 'delayed' may be used interchangeably to render *al-muʾajjal* (المؤجّل). According to Saleh (2011, 151), 'deferred dower' refers to the portion of the *mahr* that the groom undertakes to pay to his wife at a later stage, either upon separation or at the wife's request. Similarly, Al-Khudrawi (2004) and Alkhuli (1990) both interpret *al-muʾajjal* as meaning 'deferred'.

All the examined translations adopt a direct translation strategy, commonly referred to as calque. While this approach may successfully convey the surface meaning of *al-muʾajjal* and *al-muʾajjal* (المعجّل والمؤجّل), it can sound unnatural to readers unfamiliar with the internal classifications of *mahr* in Islamic law. This is comparable to the Arabic calque ناطحات السحاب for 'skyscrapers', which preserves semantic transparency but may still require cultural familiarity. More importantly, although calque captures the temporal distinction between the two components, it fails to adequately represent the culturally embedded concept of *mahr* itself. In employing this procedure, translators appear to have prioritized formal correspondence without sufficient consideration of the accuracy and acceptability of the proposed equivalents in the target legal and cultural context.

Table 6 - *Translation of* المؤجل *al-muʾajjal*

English translation	*Document No.*
Deferred	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
Postponed	8
Delayed	11, 13

Islamic law permits *wikālah* [agency in marriage], allowing an individual to appoint a proxy (*wakīl*) to conclude the marriage contract on their behalf (Imam 1996). The proxy may be male or female and is restricted to performing the contractual formula; they are neither permitted to delegate this authority nor responsible for fulfilling contractual obligations such as demanding or receiving *mahr* or alimony. Valid appointment requires legal adulthood, sound mind, reputable character, and compliance with Islamic legal norms.

In marriage contracts, *al-wakīl* (الوكيل), as in *qāla wakīlu al-zawjah* (قال وكيل الزوجة), is commonly translated as 'proxy', 'representative', or 'agent'. These equivalents are appropriate insofar as they denote authorized representation. By contrast, 'guardian' is inaccurate, as it implies authority over minors or legally incompetent persons (Merriam-Webster), and

'attorney' is misleading because it refers primarily to legal professionals operating within court systems. Western legal scholarship therefore favors 'proxy' or 'marriage agent' when discussing agency in Islamic marriage contracts (Pearl, Menski 1998; Nasir 2009).

Although *wakīl* appears in Qurʾānic contexts to denote one entrusted with managing affairs (e.g., al-Anʿām: 107; Ibn Kathīr 2000), its function in marriage contracts is narrower and distinct from that of a legal attorney. Either spouse may appoint a *wakīl*, commonly a close male relative in the case of the bride. Given these functional constraints, 'representative' offers the most accurate and context-sensitive translation.

Translators have employed 'modulation' (Vinay, Darbelnet 1995) to render this culture-specific term. While effective in some instances, this strategy proves less successful for *al-wakīl* when functional and cultural distinctions are insufficiently reflected.

Table 7 - *Translation of al-wakīl* الوكيل

English translation	*Document No.*
Proxy	2, 4, 5, 11, 16
Attorney	9
Agent	1
Guardian	7, 12, 18, 19
Representative	3, 6, 10, 13, 15, 17, 20

Wilāyah denotes legal authority in Islamic law to oversee the affairs of others and takes two principal forms: *wilāyah khāṣṣah* (specific authority), exercised over individuals such as minors or persons of unsound mind, including a father's authority in arranging his daughter's marriage; and *wilāyah ʿāmmah* (public authority), which entails general decision-making powers vested in judges and rulers (Imam 1996, 104–105).

Wilāyah is a prerequisite for the validity of marriage contracts. The *walī* (الولي) must be an adult male of sound mind and upright character, and may include the woman's father, grandfather, brothers, their sons, or paternal uncles and their sons (Salem 2003, 143; Kitāb al-Fiqh al-Muyassar 2004). Although *walī* has multiple meanings, including *walī al-amr* (Saleh 2011, 256), in marriage contracts it refers specifically to guardianship over the woman.

Western Islamic legal scholarship typically translates *al-walī* as 'marriage guardian', indicating the person whose consent is required for the marriage, with the scope of this authority varying across the Islamic schools of law (Ali 2008; Nasir 2009). In the analyzed marriage contracts, *al-walī* is rendered as 'custodian' or 'proxy', both of which are inaccurate: 'custodian' relates to property rather than persons, while 'proxy' denotes representation rather than protection. The most appropriate equivalent is 'guardian' or 'protector', reflecting the *walī*'s role in safeguarding the woman's rights (Al-Khudrawi 2004; Alkhuli 1990). As this concept lacks a direct counterpart in the target legal system, 'adaptation' – an oblique translation strategy (Vinay, Darbelnet 1995) – is the most suitable procedure.

Table 8 - *Translation of al-walī* الولي

English translation	*Document No.*
Proxy	16
Custodian	5, 13
Guardian	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20

The formula *al-ījāb wa al-qubūl* (الإيجاب والقبول) constitutes the foundational requirement for the validity of Islamic marriage contracts. *Al-ījāb* denotes the contractual offer made by one of the parties or their proxy, while *al-qubūl* refers to the corresponding acceptance by the other party (Salem 2003, 132). In the analyzed corpus, contracts numbered (4, 6, 9, 15, and 20) employ the phrase *bi-ījābin wa qubūlin sharʿiyyayn*.

In the English translations, *ījāb wa qubūl* is rendered as 'affirmation and acceptance'. However, 'affirmation' fails to convey the performative legal function of *al-ījāb*, which Saleh (2011, 92) defines as an 'offer' or 'proposition', typically articulated by the woman's guardian. Although Alkhuli (1990, 14) associates *al-ījāb* with acceptance, the contractual context favors 'offer'. Accordingly, 'offer and acceptance' provides a more accurate and legally aligned rendering. The translations rely on direct translation (Vinay, Darbelnet 1995), a strategy that preserves form but inadequately represents the functional meaning of *ījāb wa qubūl* in marriage contracts.

Table 9 - *Translation of maʾdhūn* المأذون

English translation	*Document No.*
The Marriage officer	3, 6, 14, 15, 17
The Marriage contract officer	18
The Marriage officer (mazoon)	1, 12
The Registrar authorized to perform marriage	10
The Official authorized to perform marriage	20
Marriage officiating officer (mazoun)	5
The Marriage solemnizer	2
The Marriage registrar	16
Mazoun of marriage contracts	4
The Marriage officiating officer	7
Official-in charge of marriage	8
Legal Marriage official	9
The marriage official	11
Licensed marriage contract initiator (ma'zoun)	13
An authorized marriage officer	19

The exclusively authorized official responsible for documenting and registering marriage contracts, divorces, and certificates of return is known as the *maʾdhūn* (مأذون), or authorized registrar. This designation is typically conferred either by a governing authority, such as a

ruler or court, or by the contracting parties themselves. The terms 'religious official' and 'marriage registrar' are often used interchangeably to refer to this role, which is sometimes described as the 'notary of marriage and divorce'. Although the presence of a *maʾdhūn* is not a formal requirement for the validity of marriage contracts, it has become essential for safeguarding the rights of the parties, particularly in cases where the existence of the marriage or its conditions, obligations, and consequences are disputed (Mohammad 2019, 1647–1653).

In the Palestinian and broader Middle Eastern context, *maʾdhūn* is commonly translated as 'marriage registrar' or 'authorized marriage registrar'. These renderings capture both the official's legal authority to register marriages and divorces and his religious function as an officiant. Studies such as Musawah (2019) and Welchman (2007) favor 'registrar' over 'officiant', as it more accurately reflects the *maʾdhūn*'s institutional role within the judicial system. Similarly, Saleh (2011) and Alkhuli (1990) translate *maʾdhūn* as 'justice of the peace', 'registrar', or 'authorized registrar', while Al-Khudrawi (2004, 22) renders *al-maʾdhūn al-sharʿī* as 'the authorized registrar who performs marriage ceremonies'.

Across the analyzed translations, various equivalents are used to denote *maʾdhūn*, including 'marriage officer', 'marriage contract officer', 'marriage official', 'marriage solemnizer', and 'marriage registrar'. Structurally, these translations employ noun phrases of varying complexity, such as determiner + noun ('the marriage officer'), noun + prepositional phrase ('official in charge of marriage'), or adjective + compound noun ('legal marriage official'). Despite these formal variations, all equivalents successfully convey the functional role of an individual authorized to officiate and document marriage contracts in the presence of witnesses.

From a translation-theoretical perspective, these renderings exemplify 'transposition' as defined by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995), whereby the Arabic noun *maʾdhūn* is translated through shifts in grammatical structure. As an oblique translation strategy, transposition proves effective in conveying the meaning of *maʾdhūn*, in contrast to its limited success in rendering other culture-specific terms such as *al-muʾajjal*.

The term '*uzūbah* denotes the state of being unmarried and appears in documents 5, 13, 17, 18, and 19. In documents 5, 13, and 17, it is translated as 'celibacy', whereas documents 18 and 19 render it as 'bachelorship' and 'bachelorhood', respectively.

However, 'celibacy' generally refers to the voluntary decision to refrain from marriage and sexual relations, often for religious reasons, such as among clergy. This meaning does not align with the intended definition of the Arabic term *shahādat* '*uzūbah* (شهادة عزوبة), which serves as a certificate confirming that an individual is not married. Therefore, 'bachelorhood certificate' is a more accurate equivalent.

It is noteworthy that neither '*uzūbah* nor *aʿzab* (عزوبة / اعزب) are explicitly mentioned in the Qurʾān. Instead, the term *bikr* (بكر) is used to denote an unmarried woman who has never married, commonly translated as 'virgin' (e.g., Qurʾān, verse 5 of the prohibition chapter). Translating '*uzūbah* as 'celibacy' exemplifies a literal translation strategy, following Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) procedure, but it does so at the expense of accuracy in conveying the legal and cultural meaning.

Table 10 - *Meaning perception in Arabic-English Islamic dictionaries and legal Islamic studies*

Arabic Term	*English Translation*	*Explanation*	*Suggested translation*
محكمة شرعية *maḥkamah shar'īyah*	Sharia Court / Islamic Court	A judicial body that applies Islamic legal rulings, especially on personal status matters like marriage and inheritance (Ibn Qudamah, 1997; Al-Zuhayli, 2007)	Sharia court+ explanation (Personal status affairs court for Muslims).
عزوبة ('Uzūbah)	Celibacy	The state of not being married; addressed in fiqh regarding social ethics and rulings. (Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs (1983–2007); Sabiq, 2005).	bachelorhood
مهر (Mahr)	Dowry, dower Al-Khudrawi (2004)	The obligatory gift from the groom to the bride, required for a valid Islamic marriage (Sabiq, 2005).	Mahr+gloss (the money that a husband is obliged to pay for his wife as part of a marriage contract.
ولي (Walī)	Guardian (of the bride) Al-Khudrawi (2004, 539) and Alkhuli (1990, 117)	A male relative responsible for authorizing the marriage on the bride's behalf (Al-Zuhayli, 2007).	Protector
موانع (Mawāni')	eligibility Saleh (2011), obstacle, legal impediments.	Factors that invalidate or prohibit a marriage in Islamic law, such as kinship, religion, or legal waiting periods (Al-Zuhayli, 2007; Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs 1983–2007).	*mawāni' al-zawāj (marriage impediments in Islamic law, such as consanguinity, religious difference, or other Sharia-based prohibitions).*
وكيل (Wakīl)	Attorney, Proxy Al-Khudrawi (2004) Imam (1996)	A person authorized by the bride or groom to conclude the marriage contract on their behalf (Ibn Qudamah, 1997; Sabiq, 2005).	representative

Arabic Term	*English Translation*	*Explanation*	*Suggested translation*
مأذون (Ma'dhūn)	Marriage Registrar	A legally recognized official who formalizes and documents marriage contracts in contemporary Islamic legal systems (Al-Zuhayli, 2007).	Ma'dhūn (Muslim marriage officiating and registrar officer)
المعجل *al-muʿajjal*	Down payment, prompt	The part of the dowry paid at the time of marriage contract (Al-Marghīnānī (1997) and Al-Kāsānī (2005).	*al-mahr al-muʿajjal: the portion of the obligatory bridal gift paid at the time of contract, serving as both a symbol of marital commitment and a financial obligation in Islamic law.*
المؤجل al-muʾajjal	Deferred Dowry	The part of the dowry postponed, usually until divorce or the husband's death (Sābiq (2005) and Ibn ʿĀbidīn (1994)	*al-mahr al-muʾakhkhar: the deferred portion of the bridal gift contractually owed to the wife, typically payable any time during her marriage hood, upon divorce or the husband's death, serving as post-marital financial protection.*
الايجاب *Al-ījāb*	Affirmation and acceptance	jāb wa-qabūl: the formal and ritualized verbal exchange of offer and acceptance constituting the conclusion of the Islamic marriage contract, typically performed in a single sitting before witnesses (Al-Nawawī (2005).	Offer and acceptance

Translating Arabic Islamic legal terminology into English involves both semantic loss and gain due to the deep embedding of these terms in religious, cultural, and juridical contexts. Terms such as *maḥkamah sharʿīyah* (محكمة شرعية), commonly translated as 'Sharia court', may convey unintended meanings in non-Muslim contexts and obscure its concrete func-

tion as a personal status court in most Muslim jurisdictions. A more precise rendering is 'Islamic personal status court', accompanied by a gloss explaining its jurisdiction over marital, family, and inheritance matters.

Similarly, '*uzūbah* (عزوبة) is often rendered as 'celibacy', implying voluntary religious abstinence, whereas in Islamic legal texts it simply denotes unmarried status. A more accurate translation is 'bachelorhood' or 'singlehood', reflecting its neutral, descriptive function.

The term *mahr* (مهر) is frequently mistranslated as 'dowry', which in Western usage refers to payments from the bride's family, contrary to Islamic custom where the groom provides a financial gift to the bride. Retaining the term with an explanatory gloss – *mahr: obligatory marital gift from groom to bride* – preserves its legal and cultural significance as a contractual safeguard for the wife.

Walī (ولي), often translated as 'guardian', does not fully convey the legal function of the *walī* in marriage contracts. A more precise translation is 'woman's representative and rights protector in Muslim marriage contracts', highlighting both protective and contractual responsibilities.

The term *mawāniʿ* (موانع), commonly rendered as 'eligibility', 'legal impediments', or 'marital prohibitions', refers to specific barriers – such as consanguinity, marital status, or religion – that render a marriage invalid. Traditional translations obscure the nuanced distinctions between permanent and temporary impediments. Retaining the term in transliteration with a gloss (e.g., *mawāniʿ al-zawāj*: marriage impediments under Islamic law) ensures doctrinal precision for comparative family law research.

Wakīl (وكيل) is typically translated as 'agent' or 'proxy', yet these terms fail to capture the religious and contractual dimensions of the role. A precise translation is 'authorized legal representative in Islamic marriage contracts, typically appointed to conclude the contract on behalf of the bride', reflecting the dual function of proxy and representative within Islamic matrimonial practice.

Maʾdhūn (مأذون), rendered as 'marriage registrar', situates the term in contemporary administrative contexts but obscures its religious-legal origin. In practice, the *maʾdhūn* is an officially authorized Islamic law-trained officiant whose role ensures compliance with Sharia. A more accurate rendering is *maʾdhūn:* 'officially authorized Islamic marriage contractor under Sharia, ensuring both legal and religious validity', reflecting its hybrid civil-religious character.

The terms *al-mahr al-muʿajjal* and *al-mahr al-muʾajjal* denote the portions of the mahr paid immediately at the marriage contract or deferred to divorce, death, or the wife's request. Traditional translations 'immediate dowry' and 'deferred dowry' focus on timing while neglecting the religious and economic significance. The recommended translations are:

- *Al-mahr al-muʿajjal*: the portion of the obligatory bridal gift paid at the time of contract, symbolizing marital commitment and financial obligation.
- *Al-mahr al-muʾajjal*: the deferred portion of the bridal gift contractually due, payable during marriage, on divorce, or upon the husband's death, serving as post-marital economic security (Sābiq 2005; Ibn ʿĀbidīn 1994).

Finally, *ījāb wa qubūl* (الإيجاب والقبول) is conventionally translated as 'affirmation and acceptance'. While technically correct, this translation misses the ritualized, synchronous, and

formulaic nature of the exchange in Islamic legal practice, which must occur verbally in a single session with witnesses. The recommended translation, 'offer and acceptance', aligns with classical fiqh texts (Al-Nawawī 2005) that treat these elements as integral to contract validity rather than procedural phases.

5. *Implications and Recommendations*

This study offers important insights for technical translation in general and for the translation of legal *sharīʿah* documents in particular. The findings propose refined translation equivalents that can serve as practical references for sworn translators responsible for rendering marriage documents into English. These suggested translations reflect a shift from literal correspondence to context-sensitive, culturally grounded translation practices.

By preserving key Arabic terminology through transliteration and supporting it with explanatory glosses, the study minimizes semantic distortion and maintains the integrity of Islamic legal discourse. This approach helps bridge conceptual gaps between Islamic jurisprudence and Western legal frameworks, enhancing both accuracy and cross-cultural intelligibility. The study thus contributes to improving translation quality in this domain by guiding translators in choosing appropriate equivalents and avoiding common pitfalls identified in Arabic-English legal translation.

Furthermore, this research addresses a gap in the literature by examining the translation of culture-specific terminology in Sharia court marriage documents in Palestine. It also highlights issues relevant to the development of human and machine translation systems specialized in religious-legal documents, suggesting that improved translation models must recognize cultural nuance rather than relying solely on surface-level equivalence.

Since this study focuses exclusively on marriage documents, further research is recommended to explore culture-specific terms in other Sharia court documents, such as divorce, custody, guardianship, maintenance, and parentage. Such investigations would broaden the understanding of the translatability of Islamic legal terminology and its impact on readers' comprehension across different legal contexts.

6. *Conclusion*

This study aimed to identify culture-specific terms in Arabic and English Sharia marriage documents, assess the accuracy and acceptability of their translations, and determine the translation procedures applied to resolve translatability challenges.

In response to the first question, it is found that culture-specific terms in marriage documents are: المحكمة الشرعية (al-maḥkamah al-sharʿīya), خلو الموانع (khulū mawāniʿ), المهر (al-mahr), المعجل (*al-muʿajjal / al-muʾajjal* المؤجل, الوكيل (*al-wakīl*), الولي (*al-walī*), الايجاب (*al-ījāb*), مأذون (*maʾdhūn*), and عزوبة (*ʿuzūbah*).

Concerning the second question, the translations of *al-muʿajjal, al-muʾajjal, al-walī, al-mawāniʿ,* and *al-sharʿīyah* were generally accurate across most documents. Approximately half of the translators successfully translated *al-wakīl,* while the remaining half

provided inaccurate equivalents. The term *maʾdhūn* was translated correctly whenever descriptive equivalents were used. However, mahr and *ījāb* were mistranslated in all twenty documents, demonstrating a consistent pattern of inaccuracy with these two culturally and legally loaded terms.

For the third question, the translators employed several translation procedures based on Vinay and Darbelnet's (1995) model, including borrowing, modulation, adaptation, literal translation, transposition, and calque. Literal translation and adaptation were the most frequently used procedures. Modulation and borrowing proved effective in most cases, while adaptation, literal translation, and transposition yielded mixed results. Calque was accurate in many instances but depended heavily on the clarity of the underlying Arabic term.

Overall, the findings underscore the need for specialized training in Islamic legal terminology, particularly for translators working with marriage documents, to ensure the accuracy, consistency, and cultural integrity of Arabic-English legal translations.

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The Visual in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*. Revisiting Orientalism and Syncretism through a Multimodal and Literary Criticism Perspective

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In the critical context of renewed interest in the works of Rudyard Kipling by key scholars in postcolonial studies, this article investigates the role of the illustrations and textually mediated images in the representation of racial relations in *Kim* (1901). It addresses the illustrations in the first Macmillan edition and the descriptions of the Wheel of Life that play such an important role in Kipling's characterisation of Indians, their relations to English characters and Kipling's own position with reference to Eastern forms of art. In doing so, it adopts an interdisciplinary methodology that includes multimodality, functional linguistics, cultural and postcolonial studies theories and literary criticism. It argues that racial representations in *Kim* remain unresolved between Orientalism and syncretism; the product of a complex writer divided between his political views that placed East and West as separate and irreconcilable entities and an imaginative force that overcame racial and geographical boundaries.

Keywords: Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, Multimodality, Orientalism, The Visual

1. *Introduction*

Undoubtedly, interest in colonial fiction has waned following the demise of the British Empire, the development of postcolonial studies and, more recently, of critical movements of cultural decolonisation. And yet, Kipling's works endure; though they continue to be heavily criticised for their common racist views of their time, they remain among the most popular and best loved pieces of literature in English. The case of "If" (1910) is exemplary of this contradiction; voted in a BBC poll of 1996 as the nation's favourite poem, in 2008, its text was defaced by Manchester University students because of Kipling's reputation as a writer who expressed racist views[1].

The Nobel prize-winning novel *Kim* (1901) presents a similar case. Janet Montefiore (2007, 1) describes the critical debate around this work as a metaphorical battlefield

[1] Details on BBC poll can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If%E2%80%94 (last accessed June 15, 2026). On Manchester University students' action, see https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-44884913 (last accessed June 15, 2026).

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between, on the one hand, those according to whom Kipling's works are mere racist representations of Indians and, on the other, those who contradict this view by highlighting Kipling's delight in cultural differences. The recent revival of interest in this novel by postcolonial critics has contributed an original critical perspective that has interrupted this impasse characterised by polarised responses:

> Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) [...] renewed interest in Kipling as a representative Orientalist, [...] Homi Bhabha's essays, collected in *The Location of Culture* (1994), opened the way to reading Kipling's texts as sites of colonial ambivalence and hybridity. (Rooney, Nagai 2010, 1; 2)

Bhabha's work, with its displacement of a logic of racial binaries and focus on hybrid and liminal spaces and identities, has proved of key importance in re-orienting attention on Kipling's work and paving the way for original critical trajectories that investigate issues of representation of race and racial relations. Also significant in this respect is the contribution of Abdul JanMohamed (1985) who singles out *Kim* as one of the most interesting attempts to overcome racial dichotomies (74), opening up the possibility of reading this work as an exploration of "racial barriers and syncretic possibility" (77).

This study provides a contribution to this still ongoing debate by focussing attention on the visual aspects of *Kim*. Though marginal in Kipling's criticism, commentators and writers have not failed to note the visual, painterly and even filmic style of Kipling's writing[2]. The pervasiveness of images and forms of visualisations in *Kim* confirm their views. References to the visual here include the illustrations interspersed at all stages of the narrative in the original and in some of its later editions, as well as repeated instances of textual mediated imagery. As concerns the latter, *Kim* includes descriptions of religious paintings, sculptures and photographs kept in the Museum of Lahore, maps of cities and holy places that Kim must remember and learn to reproduce accurately for the Great Game. Particularly relevant for this study are references to drawings of the Wheel of Life made by the Teshoo Lama that have the peculiarity of being semiotically hybrid; they are in fact described as "half written and half drawn"[3] artifacts that are difficult to categorise by Western standards because they fall between two semiotic modes: the visual and the linguistic.

By addressing the pictures in the first Macmillan edition and the descriptions of the Wheel of Life, this study investigates the relation between text and illustrations and connections between the act of drawing and writing. Private correspondence in which Kipling writes metacritically on illustrations (see for example Pinney 1990, 1: 325, and Pinney 2004, 5: 50) and discusses future cinematographic adaptations of his work (Pinney 1990, 2: 356; 410), the pictures that Kipling himself produced for *Just So Stories* (1902) and the numerous sketches found in the margins of the manuscript of *The Jungle Book* ([1894–1895]

[2] The visual dimension of Kipling's writings has been commented on in foundational criticism on Kipling over the last four decades – see for example Tompkins (1959) and Ricketts (1999) – as well as by Kipling's admirers and detractors, including Amit Chauduri (2000) and George Orwell (1942).

[3] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* ([1901] 2002, 14). Hereafter, all references to this novel are taken from this edition and are indicated in parenthesis in the text with K followed by the page number.

2021) contribute a powerful testimony of an "author-artist" (Cheff 1987, 13) for whom book illustration and drawing are art forms that are connected with the process of writing.

This study argues that the illustrations and the description of an imagined half written and half drawn artifact are central to Kipling's characterisation of Indians, their relations to English characters, as well as the author's position as concerns interrelated cultural issues, providing an argument about the importance of the visual for this novel's representation of race and racial relations. As will be shown in the first part of this article, the illustrations make forcefully visible, and indeed place at the centre of readers' attention, all the main Indian characters in a way that was unusual in colonial fiction, where the colonised were reduced to sketched types with marginal roles, at times almost invisible. And yet, this making visible is complicated by a style of representation that reinforces an Orientalist view of Indians. This mismatch is elaborated further by the descriptions of the Wheel of Life that will be analysed in the second part. These trace a more complex and subtler range of interpersonal and racial relations than the illustrations that also extend beyond characters' representation and involve Kipling as author. The distinct characteristic of the Wheel of Life to be half drawn connects with the medium of the illustrations but relates to Kipling's art and imagining in a different way from the latter. This difference can be explained through John Bayley's description of Kipling's "compartmented mind". This describes Kipling's stance in respect to his own art as "at once outside and inside, safely distanced by an encircling frame [...], yet imprisoned within and endangered by the text at the same time" (Kemp, Lewis 1996, xxii). The illustrations in *Kim* appear outside Kipling's stance both because they are the workings of another artist – his father – and because of their position in the novel, where they are reproduced in separate pages and hence appear distanced from the text. By contrast, the Wheel of Life – textually mediated, half drawn and half written – is a hybrid visual representation that is not only inseparable from the text, but also a persistent motif in Kipling's writings that will return in the themes and structure of *Just So Stories*. Here, Kipling practices his own version of half written and half drawn art by taking up the double role of illustrator and writer and playfully challenging boundaries between not just drawing and writing but also Eastern and Western art forms. Similarly, in *Kim*, the motif of the Wheel of Life constructs narratives and characterisations that problematise long-established binaries that divide East and West, creating syncretic possibilities. In particular, these involve the Lama, on the one hand, and, on the other, the curator of the Museum of Lahore and Kim.

For the analysis that follows, this article employs an interdisciplinary methodology that includes multimodality, functional linguistics, cultural studies and postcolonial theories, as well as a close literary and intertextual analysis of descriptions of the Wheel of Life. The early multimodal framework devised by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2006) in conjunction with Edward Said's theories of Orientalism (1979) contribute a close reading of the illustrations that connects with the cultural context in which this novel was written and read by the Anglo-Indian audience of the time. Descriptions of the Wheel of Life in the second part will be investigated through a close analysis of characters' interaction, as well as intertextual references to Kipling as the author and illustrator of *Just So Stories*.

This article argues that, in contradistinction to those interpretations that attempt to fit this novel within clear-cut, essential, but misleading, binaries, the representation of Indian characters and Anglo-Indian relations in *Kim* remain complexly articulated and unresolved. Elements of Orientalism co-exist with the problematisation of racial boundaries opening spaces of contact and dialogue between Indian and English characters. Kipling's self-identification with the Lama via the Wheel of Life defines these contradictions as the product of a writer divided between orthodox political views that placed East and West as separate and irreconcilable entities and an imaginative force that knew no geographical boundaries and persistently drew Kipling to India and to its population. This was nurtured by never forgotten and cherished childhood memories and experiences during Kipling's time as a journalist for major Anglo-Indian newspapers that, as Charles Allen (2007) has suggested, played a crucial role in Kipling's formative years.

2. *The Illustrations: Watching Indians*

Illustrations in the first Macmillan edition of *Kim* consist of ten full-page photographic reproductions of terracotta plaques in low bas-relief inserted into the book as sepia plates. These were realised in unusually close collaboration with the writer, making this novel an example of what Michael Toolan (2010) has called "old-tech multimodal narrative" (127). In keeping with the text-image connection, the method of analysis adopted here is based on the early multimodal framework by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen. This is applied to a selection of Kipling's illustrations to provide a close reading that is comparable to a qualitative linguistic analysis set in the context of the text's creation and reception. By adapting M.A.K. Halliday's model of functional linguistics (Halliday [1985] 1994; Halliday, Matthiessen 2014), Kress, van Leeuwen's framework provides a way to analyse illustrations that bridges the divide between word and image. In a way comparable to Halliday's (1979) understanding of the operations of language, Kress and van Leeuwen argue that visual images are socially situated and simultaneously instantiate three types of social meanings, called metafunctions. The textual metafunction focuses on issues of the composition of the image and will be investigated here with reference to the position of elements in the illustration and to framing (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, 175–214). The interpersonal metafunction explores the relation between those who are represented and the viewers (114–174) – in this case the Indian characters and Kipling's audience respectively. Finally, the ideational metafunction considers the participants represented and their relations "in a world outside the representational system" (42); here, this metafunction connects representations of Indians with the Anglo-Indian context at the time in which *Kim* was written.

The context of the creation of illustrations in *Kim* has its own peculiar story that sets them apart from other book illustration projects in Kipling and elsewhere. At the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth century the practice of book illustration remained very common. It was "a 'golden age' of illustration and second only to the illustrious [eighteen] sixties" (Kooistra 1995, 1). What sets *Kim*'s illustrations apart from coeval ones is the fact

that these were not commissioned from professional illustrators or artists, but realised by the father of the author, John Lockwood Kipling, offering an instance of a special close connection between writer and illustrator. Indeed, biographical studies show that at the time in which *Kim* was written, father and son were so close that their relationship could be described as one of mentor and apprentice. As Charles Allen (2013) has noted, from the early 1890s on "it is no exaggeration to describe John Lockwood Kipling's role [...] as that of guru to his son" (149). For his part, in his posthumous memoir, Kipling ([1937] 1990) recalls that right from the beginning *Kim* grew as a shared project:

> In a gloomy, windy autumn Kim came back to me with insistence, and I took it to be smoked over with my Father. Under our united tobaccos it grew like the Djin released from the brass bottle. (82)

This passage is followed by an unusually detailed account of the process that led to the creation of the illustrations:

> the crown of the fun came when [...] was issued an illustrated edition of my works, and the Father attended to *Kim*. He had the notion of making low-relief plaques and photographing them afterwards. Here it was needful to catch the local photographer [...], and to lead him up the strenuous path of photographing dead things so that they might show a little life. (Kipling [1937] 1990, 83)

The expression "crown of the fun" gives the impression of the illustrative process as a light exercise to create decorations, providing one of the several possible explanations for the neglect of these illustrations in critical studies. However, this impression is challenged not only by Rudyard Kipling's lifelong interest in the visual (Turci 2011, 170–171; 174–176), but also by another passage of his memoir, where Kipling parallels his own feelings about the text layout with those of his father about the illustrations, portraying in this way writer and illustrator as equally involved, and indeed central, in the creative process:

> Naturally when he [Lockwood Kipling] got his final proofs he was sure that 'it all ought to be done again from the beginning,' which was rather how I felt about the letterpress [...]. There is one picture that I remember of him in the tin tabernacle, hunting big photos of Indian architecture for some utterly trivial detail in a corner of some plaque. He looked up as I came in and, rubbing his beard and carrying on his own thought, quoted: 'If you get simple beauty and naught else, You get about the best thing God invents.' (Kipling [1937] 1990, 83)

The final quotation, taken from Robert Browning's poem *Fra Lippo Lippi* (1855), expresses Lockwood's intentions to use the illustrations to increase the beauty of the book, closely following William Morris' project with the Kelmscott Press as part of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Crane [1896] 1984, 153–160). In providing a close analysis of the illustrations, it is important to point out that the beauty referred to by the Kiplings is also cul-

turally coded, informed by, and simultaneously contributing to a worldview. According to Edward Said (1995), the years in which *Kim* is written see

> the realization of a great cumulative process [...]: on the one hand, surveillance and control over India; on the other, love for and fascinated attention to its every detail. The overlap between the political hold of the one and the aesthetic [...] pleasure of the other is made possible by British imperialism itself. (195)

Said's afore-mentioned comment provides a context for the following close reading of *Kim*'s illustrations that create the possibility to see them as fulfilling not just the function of decorations to the writing, but also as partaking of a hermeneutical process in which aesthetic pleasure intertwines with a hegemonic discourse on the Orient "that channel[s] thought into a West or an East compartment" justifying the existence of "a battlefront that separates them" (Said 1978, 46; 47–48) and their population.

This close reading begins with some reflections pertaining to the textual metafunction, in particular the information and semiotic value of the elements placed at the centre of the image, and on framing. The former provides a way to single out a group of six illustrations all portraying Indian characters: *The Lama* (Figure 1), *Mahbub Ali* (Figure 2), *The Ressaldar*, *Hurry Chunder Mookerejee*, *The Jat and his Sick Child* (Figure 3) and *The Woman of Shamlegh*.

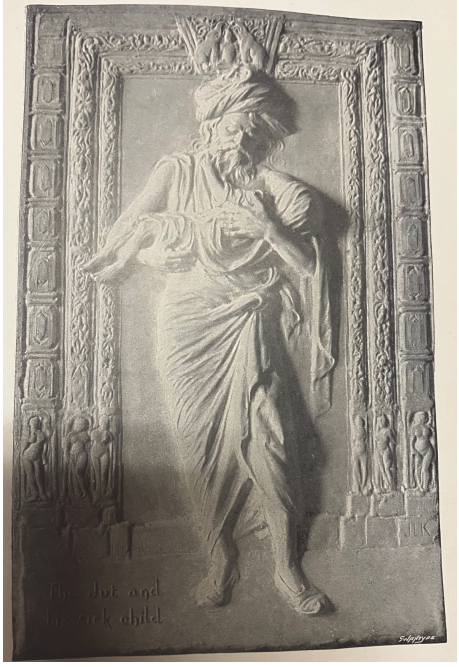
Figure 1 - *The Lama (Kipling 1901, 21)*



Figure 2 - *Mahbub Ali (Kipling 1901, 33)*



Figure 3 - *The Jat and his Sick Child (Kipling 1901, 268)*



In all these illustrations, the Indians are placed in the centre foreground. This compositional strategy not only makes the Indian characters visible for a Western audience but, feeding on a long and well-established convention in Western visual arts (Arnheim quoted in Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, 194), also points to their pivotal role. Instances in which the central position is occupied by important political and religious figures abound in painting of all times. Andrea del Castagno's cycle entitled *Famous Men and Women* (1448–1451)[4], is only one of several examples that closely recalls the style of Lockwood's illustrations. In keeping with this, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), elements in central position have salience, by which they mean that they are not only important but also "made to attract the viewer's attention" (177).

As concerns issues of framing, the Indians represented in the selected illustrations are always enclosed by one or, in some cases, multiple frames. With reference to the outer space of the illustration, the white space of the page surrounding them can be seen as a covert external framing that has the effect of creating a visual interruption between the illustrations and the text. This interruption is also semiotic; in stark contrast to the text that portrays these characters continuously moving along the Great Trunk Road, living their every-day existence, exchanging views and conversations, telling stories, praying, plotting and showing a rich range of emotions – from joy to despair, from fear and hatred to love and passion – the illustrations present readers with immobile figures frozen in unnatural poses. In some cases, overt internal framing contributes to this effect adding further meanings. This is particularly evident in Fig. 3 that represents the Jat enclosed by a richly ornate door frame. This compositional detail has a double meaning providing an example of the connection between aesthetic and political: it is a sample of a richly ornate Indian architectural structure that would have fascinated Lockwood Kipling, and, on a different semiotic level, it would have evoked physical lines of demarcation in Anglo-Indian cities that served to shelter the Anglo-Indian community from whatever threat the Indians posed[5]. The aesthetics of the composition of this illustration with reference to framing provides the visual correlative of Anglo-Indians' attempts to contain natives within physical and symbolic boundaries, as well of the persistent interest in the demarcation and classification of Indians on the part of Orientalists, scholars and Imperial administrators.

The salience produced by positioning the Indians at the centre of the illustration is connected to the interpersonal metafunction that articulates in a more specific way the relation between the Indians represented and readers/viewers. If the characters' salience is made to attract viewers' attention, the representation of the Indians' gazes and the type of shot used to photograph these sculptures complicate relations with viewers and produce an ambiguous effect where viewers' attraction co-exists with their distancing.

With reference to the gaze, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that:

[4] See the Web Gallery of Art's display at https://www.wga.hu/html_m/a/andrea/castagno/2_famous/index.html (last accessed June 15, 2026).

[5] On Anglo-Indian topographies as cultural and political spaces in connection to Kipling's works, see Gail Ching-Liang Low 1996, 156–168.

> [t]here is [...] a fundamental difference between pictures from which represented participants look directly at the viewer's eyes, and pictures in which this is not the case. When represented participants look at the viewer, vectors, formed by participants' eyelines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level. (117)

In all the illustrations analysed, contact following Kress and van Leeuwen's approach is consistently avoided as no character looks directly at the viewers. The Lama and the Jat look down. Hurry Chunder Mookerejee, the Woman of Shamlegh, and the Ressaldar direct their gazes towards an indistinct point in the upper left corner. Mahbub Ali (Fig. 2), who is represented facing the viewers, is the only exception in this respect; however, while the direction of his gaze would have had the potential of establishing a sort of contact, the disturbing absence of his pupils turns this possibility into a void. By denying eye contact, what is also denied is a reciprocal exchange between Indians and viewers and the possibility of constructing identification, empathy or any other interpersonal connections between the two. The distancing effect produced by the characters' gaze is further reinforced by the representation of the Indians through a long shot that shows their whole figures with space around it, in this way placing Indians and viewers at a "far social distance" (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, 124–125).

Consideration of the ideational metafunction contributes insights into the social and political roles of the Indians represented, as well as issues of power relations. Analysis of participant roles following Kress and van Leeuwen's framework is here combined with Ruqaiya Hasan's cline of dynamism (1989, 46) that orders participants according to their degree of dynamicity, that is to say according to their possibility to act and exercise power. As shown in Table 1 below, with the sole exceptions of the Lama (Fig. 1) that is represented as the object of Kim's loving gaze hence as a Phenomenon (Kress, van Leeuwen 2006, 77) and the Jat who, by gazing at his suffering child, has the role of Senser (77) – an active participant of a mental perceptive process – all the other Indians are represented as part of analytical processes (87–92), which portray them as Carriers of possessive attributes, that is to say that their only function is to pose for the viewers displaying their costumes[6].

[6] Kress and van Leeuwen and Hasan draw on M.A.K. Halliday's pioneering work, particularly his description of the clause as representation of experience. Participants are, along with processes and circumstances, a constituent of the 'transitivity system' and their meaning is connected to the processes they are semantically connected to, which in turns defines the nature of the action performed. Hasan's cline of dynamism deploys this classification and focuses on the distinction between active and passive participants as a sign of agency and power. For a description of processes and participants, see Halliday 1994, 106–144.

Table 1 - *Indians' roles in a selection of illustrations in* Kim *on Hasan's cline of dynamism*

	DYNAMIC
1	(Actor + Animate Goal)
2	(Actor + Inanimate Goal)
3	(Sayer + Recipient)
4	(Sayer + Target)
5	(Sayer)
6	(Phenomenon + Senser). *The Lama*
7	(Senser) *The Jat and his Sick Child*
8	(Actor – Goal)
9	(Behaver)
10	(Carrier) *Mahbub Ali*; *The Ressaldar Hurry Chunder Mookerejee*; *The Woman of Shamlegh*
	PASSIVE

Taking line 6 in the table as the halfway point separating active and passive roles (Hasan 1989, 46), it is interesting to note that all the Indians are placed in the bottom half of the cline that lists the more passive roles. These are characters that rarely feel, think, or act; they are, in this way, deprived of quintessential human qualities and made to fit the stereotype of the irrational, backward, uncivilised, and weak Oriental (Said 1978, 7; 40; 178; 207; 253). Moreover, the frequency with which Indians are represented as part of analytic processes defines their predominant role as bearers of native costumes and ornaments that are always elaborate, distinctly Oriental and made up of a head-dress, a robe, slippers or, in some cases, boots. They are, thus, identified through the wide and general category of the exotic garment that deprives them of a distinct and individual personality. The Lama's costume deserves particular attention as it has the peculiarity of creating an incongruous effect with the way it is represented in the text. Where the novel describes the Lama as a priest dressed in rags (K, 6), in the illustration (Fig. 1), he appears with rich garments and precious ornaments. As Rachel Fleming (2003, 42) has noted, this illustration is reminiscent of another one captioned *Rae Doona Chund, A Banker,* taken from a volume entitled *People of India* (1908), a study commissioned by the British government intended to provide a complete guide to different casts and ethnic groups in the Indian subcontinent. The deviation between text and illustration, along with this illustration's similarity with another one taken from an anthropological essay, deprive the Lama of the rich personality that Kipling's story endowed him with and transform him into a specimen of an anthropological inquiry. Furthermore, the peculiar choice of providing the Lama with an opulent costume is symbolic of imaginary representations of India as a sub-continent of immense wealth that for decades fuelled British imagination leading to its colonial exploitation.

This analysis of illustrations in *Kim* has provided a contradictory and open conclusion as regards the representation and reception of the Indian characters. If, on the one hand, the illustrations bring the main Indian characters to the attention of the readership in such a way that their power of fascination can hardly be denied, this is the cultural fascination of "the theatre of Empire" (Low 1996, 203; 206) that in the Victorian period thrived on Oriental display and portrayed Indians as mere spectacles of alterior beauty and picturesque excess. The illustrations, far from being just beautiful decorations that embellish the book, are charged with a political and cultural message that constructs the Indians as incapable of actions, passive, exotic and harmless objects of observation that Western viewers could admire from a safe distance; emanations of an Imperial imagination that saw them as specimen for display in staged narratives of a mythical colonial El Dorado.

3. *The Wheel of Life: Where Indians and British Meet*

References to the Wheel of Life provide a different take on the representation of Indians and the relationship between East and West; these contribute narratives of encounters between British and Indian characters in *Kim* and offer a persistent motif in Kipling's oeuvre that connects the Lama and Kipling as artists. Though the Wheel of Life was at the time of Kipling a central and well-known component of Buddhist philosophy and religion (Shaw 1995, 14), Kipling imaginatively re-fashioned it. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Kipling represents the Wheel through textual descriptions, despite the fact that when *Kim* was written several of its visual representations circulated in popular studies on Buddhism. These include Henry Clarke Warren's *Buddhism in Translation* (1896) and L.A. Waddell's *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism* (1897); the latter is, according to Kipling's scholars, among the sources for *Kim* (Allen 2007, 358; Shaw 1995, 14). Providing descriptions instead of faithful visual reproductions of the Wheel allowed Kipling to move away from the constraint of facts from Western interpretations of Buddhist philosophy and construct a representation that mixes imaginary details with actual information. From scholarly sources Kipling took one of the purposes of the Wheel in Buddhist religion, that is the use of iconology to make universally accessible and teach young disciples – in the novel Kim – the philosophy of the realms of being. What is not mentioned in the sources, and hence can be presumed to be the sole product of Kipling's imagination, is the way the Wheel is described as partaking of a mixture of drawing and writing; this becomes a persistent motif of Kipling's art that will resurface in his *Just So Stories*.

Though not frequently mentioned in criticism on *Kim*, the role of the Wheel of Life is the focus of an article by Bruce Shaw (1995) who has noted its crucial role in Kipling's representation of the search for Enlightenment. In a complementary fashion, this article illustrates how the Wheel is also a structuring element of the plot and characterisation, where it plays a central role in the representation of relations between British and Indian characters.

The first mention of the Wheel is found at the beginning of the novel and the completion of its drawing coincides with its end, thus providing whatever closure is affected in this open-ended work. The Wheel also shapes the characters' roles and their relations, with

reference to the Lama on the one hand and on the other Kim the curator of the Museum of Lahore – a fictional persona evidently based on Kipling's father (Ankers 1988, 53).

The encounter between the Lama and the curator of the Museum of Lahore occurs at the beginning of the novel when the Lama first appears. The first mention of the Lama is likely to disorient Western readers at least as much as it disorients young Kim. Based on this initial description, readers' impression is of a striking, wise, yet vague and helpless, old man who has drifted away from his monastery into a foreign land and come to rely on chance information and help given by Kim, at that point only a child:

> The man turned helplessly and drifted towards the boys. He was old, and his woollen gaberdine still reeked of the stinking artemisia of the mountain passes.
> 'O Children, what is that big house?' he said in very fair Urdu. 'The Ajaib-Gher, the Wonder House!' [...]
> 'Ah! The Wonder House! Can any enter?'
> 'It is written above the door – all can enter.'
> 'Without payment?'
> 'I go in and out. *I* am no banker,' laughed Kim.
> 'Alas! I am an old man. I did not know.' (K, 7)

The curator welcomes the Lama with a mixture of polite hospitality and deference for his age, but also condescension. He is described as smiling "at the clumsy, childish print" (K, 9) of the Lama's handwriting and, during their conversation, shows such an extensive knowledge of Buddhist imagery to leave the Lama surprised and momentarily caught off guard. The curator's cultural superiority emerges from the following passage in which he shows the Lama some photographs of the very place he used to live while in Tibet:

> The lama, haltingly at first, spoke to the Curator of his own lamassery, the Such-zen, opposite the Painted Rocks, four months' march away. The Curator brought out a huge book of photos and showed him that very place [...]
> 'Ay, ay!' The lama mounted a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles of Chinese work. '[...] And thou – the English know of these things?' (K, 9)

Though only a character, in this exchange, the curator momentarily takes up the role of the omniscient narrator who has complete knowledge of the Lama's life, his culture, his past and origins; his gaze is that of the all-seeing mastery of colonial power which, through the medium of photography, has symbolically appropriated territories even beyond the British Empire[7]. The gift of glasses that the curator bestows on the Buddhist priest can be interpreted along this visual metaphor, as granting the Lama the lucid clarity of vision of a self-assured superior British culture.

The introduction of the Wheel in this exchange has the effect of complicating readers' first impression and overturning the power relation that sees the curator as a culturally superior coloniser and the Lama as an inferior colonised. When the Lama is about to leave

[7] On the role of photography in Imperial discourse, see James R. Ryan 1998.

the museum he reciprocates the curator's gesture with his iron pen-case and the promise of another gift:

> When I return, having found the River, I will bring thee a written picture of the Padma Samthora such as I used to make on silk at the lamassery. Yes – and of the Wheel of Life, [...] The Curator would have detained him: they are few in the world who still have the secret of the conventional brush-pen Buddhist pictures which are, as it were, half written and half drawn. (K, 13–14)

In the final part of the quotation, the omniscient narrator reports the thoughts of the curator that portray the Lama as the object of his admiration and respect for possessing an ancient skill that only a few have. The fact that the Lama is able to reciprocate the Englishman's gift with another, whose cultural value is far superior, places him on an equal footing with the curator. Moreover, the introduction of the motif of the Wheel transforms a polite but distant exchange into an intimate and personal one. The conversation between a benevolent and superior coloniser and an inferior colonised subject is turned into one in which the Lama and the curator reciprocally address each other as "we be craftsmen together, thou and I" (K, 14), showing that their common interest for representations of the Wheel has the effect of creating the conditions of shared intersubjective relations that overcome personal, cultural and geographical boundaries.

References to the Wheel also shape the power relation between the Lama and Kim with similar effects to those noted above. This is a more complex relation that unfolds throughout the novel in two broad sections: the first one includes the first part of Kim and the Lama's journey, starting at the beginning of the novel and ending with Kim joining St Xavier school – including chapters 1 to 5. Here references to the Wheel are limited to the afore-mentioned episode involving the curator but otherwise absent from the relationship between Kim and the Lama. The second section consists of the second part of their journey when Kim joins the Lama again after completing his education. This includes chapters 11 to 15. Here the motif of the Wheel recurs frequently, marking the stages of the Lama and Kim's daily travels and setting up pivotal incidents, such as the dramatic encounter between the Lama and the Russian spies in chapter 13. In this part, the introduction of the Wheel causes a development in the characterisation of the Lama and his relationship with Kim marking another reversal of their power relation.

In what has been referred as the first part of Kim and the Lama's journey, Kim's decision to follow the Lama in his pilgrimage and become his *chela* (disciple) is undertaken out of a mixture of curiosity and compassion for the Lama's simple ways:

> 'I have never seen anyone like to thee in all this my life. I go with thee to Benares. And, too, I think that so old a man as thou, speaking the truth to chance-met people at dusk, is in great need of a disciple.' (K, 17)

While the Lama thinks that the role of the *chela* is a very serious matter and crucial for the successful completion of his journey, Kim makes fun of it; his wish to become the Lama's

disciple does not imply that he believes the Lama can teach him something or lead him to higher spiritual grounds. On the contrary, it is the Lama who, he believes, needs his protection and guidance. When Kim is questioned by a suspicious Mahbub Ali on his reasons for joining the Lama, he answers using the same irony verging on contempt. He says to Mahbub Ali that the Lama is "quite mad" (K, 20) and the reason why he travels with him is simply because he wants to leave Lahore: "I am tired of Lahore city. I wish new air and water" (K, 20). During the first part of their journey, it is Kim who gives instructions, decides where to go and when, gets food and finds ways to avoid trouble, all the while the Lama is lost in meditations and prayers only he can understand. Though generally treated with tolerance and sometimes reverence by other characters, he is described by the omniscient narrator in derogatory terms, a holy man like many others in India

> stammering gospels in strange tongues; shaken and consumed in the fires of their own zeal; dreamers, babblers, and visionaries: as it has been from the beginning and will continue to the end. (K, 31)

References to the Wheel of Life in the context of the Lama's relationship with Kim begin to appear in the second part of their journey. As in the episode of the Lama's encounter with the curator, the introduction of the Wheel has the effect of reversing the relationship between the Lama and Kim. If Kim was once the Lama's guide, now he becomes his disciple:

> 'I [the Lama] write pictures of the Wheel of Life. Three days to a picture. I was busied on it [...] when they brought word of thee. It is good to have thee here: I will show thee my art – not for pride's sake, but because thou must learn. The Sahibs have not all this world's wisdom.' (K, 161)

To convey the message that the Wheel provides higher spiritual standards of education for its complexity and tradition than the best English schools in India, and that the Lama is one of the greatest authorities on this subject – hence portraying him as culturally superior to the English – the narrator states:

> In cleanest, severest outline he [the Lama] had traced the Great Wheel with its six spokes, whose centre is the conjoined Hog, Snake, and Dove (Ignorance, Anger, and Lust), and whose compartments are all the Heavens and Hells, and all the chances of human life. Men say that the Bodhisat Himself first drew it with grains of rice upon dust, to teach His disciples the cause of things. Many ages have crystallized in into a most wonderful convention crowded with hundreds of little figures whose every line carries a meaning. Few can translate the picture-parable; there are not twenty in all the world who can draw it surely without a copy: of those who can both draw and expound are but three. (K, 162)

This passage marks frequent mentions of the Wheel that elevate the Lama into an exceptional spiritual guide and scholar, illuminating for Kim – his disciple – rare and ancient spiritual knowledge that will lead to the completion of his education. In the same way in

which Buddhist priests hung representations of the Wheel outside their temples for the benefit of illiterate peasants, the Lama draws the Wheel so that Kim can learn:

> When the shadows shortened and the lama leaned more heavily upon Kim, there was always the Wheel of Life to draw forth, to hold flat under wiped stones, and with a long straw to expound cycle by cycle. [...] Let the *chela* study the troubles that come from over-eating – bloated stomach and burning bowels. Obediently, then, with bowed head and brown finger alert to follow the pointer, did the *chela* study; (K, 177)

In the above quotation, the Wheel is the medium through which Kim and the Lama are described as forming a reciprocal relationship. The image of the old priest leaning upon Kim for physical support, and Kim, in turn, leaning over the priest to watch and listen to tales of the Wheel, is a powerful description of the symbiotic relationship between the two characters.

The ending of the novel confirms the role of the Wheel in redefining the relationship between Kim and the Lama and also connects with issues of Kim's identity that remain open to debate. As occurs so often, critical interpretations of the ending have been polarised: will Kim join Mahbub Ali and Colonel Creighton and become a regular player of the Great Game, or will he stay with the Lama and follow his spiritual path? Far from moving to a denouement, the novel ends with the dilemma of Kim's future and identity torn between Oriental spirituality and Imperial power. Among critics that have explored this ambiguous ending, Mark Kinkead-Weekes provides a particularly illuminating reading that draws attention to the role of the Wheel in the concluding passages. He notes that, though not directly mentioned, references to the Wheel in the final stages of the novel are implicitly present through lexical choices that belong to its semantic field. Referring to the passages where Kim questions his own identity, Kinkead-Weekes (1964) comments that

> [A]s the 'gear' imagery makes clear, this is commitment not to the Game with which we are no longer concerned but, at a far more fundamental level to the Wheel of earthly and human life. (231)

Soon after, Kim has felt "the wheels of his being lock up anew" (K, 234), the Lama tells him that while he was lying ill, he had wrenched himself from the nirvana, so that he could come back and be with him on that very Wheel of Things he wanted to transcend.

At the beginning of the novel, Kim and the Lama start a journey together, each of them towards different destinations: the Lama in search of the river of the arrow, Kim for a red bull in a green field as prophesied by his deceased father. Initially, what draws them together is a chance meeting; by the end, after they have both fulfilled their search, they seek each other out of a reciprocal desire to be together again. If, at the end of their daily travels, when the shadows shortened on the Great Trunk Road, the Wheel was what drew them together, at the end of their journey one of its realms –the Wheel of Things, the Buddhist earthly existence and the Western every-day reality – is the space where a deep but quite unexpected almost impossible bond between an English Sahib and a Tibetan Lama is

formed against social and cultural norms and made possible through commitment to each other and mutual affection.

Explicit references to the Wheel and its semantics stop with *Kim*'s ending, but its echoes survive and extend beyond this novel and re-appear in the *Just So Stories*. It is in these stories that Kipling, following in the Lama's footsteps, practices for the first time his own version of a half written and half drawn art. In this collection that has been defined as his most experimental work (Lewis 1995, xli), Kipling explores hybrid semiotic spaces. In the same way that in *Kim* the Lama shifts seamlessly from writing to drawing, so, in these stories, the hand that writes is the same hand that draws. Kipling's double role of writer and illustrator conjures narratives and produces illustrations where words and images continuously overlap and refuse to occupy separate grounds. In the stories entitled "How the First Letter Was Written" (Kipling [1902] 1995, 91–109) and "How the Alphabet Was Made" (109–129) the intertwining of drawing and writing is narrativised in the stories of Taffy and her father, who develop pictures first into letters and then into the alphabet. On an iconographic plane, the decorative capital letters in the stories entitled "How the Whale Got His Throat" (3) and "How the Leopard Got His Spots" (33) are a practical demonstration of a semantic co-existence of writing and drawing, providing a further example of the way Kipling challenges boundaries between the two. These decorative letters, with the letter "I" traced in the shape of a knife in such a way that "the physicality of [this] object, conveyed through an intense attention to detail, co-exists with [the letter's] abstract symbolic function" (Turci 2011, 165) are an example of half written and half drawn art forms.

If in *Kim* the Wheel constructs narratives of harmonious connections between Indian and English characters, in *Just So Stories* its peculiar feature of mixing writing and drawing echoes Kipling's art leading to further encounters between East and West. As Lewis (1995) has noted, these stories are inspired by and provide references to a wide variety of visual artists and movements ranging "from Aubrey Beardsley, Burne-Jones and the Arts and Crafts movement to Hokusai and other Japanese artists" (xxiii). References also extend to the art of Oriental penmen that Kipling knew from his father's studies, an art that, like Kipling's decorated capital letters, wove "the fine forms of Persian letters into the outlines of animals or birds" (Kipling 1892, 325–326).

The semiotic and cultural encounters between Indian and English characters, between writing and drawing and Western and Oriental arts and forms of writing provide a poignant testimony of the writer of *Kim*, one whose art not only refused to demarcate different semantic modes but moved beyond cultural boundaries that separate East and West.

4. *Conclusion*

This exploration of forms of visuality in *Kim* has provided yet another example of the complexities of Kipling's work in the way it represented India, its population and cultures, while at the same time reinstating the importance of visual elements. Where the illustrations make Indian characters visible for the audience only to transform them into passive

subjects of an Orientalist discourse, the representation of the Wheel of Life provides a far more complex motif that balances and even contradicts this view.

The close readings of illustrations and writing show that to pose the question of Kipling's attitude to Orient as one of positive or negative, as is so often the case, would be to pose the question too simplistically; what *Kim* reveals is rather the complexity of the author's position, informed on the one hand by rigid cultural attitudes shaped by British Imperialism in the late Victorian period, but also by what Kipling found there that contradicted and exceeded the limits of this frame. The predeterminations of the former clearly cannot be said to have limited and contained the power of Kipling's imagination or his ability to perceive the separations of his experience of the two worlds he existed between and find bridges across them through his art.

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Паратексты как семиотическое поле битвы: идеологический контроль и рецепция Г. Дж. Уэллса в СССР (1920–1930-е гг.)

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This article offers a diachronic, comparative analysis of key paratexts accompanying Soviet editions of H. G. Wells's translated works from the 1920s through the 1930s – including prefaces, critical essays, journal articles and afterwords, as well as the published transcript of Wells's 23 July 1934 meeting with Stalin (issued in 1935; reissued 1937–39), alongside contemporary commentary. It attempts to identify strategies of ideological mediation: from the anti-Western, anti-bourgeois rhetoric of the first Soviet edition of *Russia in the Shadows* (*Rossiia vo mgle*, 1922) to harsh condemnations of Wells's utopian visions in late 1930s literary journals and reprints. The study shows that Soviet translators and paratext authors acted as cultural agents, reshaping Wells's texts to meet ideological directives. It also considers the role of party-controlled criticism and key paratext authors – from Lunacharsky and Zamyatin to Olesha and Shklovsky – in shaping the reception of Wells's work. Tracing these shifts reveals how Soviet literary translation became a 'semiotic battlefield' reflecting evolving cultural-policy priorities.

Keywords: Paratexts, H. G. Wells, Soviet translation, Ideological control, Reception studies

Введение[1]

В сталинской России, где каждое слово подвергалось политической проверке, а каждая мысль должна была соответствовать партийной доктрине, художественный перевод становился чем-то большим, чем просто лингвистическое транспонирование: он превратился в идеологическое поле битвы, в призму, через которую внешний мир преломлялся и переписывался в соответствии с потребностями режима. В этом контексте все большую актуальность приобретает изучение трансляции и адапта-

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ции зарубежной литературы в СССР. Особый импульс этому направлению придали работы Брайана Бэра и Сюзанны Витт (Baer 2011; Baer, Witt 2018), сыгравшие ключевую роль в его концептуализации на стыке переводоведения, культурологии и политической истории. Этот исследовательский подход участвовал в построении специфической модели национальной и культурной идентичности, обнажая постоянное напряжение между универсалистскими устремлениями и системой нормативного контроля. В этом ключе Елена Земскова предложила понимать художественный перевод как форму "литературного гражданства" (Zemskova 2014, 16) – средство интеграции в официальную культурную иерархию. Параллельно внимание сместилось к роли переводчиков и издателей как сознательных посредников политических значений и ценностей; были проанализированы механизмы, с помощью которых эти акторы формировали 'идеологический эффект' переведенного текста. Исследования показали, что они выступали не просто медиаторами, но активными культурными агентами: им поручалось адаптировать тексты к ожиданиям публики и требованиям, исходящим от издательств и цензуры (см. Баскина 2021). В первые полтора десятилетия советской власти – в 1920-е и в начале 1930-х гг. – переводческая практика в СССР находилась в руках широкого круга профессиональных филологов и других гуманитариев, что обусловило появление "филологически точного" подхода к работе с текстами, их переводили, редактировали и снабжали развернутыми комментариями в масштабных изданиях мировой классики (там же, 5). Этот подъем был прерван репрессиями Большого террора, после чего усилилась тенденция к "доместицирующему" переводу для массового читателя, а профессиональные дискуссии сузились (там же, 9).

Механизмы смыслового надзора особенно отчетливо проявляются, если рассмотреть их через понятие паратекста. По определению Жерара Женетта, все внешние по отношению к тексту элементы – "перитекст" (заглавия, предисловия, послесловия, примечания и т. п.) и "эпитекст" (рецензии, критические статьи, интервью и т. д.) – составляют "порог"[2] текста, через который он выходит за пределы собственной границы (Genette 1987, 7, 11). В сталинской действительности, где художественный перевод стал важным фактором культурного посредничества, этот порог служил орудием доктринального управления, задавая узкий диапазон допустимых прочтений. Переводы не только отбирались и переформулировались на языковом уровне, но и обрамлялись с помощью широкого спектра паратекстуальных средств – измененных заглавий, предисловий, послесловий, редакционных примечаний, рецензий и критических статей – способных глубоко ориентировать рецепцию в соответствии с требованиями идеологической ортодоксии. В этом смысле, как писал Юрий Лотман, "текст содержит в себе свернутую систему всех звеньев коммуникативной цепи," благодаря чему "мы можем реконструировать на его основании и идеального читателя"; даже "взятый изолированно", он остается "важнейшим источником суждений относительно его собственных прагматических связей" (Лотман 1977, 58). Созвучно

[2] Если не указано иначе, перевод наш.

этому наблюдению Евгений Добренко подчеркивал, что критика (включая издательский дискурс) не просто сопровождала текст, а прежде всего моделировала фигуру "идеального читателя", воздействуя на него через писателя: "Читатель критику не читал. Критика занималась созданием 'идеального читателя' и была установочной прежде всего для писателя, воздействуя через него на читателя (а не наоборот)" (Добренко 2011, 15–16). Более того, начиная с конца 1920-х и особенно в 1930-е годы, через партийные журналы, газеты и издательства внедрялись структуры партийного кураторства над литературным процессом, превращая критику в нормативный фильтр художественного производства и наделяя ее задачей очерчивать рамки 'правильного' восприятия текста. В этой теоретической и исторической перспективе мы и рассматриваем паратексты в советском издательском процессе 1920-х и 1930-х гг.: несмотря на свою, казалось бы, второстепенную позицию, они выступают важным каналом направленной интерпретации.

Роль паратекстов, в частности, четко прослеживается на примере переводов Герберта Джорджа Уэллса – одного из наиболее часто публиковавшихся в СССР западных авторов. Его рецепция формировалась не только в литературной, но и в международно-политической плоскости. В 1920–1930-е гг. отношения между СССР и Великобританией были неоднозначными: с одной стороны, сохранялась идеологическая враждебность, усиленная вмешательством Британии в Гражданскую войну и разрывом дипломатических отношений в 1927 г. (после "дела Аркос"); с другой – в Советском Союзе проявлялся устойчивый интерес к западным интеллектуалам, которые высказывали симпатию к социалистическому проекту. Такие фигуры, как Уэллс, использовались для демонстрации культурной открытости СССР и одновременно – для идеологической критики буржуазного строя. Следует подчеркнуть, что фигура Уэллса в этом отношении не была исключительной. В 1920–1930-е гг. привлечение западных интеллектуалов – писателей, журналистов, ученых – являлось частью более широкой стратегии советской культурной дипломатии, направленной на формирование внешнего образа СССР и демонстрацию 'великого эксперимента'. Как показано в исследованиях Катерины Кларк и Майкла Дэвид-Фокса, визиты и публичные контакты с зарубежными деятелями культуры функционировали как инструмент символической политики сталинской эпохи, сочетая элементы открытости и идеологического контроля (Clark 2011; David-Fox 2012).

На этом фоне творчество Уэллса в других странах – европейских и, разумеется, в Великобритании – воспринималось в условиях более плюралистической критической среды (Soboleva, Wrenn 2017, 101–141; Parrinder 2005), в то же время советская рецепция была жестко опосредована официальными установками. Массовые тиражи его произведений и знаковые встречи с Лениным (1920) и Сталиным (1934) сделали его важной фигурой культурного посредничества и идеологической переинтерпретации. Эта вовлеченность повышала политические ставки каждого нового издания, а сопроводительные тексты – предисловия, послесловия, критические статьи – направляли читательское внимание в нужное русло.

Не менее важно и другое: Уэллс послужил вдохновением целому поколению советских авторов, мыслящих на стыке науки и утопии. Еще до революции произведения Уэллса активно переводились и обсуждались в России, где писатель воспринимался прежде всего как представитель научно-фантастического и социально-критического романа, связанного с идеями прогресса, науки и рациональной организации общества. В дореволюционной критике его тексты читались вне жесткой идеологической рамки – как часть общеевропейского модернистского дискурса, а не как политическая программа. "Эффект Уэллса," по определению Гали Димент (Diment 2021, 5), придал мощный импульс развитию научной фантастики в 1920-е г. – от Замятина и Алексея Толстого до Богданова, Беляева, Кржижановского и Булгакова. Несмотря на политические чистки 1930-х, его влияние сохранялось благодаря своеобразной 'уловке': темы и образы Уэллса продолжали циркулировать в смягченной форме в рамках детско-юношеской литературы – сравнительно автономного пространства в структуре советской культуры.

С помощью диахронического и сравнительного анализа паратекстов, сопровождавших советские издания Уэллса в 1920-е и 1930-е гг., мы задаем центральный вопрос: какую роль играли паратекстуальные средства в построении специфического, идеологически контролируемого горизонта рецепции одного из наиболее популярных английских писателей в СССР? Чтобы ответить на него, мы обращаемся к корпусу паратекстов – предисловий, послесловий, рецензий и критических статей таких авторов, как Анатолий Луначарский, Сергей Динамов, Юрий Олеша, Виктор Шкловский, Александр Беляев и многих других, опубликованных на страницах ведущих журналов вроде "Интернациональной литературы", "Литературного критика" и т. п. Отбор материала основан на критериях, включающих статус автора, значимость публикации, масштаб распространения и жанровую специфику[3]. Такое превращение перевода в идеологическое переписывание продуктивно осмысляется в рамках концепции Андре Лефевра о переводе как форме "*rewriting*", подверженной поэтическим и институциональным давлениям (Lefevere 1992), а также с опорой на теорию Пьера Бурдье о переводе как практике, структурируемой отношениями символической власти в литературном поле (Bourdieu 1991): переводчики, издатели и критики выступают стратегическими агентами, а не простыми транспонировщиками.

Дальнейший анализ основан на систематическом сопоставлении паратекстов к советским изданиям Уэллса с директивными материалами, публиковавшимися преимущественно в журнале "Литературный критик" – центральном теоретическом органе советской литературной критики 1930-х гг., служившем не только площадкой для обсуждения эстетических и идеологических проблем, но и важным звеном в процессе выработки нормативных художественных ориентиров. Под 'директивами' мы понимаем программные теоретические статьи и редакционные публикации, задававшие ориентиры для критической практики и издательской политики. Эта функция журнала подробно проанализирована в недавнем исследовании Сюзанны Франк

[3] Перечень публикаций и паратекстов с 1898 до 1965, см. (Левидова, Парчевская 1966).

(Frank 2022); следуя ее подходу, мы рассматриваем директивные тексты "Литературного критика" как репрезентативные выражения официального дискурса.

Статья строится вокруг пяти ключевых разделов: (1) общий обзор публикаций Уэллса и основных переводчиков и авторов паратекстов; (2) типология и функции паратекстуальных материалов; (3) авторские различия; (4) диахронические вариации; (5) отношения Уэллса с Россией. В заключении предпринимается попытка более широко осмыслить редакционную, культурную и политическую функцию художественного перевода в сталинскую эпоху на примере рецепции Уэллса. Такой ракурс позволяет проследить трансформацию его образа – от признанного мастера научной фантастики через фигуру идеологически подозрительного реформатора к окончательно чуждому 'буржуазному фантазеру'. Эта динамика, в свою очередь, выявляет не только эволюцию редакционной политики и критической риторики того времени, но и фундаментальную роль паратекста как инструмента контроля над каноном переводной литературы.

1. *Издания Уэллса (в 1920-х – 1930-х гг.), переводчики и авторы паратекстов*

Герберт Уэллс был одним из самых широко издаваемых британских авторов в Советской России начала XX века. Только за десятилетие (1919–1929) было выпущено более 80 книг с его произведениями. В 1930-е гг. их стало меньше – чуть более 20 изданий, а в период с 1941 г. до смерти Сталина в 1953 г. – всего 7. Первое советское собрание сочинений вышло в 1924–1926 гг. под редакцией Евгения Замятина (см. Уэллс 1924–1926), а в 1930 г. было издано *Собрание фантастических романов и рассказов* со вступительной статьей Анатолия Луначарского (Уэллс 1930).

Некоторые тексты переиздавались неоднократно: *Машина времени* (The Time Machine, 1895); *Борьба миров*[4] (*The War of the Worlds*, 1897); *Человек-невидимка*[5] (*The Invisible Man*, 1897); *Первые люди на Луне* (*The First Men in the Moon*, 1901). К их числу примыкают и другие знаковые для русского читателя романы: *Остров доктора Моро* (*The Island of Dr. Moreau*, 1896), *Когда Спящий проснется* (*When the Sleeper Wakes*, 1899), *Облик грядущего* (*The Shape of Things to Come*, 1933).

Менее известные произведения Уэллса, изданные в СССР в основном в 1920-е годы, представляли бытовую и лирическую сторону его творчества: *Колеса фортуны* (*The Wheels of Chance*, 1896); *Любовь и мистер Льюишем* (*Love and Mr. Lewisham*, 1899); *Билби (Bealby,* 1915); *Анна-Вероника* (*Ann Veronica*, 1909); *История мистера*

[4] В собраниях сочинений 1929, 1930 и 1945 г. – *Война миров*. Хотя обе версии заглавия – *Борьба миров* и *Война миров* – встречались уже до 1917 г., в советский период чаще использовался первый вариант, как, например, в изданиях 1919, 1922, 1925, 1928 и 1935 гг. Напротив, в собраниях сочинений 1929, 1930 и 1945 гг. роман выходил под названием *Война миров*. Такое различие, по-видимому, отражает осознанную редакционную стратегию, придававшую заглавию паратекстуальную функцию. Само слово *борьба*, обладавшее выраженной идеологической окраской (ср. *классовая борьба*, *борьба за мир*), могло направлять интерпретацию текста как аллегории идейного противостояния уже на уровне перитекста.

[5] В изданиях 1927 и 1928 гг. – *Невидимка* (пер. Веры Засулич и О. Богдановой, см. Уэллс 1927, 1928).

Полли (*The History of Mr. Polly*, 1910); *Новый Макиавелли (The New Machiavelli*, 1911). Эти тексты не получили столь широкого отклика и многократных переизданий, как научно-фантастические романы.

В то же время значительная часть социально-политических и философских сочинений Уэллса осталась неизвестной советскому читателю. В СССР не публиковались такие ключевые работы, как *The Open Conspiracy* (1928)[6], *World Brain* (1938), *The New World Order* (1940), в которых он размышлял о будущем человечества и глобальных преобразованиях. Исключение составили лишь эссе *Russia in the Shadows* (1921; *Россия во мгле*, 1922) и *A Short History of the World* (1922; *Краткая история человечества*, 1924).

Над произведениями Уэллса трудилась целая когорта переводчиков. Больше всего переводов выполнила Эмилия Пименова, писательница, работавшая и с социально-политической прозой. В 1920-х гг. автором и редактором многих переводов был Владимир Ашкинази (псевдоним В. А. Азов), сотрудничество с которым прекратилось после его эмиграции во Францию в 1926 г. Среди других переводчиков – Алла Карнаухова, Семен Займовский, Давид Вейс, Николай Морозов, В. Г. Тан (наст. имя – Владимир Богораз), Роберт Куллэ и др.

В 1930-х гг. имя переводчика часто не указывали. Так, *Каникулы мистера Ледбеттера* (в обработке В. Дубошина и В. Карзинкина, см. Уэллс 1934) вероятно перевел Александр Туфанов – его версия вышла в 1925 г. (Уэллс 1925). Туфанов, арестованный в 1931 г. вместе с обэриутами, ранее активно сотрудничал с Детгизом. Похожая судьба, возможно, постигла В. Готвальда (перевод *Первые люди на Луне*, см. Уэллс 1923а): в переизданиях 1935–1940 гг. имя переводчика уже отсутствует.

Такая практика стирания имён была частью более широкой тенденции: преследования и идеологическое давление затрагивали не только переводчиков, но и редакторов, авторов предисловий и комментариев. Евгений Замятин, редактировавший и сопровождавший вступительными статьями множество изданий (Уэллс 1919, 1920, 1922а, 1922б, 1923), а также составивший собрание сочинений 1924–1926 гг., с 1929 г. подвергался травле за роман *Мы*, и в 1931 г. эмигрировал. Помимо предисловий, он подготовил и отдельную книгу о британском фантасте (см. Замятин 1922) и, по-видимому, был главным исследователем его творчества в 1920-х.

Среди авторов паратекстов, посвященных произведениям Уэллса, были и те, чьи жизни трагически оборвались. Моисей Равич-Черкасский, историк и обществовед, был арестован в 1936 г., дальнейшая его судьба осталась неизвестной. Были арестованы и расстреляны видные литературоведы и редакторы Александр Старчаков (в 1937 г.), Роберт Куллэ (в 1938 г.), Сергей Динамов (в 1939 г.), Михаил Левидов (в 1942 г.). Александр Беляев, популярный фантаст и знакомый Уэллса, скончался от голода в 1942 г. во время немецкого наступления на Ленинград и оккупации Пушкина, будучи тяжело больным и не подлежавшим эвакуации.

[6] *Открытый заговор* стал доступен на русском языке лишь в последние годы (см. Уэллс 2021).

Под удар попали также писавшие об Уэллсе Абель Старцев, историк, критик, англист, арестованный в 1948 г. и проведший в лагерях шесть лет, и Исаак Звавич, преследовавшийся за космополитизм с 1949 г. Если Александр Ивич так и не получил официального признания, то Юрий Олеша, признанный автор 1920-х гг., в сталинскую эпоху оказался вне новой литературной реальности и фактически замолчал, оставшись в изоляции внутри самой системы. Иная судьба выпала Григорию Мишкевичу, сотруднику Детиздата: участник репрессий 1937–1938 гг., он сам был арестован в 1951 г. и освобожден лишь после смерти Сталина.

В отличие от вышеупомянутых, другие участники паратекстуального дискурса сумели успешно адаптироваться к советской системе и занять в ней устойчивое положение. В ряду таких – Давид Заславский, публицист, литературовед и партийный деятель, взгляды которого последовательно отражали господствующую идеологию. Ему принадлежат обличительные статьи против Мандельштама, Пастернака и Шостаковича. Виктор Шкловский, постепенно отошедший от формализма в начале 1930-х, также стремился соответствовать требованиям времени. Стабильная карьера сложилась у Льва Никулина – писателя и журналиста, неоднократно выезжавшего во Францию. Значительное внимание Уэллсу уделял и Анатолий Луначарский, первый нарком просвещения РСФСР, лично знакомый с писателем.

Таким образом, судьбы переводчиков и авторов паратекстов отражают сложную картину сталинской эпохи – от лоялистов до эмигрантов и жертв репрессий. Примечательно, что большинство из тех, чьи биографии нам известны, либо подверглись преследованиям, либо были вытеснены из литературной жизни.

2. *Типология и функция паратекстов*

Проанализируем теперь паратексты сквозь призму эпохи и личности их авторов: все они едины в оценке Уэллса как непревзойденного мастера научной фантастики. Так, Динамов называет его “королем” романа наряду с Голсуорси и Джойсом (Динамов 1929, 206), Луначарский видит в нем “чрезвычайно оригинальную и необыкновенно блестящую” фигуру европейской литературы (Луначарский 1930, XX), а Яков Рыкачев и Юрий Олеша подчеркивают блестящий стиль и эпический размах его фантастики (Рыкачев 1939, 13; Олеша 1937, 5). Этот в целом благосклонный взгляд на произведения буржуазного писателя сочетался с выраженной в директивах необходимостью хорошо знать западную литературу (Розенталь, Усиевич 1933).

Немаловажным положительным моментом для советских авторов была и острая критика Уэллсом буржуазного общества. Хотя он сам принадлежал к английскому среднему классу и в его мировоззрении присутствовали “сильные буржуазные элементы” (Динамов 1929, 211), Луначарский указывал, что “для Уэллса очень скоро выяснилась преходящесть буржуазного строя и полная [...] необходимость как можно скорей изжить все уродливые стороны этого общественного уклада” (Луначарский 1930, V). Эти идеи получили теоретическое обоснование в программной статье Мариэтты Шагинян 1933 г., где утверждалось, что искусство есть форма идеологии, а

выбор художественных средств – выражение политической позиции автора, определяющее ценность произведения, даже если речь идет о буржуазной литературе (Шагинян 1933, 28). Олеша видел в произведениях Уэллса "ужас капиталистического мира" (Олеша 1937, 5), а Балашов отмечал, что Уэллс "ярко и талантливо показал, как капитализм несет войны, разруху, нищету и голод" (Балашов 1938, 5). Более сдержанно высказались Старцев, отмечавший, что Уэллс все время отстаивал мысль о "ликвидации общественного строя, основанного на частной собственности" (Старцев 1936, 5–6) и Левидов, указавший, что писатель сумел отразить "все лучшее" из культуры капитализма, оставаясь при этом его искусным критиком (Левидов 1934, 1). Подход Левидова, напротив, не сочетался с линией, сформулированной Марком Розенталем в 1934 г., согласно которой мировоззрение писателя, если оно буржуазное, неизбежно несет в себе внутренние противоречия, подрывающие художественную ценность (Розенталь 1934, 25). Аналогично, Семен Вольфсон в том же году утверждал, что даже "научная" составляющая буржуазной культуры находится в стадии загнивания и не может быть источником позитивного влияния (Вольфсон 1934, 16).

Хотя в начале 1930-х гг. Л. Филатова и Рашель Миллер-Будницкая обнаруживают у Уэллса идеи, близкие к фашизму (Миллер-Будницкая 1932; Филатова 1935), в 1936 г. выход повести *Игрок в крокет* (*The Croquet Player*, 1936) изменил мнения критиков. Олеша отмечает "несомненную заслугу" писателя в приближении к антифашистскому фронту (Олеша 1937, 5), а две анонимные статьи в журнале "Интернациональная литература" подчеркивают, что Уэллс выступает "против фашизма и как писатель, и как политический деятель," осуждая "фашистское варварство" (Иллюзии Уэллса 1937, 88; Антифашистские писатели мира 1937, 122). В 1938 г. Звавич добавил, что Уэллс "в ужасе от всеобщего озверения и нарастающей угрозы фашизма" (Звавич 1938, 356). Такие нотки появляются в паратекстах этих лет неслучайно: в 1937 г. на втором международном конгрессе писателей была провозглашена необходимость единства всех антифашистов, и советской критике важно было заручиться поддержкой как можно большего числа зарубежных авторов (Конгресс 1937, 14). Так, к концу десятилетия Уэллс стал восприниматься не только как мастер научной фантастики и критик капитализма, но и как активный противник фашистской идеологии.

Наряду с положительными сторонами все авторы отмечали недостатки Уэллса: 'социальную близорукость' и 'технократические иллюзии'. Луначарский упрекал его в 'английском чванстве' и непонимании марксизма (Луначарский 1930), а анонимный автор статьи *Иллюзии Уэллса и правда жизни* – в игнорировании перспектив рабочего класса (Иллюзии Уэллса 1937, 88) – мотив, красной нитью проходящий через множество советских директив того времени (ср., например, тезис о том, что только литература, создаваемая писателями, перешедшими на сторону рабочего класса, способна передать полноту художественных образов, Кирпотин 1933, 41). Особенно опасным критики считали недоверие читателя к пролетариату – Уэллс считал, что "малокультурные, плохо образованные трудящиеся массы" лишь усугубляют хаос (Старцев 1936, 6). Таким образом, утопия "мирной эволюции" под руководством "разумных

организаторов" была единодушно отвергнута: "Любой комсомолец [...] без труда разберется в этой наивной и невежественной концепции" (Рыкачев 1939, 11).

Ключевую "иллюзию" Уэллса критики видели в отказе от революции и классовой борьбы – уже в 1930 г. Луначарский осуждал его за то, что он "совершенно не революционер" и предпочитает "эволюционные" пути (Луначарский 1930, VII). В послесловии к *Человеку-невидимке* физиолог Андрей Лебединский и математик Яков Перельман продолжили эту линию: они не только рассуждали о феномене невидимости, но и обвиняли Уэллса в том, что он "правоверный буржуазный реформист," неспособный представить "вооруженное пролетарское наступление" и победу над капитализмом (Лебединский, Перельман 1936, 179). Участие таких видных ученых подчеркивает серьезность и статус дискуссии об Уэллсе, но одновременно демонстрирует, что даже в сугубо научных статьях появлялись идеологические отсылки, никак не связанные с предметом исследования. При этом вся эта полемика формировалась в режиме обязательного цензурного контроля: переводы и паратексты направлялись на согласование в Главное управление по делам литературы и издательств (Главлит), где цензоры удаляли или смягчали фрагменты, противоречившие партийным директивам, и правили предисловия, рецензии и критические статьи (Fitzpatrick 1992, 91–114; Плампер 2014). Именно благодаря этой процедуре многие наиболее острые замечания авторов, касавшиеся советской действительности и организационных провалов, либо редактировались, либо не были допущены к печати, что усиливало единство официального 'голоса' паратекстов. Все это позволяет перейти от анализа типологических особенностей к рассмотрению различий между самими авторами, нередко придававшими индивидуальный отпечаток официальному дискурсу.

3. *Различия паратекстов разных авторов*

На общем фоне 'единого голоса' бросается в глаза благосклонный тон Евгения Замятина, который уже в 1922 г. опубликовал первую в СССР монографию о британском фантасте (*Герберт Уэллс*, Петроград, Эпоха), а затем включил это же эссе в предисловие к *Собранию сочинений* (Ленинград, Мысль), изданному в 1924 г. В своем поэтически окрашенном тексте он противопоставляет "русскую сказку", где герой ждет чуда "по щучьему веленью", "городскому эпосу" английского писателя, который рождает чудеса "через чертежную доску", "логарифмическую линейку" и лабораторные опыты (Замятин 1922, 9). По Замятину, именно эта "формульная" практика отличает автора от "русских сказочников" и делает его "почти поэтом науки" (там же).

Социальные зарисовки Уэллса он называет "великолепной пародией на современную цивилизацию", а призыв к человечеству – центральным пафосом произведений: "Уэллс зовет людей опомниться, пока еще не поздно, [...] вспомнить, что они не англичане, французы, немцы, а люди" (там же, 18). Замятин подчеркивает, что социалистические идеи писателя не поддаются партийной стандартизации:

> Художника настоящего – никогда не уложить в уже созданный, семидневный, отвердевший мир какой-нибудь догмы. Он непременно выскочит из параграфов этой догмы, он непременно будет еретиком. (Там же, 18)

Замятин приветствует кредо писателя, где разум и ценность человеческой жизни превыше насилия, считая отказ от революционных методов вполне оправданным ("красное знамя Уэллса окрашено не кровью, [...] [а] зарей нового человеческого дня", а жизнь для него – "неприкосновенная ценность," там же, 20). Замятин с тем же пониманием воспринимал и религиозные мотивы в творчестве Уэллса, считая обращение к теме Бога естественным продолжением его гуманизма и научного мировоззрения. Резко контрастирует с этим пассажем мнение Старцева, который в 1936 г. обвиняет Уэллса в "задушенном поповщиной богостроительстве" и скандальном "флирте с Господом," который якобы "одухотворил" все его творчество (Старцев 1936, 8). Замятин же, напротив, видит в религиозных метафорах продолжение рационального и социалистического проекта: "на фундаменте разумности, целесообразности всего бытия Уэллс строит храм своему Богу и рядом [...] воздвигает свои лаборатории, свои социалистические фаланстеры" (там же, 29); "этот Бог – западный, требующий от человека [...] активности" и хоругви его – красные (там же, 35). Религиозные метафоры Уэллса в этой трактовке дополняют его социалистические и научные устремления, тогда как у Старцева становятся поводом для идеологической атаки.

В заключение Замятин, вопреки мнению большинства последующих рецензентов, отвергает классификацию "социально-фантастических" романов писателя как утопий, подчеркивая их памфлетную функцию: они вскрывают "дефекты существующего строя," а не рисуют "грядущий рай." По его словам, эти произведения представляют собой "новую, оригинальную разновидность литературной формы" (там же, 43).

Такая положительная оценка объясняется относительной свободой начала 1920-х: ещё до наступления жёсткой идеологической цензуры Замятин выступил как редактор и критик Уэллса. Уже в 1924 г. Давид Заславский, отдавая дань социальной ангажированности писателя ("резкая критика буржуазного порядка, [...] проповедь общечеловеческой солидарности"), упрекал его в "примитивности" и "наивном идеализме," сравнивая его идеализм с "воскресным цилиндром" английского джентльмена (Заславский 1924, 8–12). Тем не менее он признавал, что *Краткая история человечества* – "не скучный род литературы," а "новая характерная черта" в творчестве популярного автора (Заславский 1924, 18).

Разные авторские подходы часто отражали не только личные убеждения, но и меняющийся идеологический климат – на котором мы теперь остановимся более подробно.

4. *Различия паратекстов во времени*

В конце 1920-х – начале 1930-х гг. паратексты в целом сохраняли снисходительный тон, признавая 'чуждость' Уэллса по отношению к советской действительности. Так,

в 1923 г. Р. Арский признавал: "нельзя и требовать того, чтобы взгляды человека, воспитанного в совершенно другой общественной среде, [...] сошлись с нашими взглядами" (Арский 1923, VII), и советовал не отвергать автора за это. Р. Генкель в 1924 г. обращал внимание на то, что британец, "прочно коренясь в почве Альбиона с его консерватизмом," не приемлет "революционный подход" и остается сторонником эволюции (Генкель 1924, 3). Рецензия 1925 г. (автор В.К.) ставила в упрек прозаику "анти-исторический" склад ума, не позволяющий "выйти мыслью за пределы своей эпохи" (В.К. 1925, 6).

Более благожелательное и взвешенное отношение к Уэллсу в конце 1920-х гг. заметно на примере обзоров Динамова. В эссе 1928 г. о романах *Мир Вильяма Клиссольда* (*The World of William Clissold*, 1926) и *В ожидании: Портрет женщины* (*Meanwhile, or the Picture of a Woman*, 1927), он подчеркивает, что эти произведения отражают "сознание английской радикальной мелкобуржуазной интеллигенции, в особенности же ее научно-технической части" (Динамов 1928а, 5), а чуть позже с некоторой долей иронии замечает, что "английская интеллигенция [...] уже сходит с капиталистического пути" (Динамов 1928б, 46). При этом критические ремарки смягчаются через союз "но":

> Уэллс – против коммунизма, *но*[7] он вынужден был с похвалой отозваться о деятельности компартии [...]. Уэллс – за мирное эволюционное изменение общества, *но* он с едкой иронией обрисовал поведение реформистов [...]. Уэллс – не выступает против капитализма в целом, *но* он показывает лицо капитализма, задавившего горняков. (Динамов 1928а, 17)

– где союз "но" постоянно возвращает читателя к сильным сторонам автора. Уже в 1929 г. Динамов переключается на союз "и," констатируя неразрешимые противоречия:

> Он выступает против капитализма *и* проповедует союз с ним, видит безысходность строя *и* отталкивается от революции, дает мрачные картины классовой борьбы *и* не принимает теории этой борьбы. (Динамов 1929, 210)

Такая риторическая стратегия – сперва баланс через "но", затем акцент на противоречиях через "и" – отражает эволюцию оценки Уэллса с конца 1920-х.

Луначарский в 1930 г. сохранял взвешенный подход, называя Уэллса "одним из любимых писателей нашей молодежи" и подчеркивая, что его увлекательность рождается из "сочетания воображения и серьезного отношения к науке" (Луначарский 1930, IX). Схожую позицию занимает Старчаков, автор нескольких предисловий к произведениям из *Собрания фантастических повестей и рассказов*, который, несмотря на упоминание "буржуазного пацифизма" и "филистерства", считал, что читатели с легкостью оценят "великолепный художественный дар" писателя (Старчаков 1930а, 202; 1930б, 8). Эти оценки свидетельствуют, что в начале 1930-х, несмотря на идеоло-

[7] Курсив наш.

гические оговорки, Уэллса по-прежнему воспринимали как новатора фантастического жанра, а не как писателя, вызывавшего недоверие у партии.

В том же духе Роберт Куллэ, открывая новое собрание сочинений, восхищался "обилием материала", который Уэллс "превращает в ценные художественные открытия" (Куллэ 1930, XXVII). Признавая его "мелкобуржуазное" происхождение и статус автодидакта, он подчеркивал способность автора преобразовывать "научно-инженерную культуру" в богатую художественную лабораторию (там же, XVII). В том же направлении развиваются рекомендации Павла Юдина об укреплении связи литературы с научно-технической интеллигенцией и обеспечении "классовой цельности" художественного метода (Юдин 1934, 3–12). Все это предвосхищает постепенный сдвиг в сторону ужесточения критики, который достиг кульминации в 1934 г. – переломном моменте для всей литературной политики СССР.

На Первом Всесоюзном съезде советских писателей в 1934 г. были обозначены и ратифицированы ключевые позиции будущей паратекстуальной стратегии. Имя британского автора стало предметом оживленной дискуссии. Карл Радек, Бруно Ясенский и Лев Никулин выступили с резкой критикой, осудив наследие 'старого мира' в образах "уэллсовских машин" и охарактеризовав пацифизм писателя как проявление "английского аристократического снобизма" (Ясенский 1934, 276; Никулин 1934, 330). Радек обвинил его в политическом бессилии и буржуазном пацифизме, неспособности противостоять угрозе войны. Его доклад, сочетавший критику Уэллса с нападками на 'нечестивую триаду' Пруста, Джойса и Кафки, стал ориентиром паратекстуальной политики второй половины 1930-х[8]. Более того, Радек предложил целостную схему 'мировоззренческого краха' Уэллса: "Этот писатель, который претендовал не столько на роль великого художника, сколько на роль мозга английской литературы, не понял буквально ничего" (Радек 1934, 296). Эти тезисы – о 'технократических иллюзиях' и 'буржуазной слепоте' – стали хрестоматийными и воспроизводились в десятках паратекстов.

После этого риторика меняется: вместо умеренных замечаний появляются оскорбления. В 1936 г. Старцев называл Уэллса "семидесятилетним фантазером" с "заплесневелыми идеями," чья идеология "полна дичайших анахронизмов" и служит защитой буржуазного господства (Старцев 1936, 30), а Мишкевич обвиняет его в "воинствующем мракобесии" (Мишкевич 1938, 219).

К 1939 г. критика становится безапелляционной и практически тотальной. Рыкачев настаивает на необходимости нейтрализовать "идеологический яд, присут-

[8] На этом фоне едва ли не единственным позитивным выступлением стала речь инженера Михаила Лапирова-Скобло, напомнившего о значении научной фантастики Уэллса как источника технического воображения и предвидения научных открытий (Лапиров-Скобло 1934, 435). Несмотря на общий фокус на советском контексте, показательно и мнение зарубежных делегатов. Амабель Уильямс-Эллис, подчеркивая снижение интереса к Уэллсу среди молодежи и рост популярности Олдоса Хаксли, выступила в защиту литературного плюрализма (Вильямс-Эллис 1934); Эрнст Толлер с симпатией упомянул Уэллса как любимого автора рабочих, с которыми он беседовал на пароходе "Рыков," – то есть как автора, живо присутствующего в читательской практике советского пролетариата и символа доступной мировой культуры (Толлер 1934, 453).

ствующий в каждой книге Уэллса: его наивные рецепты спасения человечества" (Рыкачев 1939, 12). Если в середине 1930-х авторы, как Левидов, еще надеялись, что британский мыслитель "преодолеет свою ограниченность" (Левидов 1934, 1), то к 1938 г. Звавич уже усомнился в этом. По его мнению, стремясь сохранить "среднюю" позицию между фашизмом и коммунизмом, писатель "вольно или невольно играет на руку самым темным силам" (Звавич 1938, 357). В той же статье он называет уэллсовскую утопию "утомительной, бесплодной," а его веру в "критически мыслящих личностей" – "наивной" и "достаточно неприятной" (там же). Рыкачев говорит о "позорном завершении" его социально-фантастических исканий (Рыкачев 1939, 11), а Ивич и Шкловский подчеркивают его анахроничность, отмечая, что он "создан той Англией [...], робкой, состарившейся" (Шкловский, Ивич 1939, 18).

Эти оценки напрямую соотносятся с идеологическими установками конца десятилетия – утверждением о буржуазном обесчеловечении, накопившемся за годы империалистического загнивания в литературе декаданса, которое отравляет сознание писателя (Усиевич 1936, 27), о культурном вырождении буржуазии (например, Розенталь 1936). Георг Лукач, утверждал, что "распад охватил всю буржуазную идеологию, и ему противились только немногие гуманисты, бессильные изменить весь ход общественного развития" (Лукач 1939, 4). В этом контексте паратексты функционируют как инструмент партийного дискурса, превращая прежнего реформатора в символ классового врага.

Итоговый взгляд показывает хронологическую эволюцию 'голосов' авторов паратекстов. В начале 1920-х Замятин, пользуясь относительной свободой, прибегает к поэтической и гуманистической интонации, подчеркивая универсализм и нравственный пафос английского писателя. Во второй половине 1920-х – начале 1930-х проявляется внутренняя разнородность: практически в каждом тексте соседствуют идеологическая критика и признание художественных достоинств. Особенно выразительно эта риторическая амбивалентность проявляется у Луначарского, склонного к взвешенному, 'педагогическому' тону, и у Динамова, который сначала стремится сохранить равновесие между осуждением и признанием, но уже к 1929 г. выстраивает логически непримиримую схему противоречий. К концу 1930-х гг. паратексты радикализуются – красноречивое свидетельство становления идеологической монолитности и утраты прежнего риторического баланса.

Таким образом, диахронический анализ советских паратекстов выявляет прогрессирующее идеологическое дистанцирование от фигуры Уэллса, что подводит нас к необходимости рассмотреть и обратный взгляд: восприятие писателем Советской России и взаимодействие с советским пространством, неизбежно преломленные в этом процессе рецепции.

5. *Уэллс и Россия*

Рецепция Уэллса в Советском Союзе складывалась из трех взаимосвязанных элементов: собственных впечатлений писателя от двух поездок (1920 и 1934 гг.), многократных со-

ветских ‘обработок’ его текстов и его личной эмоциональной привязанности к России, обусловленной романом с Марией ‘Мурой’ Будберг и дружбой с Максимом Горьким.

Писатель впервые побывал в России в 1914 г. и отнесся к ней вполне благосклонно: “с большим удовольствием гулял по этим улицам, покупая разные вещицы и наблюдая оживленное уличное движение” (Уэллс 1922, 15), его очаровал русский театр и впечатлили встречи с интеллектуалами. Во время второй поездки, в 1920 г., он увидел страну, разоренную Гражданской войной, признал правительство большевиков “единственным, которое может не допустить Россию до окончательной гибели” (там же, 94), но назвал его “самым смелым и вместе с тем самым неопытным правительством в мире,” упрекнув за красный террор и “отсутствие внутренней организации” (там же, 52, 79). Эти заметки вошли в первое советское издание его очерка *Russia in the Shadows* (*Россия во мгле*), вышедшее в Харькове в 1922 г. с объемным предисловием Моисея Равича-Черкасского.

Примечательно, что заглавие *Россия во мгле*, закрепленное за эмигрантским софийским изданием 1921 г. (см. Уэллс 1921, перевод и предисловие Николая Трубецкого[9]), представляет собой не буквальный перевод оригинального *Russia in the Shadows*, а его семантически усиленную интерпретацию. В отличие от возможных, но стилистически менее выразительных вариантов вроде *Россия в тени* или *Россия в сумерках* (ср. у Замятина 1922), слово *мгла* придает заглавию поэтическую насыщенность и – в советском контексте – определенную идеологическую окраску[10]. Таким образом, уже само заглавие *Россия во мгле* программирует негативное восприятие России – не только как образ пространственной темноты, но и как метафору когнитивного и идеологического затмения. Оно формирует интерпретационную рамку еще до начала чтения – наглядный пример действия паратекста как средства смысловой и идеологической фильтрации.

Вступление Равича-Черкасского превратило многогранный отчет Уэллса в инструмент пропаганды. Апеллируя к “объективности англичанина,” он цитировал уэллсовские описания “грандиозной катастрофы” и акцентировал внимание на том, что писатель винит во всех бедах России “мстительного французского кредитора” и “тупого английского журналиста” (Равич-Черкасский 1922, 7), но умалчивал резкие

[9] В пространном предисловии к харьковскому изданию 1922 г. Равич-Черкасский резко полемизирует с Трубецким, называя его “отщепенцем,” “предателем” и обвиняя в желании отдать Россию “гнилому Западу” (Равич-Черкасский 1922, 5, 8, 11). Между тем сам Трубецкой в ироничном предисловии подчеркивал, что Уэллс не понял ни большевизма, ни самой России (см. Трубецкой 1921, XII). Парадоксально, но обе стороны – эмигрант и советский критик – обвиняют Уэллса в непонимании российской действительности, исходя из противоположных позиций.

[10] Слово *мгла*, использованное в советском переводе, имеет иную образную окраску по сравнению с более нейтральными *тенью* или *сумерками*, которые, согласно *Русско-английскому словарю* А. Александрова (1915, 621, 650), ближе к оригинальному *Shadows*. В *Толковом словаре* Даля (издание 1914 г., дополненное и отредактированное Бодуэном де Куртенэ), *мгла* определяется как “помраченье воздуха [...] и мешающее зрению” (Даль 1914, 811) – временное затмение, не исключающее возвращения видимости. В советском контексте это могло восприниматься как метафора преходящих трудностей, что, возможно, лучше соответствовало идеологической установке на оптимизм и преодоление.

оценки, даваемые британским гостем большевистскому правительству. Критические же пассажи эссе о красном терроре, некомпетентности и "социальном разложении" революции оказались сведены к "буржуазному шаблону" и объявлены плодом "незнания России" (Равич-Черкасский 1922, 6). Такой подход в целом отвечает политике критических статей, позднее сформулированной в директивах 1930-х гг.:

> Критик должен научиться писать [...] для рабочих и колхозных масс, научиться критиковать с точки зрения современности, с точки зрения тех вопросов, которые волнуют массы, писать так, чтобы вооружать массы умением критически относиться к художественным произведениям, вооружать массы пониманием этих произведений. (Крупская 1933, 8)

В 1920–х гг. *Россия во мгле* вызывала в целом одобрительные оценки некоторых советских критиков: Адриан Пиотровский в предисловии к *Душе епископа* (1924) назвал уэллсовский отчет актом мужества и честного анализа (Пиотровский 1924, 7), а Р. Арский (1923) подчеркивал "обостренное чувство художника и общественника" (Арский 1923, III).

Критическая интонация быстро ужесточалась: от определения Старчакова, назвавшего очерк "памятником филистерского суждения" и "исповедью пигмея в стране гигантов" (Старчаков 1930в, 139), через формулу Левидова о "трагической ошибке" (Левидов 1934, 1) и упрек Льва Никулина, что Уэллс так и "не сумел понять, что происходит в Советском Союзе" (Никулин 1937, 5), – к оценке Мишкевича, для которого книга превратилась в "оскандалившуюся" (Мишкевич 1938, 222). По мнению Радека, *Россию во мгле* наиболее точно отражает всю позицию писателя, в которой он, несмотря на декларативное неприятие интервенции, изображает страну как "полный развал и разрушение современной цивилизации," а советскую власть как "правительство дилетантов" (Радек 1934, 295–296).

Одной из важнейших (в том числе для советской критики) частей эссе Уэллса стала глава "Кремлевский мечтатель" посвященная встрече с Лениным. Сам писатель придавал этой встрече большое значение, рассматривая ее как один из ключевых моментов поездки. В советской интерпретации эпизод получил устойчивое прочтение: он изображался прежде всего как обсуждение плана ГОЭЛРО (Государственная комиссия по электрификации России). Подчеркивалось, что англичанин не поверил в возможность этого проекта, назвал Ленина мечтателем, но позже убедился в реальности его замысла, посетив страну через 14 лет. Слова Ленина – "Приезжайте снова через десять лет и посмотрите, что сделано в России за это время" – активно цитировались; в том числе Беляев, обращаясь к знаменитому писателю, "непревзойденному фантасту, пророку и провидцу будущего," призывает его приехать и посмотреть "на [социалистический город] своими ясновидящими глазами. Сравните его с вашими городами во мгле! [...] Это город – 'кремлевского мечтателя'" (Беляев 1933, 13). В стилизованной под путевые заметки статье Уэллс предстает как растерянный буржуазный наблюдатель, неспособный осмыслить достижения социализма без 'разъяснений' советского рассказчика.

Через год после публикации статьи Беляева Уэллс снова посетил Россию; ключевым моментом этой поездки стала его встреча со Сталиным. Стенограмма беседы, состоявшейся во время визита в 1934 г., была опубликована в следующем году (Сталин 1935)[11] и затем без изменений переиздавалась в 1937–1939 гг. Именно эта запись, лишенная всяких пояснений, стала 'кладезем' цитируемых в паратекстах 'партийных формулировок' вождя. Старцев обвинял Уэллса в стратегии "твердить зады и врать за двух", цитируя его слова о "многочисленных талантливых инженерах-организаторах" и "примитивном антагонизме классовой борьбы" (Старцев 1936, 30), а Балашов усматривал в доводах Сталина доказательство "обманчивости иллюзий" писателя (Балашов 1938, 6). В русскоязычных изданиях беседы имеются примечательные расхождения с английским оригиналом: переводчик сознательно вставлял прокоммунистические пассажи и "сглаживал" скепсис Уэллса, чтобы представить его более "сочувствующим идеям коммунизма" (Савенкова 2016, 93).

Наконец, эмоциональный фон уэллсовских текстов определяла его личная жизнь, связанная с Россией: многолетний роман с 'Мурой'[12], секретаршей Горького и, по некоторым свидетельствам, секретным агентом, а также многолетняя дружба с самим писателем. Отношения с Горьким ухудшились после их встречи в 1934 г.: Уэллс упрекал его, что тот "превратился в законченного сталиниста," утратив "человеческое начало" и став "Пролетарским Гением с твердыми классовыми установками" (Уэллс 2007, 417). Сам же автор признавал, что ревность к "Муре, преданной России," сделала его "суждения о России в течение нескольких лет чересчур суровыми и несправедливыми" (Уэллс 2007, 533).

В финальном аккорде при отъезде из Советского Союза в 1934 г. писатель также сравнивает Россию с возлюбленной: "Для меня Россия всегда обладала каким-то особым очарованием, и теперь я горько сокрушаюсь о том, что эта великая страна движется к новой системе лжи, как сокрушается влюбленный, когда любимая отдаляется" (Уэллс 2007, 423). Эта фраза, объединяющая объективный взгляд публициста и боль от утраты прежних надежд, завершает многослойный портрет Уэллса в СССР – от 'объективного иностранца' до человека, чья эмоциональная привязанность испытала столкновение со сталинской действительностью.

[11] В Англии текст этой беседы был издан годом ранее на основании записей Уэллса (Wells 1934). Переводчиком во время встречи был Константин Уманский – дипломат, известный своей феноменальной памятью и лингвистическими способностями (см. Кагарлицкий 1989, 334).

[12] Мария (Мура) Закревская-Бенкендорф-Будберг – международная авантюристка, писательница, предположительно тройной агент ОГПУ, английской и германской разведок. Уэллс познакомился с ней в 1920 г. в Москве, когда останавливался у Горького. Впоследствии Мура переехала в Англию. В 1934 г. она не сопровождала Уэллса в поездке, сославшись на запрет въезда в СССР. Однако по приезде Уэллс узнал от Горького, что она недавно была в Москве. Эта ложь, причины которой он так и не понял, стала для писателя серьезным ударом и поворотным моментом в отношениях с любовницей (Уэллс 2007, 529–530).

Заключение

Наш диахронический и сравнительный анализ паратекстов советских изданий Уэллса в 1920–1930-е годы выявил пять ключевых тенденций, определявших идеологическую рецепцию его творчества.

Во-первых, *выбор авторов паратекстов* – от лояльных к режиму Луначарского и Заславского до относительно автономных критиков, таких как Замятин, – задавал тональность и степень 'открытости' издания.

Во-вторых, *динамика стратегий акцентирования и нейтрализации* утопических и прогрессивных мотивов в его произведениях отражала изменение политического курса: если в 1920-е годы превалировали позитивные оценки 'социалистической' направленности, то к середине 1930-х эти же мотивы становились поводом для критики и нивелирования революционного посыла.

В-третьих, важнейшим инструментом контроля выступали *паратексты, функционировавшие как медиаторы* идеологически направленного восприятия и к 1934 г. достигшие высокой степени унификации. При этом даже после официального приема писателя Сталиным идеологическая фильтрация не ослабла.

Четвертым фактором стало *напряжение между партийными директивами и индивидуальностью авторов паратекстов*: несмотря на аресты и преследования, подавляющее большинство текстов строго соответствовало линии партии, в то время как редкие исключения – например, Замятин – демонстрировали лишь локальные проявления интерпретационной свободы.

Наконец, *устойчивый читательский интерес* – тиражи переводов достигали 25 000 экземпляров – указывает на разрыв между официальным контролем и реальными запросами аудитории.

Таким образом, паратексты советских переводов Уэллса действительно функционировали как 'поле семиотической битвы', где текст и сопровождающие его элементы переплетались в интересах идеологической ортодоксии. В послесталинский период, на фоне активного развития советской научной фантастики, Уэллс продолжал восприниматься как одна из ключевых фигур жанра – не столько как актуальный идеологический ориентир, сколько как исходная модель и точка отсчета для последующих интерпретаций и переосмыслений. Его влияние на формирование советской фантастики и на способы ее историко-литературного осмысления подробно анализировалось как в позднесоветской критике, так и в постсоветских и эмигрантских исследованиях (Бритиков 1970; Ревич 1997; Heller 1979). Однако за внешней риторической однородностью прослеживаются не только изменения культурной политики СССР 1930-х гг., но и скрытые зоны напряжения – между замыслом автора, установками критики и ожиданиями читателя. Эти противоречия, возможно, и определяют подлинную сложность советской рецепции классика английской литературы – как объекта не только идеологического контроля, но и культурного переосмысления.

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Русский Эрос: Художественное Воплощение В Поэзии Павла Васильева

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The article examines the artistic depiction of the act of love and the erotic bodily canon in the work of the Russian poet Pavel Vasiliev as a poetic expression of the Russian Eros. Russian Eros is understood as a separate cultural space that includes ideas about eroticism, sex, love existing in the society, literature, and art. His figurative and aesthetic embodiment in Vasiliev's poetry was influenced by the artistic worldview and personality traits of the poet and, undoubtedly, by the ideology of his time – Stalinist traditionalism and puritanism. The locus and chronos of lovemaking are shown as events with spatial and temporal characteristics. The reduction of the chronos of intra-event fragments of a love act, the specificity of the locus with specific details (house, room; outdoors; in the hayloft) are considered. The term "erotic bodily canon" is introduced, developing and concretizing the theoretical concept of the bodily canon of Mikhail Bakhtin. The erotically significant parameters of the bodily top and bodily bottom of a woman are modelled, the specificity of their figurative-poetic implementation in the works of Vasiliev, and the connection with folk ideas are described.

Keywords: Pavel Vasiliev, Lyric Poem, Eroticism, Locus, Chronos, Bodily Canon

1. *Русский Эрос в философии*

Тема Эроса, или эротики и секса в художественной литературе до сих пор (в третьем десятилетии XXI века!) остается малопопулярной и практически неприкосновенной зоной исследования для литературоведов, лингвистов, культурологов. Как полагает Георгий Гачев: "И повинно в этом, в частности, – ханжески-чистоплюйское отношение к культуре Эроса в нашей мысли и в литературе последних десятилетий" (1994, 2).

Проблема исследования художественной эротики и секса напрямую влияет на формирование сексуальной культуры в обществе, под которой И. С. Кон понимает "отношение к сексуальности, сексуально-эротические ценности и соответствующие формы поведения" (1996, 6). Исследование художественной эротики в литературе, помимо сугубо научных результатов, способствует воспитанию открытого, здорового отношения к сексуальности, формированию системы сексуально-эротических ценностей общества и вытекающих из них правильных моделей поведения членов общества, в первую очередь молодежи.

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Б. П. Вышеславцев, называя учение Платона об Эросе "гениальным предвосхищением" теории З. Фрейда, указывал в то же время на их отличие: "Эрос бесконечно большее объемлет, нежели libido sexualis, нежели даже эротическая влюбленность. Это его корни и цветы, но не его всеобъемлющее древо жизни" (1931, 62). Под Эросом подразумевают отдельный культурный космос, возникший вокруг любовных отношений и секса как чувственного наслаждения в акте телесного соития полов, который порождает комплекс определенных эмоций, устремлений, идей и вокруг которого вращаются и взаимодействуют самые разнообразные силы и стихии: природные, климатические, физиологические, психологические, духовные, культурно-исторические и т. д. В этом космосе как в целостной семиотической системе, обусловленной своеобразием национальной ментальности, быта, природно-климатических обстоятельств, значимы все детали и мелочи. Понятие Эроса объединяет представления и о любви, и об эротике, и о сексе.

По мнению Вл. Соловьева, эротическая связь между мужчиной и женщиной естественна, если она одухотворяется. Соловьев видит в ней условие метафизического спасения и преобразования мира (1990, 505). Жорж Батай справедливо отмечает, что эротика – это сознательное преследование цели, сознательное искание сладострастия (1994, 282). Кон характеризует эротику как подсистему семиотики народной культуры:

> Эротика, образный строй, в котором воспринимается и символизируется и которым формируется и структурируется сексуальность, – важнейший элемент сексуальной культуры любого народа. Даже самый примитивный народный физиологический натурализм в действительности содержит достаточно сложную символическую картину мира, человеческого тела, репродукции и наслаждения. (1996, 11–12)

В 90-е годы XX века и начале XXI века появилось несколько солидных монографий и сборников статей, в том числе докладов на конференциях, объединивших исследования культурологов, философов, литературоведов и лингвистов по Русскому Эросу, например: *Русский Эрос, или Философия любви в России* (составитель В. П. Шестаков, 1991), *Amour et érotisme dans la littérature russe du XXe siècle* под ред. Л. Геллера (Heller 1992), *Любовь и эротика в русской литературе XX век*а (Bern, Slavica Helvetica, 1992), *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture* под ред. Дж. Т. Костлоу, С. Сандлер и Дж. Волуэс (Costlow, Sandler, and Volwes 1993), Г. Д. Гачев *Русский Эрос. 'Роман' Мысли с Жизнью* (1994), *Секс и эротика в русской традиционной культуре* (составитель А. Л. Топорков, 1996), О. Матич, *Erotic utopia: The decadent imagination in Russia's fin de siècle*" (Matich 2005), *Дискурсы телесности и эротизма в литературе и культуре: Эпоха модернизма* под ред. Д. Г. Иоффе (2008), А. Щербакова *Éros, corps, sexualité dans la littérature russe contemporaine* (Shcherbakova 2016). См. также работы М. Окутюрье (1998), Г. Биновой (2005; 2006), посвященные русской литературной эротике советского периода.

Все это свидетельствует о том, что в мире растет научный интерес к теме эротики и секса в художественной литературе, потребность осмысления важнейшей универсальной сферы человеческой жизни.

2. *Своеобразие творчества Павла Васильева*

Задачей нашей статьи является изучение представлений об эротике и сексе, нашедших художественно-эстетическое воплощение в поэзии выдающегося казахстанского и русского советского поэта Павла Николаевича Васильева (1910–1937)[1]. Он был расстрелян 16 июля 1937 году в возрасте 27 лет по обвинению в принадлежности к террористической "сибирской группе", якобы готовившей покушение на Сталина. В 1956 году был реабилитирован Верховным судом СССР. Павел Васильев оставил после себя значительное поэтическое наследие, часть которого была впервые опубликована только в 80–90-х годах XX века. Несмотря на идеологические запреты, его стихи читали и знали, а публикация новых произведений возродила интерес к его своеобразной лирике и неординарной личности.

Известный почитатель поэзии Павла Васильева С.С. Куняев говорил о том, что в многочисленных публикациях 80-х — начала 90-х годов "преимущественно делался акцент на 'звериный', 'природный', 'нутряной', не обогащенный культурой дар и неуправляемый характер Павла Васильева" (2002, 4). Васильев переживал жизнь как экстремальную и пограничную ситуацию, в которой проявляется глубокое ощущение антагонизма бытия и сверхактивизируется творческая потенция мысли и слова. Именно об этой особенности его творческого мироощущения говорил М. Н. Эпштейн, отмечая, что "среди других русских поэтов Васильев едва ли не самый крутой по характеру лирического героя, которого и в природе влечет все тяжелое по весу, плотное по составу, косое по направлению — как хищный бросок" (1990, 255). Эта врожденная тяга к жизнеутверждающей полноте и мощи мироощущения, не скованного ханжеской моралью новой социалистической идеологии, к первозданному природному естеству человека, его подлинной, 'животной' или 'звериной', сущности, несомненно, повлияла и на художественно-эстетическую специфику воплощения секса и эротики в его поэзии.

Васильев наиболее активно творил в период 1929–1937 гг., когда в стране проблемы половой жизни, секса и любви рассматривались и решались исключительно с идеологических позиций советской морали. Наступившая в послереволюционные годы свобода сексуальной жизни поддерживалась идеологией большевиков, в которой развивалась идея любви-товарищества, основанная на здоровом, естественном половом влечении. Крайним выражением доктрины свободной любви в эти годы является теория стакана воды Александры Коллонтай, в которой секс приравнивается к простейшему физиологическому действию, такому, например, как выпить стакан воды (см. об этом: Куренная 2002). Однако, как пишет Л. М. Геллер, уже через относительно небольшое время "в сталинском обществе сексуальность была в большей степени задушена мел-

[1] Он родился 5 января 1910 года в семье учителя в городке Зайсан в Казахстане. Детство и юность прошли в г. Павлодар (Казахстан). Его короткая жизнь была достаточно насыщенной различными событиями: он был два раза женат, в 1929 году приехал покорять литературную Москву, в Москве его три раза арестовывал НКВД, испытал гонения со стороны РАПП и Максима Горького.

кобуржуазным традиционализмом семейной жизни, абсолютно викторианским пуританизмом, требующим, чтобы и статуи в парке были прикрыты одеждой"[2] (2008, 43).

> В это время и появляются наши красавицы – социалистические, и поэтому все: глаза, прически, цвет волос, улыбка, походка – обуславливались неким женским каноном. И костюмы этим женщинам шились соответствующие – неяркие, легкие коверкотовые, подчеркивающие рост и плечи, с неясным намеком на грудь. И никаких там декольте, никаких там коротких юбок, никаких тебе открытых коленок... (Домбровский 1984, 185–186)

Творчество поэта приходится как раз на годы пуританизма сталинской эпохи, который находился в резком противоречии с его поэтическим мировоззрением и человеческим темпераментом. Кон определяет доминирующую в русской культуре тенденцию в понимании Русского Эроса:

> Противоречие между высочайшей духовностью и полной бестелесностью 'сверху' и грубой натуралистичностью 'снизу' (т.е. на уровне повседневной жизни) красной чертой проходит повсюду через всю историю русской культуры, включая многие крестьянские обычаи. (1996, 8)

Эта тенденция нашла отражение и в русской литературе:

> Если перебрать книги русских писателей, то образов чувственной страсти окажется ничтожно мало. В поэзии начала XIX века все эти амуры, Киприды, Адели отзываются скорее условным поэтическим ритуалом, навеянным французской или античной литературой. (Гачев 1994, 7)

Гачев относил к особенностям Русского Эроса предпочтение не чувственной страсти и сексуальности, а стыдливого уклонения от них либо подневольного подчинения им. И подобное отношение берет начало от А. С. Пушкина, который в стихотворении "Нет, я не дорожу мятежным наслажденьем..." заявляет, что ему милее стыдливая холодность смиренницы, которая предается ласкам без упоенья, чем мятежное наслаждение и чувственный восторг вакханки молодой (Гачев 1994, 7–8).

Павел Васильев в этом отношении выбивается из магистральной линии русской художественной литературы, поскольку с буйством молодости он выбирает земную, животворящую страсть и любовь в ее равновеликих ипостасях: эротических желаниях и влечениях, разгуле чувственных страстей, бурном соитии, нежности и теплоте любви. Возможно, это объясняется его происхождением, близостью к народу, молодостью, необузданным складом характера, любовью к природе, к первозданному естеству человека, неприятием ханжеских норм и правил приличия сталинского традиционализма, сковывающих "звериную", т.е. природную натуру человека. Эпштейн указывал на специфику лирического героя в васильевской поэзии: он "не созерцатель

[2] См. об этом также (Nivat 1992).

природы, а деятельный участник ее буйных и кровавых пиршеств, ее наивное и жестокое дитя, которое соперничает со зверем и тем самым роднится с ним" (1990, 256).

3. *Методы*

Каким выглядит Русский Эрос в поэзии Павла Васильева? Чтобы ответить на этот вопрос, нужно решить две исследовательские задачи: 1) как представляет поэт любовный акт, его место и время, какие образно-эстетические средства с учетом идейно-мировоззренческих установок он использует; 2) какие параметры внешности женщины кажутся поэту эротически привлекательными и формируют женский эротический телесный канон в его картине мира.

В дополнение к литературоведческим и художественно-стилистическим методам мы применяем семиотический метод и комплекс сугубо лингвистических методов: корпусный анализ, контекстуальный анализ, метафорическое моделирование, измерение частотности языковых единиц и т.д.

В ходе корпусного и контекстуального анализа произведений Васильева в Национальном корпусе русского языка (НКРЯ), подкорпус 'поэтический'[3] устанавливаются языковые средства выражения, их частотность. Для более эффективного решения исследовательских задач мы вводим некоторые термины: локус, хронос, эротический телесный канон. Концепция Михаила Бахтина о хронотопе и телесном каноне дополнена и уточнена в соответствии с задачами статьи (более детально см. об этом далее). Полагаем, что термин 'эротический телесный канон' имеет значительные художественно-стилистические и литературоведческие перспективы в исследовании Русского Эроса, художественной эротики в творчестве различных писателей.

Таким образом, использованная нами комплексная методика анализа поэтического текста, включающая литературоведческие, лингвистические и семиотические методы и приемы, показана в Таблице 1.

Таблица 1 - *Комплексная методика анализа поэтического текста*

Литературоведческие методы	**Объект исследования**	**Лингвистические методы**
Историко-литературный комментарий	Поэтический текст	Корпусный анализ
Стилистический анализ		Контекстуальный анализ
Семиотический анализ		Метафорическое моделирование
		Измерение частотности

[3] Национальный корпус русского языка (https://ruscorpora.ru/new/search-poetic.html).

4. *Любовное соитие: локус и хронос*

При создании художественного произведения автор наделяет пространство и время субъективными характеристиками, которые отражают авторское мировосприятие. В нашей статье мы используем понятия ‘локус’ (locus ‘место; расположение; положение’) и ‘хронос’, которые позволяют нам дифференцированно представлять пространственные и временные характеристики события, при необходимости объединяя их. Дифференциация времени и места события важна при семиотическом осмыслении времени и места события как знаковых систем, содержащих в себе семантические коды (исторический, культурологический, религиозно-мифический, географический, анатомический и др.).

В стихотворении Васильева “Любовь на кунцевской даче” (1931) наиболее полно – от начала до конца – показано любовное соитие. Лирический герой последовательно представляет хронологию событий перед свиданием: поездку в электричке, попрошайку-слепца в поезде, любовное томление, из-за которого любовники не замечают ничего вокруг (*Кровь бешеная, бей же без стесненья / В ладони нам, в сухой фанер виска. / Не трогая ничем, не замечая / Раздумья, милицейского свистка*) (Васильев 1989, 60)[4]. Лирический герой размышляет о бренности мира (*Все это канет в Лету*) и насмешливо иронизирует над отношением к их любви в новой морали большевиков, над попыткой советской идеологии контролировать и эту сферу жизни человека:

Ты счастие двух мелких буржуа,
Республика, ей-богу, проглядела...
Республика, ты разрешила им
Сплетать ладони, плакать и плодиться.
Ты радоваться разрешила. Ах!
А если нет? Подумаешь – обида!
Мы погрешим, покудова монах
Еще нам индульгенции не выдал. (Васильев 1989, 60)

Стремление к любви, счастью характеризуется в советской идеологии как мелкобуржуазное. Как верно подмечает Галина Бинова:

> Естественно, при таких идеологических установках эротизм в литературе отвергается как явление декадентское, ‘нездоровое’, извращенное. Уже в 20-е годы в России устанавливается жесточайшая нравственная цензура. А гонения на безнравственность в литературе, в печати, как известно, всегда и везде идут рука об руку с политическими гонениями и с политической несвободой. Ужесточение цензуры нравов – вечный признак идейной и политической реакции. В этих условиях секс приобретает все более политический подтекст, а во второй половине 20-х лет, как и политическая смута, окрашивается криминальным характером. В этом контексте понятны крайне скупые и осторожные эротические описания в произведениях художественной литературы. (2006, 62)

[4] Текст стихотворения приводится по изданию (Васильев 1989).

Для новой морали характерен тотальный контроль над личной жизнью человека, даже над сферой эмоций: плачем, радостью, лаской. Бунтарская натура поэта не приемлет этого: ему не нужно разрешение для радости и любви. Он сравнивает тотальный контроль новой идеологии с инквизицией (*погрешим, монах, индульгенции*).

Далее следует изображение локуса события – комнатки, отдельных деталей: раздевающаяся девушка; застывший клоп; разбитое зеркальце; брошенный недошитый фартучек. Все эти обыденные мелочи, подмеченные лирическим героем, передают его волнение и томление, от которого он пытается отвлечься. Чувственной радостью и полнотой жизни пронизано описание обнаженной девушки, излучающей зной, обрызганной смехом; она воплощение счастья для лирического героя. Он отмечает эротические детали, которые воссоздает с присущей ему эстетической точностью и тонкостью чувственного восприятия: белизну тела, '*меж бедер отороченную мехом*', выгнутую '*лебяжьей шеей*' руку, '*алый след от скинутых подвязок*'. Лирический герой передает ощущение исчезающего в порыве страсти мира, в котором остались только он и она; возникающий в предчувствии любовного наслаждения '*холодок по хребтовине*', сближение в начале: '*тебя, нацеливаясь, враз охватываю вдруг по-обезьяньи*', когда он способен еще различать что-то, например, туфли на ногах девушки, которые '*высоко взлетели*'. Затем наступают мгновения полного всепоглощающего забвения, когда '*Нет ничего. Нет берега и цели*'; '*Исчезло все. И только двое нас*'. Описание любовного акта переходит к нарратору – наблюдателю, который повествует о происходящем: *Лишь радостные хриплые тела / По безразличной мечутся постели*.

Поэт любит женщин, принимает их эротические игры (*Жеманница! Ты туфель не сняла*), ласково обращается к ним во время любовного заигрывания: *жеманница, проказница*.

Апофеоз любовного акта лирический герой сравнивает со скачкой по пустыне, он мастерски описывает ощущение самозабвения в момент экстаза, выраженное в восклицаниях и незаконченных фразах (*Да здравствует! Пусть слышишь ты...*), ритм движений поддерживает повтором слов (*Еще, еще...*):

Для нас, для окаянных, обреченных
Да здравствуют наездники пустынь,
Взнуздавшие коней неукрощенных!
Да здравствует!.. Еще, еще... И бред
Раздвинутый, как эти бедра... Мимо
Пусть волны хлещут, пусть погаснет свет
В багровых клочьях скрученного дыма,
Пусть слышишь ты... (Васильев 1989, 62)

В метафорической модели [СЕКС – это СКАЧКА НА КОНЕ] акцентируются черты неукротимости, непокорности животного: это не просто конь, а неукрощенный, только что взнузданный, которому предстоит скачка по пустыням и степям (*наездники пустынь, Взнуздавшие коней неукрощенных*). Подобная экстремальность в реализации распространенной метафоры связана с такими особенностями поэтического мировоззрения Васильева, как "его врожденная тяга к дикой и пустынной

природе русской Азии, хищный склад его лирического героя" (Эпштейн 1990, 256). Страстная любовь поэта к казахской степи, в которой он вырос, к кочевой необузданной вольнице проходит через все его творчество, определяя многие особенности его поэтического стиля и образного мышления (Темиргазина 2022, 255–256).

Любовный акт в стихотворении обрамлен хронологически последовательной событийной канвой, погружен в идеологическую атмосферу эпохи. Он пронизан ощущением счастья двух молодых, полных любви и здоровых желаний мужчины и женщины, радостью жизнеутверждения. Ни отдельные эротические, иногда стилистически сниженные детали полового действа (*холодок по хребтовине, высоко взлетевшие туфли, охватил по-обезьяньи, крик, хриплые тела*), ни передача его ритма (*Еще, еще...*) не приземляют его возвышенную, с точки зрения поэта, суть, не опошляют акта любви, не превращают его в простое совокупление. Васильеву не позволяли сделать это собственные нравственные убеждения, истинное уважение и любовь к женщине, поэтическое чутье и интуиция художника, не допускающие пересечения границы между пошлостью и художественной правдой, что привело бы к натуралистическому упрощению и примитиву.

Локус любовного события – крохотная комнатка (*Сам бог / Ее, наверно, вымерял аршином*) с непритязательной мебелью на подмосковной даче в Кунцево. Локус постепенно сужается до старой кровати, которую поэт очеловечивает и которой придает символический смысл:

Пускай узнает старая кровать
Двух счастий вес. Пусть принимает милость
Таить, молчать и до поры скрывать,
Ведь этому она не разучилась. (Васильев 1989, 62)

Событийный ряд любовного акта завершается легким незначащим разговором о примете числа тринадцать, шутливым обменом репликами, поцелуями, курением в постели: *Целуемся. И вот вам разговор. / Лежим и, переругиваясь, курим* (Васильев 1989, 63).

Художественное изображение любовного свидания, секса в этом стихотворении характеризуется несколькими переходами от приземленно-обыденного к возвышенно-поэтическому, от конкретного к обобщенному (Temirgazina, Bakhtikireeva, et al. 2016). И эти перепады не дают автору опуститься до натурализма или, наоборот, оторваться от действительности жизни, "улететь в эмпиреи любви". Вышеславцев, полемизируя с отдельными положениями теории психоанализа З. Фрейда, ставит ему в заслугу обнаружение в самых возвышенных формах человеческого сознания – религии и искусства – подсознательных сексуальных инстинктов и утверждает, что понятие "сублимация" заключается в возведении низшего к высшему: "Сублимация, возвышаясь над природой, природу не уничтожает, но восполняет, преображает и усовершает; или, как гласит классическая формула, gratia naturam non tollit, sed perficit!" (1931, 70).

Поэт со всей мощью своего таланта создал эстетизированную семиотику художественной телесности, эротики и сексуальности, которая передает его 'нутряное', 'звериное' восприятие жизни во всей ее полноте и красоте без каких-либо оговорок и идеологических ограничений в духе времени.

> Он жил в трудное и возбужденное время и, несмотря ни на что, добился этого совершенства. У него нет убогих тропов, унылых и вялых строк, все под током творческой ярости, каждый образ слепящ и рельефен, что доводит силу чувства, рисунок переживания до апогея. (Поделков 1989, 5)

Рассмотренное нами выше стихотворение, пожалуй, единственное у Васильева, в котором в наиболее полном виде воплощены хронос и локус любовного акта. Он воссоздает события до самого любовного акта, прелюдию к нему – разговоры, любовные ласки и т.п., момент экстаза и события после любовного акта. Локус любовного свидания меняется, постепенно сужаясь: ПОЕЗД → КОМНАТА НА ДАЧЕ → КРОВАТЬ.

Более типичным для Васильева является описание прелюдии и завершения соития:

> *Воздух пах*
> *Кожей девическою,*
> *Задыхаться*
> *Девки начали*
> *На сеновалах – впотьмах.*
> *И чудились*
> *Их ноги босые,*
> *Тихий смешок перед концом*. (Васильев 1968, 311)[5]

Иногда знаком состоявшегося любовного соития является всего лишь одна деталь, например, отброшенный в сторону платок:

> *Близость тонких загорелых пальцев,*
> *Теплота порозовевших щек!*
> *...На траву отброшенным остался*
> *Позабытый ситцевый платок*. (Васильев 1968, 43)

Автор сокращает хронос любовного свидания, редуцируя такой важный событийный элемент, как сам половой акт. Таким образом, хронос свидания в тексте выглядит как цепочка внутрисобытийных явлений:

> ЗАИГРЫВАНИЕ → ПРЕЛЮДИЯ → (СОИТИЕ)[6] → РАССТАВАНИЕ или
> ЗАИГРЫВАНИЕ → (ПРЕЛЮДИЯ) → (СОИТИЕ) → РАССТАВАНИЕ.

[5] Далее тексты стихотворений приводятся по изданию (Васильев 1968).

[6] Скобки означают редуцированное в хронологическом описании событие.

В стихотворении "Дорога" (1933 г.) лирический герой сравнивает желанную женщину с *розаном ситцевым*, он испытывает сексуальное возбуждение (*Под юбки бы...*), мысленно рисуя себе соблазняющие эротические ласки (*скользить по коже, родинку найти*), хорошо представляя их возбуждающее действие на девушку (*Я знаю: от ступни и до виска / Есть много жилок, и попробуй тронь их*):

Всё ж Настенька похожа
На розан ситцевый, как ни крути.
Под юбки бы... По золоченой коже
Скользить, скользить и родинку найти.
Я знаю: от ступни и до виска
Есть много жилок, и попробуй тронь их –
Сейчас же кровь проступит на ладони
И сделается тоньше волоска.
Твое дыханье и сойдет на нет.
Там так темно, что отовсюду свет,
Как рядом с солнцем может быть темно,
Темно до звезд, тепло, как в гнездах птичьих,
И столько радостей, что мудрено постичь их,
И не постичь их тоже мудрено.
Под юбки бы. Но в юбках столько складок,
Но воздух горек до того, что сладок. (Васильев 1968, 420)

Последние семь строк представляют собой рассуждение о загадочном *ТАМ*. Где *ТАМ*? Что имеет в виду поэт? Описание *ТАМ* построено на антитезе: *темно – свет; солнце – звезды; постичь – не постичь; горек – сладок*. И только возвращение к лейтмотиву сексуального влечения *Под юбки бы* проясняет для читателя загадку: *ТАМ* – это радость сексуального слияния, любовный экстаз, на пути к осуществлению которых возможны препятствия (*Но в юбках столько сладок*), но не осуществить его нельзя, как нельзя остановить саму жизнь. Придание любовному акту характера локуса (*ТАМ*), т.е. реализация метафоры [СЕКСУАЛЬНЫЙ ЭКСТАЗ – это МЕСТО] означает в определенном смысле принижение его хронологического событийно-пропозиционального статуса, но зато передает его основную цель: любовный экстаз как место, куда стремятся попасть, как, например, стремятся попасть в обетованную землю, в рай. Любовный акт, сексуальное наслаждение предстают здесь сутью и целью жизни, частью природы человека, неотделимой от остальной его жизни; они приносят муки, переживания, терзания, но при этом дарят радость, свет, тепло.

Лирический герой описывает женщину, проснувшуюся на ранней заре (*в предзорную пору*) после ночи любви, и использует образные ассоциации с хмелем, дымом, тяжестью, передающие томное состояние женщины, утомленной и опьяненной любовными ласками: *темный хмель волос, глаза в дыму, тяжкие ресницы* (Васильев 1968, 167).

Поэт сравнивает поцелуй с тем, как голубь пьет воду: *Я поцелую тяжкие ресницы, / Как голубь пьет – легко и горячо* (там же, 167). Метафорическая ассоциация [ПОЦЕ-

ЛУЙ – это ПИТЬЕ, УТОЛЕНИЕ ЖАЖДЫ] типична для художественной эстетики Васильева: *Дорогая, я к тебе приходил, / Губы твои запрокидывал, долго пил* (там же, 169); *Я еще нигде / Никому не говорил, / Что расстаюсь / С проклятым правом / Пить одному / Из последних сил / Губ твоих / Беспамятство / И отраву* (там же, 175).

Трогательную эротическую картину создает поэт, метафорически описывая любовную ласку женщины, перебирающей волосы любимого: *И другому в волосы нежнее / Заплетаешь ласки ты, любя...* (там же, 38).

Важным локусом любовного акта в художественной эротике Павла Васильева является постель (14)[7], перина (6), кровать (3), сеновал (10), палисад (4), травы (3), поле (2).

Застилай, забава,
Постель на двух.
Наволоки, пологи,
Лебяжий пух. (там же, 227)

Лишь радостные хриплые тела
По безразличной мечутся постели.
Пускай узнает старая кровать
Двух счастий вес. (Васильев 1989, 62)

Я целый век готов скитаться
По шатким лесенкам с тобой,
И слушать –
Как ты жарко дышишь,
Забыв скрипучую кровать,
И руки, чуть локтей повыше,
Во тьме кромешной целовать. (Васильев 1968, 198)

Синтагматические связи слов характеризуют локус любовного акта, происходящего в комнате, в доме: *постель на двоих, взрытые постели, в постелях пуховых; старая кровать, безразличная кровать, скрипучая кровать; на перинах лебяжьего пуха; на взбитых горой перинах; брачных перинах; лебяжьих перинах.*

Локус любовного свидания вне дома, на природе – это сеновал, поля, палисад, заросли карагача: *Задыхаться / Девки начали / На сеновалах – впотьмах* (там же, 311); *И просыпался с милою в овсах!* (там же, 179); *Проводил соседку я тихонько / В мой густой зеленый палисад* (там же, 43); *Я видел – в зарослях карагача / Ты с ним, моя подруга, целовалась* (там же, 146).

Возвышенно-поэтическое описание летних любовных ночей на сеновале дано поэтом в стихотворении "Поверивший в слова простые..." (1932 г.):

[7] Цифры в скобках означают количество употреблений в НКРЯ.

Под стеганые одеяла
К молодкам в темень сеновала
Гостить повадился июнь.
Ну, значит, ладны будут дети,
Желтоволосы и крепки,
Когда такая сладость в лете,
Когда в медовом, теплом свете
Сплетает молодость венки. (Васильев 1968, 355)

Васильев не описывает позу любовников, но из подтекста можно сделать вывод о том, что это традиционная поза – лицом к лицу. Но в одном случае в стихотворении-шутке "Обида" (1929–1932 гг.) он упоминает другую позу:

Я ответил ей:
Хорошо,
Я согласен собакой быть,
Но позволь, подруга, тогда
По-собачьи тебя любить. (там же, 108)

Выражение *познать женщину*, которое в библейском понимании означает 'иметь с женщиной половую связь', своеобразно трактуется Васильевым: в стихотворении "Дорога" лирический герой говорит о женщине, которая была близка со многими, но они все-таки не узнали ее душу, не постигли внутренний мир, и вряд ли им это удастся, потому что для этого они должны познать себя:

Бесстыдная, ты ароматна так,
Как будто лето в травах пробродила,
Как будто раздевали догола
Тебя сто раз и всё же не узнали,
Как ты смеешься, до чего ты зла, –
Да и узнать удастся им едва ли. (там же, 419)

В. Н. Топоров говорил о своеобразии православного познания следующее: "Познать женщину (*coire*), познать мир, познать самого себя – звенья одной цепи познания, и последнее – высшее: оно в некотором роде собирание самого себя..." (1995, 101).

Результаты анализа локуса и хроноса любовного акта представлены в Таблице 2.

Таблица 2 - *Локус и хронос любовного соития*

Локус	**Дом, комната**	**На природе**	**Сеновал**
Хронос	неопределенный хронос	лето (июнь, июль, август)	лето (июнь, июль, август)
Детали	*скрипучая кровать, постель, перина из лебяжьего пуха, по шатким лесенкам, разбитое зеркальце*	*травы, поле, в овсах, заросли карагача, густой зеленый палисад*	*стеганые одеяла, впотьмах*

5. *Эротический телесный канон в лирике Васильева*

И. Кон констатирует важность понятия 'телесный канон': "Для понимания эротической культуры любого народа важно учитывать не только и не столько его отношение к собственно сексуальности, но то явление, которое Михаил Бахтин назвал 'телесным каноном' – символическое представление тела, особенно наготы и телесного низа" (1996, 13). Интерпретация телесного канона в философии Бахтина непосредственно связана с господствующей в мифологических и христианских воззрениях дихотомической оппозицией духовного 'верха' и телесного 'низа' как принципа мироустройства.

> 'Верх' – это небо, 'низ' – это земля, в чреве которой происходят процессы рождения и гибели. В эту картину мира был органично вписан и человек, его 'верхом' является голова, лицо, 'низом' – производительные органы, живот, зад. В то же время такая трактовка космического мироустройства не могла не получить своей аксиологической проекции: осмысление 'верха' и 'низа' как разного, а подчас и полярного рода ценностей. (Богданова 2011, 41)

В рассуждениях Бахтина (1990) о творчестве Франсуа Рабле материально-телесная стихия есть созидательное, позитивное начало, ответственное за вечное течение жизни, за ее обновление; носителем ее выступает народ, выражающий взгляд на телесность человека в карнавальной и смеховой культуре. В XVI веке позитивный взгляд на телесное в человеке сталкивается с ужесточающимися запретами и сменяется новым телесным каноном.

> Для нового телесного канона характерно – при всех его значительных исторических и жанровых вариациях – совершенно готовое, завершенное, строго отграниченное, замкнутое, показанное извне, несмешанное и индивидуально-выразительное тело. Все то, что выпирает, вылезает из тела, всякие резкие выпуклости, отростки и ответвления, то есть все то, в чем тело выходит за свои границы и зачинает другое тело, отсекается, устраняется, закрывается, смягчается. Также закрываются и все отверстия, ведущие в глубины тела. (Бахтин 1990, 354–355)

Н. Б. Кириллова, А. В. Пестова определяют телесный канон как "характерную для той или иной культуры нормативную систему установок и представлений относительно внешнего вида тела и его функциональной исполнительности" (2016, 4). Далее исследователи подчеркивают предпочтительность этого термина по сравнению с другими:

> Несмотря на наличие множества синонимичных выражений, таких как 'телесная нормативность', 'телесный эталон', 'телесный образец', 'телесный образ' ('body image'), понятие 'телесный канон' позволяет анализировать явление телесности наиболее полно в силу своей неакцентированности на эстетической или нравственной оценке телесных проявлений, их социальной значимости. (Кириллова, Пестова 2016, 4)

Таким образом, существенным компонентом эротической и сексуальной культуры любого народа является эротический телесный канон**.** Считаем необходимым ввести этот термин, который мы определяем как свойственную определенной культуре модель тела, отражающую сексуально-эротические установки и стереотипы социума о внешнем виде тела, отдельных его частях, об их функциональности. Общепринятый эротический телесный канон гендерно ориентирован, исторически и культурно изменчив. В художественной литературе отражаются как общепринятые черты эротического телесного канона, так и индивидуально-авторские, обусловленные художественно-эстетическими, личностными предпочтениями автора.

В нашем исследовании мы попытаемся воссоздать эротический телесный канон женщины как важнейший компонент художественной эротики Павла Васильева. В него включены некоторые общие внешние черты, создающие определенный эротически привлекательный тип женщины:

Сшей ты, ради бога, продувную
Кофту с рукавом по локоток,
Чтобы твое яростное тело
С ядрами грудей позолотело,
Чтобы наглядеться я не мог.
Я люблю телесный твой избыток,
От бровей широких и сердитых
До ступни, до ноготков люблю,
За ночь обескрылевшие плечи,
Взор, и рассудительные речи,
И походку важную твою. (Васильев 1968, 189)

Образ любимой женщины создается в отдельных, эротически важных деталях-знаках: '*ядра грудей*,' крепкое тело ('*телесный твой избыток*'), неспешная '*важная походка*', '*обескрылевшие*' плечи. Он во многом напоминает народный, крестьянский эстетический идеал: "Эталон красоты девушки: плавная походка, скромный взгляд, высокий рост, густые волосы, полнота, круглота и румяность лица" (Кон 1996, 9). Желанная женщина выглядит в глазах лирического героя светящейся изнутри жар-

кой плотью, он заостряет внимание на томящихся сосках женской груди, просвечивающих через шелк.

Будто свечи
Жаркие тлятся,
Изнутри освещая плоть,
И соски, сахарясь, томятся,
Шелк нагретый
Боясь проколоть. (Васильев 1968, 320)

Значимым для поэта элементом ‘телесного низа’ женщины являются бедра (5 упоминаний). Его взор привлекает их изгиб: *Круглобедрые казачки / Промелькнули взмахами платков* (там же, 46); движение бедер при походке: *Вокруг бедер / Порхает тюник. / И под тюником / Охают бедра* (там же, 320). Он сравнивает бедра женщины с двумя лебедями [БЕДРА – это ЛЕБЕДИ]: *И бедра там, где стянут ремешок, – / Два лебедя* (там же, 417). В любовной лирике Васильева, глубоко связанной с народными корнями, с фольклором, часто возникают ассоциации с лебедем. В песенно-сказочном фольклоре Руси и поэзии России лебединый образ – один из самых распространенных, он восходит к мифологии и языческим верованиям древних славян (Топоров 1988, 40–41). Эротический подтекст приобретает у Васильева и традиционная русская поэтическая метафора [ЖЕНСКИЕ РУКИ – это ЛЕБЕДИ] (сравним с есенинскими строками: *Руки милой – пара лебедей; И меня твои лебяжьи руки / Обвивали, словно два крыла*). См. у Васильева: *Обними меня руками / Лебедиными*... (Васильев 1968, 227); *И когда я душил ее руки, как шеи / Двух больших лебедей, ты шептала: “А я?”* (там же, 165); *Лебяжьей шеей выгнута рука*... (Васильев 1989, 62).

Лебедь в русской фольклорной и мифологической традиции сугубо женский символ, который приобретает в поэзии Васильева особый эротический смысл, ассоциируясь не только с ‘телесным верхом’ (руками, шеей), но и с ‘телесным низом’ (бедрами). “...Эротическая образностъ метафорична, превращает свой предмет в загадку, затрудняет его опознание, выводит из автоматизма, тем самым одновременно эротизируя и эстетизируя его восприятие” (Эпштейн 2021, 169).

Губы женщины также являются важным элементом ‘телесного верха‘ в эротическом каноне, они упоминаются, по данным НКРЯ, в эротическом контексте 26 раз. Губы ассоциируются с созревшими красными ягодами [ГУБЫ – это ЯГОДЫ], в своих фантазиях лирический герой представляет их *винный привкус*:

... и даже привкус винный
Созревших губ, которых я не смог
Еще коснуться, но ужель боюсь
Коснуться их примятых красных ягод. (Васильев 1968, 419)
Пусть улыбку сберегут
Губы твои – ягоды. (там же, 151)

Особенно эротичным ему кажется пушок (4 раза) над губами: *И золотой, чуть слышимый пушок, / Чуть различимый и почти невинный* (там же, 419); *Я над теплой губой обозначу пушок* (там же, 166); *Пушок у губ* (там же, 167).

Эротические ассоциации вызывают у поэта такой элемент женского 'телесного верха', как волосы, прическа: *Ах, пшеничная прическа в два узла, / Широким гребнем схваченная наспех* (там же, 419); *Не суждено мне, видно, расплетать / Твои тяжелые и золотые косы* (там же, 162).

Волнующий его цвет женских волос, убранных в прическу (узел, коса), – пшеничный, золотой; расплести косы, распустить прическу является для него чрезвычайно эротическим действом, предшествующим любовному событию:

И этот узел кос тугой
Сегодня ж, может быть, под вечер
Не ты, не я, а тот, другой
Распустит бережно на плечи. (там же, 48)

В русских народных представлениях, отраженных в фольклоре и фразеологии, коса была знаком девичества и невинности, а расплетенная коса девушки, распущенные волосы означали бесчестие и потерю невинности (Толстой 1999, 616–618). Эти народные представления, восходящие к славянскому язычеству, отражены в поэтической картине мира Васильева:

Пес на крыльце парадном, ласковый и косой,
Верочка Иванова, вежливая, с косой,
Девушка-горожанка с нерасплетенной косой. (Васильев 1968, 128)

Существенным элементом сексуальности женщины поэт считает запах. Как верно отмечает Гачев: "... Сексуальное наслаждение связано прежде всего с первичными телесными ощущениями: осязание, вкус, запах..." (1994, 11). Для лирического героя Васильева женская сексуальность усиливается запахами трав, лета, меда, т.е. естественными, близкими ему, родными ароматами: *Бесстыдная, ты ароматна так, / Как будто лето в травах пробродила*; *Медовая, крутая, травяная*... (Васильев 1968, 417); *Воздух пах / Кожей девическою* (там же, 311). Эротично выглядит и загорелая женская кожа: *веселый зной загара золотого; по золоченой коже скользить; пшеничная от света, в солнце вся от макушки до пят* (там же, 200–201).

Интересно, что в эротический телесный канон Васильев включает и детали женской одежды: юбка (17), каблучки (6) (см.: Bakhtikireeva, Sinyachkin et al. 2017). Как показывает корпусное исследование, юбка упоминается много раз, причем большей частью в эротическом контексте. Взгляд лирического героя привлекают девушки и женщины в колышущихся от ходьбы, разлетающихся от ветра ситцевых юбках: *Ну и юбки! До чего летучи! / Ситцевый буран свиреп и лют*... (Васильев 1968, 206); *Ах, эти юбки в розовых цветах, / Рассыпанных – куда попало!* (там же, 419).

Юбки не просто эротическая деталь одежды девушки, она приобретает у Васильева значение символа желанной женщины: *Сапоги за юбкою, / Голубь за голубкою..; Сапоги за юбкою, / За ситцевой вьюгою* (там же, 256). Сапоги – символ мужчины, преследующего желанную женщину. В этом контексте *смятые юбки* приобретают скрытый сексуальный символический подтекст:

Но слухи шли, что Христолюбов
(Хоть и почтенна седина)
Охоч до смятых бабьих юбок. (там же, 527)

Юбка как символ женской сексуальности типичен для народного традиционного сознания и, как следствие, частотен в русской фразеологии: *лезть/ залезть (полезть) под юбку* – "кому. 1. Прост. неодобр. Грубо и вульгарно ухаживать за женщиной" (Мокиенко, Никитина 2003, 405); *крутить/ крутнуть подолом (юбки)* – "1. Прост. Флиртовать, кокетничать, вести себя легкомысленно. 2. Прост. Пренебр. Флиртовать, кокетничать с кем-л.)" (там же, 263); *приносить/ принести в подоле (юбки)* – "Прост. Неодобр. Рожать ребёнка, не будучи замужем" (там же, 520).

Эротика 'телесного низа' приобретает в поэтике Васильева возвышенный, образно-эмоциональный характер, лишенный какого бы то ни было натурализма и примитивизма: *белизна, отороченная мехом между бедер; бедра – два лебедя.* Таким образом, эротический телесный канон предстает для Васильева в следующем женском образе: *Веселый зной загара золотого, / Пушок у губ и юбка до колен* (Васильев 1968, 167).

Каблучки выступают одним из важных элементов эротического телесного низа, привлекая внимание к ногам женщины, обутым в туфли или ботинки с каблуками. Лирический герой отмечает и стук каблучков, и высоту, и форму каблуков, придающих походке женщины легкость и сходство с полетом:

Опрокинется небо над нами, и рядом мгновенно
Я услышу твой смех, и твои каблучки простучат. (там же, 142)
Пусть смекнут про остальное сами.
Нечего скрывать тебе, – почто ж! –
С кем теперь гуляешь вечерами,
Рядом с кем московскими садами
На высоких каблуках идешь. (там же, 206)
Верочка Иванова с туфлями на каблуках. (там же, 128)
Каблуки – тонки,
На полет легки. (там же, 256)

Естественной женской сексуальности Васильев противопоставляет искусственную, поддельную, которая кажется ему фальшью. Ее знаками являются: *подкрашенные губы*, крашенные волосы (*кудлы*), *запах псины* от них, *ароматы пудры и мыла, гусиная кожа бедер, на ногах мозоли от обнов*. Семиотика 'фальшивой', неестественной женской сексуальности формируется у него в московский период, в период самоутверждения в столичной литературной среде, когда он приходит к осознанию неприятия многих

вещей, к которым можно отнести и искусственные изощрения столичных красавиц: *Но не для нас цветут у ней / В губах подкрашенных улыбки* (там же, 48); *Туда, где, проснувшись, постельный уют / Пропах ароматами пудры и мыла* (там же, 70).

В "Стихах в честь Натальи" (1934 г.) он противопоставляет эти два канона красоты: естественный, природный, связанный народными представлениями, и московский, искусственный:

Прогуляться ль выйдешь, дорогая.
Все в тебе ценя и прославляя,
Смотрит долго умный наш народ,
Называет "прелестью" и "павой"
И шумит вослед за величавой:
"По стране красавица идет".
Так идет, что ветви зеленеют,
Так идет, что соловьи чумеют,
Так идет, что облака стоят.
Так идет, пшеничная от света,
Больше всех любовью разогрета,
В солнце вся от макушки до пят.
Так идет, земли едва касаясь,
И дают дорогу, расступаясь,
Шлюхи из фокстротных табунов
У которых кудлы пахнут псиной,
Бедра крыты кожею гусиной,
На ногах мозоли от обнов. (там же, 200–201)

Поддерживая революцию и новую жизнь, несущую новые идеалы, он характеризует прошлую как *подлую, падлую мреть*, обвиняя ее (и это очень важно для Васильева) в стремлении *к любви дешевизне.* Любовь для поэта – 'дорогая' вещь, и она не должна быть обесценена ни по каким причинам – ни по идеологическим, ни по экономическим, ни по социальным:

Бей в эту подлую, падлую мреть,
Томящуюся по любви дешевизне,
Чтоб легче было дышать и петь,
И жизнью гореть,
И двигаться с жизнью! (там же, 374)

Изучив эротический телесный канон в стихах Васильева, мы можем представить полученные результаты в Таблице 3.

Таблица 3 - *Эротический телесный канон в стихах Васильева*

Части канона	Детали канона	Специфика художественного воплощения в тексте
Общие параметры	Тело в целом	Дородность: *телесный избыток, яростное тело*
	Загорелая кожа	Метафорическая модель [ЗАГОРЕЛАЯ КОЖА – это ЗОЛОТО]; [ЗАГОРЕЛАЯ КОЖА – это ПШЕНИЦА]: *золоченая кожа; золотая от загара; пшеничная от света*
	Запах	Природные естественные запахи: *медовая; травяная; ароматна так, как будто лето в травах пробродила; Воздух пах девическою кожей*
Телесный верх	Волосы	Нерасплетенная коса – символ девической невинности; распущенные волосы – символ потери невинности; а также прелюдия к акту любви: *девушка-горожанка с нерасплетенной косой; пшеничная прическа в два узла; узел кос тугой ... распустит бережно на плечи; Не суждено мне, видно, расплетать твои тяжелые и золотые косы*
	Губы	Метафора [ГУБЫ – это ЯГОДЫ]: *привкус винный созревших губ; коснуться их примятых красных ягод; губы твои – ягод*ы
	Пушок над губами	*И золотой, чуть слышимый пушок, чуть различимый и почти невинный*; *Я над теплой губой обозначу пушок*; *пушок у губ*
	Грудь	Метафора [ГРУДИ – это ЯДРА]: *яростное тело с ядрами грудей.* Метафора [СОСКИ – это ОСТРЫЙ ПРЕДМЕТ]: *И соски, сахарясь, томятся, Шелк нагретый Боясь проколоть*
	Руки	Метафора [РУКИ – это ЛЕБЕДИНАЯ ШЕЯ]: *душил ее руки, как шеи двух больших лебедей*; *лебяжьей шеей выгнута рука*
Телесный низ	Бедра	Метафора [БЕДРА – это ЛЕБЕДИ]: *И бедра там, где стянут ремешок, – два лебедя*
	Лоно	Метафора [ЛОНО – это МЕХ]: *белизна, отороченная мехом между бедер*
	Юбка	Символ женского телесного низа – бедер и лона женщины: *под юбки бы; охоч до смятых бабьих юбок; Сапоги за юбкою, Голубь за голубкою...*
	Каблучки	Стук каблуков, форма и высота каблука, сравнение с полетом: *твои каблучки простучат; каблуки – тонки, на полет легки*

6. *Заключение*

В эпоху, когда "признаки пола в бесполом мире становились почти вызовом" (Бинова 2006, 65), воссоздавать в своей лирике эротический телесный канон женщины, восходящий корнями к природной естественной сути человека, воспевать любовь к женщине во всех ее проявлениях – чувственных, физиологических, эмоциональных – как неотъемлемую часть бытия и природы человека, свободную от сталинского пуританизма и идеологического контроля советской морали, было для поэта непростой задачей. Художественная эротика Павла Васильева отличается жизнеутверждающим оптимизмом, возвышенным и одновременно 'земным', естественным отношением к физиологической стороне любви – половому акту, женщина для него не объект в сексуальных отношениях, а партнер, равно создающий любовное наслаждение и получающий его. Поэт не морализирует по поводу многочисленных сексуальных связей женщины, признавая за ней право на это.

Кон говорил об особенности воплощения Русского Эроса в художественной литературе: "Женщина в ней либо 'чистейшей прелести чистейший образец' либо распутница. Середины не дано. Но оба эти полюса – всего лишь образы мужского воображения, имеющие мало общего с реальной женственностью" (1996, 15). В этом плане Павел Васильев отличается от общей тенденции русской литературы, воплощая в Русском Эросе свое понимание женственности, сочетающей в себе духовность и чувственность, не чуждающейся своих эротических желаний и сексуальности, не скованной ханжеской моралью. В то же время для Русского Эроса Павла Васильева характерны тяга к первозданной природности, необузданным проявлениям 'животной', 'звериной' сущности человека, что обусловлено художественным мировоззрением поэта, неприятием идеологического контроля над сексуальной стороной жизни. Немаловажную роль в формировании своеобразия васильевского Русского Эроса сыграл непокорный и свободолюбивый характер поэта, выросшего на вольных степных просторах 'дикого' казахско-русского пограничья.

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La geometria di Constantin Brâncuși nei versi di Lucian Blaga: una lettura delcontiana

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What tools can poetry deploy to interpret or rather reinterpret a work of art, and why have so many poets felt such an exceptional attraction to the work of Constantin Brâncuși? What drove rhymers to devote extensive, precious pages to the great Romanian artist throughout the 20th century? From this perspective, the example of Lucian Blaga's poem *Pasărea sfântă* [The Sacred Bird] emerges. It was first published in 1926 in the journal *Gândirea* [The Thinking] and subsequently reprinted in 1929 in the volume *Laudă somnului* [In Praise of Sleep].
The aim of this study is to analyze, from an interpretative perspective, the poem where Brâncuși's aesthetic conception meets Blaga's poetics and belief, creating a brilliant example of art within art. The main source is the material from the Rosa Del Conte archive, which offers us an engaging interpretation.

Keywords: Constantin Brâncuși, Lucian Blaga, Rosa Del Conte, interpretation, translation

Premessa

Quali strumenti può mettere in campo la poesia per interpretare un'opera d'arte? Perché tanti poeti hanno sentito una forte attrazione verso l'opera di Costantin Brâncuși? Cosa ha spinto gli artisti della parola a dedicare ampie pagine di inestimabile valore al grande scultore romeno nel corso del XX secolo? Si tratta di temi che sono stati scarsamente affrontati nella vasta bibliografia sullo scultore di origine romena naturalizzato francese.

Ezra Pound e Benjamin Fondane furono tra i primi a riconoscere, già negli anni Venti, l'impronta speciale della sua opera e a cercare di descrivere con mezzi poetici la sua unicità, evidenziando la difficoltà di esprimere a parole l'arte di Brâncuși. Questo in un'epoca in cui questa singolarità non era così evidente come oggi, ora che lo scultore è diventato un vero e proprio simbolo dell'arte moderna.

Qual è il filo conduttore che unisce lo scultore e la sua arte alla poesia? Riprendendo i ricordi di Ezra Pound, Brâncuși sarebbe l'artista inesorabilmente ossessionato dalla tentazione di avvicinarsi all'infinito attraverso la forma (Jeffery 2020, 244). Ma anche i poeti, almeno alcuni di loro, non sono forse ossessionati dal desiderio ardente di 'vedere idee', di raggiungere forme pure attraverso la vibrazione della parola investita di una particolare for-

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za espressiva e attraverso l'immaginazione che apre all'infinito della nostra mente? Appare assodato che il messaggio artistico nel suo tentativo di raggiungere e trasmettere la perfezione è l'obiettivo principale dell'arte in quanto tale. Ma quale potrebbe essere la chiave di lettura di un testo poetico che ha come oggetto una creazione scultorea, un capolavoro già ampiamente interpretato nell'ambito della storia dell'arte?

In questa prospettiva emerge l'esempio della poesia di Lucian Blaga *Pasărea sfântă* [Uccello sacro] pubblicata per la prima volta nel 1926 sulla rivista *Gândirea* e poi stampata nel 1929 nel volume *Laudă somnului* [Elogio del sonno]. Il testo poetico in questione è lo spazio in cui si incontrano il pensiero estetico di Brâncuşi[1] con la poetica e la riflessione di Blaga, dando vita a un mirabile esempio di 'arte nell'arte', come ben sottolineava Rosa Del Conte. La chiave interpretativa della nota studiosa romenista e traduttrice dell'opera di Lucian Blaga rappresenta l'oggetto del presente studio, nell'ottica di aggiungere elementi di novità all'interpretazione del testo poetico pubblicato nel volume di traduzioni *Lucian Blaga*, *Poesie* (Del Conte 1971, 130–131).

Gli elementi che emergono dallo studio dei materiali d'archivio[2], in particolare dalle registrazioni audio dei corsi universitari di lingua e letteratura romena,[3] costituiscono una fonte preziosa e particolarmente stimolante per gli studiosi romenisti e non solo.

1. *Dalle forme di Brâncuși alla lirica di Blaga: pensiero estetico e matrice creativa*

Esporre e rendere intelligibile la singolare visione della forma plastica di Brâncuși è una scommessa ardua. Riconosciuto inventore della scultura moderna, creatore solitario, l'artista è difficilmente riconducibile a una corrente artistica a causa delle sue creazioni di apparente semplicità ma in realtà di una complessità il più delle volte insospettata, perché celata dalla sua stessa eccellenza formale. Attraverso le sue sculture Brâncuși mira a invocare, attraverso il palpabile e la tridimensionalità, l'idea di forma pura e purificata da determinazioni troppo concrete. Una forma resa aerea che, grazie alla sua estrema purezza, può visivamente e simbolicamente "alleggerire", "smaterializzare" la percezione e la comprensione del destinatario (Cârneci 2024)[4].

Brâncuși era 'ossessionato', per usare le sue stesse parole, dal carattere vivo della materia (fosse essa pietra, legno, marmo, bronzo o acciaio) e dal potere dell'arte di aiutare l'essenza cosmica della materia a discendere e a consegnarsi come esperienza sensibile all'intelletto umano. Pochi temi fondamentali – genesi, nascita e morte, amore ed eternità – elaborati attraverso una serie ridotta di forme scultoree, che sono altrettante manifestazioni complementari di una profonda verità dell'universo. L'artista, attraverso la forma estetica, mantie-

[1] In particolare sull'essenzialità delle forme: "Ciò che è reale è solo l'essenza" dichiarava l'artista (Zărnescu 1994, 97).
[2] Il Fondo Archivistico Rosa Del Conte (d'ora in poi RDC) di proprietà dell'Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo di Studi Superiori è depositato presso l'Archivio dell'Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano.
[3] Si tratta dei corsi tenuti dalla professoressa Del Conte nell'arco della sua pluridecennale carriera universitaria, prima negli atenei milanesi e in seguito all'Università La Sapienza di Roma.
[4] Per ulteriori dettagli si veda https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/brancusi-si-poetii/ (ultima consultazione 30 gennaio 2026).

ne viva e rivela questa verità universale dell'essere – la sua unità essenziale che attraversa tutte le forme (Cârneci 2024). Si tratta di forme estratte dalla natura e purificate dai dettagli casuali, ripulite dai loro attributi circostanziali e deperibili. Parliamo di forme semplificate e unite attorno a un numero limitato di modelli essenziali, archetipici. Brâncuși, "il genio della speculazione più alta", secondo Benjamin Fondane (1995, 24), avanza addirittura l'ipotesi estetica che tutte le forme visibili possano convergere e infine essere riassorbite in un'unica forma primordiale, a partire dal fluire della materia nella temporalità e nella storicità del mondo. Alla luce di uno sguardo visionario, il corpo umano può essere ridotto a un eloquente frammento anatomico, ma soprattutto alla sua quintessenza, che è la testa. Quest'ultima, a sua volta, può essere riassunta nell'ovale puro, che racchiude in sé lo sguardo interiore, il sonno, il sogno e il risveglio. Lo stesso ovoide si ritrova nella forma dinamica dell'animale, del neonato, del torso femminile e dell'uovo germinale; l'inizio dell'esistenza individuale o cosmica (Cârneci 2024).

Nella ricerca dell'essenza, fondamentale per Brâncuși, il filosofo Lucian Blaga individua un tratto caratterizzante del momento storico e culturale: "La tendenza verso l'essenziale è uno dei tratti caratteristici della nostra epoca. L'inclinazione verso l''essenziale' corrisponde a un appetito metafisico" [trad. mia] (Blaga 1968, 141). Ancora Blaga sull'opera di Brâncuși:

> Un riavvicinamento tra l'Uccello Sacro tante volte realizzato in metallo abbagliante e un'antica cattedrale si impone insistentemente e involontariamente. La stessa estasi astratta si incarna nelle lunghe linee dell'uccello miracoloso come nell'elevazione spirituale di una chiesa. Intuiamo una negazione maschile della realtà in questa estasi che trasfigura i pensieri e le visioni di Brâncuși così come quelli di altri scultori contemporanei. [trad. mia] (Blaga 1968, 140).

Sembra che una volta trovata e portata alla perfezione della sua pura semplicità espressiva, una forma brâncușiana possa migrare senza perdite da un materiale all'altro, dal marmo al bronzo, dal legno alla pietra; pare che possa essere ripetuta innumerevoli volte, con minute variazioni, con scale diverse, senza perdere la sua armonia di proporzioni interne e la sua forza radiante.

Questa 'alchimia estetica' di cui Ezra Pound parlava già negli anni Venti, ottenuta in molti anni di lavoro ascetico e volta a raggiungere la perfezione, spiega probabilmente la sensazione di pace, calma, sollievo, assottigliamento, elevazione e libertà che le opere di Brâncuși emanano.

Il fatto che molti poeti rumeni del XX secolo – Tudor Arghezi, Ion Minulescu, Adrian Maniu, Ion Vinea, Lucian Blaga, Ion Caraion e molti altri – siano stati sensibili al messaggio visionario di Brâncuși in numero maggiore rispetto ai loro colleghi occidentali[5], si spiega forse con la loro comune appartenenza alla stessa 'matrice stilistica', secondo la formula del filosofo-poeta Lucian Blaga. Perché Brâncuși, pur essendo uno degli iniziatori della scultura moderna, rimane profondamente ancorato al terreno fertile della sua cultura nativa.

[5] Tra cui W.B. Yeats, Mina Loy, R.M. Rilke, Jean Arp, Paul Celan, Jean Cassou, Roger Vitrac, Raymond Queneau, Clara Janés, Francis Ponge, Ilarie Voronca.

Ed è proprio nella tradizione romena e nella sua matrice culturale che va collocata anche "La Măiastra" che il poeta rappresenta nella poesia *Pasărea sfântă* [Uccello sacro], lirica inclusa nella sua quarta raccolta di versi, *Lauda somnului* [Elogio del sonno] apparsa nel 1929.

"Non si può capire l'arte di Brâncuși se non si conoscono le sculture in legno della splendida arte popolare romena, che rappresenta un meraviglioso incontro tra Occidente e Oriente"[6], sottolineava molti anni dopo la professoressa Del Conte. La sua permanenza in Romania negli anni '40 come giovane docente di lingua italiana, prima a Bucarest e poi a Cluj, aveva significato "il vivo, diretto contatto con il mondo della cultura romena" e "l'incontro con la complessa personalità di Blaga, interprete originale della civiltà rumena e indagatore acuto dei suoi caratteri differenziatori, [...] la sua matrice stilistica che ne modella le forme creative" ricordava Rosa Del Conte nelle sue memorie[7].

Quelle stesse forme che costellano l'arte di Brâncuși, rendendola unica e irripetibile come il ciclo degli uccelli "inaugurato nel 1910 con la prima versione della Măiastra" e che "testimonia pienamente dell'influsso esercitato dalle tradizioni e dal folklore rumeno" (Versari 2005, 80)[8]. Si può dire che gli Uccelli di Brâncuși significhino sconfinatezza, realizzazioni concrete e varie, ma ciascuna con una propria autonomia semantica: *L'Uccello d'Oro*, *La Măiastra*, *L'Uccello nell'Aria*. Per quanto riguarda la *Măiastra*, il cui nome completo è *Pasărea măiastră* (letteralmente 'uccello meraviglioso'), cioè l'uccello fantastico dei racconti popolari rumeni, lo scultore raccontava: "Qui ho dovuto lottare con due grandi problemi. Dovevo mostrare in forma plastica il significato dello spirito, che è legato alla materia. Allo stesso tempo, dovevo fondere tutte le forme in un'unità perfetta" [trad. mia] (Zărnescu 1994, 120–121) e ancora:

> Lo scultore lotta con i materiali: pietra, bronzo, marmo o altri materiali e cerca di combinare tutte le forme in un'unità perfetta e di infondere loro vita. [...] E se non formiamo un singolo essere nella nostra opera, è meglio dedicarsi a qualcos'altro, piuttosto che cercare di essere scultori. [trad. mia] (Zărnescu 1994, 107)

Il petto prominente di quest'opera, che richiama per forma (ovale) la geometria del corpo umano, determinò l'appellativo di "uccello panciuto" coniato dallo scrittore e amico Henri-Pierre Roché. Disse quest'ultimo: "In realtà il petto gonfio, il capo eretto con il becco aperto, la verticalità della posa, sembrano alludere alla potenzialità di una metamorfosi della *Măiastra* in figura umana. Progressivamente Brâncuși si allontanò da questa prima lettura per concentrarsi sul valore spirituale dell'immagine del volo" (cit. in Versari 2005, 80). Riferendosi alla problematicità che questa ricerca suscitava, l'artista sostenne poi: "Ho voluto che la *Măiastra* drizzasse la testa senza tuttavia esprimere con questo movimento la

[6] *Pro-memoria*, RDC I Serie epistolari e documentali, Materiali biografici, Curriculum ragionato a stampa, busta 2picc., fasc. 6.

[7] *Pro-memoria*, RDC I Serie epistolari e documentali, Materiali biografici, Curriculum ragionato a stampa, busta 2picc., fasc. 6.

[8] Si tratta però, secondo Maria Elena Versari, "non di un semplice processo di rappresentazione iconologica, ma di rielaborazione dei miti e del loro approfondimento portato a un tempo formale e simbolico". Per maggiori dettagli si veda Versari (2005, 80–83).

fierezza, l'orgoglio o la sfida. Fu il problema più difficile e solo dopo un lungo sforzo sono riuscito a rendere questo movimento integrato allo slancio del volo" (Versari 2005, 80).

Dei cinque bronzi che lo scultore creò nel corso degli anni, la versione oggi alla Collezione Peggy Gugghenheim di Venezia testimonia con particolare intensità questa ricerca[9]. Il corpo è ormai affusolato in maniera molto accentuata e le proporzioni sembrano più eleganti, rafforzate dallo slancio del collo. Con l'approfondirsi di questa riflessione che è allo stesso tempo formale e concettuale, la *Măiastra* muterà di nome, divenendo negli anni successivi "l'Uccello nello spazio" (Versari 2005, 80).

Poeta degli elementi, Lucian Blaga ne decifra e codifica il significato in una prospettiva di mistero tra rivelazione e occultamento. Filosofo della cultura, il poeta decifra la semantica dell'Uccello sacro comprendendone il rapporto con l'immaginario mistico romeno, una comprensione implicita nella poesia, esplicita nell'interpretazione degli orientamenti artistici del primo Novecento. Sottolineava Blaga: "Tra i primi chiamati a trovare la nuova via nella scultura, annoveriamo necessariamente quello strano rumeno, che ha lasciato il suo paese per così tanto tempo, senza tuttavia abbandonarne le leggende e le memorie bizantine: Brâncuși" [trad. mia] (Blaga 1968, 139).

2. Pasărea sfântă*: dall'opera d'arte al testo poetico nell'interpretazione di Rosa Del Conte*

Per cogliere appieno il senso del testo poetico qui analizzato, ci si deve interrogare su dove collocare *Pasărea sfântă* all'interno dell'opera poetica di Blaga. Nell'introduzione al volume di traduzioni pubblicato nel 1971, Rosa Del Conte traccia l'evoluzione della poesia di Lucian Blaga, cresciuta come un frutto mistico, con "un armonioso e organico sviluppo, non diversamente dall'albero che sprofonda sempre più le radici nella terra, 'il cielo di quaggiù', per poter protendere sempre più alte le sue braccia alla conquista del cielo" (Del Conte 1971, 26). In questo contesto va interpretata la quarta raccolta di versi *Elogio al sonno* [Lauda somnului], dove il sonno rappresenta per Blaga un momento perfetto, quello in cui l'io profondo vive permettendo alla natura e agli uomini di interrogare le origini. Un modo per ritrovare i padri, il mito e il passato nella sua permanenza sacra. Tra figure telluriche e simboli di un ardito surrealismo,

> Blaga si muove nel clima magico del folklore rumeno che [...] ha espresso in maniera così sorprendente la comunione del contadino con l'aldilà [...], un 'al di là' che tende a discendere sulla terra. [...] L'apoteosi della creazione è nella gloria del meriggio nel quale si spengon le voci degli uomini e più ardito s'innalza il volo degli uccelli." (Del Conte 1971, 28)

Proprio in questo quadro va inserita e interpretata la poesia *Pasărea sfântă* (Uccello sacro), tradotta da Rosa Del Conte e inclusa nel volume sopraccitato. L'analisi delle scelte traduttive e l'interpretazione del testo poetico realizzata in aula dalla professoressa Del

[9] Per una raffigurazione dell'opera, si veda: https://www.guggenheim-venice.it/it/arte/opere/Măiastra/ (ultima consultazione 30 gennaio 2026).

Conte – riflessioni conservate sui nastri audio del suo archivio personale – apporta oggi una luce nuova sul testo arricchendo ulteriormente il risultato finale.

Lucian Blaga colloca l'oggetto artistico di Brâncuși sotto il segno del divino fin dal titolo – *L'Uccello Sacro*. Il commento collocato al posto dei motti "Incarnato nell'oro dallo scultore C. Brâncuși", potrebbe riferirsi al nome dato ad alcune delle numerose ipostasi dell'Uccello – *Oiseau d'or.* Da una prospettiva poetica, l'epiteto "d'oro" lo colloca sotto il segno del mito. Con questa apertura l'immaginario del poema stabilisce una spazio-temporalità con la quale il simbolo dell'uccello rivela il suo carattere archetipico, attraverso un piano semantico nel cui sviluppo Lucian Blaga correla e modella due strati precedenti: l'immaginario mitologico della creazione orale rumena ed europea (o indoeuropea) e quella della creazione scultorea di Brâncuși nel suo complesso. Dichiarava lo stesso Brâncuși: "Non desidero rappresentare un uccello qualsiasi, ma esprimere l'attributo stesso, il suo spirito, il suo volo, il suo slancio [...]. Amo tutto ciò che sale" [trad. mia] (Zărnescu 1994, 119).

L'ascensione è sempre verso il cielo. Bisognerebbe notare tuttavia che nessuno dei suoi uccelli viene chiamato da Brâncuși con l'espressione *Uccello Sacro*, ma ognuno di essi è portatore della divinità. Con tale visione, diverse ipostasi dell'Uccello si integrano nel poema di Blaga, che sono da riconoscere tra dissimulazione e rivelazione.

Attraverso una complessa relazione tra astratto e concreto, tra mitico e sacro, si delinea l'immagine della prima strofa[10]:

> În vântul de nimeni stârnit
> hieratic Orionul te binecuvântă,
> lăcrimându-și deasupra ta
> geometria înaltă și sfântă.
>
> Nel vento che nessuno ha sollevato
> Ieratico ti benedice l'Orione
> sovra di te lagrimando
> la sua geometria sublime e sacra.

L'interpretazione di Rosa Del Conte si sofferma a lungo su questa prima rappresentazione, in particolare sul primo verso, che lei considera "difficilissimo" e bellissimo allo stesso tempo, un verso "degno di Mallarmé"[11]. La rappresentazione ruota intorno all'immagine del vento 'sollevato da nessuno' e implicitamente sulla raffigurazione dell'oggetto stesso. L'opera d'arte, pur nella sua pesantezza di materia bronzea, è talmente palpitante nella sua staticità che il poeta la colloca già nel vento che si muove attorno allo stesso ritmo. L'uccello slanciato, così palpitante di volo, smuove il vento e l'aria che intorno sembra spostarsi

[10] Il testo originale in lingua romena e la traduzione in italiano in Del Conte (1971). La versione romena di riferimento è quella inclusa in Blaga (1967).

[11] Le citazioni provengono dal materiale audio dell'archivio RDC. Nastro magnetico, BOX 1_01_L_Blaga e BOX 1_02_R_Blaga (archivio digitalizzato in attesa di sistematizzazione).

anch'essa. Eppure è una statua e il vento non è sollevato da nessuno; l'aria sembra muoversi soltanto per la potenza dinamica che l'artista ha comunicato pur nella staticità del bronzo. Una materia inerte che l'arte anima dal di dentro. Perfettamente in sintonia con il credo artistico dello scultore romeno che amava dire: "l'artista deve saper portare in superficie l'essere nella materia ed essere lo strumento che ne rivela l'essenza cosmica stessa, in un'esistenza realmente visibile" [trad. mia] (Zărnescu 1994, 97).

I primi versi stabiliscono lo spazio-tempo originario sotto un aspetto cosmogonico nella stessa sacra consustanzialità mitica. L'uccello si muove fino a toccare gli astri – Orione – e queste immagini di sacri astri s'accompagnano poi ad altre immagini generando una geometria sublime e sacra ("înaltă și sfântă").

Bisognerebbe immaginare l'artista Blaga di fronte all'opera d'arte come un ammiratore che deve interpretarne lo stile, l'espressività e l'intensità emotiva. La sua impresa artistica e poetica è quella di comunicare il carattere stilistico dell'opera e l'emozione che essa trasmette. Siamo quindi di fronte a uno sforzo creatore nel quale, sottolinea Del Conte, "la parola gareggia con la materia modellata"[12].

L'arte di Brâncuși, che è di estrema stilizzazione e geometrizzazione del soggetto, si rapporta col prototipo dell'uccello come la geometria delle costellazioni con la raffigurazione artistica. Un rapporto di natura cosmica, metafisica: il volatile è fermo ma già nel vento, sotto la protezione degli astri che ritrovano in esso la stessa armonia. Armonia creata dall'artista, in corrispondenza perfetta del suo astrattizzare, con le regole matematiche di geometrizzazione del mondo.

L'acqua è l'elemento primordiale nella seconda strofa e come l'immagine del vento che nessuno agita, non è lontana dall'immagine della genesi nella mitologia rumena.

> Ai trăit cândva în funduri de mare
> și focul solar l-ai ocolit pe de-aproape.
> În păduri plutitoare-ai strigat
> prelung deasupra întâielor ape.
>
> Vivesti un giorno in abissi marini
> E da presso aggirasti il fioco solare.
> Su sospese selve oscillanti gridasti
> a lungo sovra le primigenie acque.

Il poeta interroga l'opera d'arte nel tentativo di collocarla nella dimensione spazio-temporale e la sua interrogazione pone semanticamente la genesi della poesia in un'intima comunicazione tra l'essere poetico e l'essere del mondo. Da dove viene la *Măiastra*? La risposta si trova in un paesaggio astorico, fatto di abissi di mare e terra primigenia in una sintesi di elementi in relazioni complementari. Siamo di fronte a una creatura mitica generata da un passato che non è possibile fissare nel tempo, da un universo ancora scomposto, un cosmo sprofondato in una confusione di acque primordiali e alberi.

[12] Fondo RDC, nastro magnetico, BOX 1_01_L_Blaga e BOX 1_02_R_Blaga.

La terza strofa prosegue l'indagine artistica e gradualmente aggiunge elementi preziosi rivelando la natura dell'uccello, in una pagina di estetica profondissima.

Pasăre ești? Sau un clopot prin lume purtat?
Făptură ți-am zice, potir fără toarte,
cântec de aur rotind
peste spaima noastră de enigme moarte.

Sei uccello? O campana che sul mondo trasvola?
Creatura ti direi, calice senz'anse
canto d'oro che rotea
Sullo sgomento nostro di enigmi morti.

Un susseguirsi di metafore interrogative segna il passaggio dall'uccello alla campana, quindi uno strumento che porta un messaggio di bellezza nel quale lo scultore e il poeta si ritrovano sullo stesso piano, del tutto simili, in quanto creatori di forme d'arte che hanno la stessa origine. A partire dal secondo verso inizia il processo di umanizzazione ("făptură", creatura umana) che non è mai separata dalla sacralizzazione della metafora. Il "potir", ovvero il calice dove sta l'ostia, tenta di entrare in relazione con la campana in una prospettiva in cui ciò che è "ricevuto" dall'alto viene riversato sul mondo, in una sublime comunicazione tra cielo e terra compiuta attraverso la creazione.

Potremmo qui richiamare l'idea che colloca il poeta tra divinità e umanità, concetto presente nella visione di Eminescu: "I poeti, i filosofi di una nazione, assumono nel canto e nel pensiero le altezze del cielo e le comunicano alle rispettive nazioni" (cit. in Moisuc 2015, 42, trad. mia).

Nei versi di Blaga gli elementi si fondono senza che ci siano sovrapposizioni e l'ultima trasfigurazione ripropone l'immagine del canto d'oro, ovvero voce pura, perfezione e bellezza assoluta. Il roteare sul nostro sgomento richiama l'idea del "noi", un plurale che si riferisce certamente all'umanità. I nostri enigmi sono – secondo Rosa Del Conte – gli enigmi dell'uomo, ma non certo dell'autore. "Se c'è un poeta che non sente l'angoscia del mistero ma, al contrario, ama il suo fascino, quello è proprio Blaga"[13], sottolinea Del Conte.

Il concetto di stupore è quindi implicito. Il compito dell'arte per Blaga non è quello di dare delle semplici spiegazioni ma di rivelare la presenza di un altro orizzonte e di suscitare l'inquietudine. La creazione artistica raggiunge il suo compimento sublime se anche l'uomo comune di fronte all'arte giunge ad avvertire che c'è qualcosa oltre la presenza del mistero da cui nasce la bellezza.

Rosa Del Conte sottolinea ripetutamente che bisognerebbe conoscere il romeno per poter cogliere appieno lo splendore delle immagini inserite nella strofa successiva. Qui il poeta interpreta la funzione dell'uccello sacro come portatore di messaggio che viene sospinto nell'aldilà sulle note di uno zufolo da pastore. Ecco l'ultima trasformazione nella serie: campana – calice – canto d'oro. Oltre al richiamo alle origini pastorali tipiche del

[13] Fondo RDC, nastro magnetico, BOX 1_01_L_Blaga e BOX 1_02_R_Blaga.

popolo romeno, colpisce l'antitesi tra "duraturo" / fermo e illudente. Il canto, pur come impressione illusoria, persiste nelle tenebre, laddove coloro che non ci sono più alimentano il loro sonno coi papaveri di morte. Un passaggio dal mondo e dagli enigmi degli umani agli abissi della terra. Si noti anche il ritorno al tema del sonno, come veglia e contemplazione, che è filo conduttore delle poesie incluse in questo volume.

Dăinuind în tenebre ca în povești
cu fluier părelnic de vânt
cânți celor ce somnul și-l beau
din macii negri de subt pământ.

Fermo nelle tenebre come nei miti,
sullo zufolo illudente del vento
canti a coloro che il loro sonno si bevono
dai papaveri negri di sotterra.

Anche i versi successivi richiamano il rapporto con la morte nel ritorno a contemplare la forma. L'uccello diventa qui portatore di luce strana, aliena come il riflesso enigmatico di uno spazio di morte. Il contatto con i morti diventa però portatore di vita, riporta negli occhi la luce, la fosforescenza, ricavando luce dalle tenebre.

Messaggera tra una realtà più profonda e una più alta della nostra, l'opera si arricchisce con la grazia di una rivelazione senza parole che viene captata solo dall'uccello sacro.

Fosfor cojit de pe vechi oseminte
ne pare lumina din ochii tăi verzi.
Ascultând revelații fără cuvinte
subt iarba cerului zborul ți-1 pierzi.

A scorza di fosforo tolta a vecchio ossame
È simile la luce dei tuoi occhi verdi
Ascoltando rivelazioni senza parole,
ti perdi a volo sotto l'erba del cielo.

La conclusione naturale dell'atteggiamento blaghiano di fronte alle rivelazioni è tutt'altro che inaspettata e si ritrova colla pienezza della sua forza espressiva nella quinta e ultima strofa:

Din văzduhul boltitelor tale amiezi
ghicești în adâncuri toate misterele.
Înalță-te fără sfârșit,
dar să nu ne descoperi niciodată ce vezi.

Dall'arcuata radiosità dei tuoi meriggi
sorprendi negli abissi tutti i misteri
Innalzati all'infinito,
ma non scoprirci mai quel che vedi.

Il primo verso dell'ultima strofa, di una bellezza paragonabile al primo verso della poesia, come sottolineava Rosa Del Conte, pone l'attenzione sulla perfezione della geometria. Il poeta ha astrattizzato il messaggio, poi l'ha geometrizzato creando un'immagine di perfezione assoluta. Anche qui conoscere la lingua originale consentirebbe di cogliere le sfumature e il senso profondo delle scelte linguistiche, insiste la professoressa Del Conte nelle sue lezioni. I versi suggeriscono che dalla trasparenza alta dei meriggi arcuati, dove la metafora dell'arco non è altro che l'idea stessa di culmine e perfezione, l'opera è in grado di decifrare le profondità e di dominare la bellezza misteriosa del mondo.

Quello che non può fare il poeta, lo compie la sua opera, mentre la rivelazione dell'uccello sacro è un invito a conoscere, uno stimolo a una commozione intuitiva che può essere continuamente superata. Il desiderio è che l'opera d'arte sia sempre più rivelatrice: "fa che il tuo volo sia sempre più alto". L'ultimo verso racchiude in modo metafisico il senso più profondo dell'arte: non si scopre nulla, tutto rimane da scoprire, alla ricerca di una conoscenza di un altro tipo e del mistero fuori dalla logica concettuale.

3. *Conclusioni*

"Solo Blaga poteva pensare di interpretare così Brâncuși"[14], è la conclusione spassionata di Rosa Del Conte. Nella concezione blaghiana l'arte come portatrice di inquietudine, di mistero, di un desiderio di appagamento mai soddisfatto incontra la ricerca di assoluto e d'infinito della concezione Brâncușiana.

I due artisti non solo sono uniti da una grande amicizia ma sono figli della stessa matrice culturale, messaggera di un'idea dell'arte come innesco di stati interiori purificati e unificati, come potenziatore di una coscienza più vigile, più vivida, più ampia, più elevata. Come l'arte di Brâncuși. l'opera artistica di Blaga "ha elevato lo 'spazio mioritico', cioè l'orizzonte ancestrale, non solo a categoria esistenziale, ma a matrice stilistica della creazione rumena", sottolineava Del Conte (1971, 37). L'uccello sacro nella descrizione poetica di Lucian Blaga consegna a noi lettori il vero significato della sua missione. In grado di decifrare le rivelazioni senza parole, esso porta nel mondo la perfezione del suo messaggio di bellezza e di mistero.

"Tutte le cose nascondono una verità ultima", ripeteva spesso Brâncuși (Zărnescu 1994, 99). Un'evidenza intuitiva che la mentalità (post)moderna, così pragmatica, persino cinica nelle sue prerogative limitate all'immediatezza combinatoria, sfruttabile e utilitaristica, è tentata di dimenticare. Ma questa verità ultima all'improvviso ci sorprende, balzandoci davanti con un'opera d'arte, sia essa plastica o poetica. Questa verità, emanata silenziosamente, vibra in essa come un'energia sconosciuta, situata nel cuore delle forme materiali poste all'unisono con la nostra interiorità. Essa irradia delicatamente, luminosamente, dal contorno e dalla superficie degli oggetti e dalle parole artistiche che cercano la perfezione in attesa di essere percepita, vissuta, rivelata. Come il messaggio poetico di Blaga che ha sa-

[14] Fondo RDC, nastro magnetico, Tapes 3_1_15, Box 1_02_R_ Blaga.

puto tradurre se stesso e il suo credo artistico nella sua opera, "come lo scalpellino converte le sue pietre nella serenità di una cattedrale"[15] (Del Conte 1971, 37).

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[15] La conclusione appartiene a Rosa Del Conte (1971, 37) che richiama la metafora di Rilke per descrivere il compito dei poeti.

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(Non)Assistants in Saul Bellow's Novels: A Study on Unfinished Characters

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Saul Bellow's characters, aware of their inadequacies, often struggle amid troubles rooted in what is lost or forgotten, seeking personal, cultural, and universal renewal. In this pursuit, Bellow introduces assistant-characters in the Kafkaesque tradition, a figure first identified by Benjamin and later elaborated by Agamben as a would-be helper whose half-knowledge and half-skill hinder more than they aid. These unfinished, in-between figures – neither fully members nor strangers – embody traces of the forgotten. Situated in the context of postwar American modernity – marked by urban capitalism, Cold War anxieties, the erosion of Yiddish culture, and the pressures of Jewish assimilation – these assistant-characters illuminate the ethical and existential tensions of a society that prizes material success over spiritual depth. This study examines such assistants in Bellow's novels through a typology that moves from flawed companions to picaresque protagonists, from reminders of death and oblivion to messianic viziers: Augie March, the picaro resisting fixed identities; Dr. Tamkin, Cantabile, and Gersbach, who catalyze insight through flawed guidance; and Humboldt and Ravelstein, whose gifts recall oblivion and mortality. Figures like Corde, Herzog, and Henderson emerge as 'viziers' bearing messianic truths unheeded in materialist times. By reimagining the assistant-character as both obstacle and catalyst, Bellow reveals the ethical and existential tensions of modern life, where redemption arises through flawed companionship and the persistent, if paradoxical, presence of what is forgotten.

Keywords: Assistant, Picaresque, Oblivion, Vizier, Jewish Diaspora, Modernity

1. *Introduction*

Saul Bellow's characters typically seek origins, emancipation, and morality in a quest for a unified humanity. They are concerned with primordial life as a genuine source of renewal, vision, inspiration, and transformation, one that helps them confront the distractions and misconceptions of modern life, where origins have become obscure. In this study, 'modern life' refers specifically to the postwar American experience from the 1940s through the 1980s – a period defined by rapid urbanization, Cold War political anxieties, consumer capitalism, the bureaucratization of intellectual life, and, crucially for Bellow, the pressures of Jewish assimilation into mainstream American culture. Bellow's characters inhabit a world in which the socio-political promises of liberalism, equality, and democratic indi-

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vidualism coexist uneasily with psychological trauma – the aftershocks of the Holocaust, the erosion of Yiddish cultural heritage, and the spiritual emptiness of material prosperity. It is within this constellation of forces that the figure of the assistant emerges as a distinctly modern literary phenomenon. Although most of Bellow's characters are ambitious intellectuals with high-spirited humanity, they see themselves in the grip of technologized material urban life. Yet they resist in every possible way in order to prove and recover human capacities since they believe in individual freedom that breaks constraints imposed by powerful modern political and cultural institutions. Despite endless existential conflicts and turmoil in most of Bellow's characters, they finally reach a redemptive state of mind in which the possibilities of new life are prefigured. This view is stated in his interview with Matthew Roudané:

> In almost everything I write there appears a primordial person [who] is not made by his education, nor by cultural or historical circumstances... He precedes culture and history... This means that there is something invariable, ultimately unteachable, native to the soul. A variety of powers arrive whose aim is to alter, to educate, to condition us. If a man gives himself over to total alteration I consider him to have lost his soul. (1984, 276)

By recognizing their lack of self-knowledge *when confronting* contemporary material and urban modern life, the protagonists of Bellow's novels initiate a quest in which through personal reconciliation and insight, the social conflicts are resolved. Each of his novels concentrates on the process that enables the protagonist to accommodate himself to the place where he had formerly been estranged. This estrangement is not merely existential or psychological; it is also rooted in the historical experience of the Jewish diaspora. Bellow's protagonists are, almost without exception, Jewish intellectuals whose families immigrated to America from Eastern Europe, carrying with them the weight of cultural dislocation, linguistic loss, and the traumatic memory of persecution. The 'place' from which they are estranged is thus multiple: it is the Old World of Yiddish-speaking communities destroyed by history, the idealized America that promised but did not fully deliver belonging, and the inner life of the soul neglected by a society obsessed with material progress. Their quest for accommodation is therefore simultaneously personal and collective – a struggle to reconcile Jewish cultural memory with the demands of American modernity. In most cases, the crises and disorders are provoked by contrariness between individual idealized morality and limited real life. The existential crises his characters undergo ultimately pave the way for a more authentic mode of life grounded in enduring human values. The critical moments of Bellow's characters happen when they overstep the instant burdens of their environment and the restrictive conditions of the social matrix, and ask themselves some vital questions about the nature of their humanity. Recognizing their social and cultural impotence, they attempt to reorient themselves to the present rather than submit to dehumanization. Displaced by the burden of material and urban life, in other words, they endeavor to re-accommodate their place in new conditions through a brightening and sharpening of humanity.

The whole process happens through their relationship and dialogue with other human beings. In contrast to the typical American heroes who are in pursuit of honor, manhood, obligation, and individuality, Bellowian characters are frequently victimized, feeling unable to overcome oppressing conditions, and in so doing, they descend into self-doubt and ineptitude that masochistically fill the self with the sense of guilt and incompetence. Being in one way or another middle-class intellectual Jews, they usually experience urbanized city life among groups, friends, kinsfolks, associates, and colleagues who are mainly the cause of their troubles. They are troubled by provoking adversities and failures in love, marriage, kinship, and communication. They gradually understand that suffering is an inevitable part of life leading to maturity and strength in case one withstands afflictions. Moreover, for them, the higher levels of conception and understanding cannot be encapsulated in the intellectual discourse of books or ideals, but in ordinary life where experiences, bitter or sweet, are redemptive and aspiring.

Bellowian characters, in the course of actions explained above from trouble to peace and redemption, are not alone as some companions are supposed to help protagonists or others re-place themselves individually and socially. These companions are assistant-characters in the tradition of Kafka's minor characters, who are supposed to help the confused protagonist, yet they are unable to do so. The theoretical framework for understanding these figures derives from two thinkers separated by more than half a century but united by their engagement with Kafka's literary world. Walter Benjamin, in his 1934 essay "Franz Kafka", first identified the peculiar nature of Kafka's minor characters – unfinished beings, neither members nor strangers, whose incompleteness defines their function. Giorgio Agamben, writing in *Profanations* (2007 [2005]), explicitly inherits and extends Benjamin's insight, developing the concept of the 'assistant' as a broader philosophical and literary category. Agamben reads Benjamin's observations through the lens of messianic thought, connecting the assistant to figures of oblivion, the vizier, and the forgotten. This study draws on both thinkers not as contemporaries but as participants in an intellectual lineage: Benjamin provides the foundational observation, and Agamben supplies the theoretical elaboration that makes the category applicable beyond Kafka.

These minor characters appear in Bellow's novels as well, namely, Tamkin, Cantabile, Simkin, Himmelstein, and others. However, Bellow is able to expand their characteristics to the major ones like Augie March, Corde, Henderson, Herzog, and Chick. The most significant feature of these characters is that their help is never straightforward; indeed, they sometimes create even more trouble for others. Nonetheless, Bellowian characters undergo these complicated conditions and reach emancipation with the help of some assistants and they play a significant role in understanding the human condition in contemporary modern life. It can even be claimed that the modern lifestyle is better fitted for assistants as unfinished characters than heroes of the old times.

This study argues that assistant-characters in Bellow's fiction reveal something fundamental about Jewish diasporic existence in postwar America. These unfinished, in-between figures – who cannot fully help because they themselves are incomplete – mirror Jewish immigrants navigating a society that simultaneously promises belonging and en-

forces alienation. The assistant's half-knowledge, shape-shifting identity, and ultimate forgettability embody the diasporic experience itself, where identity is perpetually provisional, community is fraught with betrayal and dependence, and help received from others is always partial and ambiguous. The study examines Bellow's assistant-characters through five categories: (1) the picaresque protagonist-assistant (Augie March); (2) the flawed companion-assistant (Dr. Tamkin, Cantabile, Gersbach); (3) the assistant as reminder of mortality (Humboldt, Ravelstein); (4) the city as non-human assistant; and (5) the messianic vizier (Corde, Herzog, Henderson). Each category progresses from assistant as trickster-companion to existential catalyst to bearer of forgotten truths.

Importantly, Bellow's assistant-figures are overwhelmingly male. The mentors and tricksters examined – Tamkin, Cantabile, Gersbach, Humboldt, Ravelstein, Einhorn – are men whose relationships with protagonists involve homosocial bonds of intellectual rivalry, mentorship, and betrayal. Female characters (Thea, Mrs. Renling, Madeleine, Ramona) do function as catalysts, but their roles are mediated through romantic or sexual relationships rather than intellectual companionship. Thea molds Augie through erotic possession; Madeleine's betrayal precipitates Herzog's crisis but she's never positioned as an assistant; Ramona offers genuine solace yet is undervalued by Herzog, who privileges intellectual over embodied assistance. This gendered asymmetry reflects both Bellow's limitations in representing female subjectivity and a structural feature of the assistant-figure as theorized by Benjamin and Agamben, whose examples are exclusively male.

2. *Body*

2.1 (Non)Assistants in Theory

Giorgio Agamben in his book *Profanations* introduces and develops characters that have been overlooked in the history of literature, still, they seem to be significant in any piece of literature in which they appear. Following Kafka, he calls them 'assistants' or helpers, "but help seems to be the last thing they are able to give. They have no knowledge, no skills, and no 'equipment'" (Agamben 2007, 29). They often create trouble under the guise of helping; they are libidinous in desire, amusing and witty, yet unwise in conduct. Their contradictory qualities often make them grotesque: childish in action yet adult in performance, novice in perception yet sage-like in appearance, intimate companions yet never truly known. Assistants are neither angels nor demons; they are incomplete beings who possess only half of everything. That is why Walter Benjamin calls them 'crepuscular', which is a moment including both night and day. Perhaps, he attempts to highlight their in-betweenness as he puts "none has a firm place in the world, or firm, inalienable outlines. There is not one that is not either rising or falling, none that is not trading qualities with its enemy or neighbor, none that has not completed its period of time and yet is unripe, none that is not deeply exhausted and yet is only at the beginning of a long existence" (1999, 799). These figures look infinitely promising with talents and qualities vast, however, their projects remain unfinished. Agamben does not intend to introduce them as ingenious and sham, though they are ignored at the end accordingly.

He implies that they are helpful, but their assistance does not match what is expected. As a result, at the end, the protagonist temporarily feels that they have betrayed him/her, though assistants are the cause of failure in the mission. Conceivably, this is why Agamben extends the category of the assistant to include inhuman or inanimate objects – things of which everyone seems to possess at least one. These objects and things are seemingly worthless, yet important for people as far as they keep them forever, because of the ugly memory attached to them. This ambivalent attitude diminishes their apparent helpfulness, and in the end everyone – including both protagonist and reader – tends to forget them and their role. In this regard, Benjamin introduces the hunchback from his childhood memory for it is a person whom, like inanimate objects, people try to forget, it is "the representative of the forgotten; he presents himself in order to lay claim to the aspect of oblivion that resides in every thing" (Agamben 2007, 33). Assistants then are usually represented as distorted, humped, maladroit, incompetent, and incomplete, so they must be forgotten because they are shameful. Although they are creatures and objects lost and forgotten, their presence is always felt nearby for they are perhaps people's Mr. Hyde in a formless chaos that looks for a space to call on the hunch of life consigned to oblivion.

The connection between Benjamin's concept of the forgotten and the Jewish diasporic experience is not incidental. For Benjamin, the hunchback – the distorted, shameful figure who embodies what must be repressed – resonates with the condition of Jewish cultural memory in modernity: the Yiddish language fading in the mouths of assimilated children, the religious practices abandoned in the pursuit of secular success, the communal bonds dissolved by urban individualism. When Agamben extends this figure to the 'assistant', he preserves this dimension of cultural loss. The assistant's incompleteness is not merely personal but historical – it reflects the condition of a people whose traditions, languages, and forms of life have been partially destroyed and partially forgotten, yet whose traces persist in distorted, half-recognized forms. Bellow, himself the child of Russian Jewish immigrants who grew up speaking Yiddish in Montreal and Chicago, was acutely attuned to this dynamic. His assistants carry the residue of a cultural world that can neither be fully recovered nor entirely abandoned.

Relying on *The Meccan Revelations* by Ibn al-Arabi and *The Thousand and One Nights*, Agamben also states that the vizier or helpers of the Messiah are assistants as well. Thus, he extends the characteristics of assistants to belong to the last day and being foreigners. They usually possess the wisdom of a messiah, capable of leading people to redemption in an apocalyptic or critical age; nonetheless, the age prevents them from doing so. They bear truth and look to translate that truth to the people and age as "he is a 'translator' of the language of God... [in a] continuous revelation. Another quality of the assistant is his "penetrating vision," which recognizes the "men of the invisible realm," that is, the angels and the other messengers who hide in human and animal forms" (Agamben 2007, 33). These messianic assistants are ignored or disregarded by the people because their presence recalls to them that there is something wrong or distorted about the age. That is the reason "the assistant is the figure of what is lost. Or, rather, of our relationship to what is lost" (34).

Readers usually find Bellow's characters in the middle of a conflict and then they move from one conflict to another in meeting people who are supposed to be helpers. Their social interactions aggravate the pain of the conflict. In their effort to understand the self, soul, and humanity and become a whole man, they come to know the fact that this goal cannot be achieved in solitude but in the company of others and within a community. Bellowian main characters are often ordinary men at the limits of understanding and they are pushed to that far by the help of assistants. Assistants are not either themselves serious or take life seriously. The first kind appears in the example of Benjamin about Kafka's novels and the second is seen in Agamben's examples from children's books such as Pinocchio since he believes these incomplete figures are understandable for children who are themselves incomplete. According to this study, on the other hand, these characters appear mainly in humor, satire, irony, parody, or picaresque, so it aims to search for them in Saul Bellow's novels as these are the characteristics of his style.

2.2 Bellow's (Non)Assistants

2.2.1 Animal Ridens

Among Bellow's characters, Augie March exemplifies the protagonist-assistant, characterized by Sophie Geratis's observation when he rejects her marriage proposal: "nothing is ever good enough for you to stick to" (1999, 271). Though Chicago-born, this restless wanderer travels to Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Texas, Mexico, France, Italy, and Belgium. He commits neither to people nor places, reflecting his restlessness. His lack of belonging – his transcendental homelessness – causes him to see the whole world as home, from parish and ghetto to metropolitan cities and countries worldwide. He states: "the animal ridens in me, the laughing creature, forever rising up" (324), explaining why he fails those desiring his assistance.

Most characters seek Augie's help. Grandma Lausch and Einhorn, his first mentors, hope to shape him. He resists his brother Simon's attempts to make him care only about money and the Magnuses. He rejects Sylvester and Frazer's suggestion to companion Trotsky, fearing being "sucked into another one of those great currents where I can't be myself" (Bellow 1999, 250). He evades Basteshaw's request to assist in establishing a laboratory, knowing his utopian world is doomed. He recognizes Mrs. Renling's adoption scheme: "But all the same I was not going to be built into Mrs. Renling's world, to consolidate what she affirmed she was" (86). He outlives Thea's plan to control and educate him, refusing to "accept her version of everything" (190). Unlike most Bellowian characters prone to sexual trouble, Augie handles libidinal female assistants. He is like "Don Juan, who chooses to multiply experience rather than hopelessly pursue an ideal love; the actor, who stakes all on each role he performs; the conqueror, who seeks in his adventures to dominate history if not eternity; the artist, whose imaginative transformations both confirm and deny the world of particularity" (Trachtenberg 1967, 38). Ultimately, Augie is too larky and boisterous for restriction.

It is worth noting that Augie's relationship with female would-be mentors reveals a gendered dimension of the assistant dynamic. Mrs. Renling's desire to adopt and refashion Au-

gie, Thea's attempt to control and educate him, and Sophie Geratis's marital proposition all represent forms of assistance mediated through possession – maternal, erotic, and domestic respectively. Augie resists these female assistants not merely because of their self-serving motives (which he also detects in male mentors like Einhorn and Simon) but because their assistance is structured through intimate bonds that threaten to absorb his identity more completely than the intellectual mentorship of men. This pattern recurs throughout Bellow's fiction: female characters offer forms of help that are embodied, relational, and domestic, while male assistants operate through intellectual rivalry and ideological instruction. Augie's capacity to navigate both forms of assistance without being captured by either is what makes him the paradigmatic picaresque assistant-protagonist.

Augie's mentors are so self-serving that Augie really cannot help them. Augie learns to prize out their half-knowledge and half-skill. These mentors look at Augie as a project to complete themselves in him or gratify their own unfulfilled desires in Augie. He knows that if they conquer him, he will be forgotten. On the other hand, Augie can survive their plans through disguise, mobility, vitality, self-assertion, and rebelliousness. In fact, Augie is the master of counterfeit, giving his mentors the sense that he is the best imitator and assistant to their ideals, plans, and values while extracting their half-knowledge for his own benefit. He resides in roles and experiences as an assistant that enable him to handle the tough and cynical reality together with the powerlessness resulting from it. Augie's role as an assistant partly comes from his awareness that these people are "Machiavellis of small street and neighborhood" (Bellow 1999, 2). Augie, in this novel, represents one more characteristic that can be added to the assistant: having opposition. It is Einhorn who notices this fact about Augie as he can be involved in influences and dominion while he is skilled in saying no and resisting. Each of these mentors undertakes to regulate and dictate Augie's relation and place in life, yet when he is to be taken in, he escapes, by his ability to recognize their disabling instruction, to another adventure. He is the embodiment of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, one of "spirits strong and original enough to provide the stimuli for opposite valuations and to revalue and invert 'external values'" (1966, 117). Likewise, it can be claimed that he is a body without organs, in the terms of Deleuze, that is a crisscrossing through which flows of external forces move and produce connections, disjunctions, and conjunctions, inception, passage, and assemblage, while he remains unoccupied or deterritorialized by these forces. Desire is his will, but his yielding to the multiform overriding external forces amounts to defeatism and negation. In this way, he generates a formless, amorphous, dangling self – a tendency that reaches its fullest expression in the figure of Dr. Tamkin.

Augie's picaresque restlessness is inseparable from his condition as a child of Jewish immigrants in Chicago. His 'transcendental homelessness', to borrow Lukács's phrase, is not merely philosophical but historically determined: as the son of an absent father and an ineffectual mother in a Jewish immigrant household, Augie inherits a condition of displacement that precedes any individual choice. His refusal to be fixed by any mentor's vision is simultaneously an assertion of American individualism and a reenactment of diasporic rootlessness – the inability or unwillingness to settle that characterizes a people for whom

'home' has always been provisional. In this light, Augie's role as a protagonist who is also an assistant – always serving others' projects while never completing his own – becomes an allegory of the Jewish American condition in the mid-twentieth century: perpetually in between, perpetually promising, perpetually unfinished.

2.2.2 Neither Member nor Stranger

In *Seize the Day*, Wilhelm visits his father at the hotel where he lives, seeking help, empathy, support, and money. Dr. Adler wards him off saying "I want nobody on my back. Get off! And I give you the same advice, Wilky. Carry nobody on your back" (Bellow 2013, 61). Dr. Adler is a revered self-made man. And he sets a test for Wilhelm so as to get rid of him; the trial is to stay away from Dr. Tamkin, "Wilky, perhaps you listen too much to this Tamkin. He's interesting to talk to. I don't doubt it. I think he's pretty common but he's a persuasive man. However, I don't know how reliable he may be" (14). Tamkin is a hypnotic and bizarre figure who speaks in riddles – a self-fashioned psychiatrist, poet, healer, philosopher, and businessman, as well as a confuser of minds and imaginations, a man who has read "the best of literature, science, and philosophy" (79). A hybrid of distinctive bodies, qualities, and characters, Tamkin is, in fact, a sphinx figure whom Wilhelm needs to defeat in order to attain his father's compassion. He is a teacher of great ideas that he himself is unable to apply to life. Like many of Bellow's characters, particularly Augie March, Tamkin has experienced many jobs, lived in different places, and played almost every societal role. He looks like a know-it-all who in every situation is able to take different identities and roles and suggest the best guide to a person in need of help. He can be introduced as the best assistant character Bellow created in his novels fitting to the description Benjamin provides for Kafka's assistants as "beings in an unfinished state... neither members of, nor strangers to, any of the other groups of figures" (1999, 798).

But again in line with his mistakes and failures in the past, Wilhelm entrusts his share of the money, his final one thousand dollars, to Dr. Tamkin in order to invest in the stock market. The latter again lures Wilhelm through his weak spot, which is a return to the community, as he urges him "'What art thou?' Nothing. That's the answer. Nothing. In the heart of hearts – Nothing! So of course you can't stand that and want to be Something and you try... Every man realizes that he has to love something or somebody. He feels that he must go outward" (Bellow 2013, 77). Tamkin's help rests on the "apparent discrepancy between Tamkin's dubious and seemingly negative personality and his uncanny ability to communicate positive, healing ideas" (Morahg 1986, 148). Tamkin is not really a con man and the reader understands his true intention in trying to help Wilhelm. Neither is he an imposter with no fixed identity bearing every label. Tamkin is "sensational but oddly dull, too... Funny but unfunny. True but false. Casual but laborious, Tamkin was" (Bellow 2013, 72–73), and, as Mr. Perls says, "both sane and crazy" (46). Sometimes, it is possible to categorize assistants as characterless, bereft of individual character; they bear feelings rather than persona, showing gestures rather than really embodying a role, position, or character. In fact, he can be read as the product of a specifically modern Jewish social condition. As Mark Cohen argues, Tamkin is "a recognizable Jewish type," a post-emancipation figure

shaped by unstable belonging and by the pressure to improvise multiple identities in order to survive, which makes his guidance to Wilhelm necessarily contradictory and unreliable (Cohen 2007, 364–66). Thus, he has to live different characters as the only answer to the problem of a person that has no sense of belonging (either concerning place or identity). When Tamkin then suggests Wilhelm to control and invest his money, he wants to help, but it is his lack of power and knowledge that fails the person who trusts him. Thus, just like the assistants that Benjamin introduces about Kafka's minor characters, they are not failures by nature; rather, it is their situation that has made them so.

Tamkin's condition as a shape-shifting, identity-less helper illuminates the broader consequences of the assistant's centrality in Bellow's fiction. His inability to help is not a personal moral failing but a structural condition of Jewish diasporic modernity: in a world where old identities have been destroyed and new ones remain provisional, the helper is necessarily incomplete because the cultural ground on which genuine help might be offered has been eroded. Tamkin's half-knowledge is the half-knowledge of a tradition in fragments – he carries traces of rabbinical wisdom, therapeutic insight, and philosophical depth, but none of these traditions is available to him in its wholeness. His failure to help Wilhelm is thus also a commentary on the impossibility of authentic guidance in a society that has severed its connection to the sources of wisdom. This is what distinguishes Bellow's treatment of the assistant from Bernard Malamud's: where Malamud's Frank Alpine can ultimately be redeemed through submission to the discipline of Morris Bober's suffering – a suffering rooted in an intact, if impoverished, Jewish moral framework – Tamkin operates in a world where no such framework remains intact, and his assistance can only ever be partial, contradictory, and unreliable.

Suffering from the deadening society and seeing the barrenness of soul and imagination in people around them, the Bellowian protagonists seek assistance from fellows that Bellow calls 'reality instructors'. They are supposed-to-be tutors for isolated and lonely protagonists. Characters like Einhorn in *The Adventures of Augie March*, Rinaldo Cantabile in *Humboldt's Gift*, and Valentine Gersbach in *Herzog* serve as helpers for protagonists to check, examine, and transform reality. Assistants are managers who are unaware of the importance of their message. At times, their message is not in what they deliver or say but in their postures and the way of partaking in actions. In other words, they involve protagonists and heroes in the course of actions, ill-judged, absurd, and reckless actions the outcome of which is clear but they help them insightfully understand their situation. Assistants in this regard are not really promising help and are as a matter of fact providing none, yet they act the role of catalyst to help the protagonist deliver from difficult situations. In other words, their help works in reverse.

It can be claimed that Tamkin reappears in *Humboldt's Gift* in the character of Cantabile. The latter is Citrine's friend, yet an opportunist and a petty swindler. When Citrine avoids paying him for the money he lost in the poker game, Cantabile, in revenge, wrecks down Citrine's car and tries to humiliate him. Cantabile is "Charlie's 'nemesis' – a satanic spirit fated to shatter Charlie's slumber of success and smugness and to compel him to move away from 'dead center' and confront his true self" (Siegel 1978, 151). Cantabile

is the comic surrogate figure of Humboldt, helping Citrine, in the absence of his master, "to undergo symbolic shock treatments that make him realize the truth about himself" (Rodriques 1984, 108). Though Cantabile embarrasses and penalizes Citrine for the latter's faults, his role as "a catalyst for certain fundamental revelations" (Pifer 1991, 132) in Citrine cannot be overlooked. The purpose of diabolic Cantabile is to put on trial Citrine's derisory schemes of humanity, society, and romanticism. Cantabile helps Citrine to recognize his follies and anticipate the course that ruined Humboldt, thereby delivering him from the dead center. Citrine's time with Cantabile is like a ritual leading him to penitence and disclosure through which Citrine achieves his spiritual restoration. It is after Citrine's involvement with Cantabile that the former comes to awaken and realize his role in society as an artist and look for "the concealed divinity of other human beings... to cross by means of thought the abyss that separates him from Spirit" (Bellow 1984, 294).

In Bellow's oeuvre, this type of assistant figure worsens to a more negative person as he reappears in Gersbach in *Herzog*. He is different from Tamkin in that he takes advantage of troubling others like Herzog to possess parasitically what they have – even their wife. Herzog tells Ramona that "people say that Gersbach imitates me – my talk, my expressions. He's a second Gersbach" (Bellow 2003, 207). Gersbach is an exhibitionist who can be a great father, a sportsman, a good husband, a man of letters, a scientist, a psychologist, and a true friend, yet lacking a reliable core of selfhood. The incorporation of multiple incompatible identities renders a person selfless and unknowable. Tamkin's unhelpfulness rests in his vagueness in living in-between for he is a stranger and an outsider. Bellow points to this fact about many Jews in contemporary modern life that "have tried to rid themselves in one way or another of the dreadful historic load by assimilation or other means... If we dismiss the life that is waiting for us at birth, we will find ourselves in a void" (1976, 3).

The progression from Tamkin through Cantabile to Gersbach traces an increasingly corrosive form of the assistant's non-help. Tamkin is incompetent but not malicious; Cantabile is destructive but ultimately catalytic; Gersbach is parasitic and genuinely harmful. This escalation suggests that the assistant-figure in Bellow's fiction is not static but evolves in response to the deepening crisis of Jewish American identity across the postwar decades. As the promises of assimilation prove increasingly hollow and the cultural resources of the Old World grow more distant, the assistant's capacity for genuine help diminishes while his capacity for damage increases. Yet even Gersbach, the most negative of these figures, serves an assistive function: his betrayal forces Herzog into the crisis of self-examination that ultimately leads to reconciliation with reality. The assistant's help, even at its most destructive, remains indispensable.

2.2.3 Oblivion and Gift

The preceding section examined assistants whose flawed companionship catalyzes the protagonist's self-knowledge in the present. This section turns to a different dimension of the assistant: the figure whose death or absence forces the protagonist to confront what has been forgotten, transforming the assistant from a living companion into a spectral gift. Assistants, in the distorted living state, invite the protagonist to recall what has been for-

gotten. Distortion is perhaps about truth, whether in art, history, ethics, or love in which a wronghood has been registered and taken casually so that no one intends to recall it. Assistants do not help the characters to turn the right way up again and set the truth in order, but they reveal the void and gap concerning truth in the current situation. They act as reminiscent of things forgotten or neglected and they compel the protagonist to confront ethical and moral questions in contemporary life through the lens of death. This kind of helper can be seen in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*.

Humboldt's Gift centers on Charlie Citrine, "the picture of the successful American man of letters. He is a cultural historian and biographer who has won Pulitzer Prizes for books on Woodrow Wilson and Harry Hopkins... Top magazines have commissioned him to write articles on the Kennedys and other national leaders, and the French government has made him a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor" (Siegel 1978, 146). Citrine's relationship with his deceased mentor, poet Von Humboldt Fleisher, shapes the novel's concerns about the artist's role in society and the battle between spiritual ideals and material values. Citrine resurrects Humboldt's memory as he confronts his own failures involving aging, money, his ex-wife's demands, lawyers, publishers, and literary fame. Humboldt, a creative force and "a hectic nonstop monologuist and improvisator" (Bellow 1984, 4), helped Citrine thrive by patronizing and instructing him academically and literarily. Humboldt warned Citrine the perils of pursuing money and fame, especially when society welcomes these most. Humboldt's life could have taught Citrine how society simultaneously elevates him as sage and prophet while leaving him ineffectual with unfulfillable missions. He is doomed to surrender his imaginative power and become one of the "drunkards and misfits and psychopaths" (155), fulfilling society's appetite for watching promising people fail. Thus, "artists and intellectuals suffer in a soulless, materialistic, technocratic society having no use for intellect, art, and the imagination" (Kremer 2017, 71).

When Humboldt loses his poetic heart to tensions, abandons creative production for academic games, exchanges poetic truths for useless oratory, and replaces friends with paranoia and infidelity, he loses money and fame to his disciple. His downfall parallels Citrine's rise. Citrine helps Humboldt financially but ultimately, encountering him cracked and pitiful on a street corner, retreats to his booming life. After learning that Humboldt died in a run-down hotel, Citrine recalls him guilt-ridden, understanding Humboldt died for "the public's conviction of the superiority of the practical over the ideal, the material over the aesthetic" (Siegel 1978, 149). He intends to revive Humboldt's reputation and complete his unfinished projects. Humboldt becomes that forgotten object Agamben describes everyone carrying unpurposefully – the ugly memory of a forgotten celestial poet. Recalling him, Citrine rescues himself from similar doom, seeing Humboldt's death as warning against surrendering spirit and imagination to societal expectations. Though Citrine gains redemption through Humboldt's movie scenario gift, the true gift is the understanding derived from Humboldt's death.

Humboldt's function as an assistant of oblivion carries a specifically Jewish resonance. The forgotten poet who dies neglected in a flophouse recalls the broader Jewish cultural anxiety about the loss of intellectual and spiritual traditions in the rush toward American

material success. Humboldt represents what Yiddish culture calls the *Luftmensch* – the impractical dreamer, the man of air and spirit who has no place in the world of commerce and power. His forgetting by Citrine and by society enacts on an individual scale the collective forgetting of Jewish intellectual traditions that cannot be monetized or instrumentalized. When Citrine finally remembers Humboldt, he is not merely recovering a personal relationship but reclaiming a cultural inheritance that American modernity has consigned to oblivion. The 'gift' of the title is thus double: it is both Humboldt's literal bequest and the gift of cultural memory itself, which can only be received through the painful acknowledgment of what has been lost.

Ravelstein, Bellow's last novel, chronicles his friendship with philosopher Allan Bloom. Ravelstein asks Chick to write a truthful memoir after his death. The novel returns to Bellow's themes of gifts and forgetting. Chick nearly forgets his promise until a near-death experience from eating poisoned fish strengthens his resolve to write. Death brings forgetfulness, and Ravelstein wants Chick to immortalize him through writing. After the poisoning, Chick begins the memoir – a win-win situation immortalizing both writer and subject as death approaches. This friendship is structured by mutual gifts. Ravelstein embodies vastness in thought and oddity in whims: "A man of idiosyncrasies and kinks, of gobbling greed for penny candies or illegal Havana cigars, was himself a Homeric prodigy" (Bellow 2001, 57). He is simultaneously a great thinker and lover of dirty jokes, a trustworthy confidant who candidly evaluates experiences, pointing to both strengths and failures. Chick presents this complex figure to readers in what appears to be a truthful, sincere, and accurate manner. Their friendship is intimate and unconditional, though not selfless. Despite Chick's claim that "You don't easily give up a creature like Ravelstein to death" (233), and Ravelstein's urging – "I want you to do me as you did Keynes, but on a bigger scale. And you were too kind to him. I don't want that. Be as hard on me as you like" (18) – many readers consider Chick's revelation of Bloom's guarded secrets a failure as assistant. Critics argue Bellow betrays Bloom by exposing private details.

Throughout the novel, Chick reminds readers he made Ravelstein famous and successful: "by following my suggestion Ravelstein had become very rich" (54), likely referencing Bellow's suggestion that Bloom write *The Closing of the American Mind*, which made Bloom renowned (Safer 2010, 130). Some commentators believe Bellow takes revenge by revealing Ravelstein's homosexuality and AIDS death – "poor Ravelstein, destroyed by his reckless sex habits" (Bellow 2001, 189) – prompting criticism for ill-will and surreptitious intentions (Max 2000, 75). Bellow, in his eighties and conscious of aging and imminent death, uses the memoir to escape death and oblivion himself. Unlike other Bellow novels addressing death's inescapability and characters' responsibility to create meaning, *Ravelstein* focuses on death causing forgetfulness and how one is remembered afterward.

In both *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*, the assistant-as-gift operates through a paradox central to the Jewish understanding of memory and obligation: the dead impose duties on the living, and the act of remembering is simultaneously an act of betrayal, since no representation can be faithful to the fullness of what is lost. Chick's memoir of Ravelstein, like Citrine's recovery of Humboldt, is an act of imperfect assistance – help that necessar-

ily distorts even as it preserves. This paradox connects the assistant-figure to the broader dynamics of Jewish cultural transmission, in which the obligation to remember is always accompanied by the impossibility of remembering fully or accurately.

2.2.4 Apocalyptic Moronic Infernos

The previous sections have examined human assistants – companions, mentors, and spectral gifts. This section extends the concept of the assistant to a non-human entity: the city itself. For Bellow and many other writers, the city is a place of recognition and redemption. These writers include the city as their character and this fact is highlighted by Victoria Aarons about Bellow that "the city is a character in itself" (2013, v) in his novels. Normally, in Bellow's novels, human characters take a city as a haven or source of help for different reasons such as racial or ethnic problems, war and violence, and mental or ethical quandaries, however, it turns out to be problematic in its own right. The city's helpfulness, even so, lies in its co-conspiracy, in a way, to alienate further the peace-seeking character and to help recognize and understand fully the troubling situation. In other words, the city exerts a force upon the character, compelling them to release their dependence on the outside world and rely on inner power. They do not belong to the world in which they are living and the only help that the city can offer is to estrange them more.

Just like Bellow himself, his characters are usually immigrant Jews who are in exile and far away from a place that can be called a home. Cities like Chicago and New York bear the same meaning America has for diasporic immigrant people: a land of opportunity and another chance. They are supposed to be a help for these people to build their lives, identities, and homes. Bellow, in this dream, for instance, portrays Chicago in *The Adventures of Augie March* as follows:

> They filled the factory-length corridors and giant classrooms with every human character and germ, to undergo consolidation and become, the idea was, American. In the mixture there was beauty – a good proportion – and pimple-insolence, and parricide faces, gum-chew innocence, labor fodder and secretarial forces, Danish stability, Dago inspiration, catarrh-hampered mathematical genius. (Bellow 1999, 45)

The city initially represents original promises for Bellowian characters – progress, money, peace, prosperity – and a place where equality, democracy, freedom, and individuality can be practiced after being lost. However, this idyllic arcadia gradually transforms into Bellow's known phrase 'moronic inferno'. Confronting reality, characters must live alone or shelter in nature. Joseph in *Dangling Man* writes about Chicago: "In a city where one has lived nearly all his life, it is not likely that he will ever be solitary; and yet, in a very real sense, I am just that. I am alone ten hours a day in a single room" (1996a, 7). Herzog feels lonely in New York, "filled with concrete-mixing trucks, smells of wet sand and powdery grey cement. Crashing, stamping pile-driving below, and, higher, structural steel, interminably and hungrily going up into the cooler, more delicate blue" (Bellow 2003, 36), needing the seashore to breathe.

Though ostensibly symbols of progress and modernity, cities are apocalyptic within – places of wickedness, immorality, corruption, hostility, criminality, and decadence. Sammler experiences violence with a giant black pickpocket; Charlie's Mercedes-Benz is battered in *Humboldt's Gift*; Rick Lester is murdered in *The Dean's December*. New York's cityscape in *The Victim* and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* suggests "the continuing threat of murder and destruction. The specter of the Holocaust exists eerily amid the noise and confusion of Bellow's urban landscape, a harbinger of anti-Semitism and its relentless presence amid the disguises of the tenets of the post-war American ethos – liberalism, equality, and enlightened reason" (Aarons 2017, 58). Writers and intellectuals seeking spiritual origins coexist with felons, mobsters, and gangsters indifferent to art, poetry, and humanity. Characters feel surrounded by threatening city dwellers.

City life creates Kafkaesque spaces where Joseph, Leventhal, Augie March, Wilhelm, Herzog, Sammler, and Humboldt inhabit cold, unkind, bizarre aspects of modern life, where human existence is fallen, unethical, or filled with existential ennui. They're endangered by immoral people and close friends alike. Despite threatening natures, cities help because "public life frees and enables" (Marshall 2011, 149). The public domain helps humanity be understood and realized fully. As humanity remains spiritually significant for Bellow's characters, cities become non-friendly assistants. Supposed New Eden cities where humanity peaks become apocalyptic, reversing their help. As Gustavo Sánchez Canales states, the modern city is "an alienating place which could annihilate the human being's individuality" (2017, 46). Heroism, beauty, purity, and imagination that Romantic Bellowian characters seek are unavailable in a society dominated by material mass culture. Characters see cities as evil friends that seduce them toward pleasure while leading them toward soul-destruction and insanity. Those refusing complicity seek retreats – writing spaces for Joseph and Herzog, or trips to Bucharest or primitive Africa for Corde and Henderson. The city as assistant-character helps, though not as expected, protagonists see "the problem of how to go beyond the modern urban consciousness and, like Wordsworth and Goethe, once again become integrated with nature" (Sánchez Canales 2017, 10).

The city's role as a non-human assistant is particularly significant for understanding the Jewish diasporic dimension of Bellow's fiction. For Jewish immigrants, American cities were not merely settings but promises – the promise of safety after persecution, of opportunity after deprivation, of belonging after exile. The reversal of this promise, the transformation of the city from haven to 'moronic inferno', enacts on an environmental scale the same dynamic that characterizes the human assistant: the help that was expected turns out to be its opposite, yet through that very reversal, a deeper understanding becomes possible. The city's failure to deliver on its promise of belonging forces Bellow's characters to recognize that accommodation in the diaspora is never complete, that the 'place' they seek is not a geographical location but an inner condition of the soul. In this sense, the city is the most comprehensive of Bellow's assistants: it encompasses all the others, providing the stage on which their dramas of failed help and paradoxical redemption are enacted.

2.2.5 Vizier

The final category of assistant in Bellow's fiction represents the most ambitious extension of the concept: the protagonist himself as vizier, the messianic helper whose penetrating vision of truth is unheeded in an age devoted to material concerns. This category connects directly to Agamben's discussion of the vizier as a figure who 'belongs to the last day', bearing truths that are essential but untimely, and whose foreignness is not geographical but spiritual and intellectual. Seeing some of Bellow's protagonists as viziers or assistants in messianic and apocalyptic times is not far-fetched. They typically appear as translators of the soul with overwhelming disclosures about humanity and the spirit of the age. However, the result of their contribution to age fails for such revelations have no price in a society inflicted by materialism and money. They are viziers or prophets without followers; hence they experience themselves as foreigners and outsiders – intellectually, inwardly, and existentially. The problem with such figures of Bellow is that their inwardly personal development and realization of a positive quality and necessity are never credited by the public or humanity that they feel responsible for. They know they are in a doomed time and destiny is inevitable and their help is turned down adding more to their afflictions.

In *The Dean's December*, Corde is blamed as a racist for defending the trial investigating his white student's murder by two Black men. Geophysicist Sam Beech asks him to address lead poisoning's ramifications. Corde feels responsible for societal events, unlike politicians, academicians, lawyers, and businessmen who fail to act according to their authority. However, main attacks target Corde's urgent call for journalism to engage with poetry and philosophy. Accidentally encountering Dewey Spangler, an old friend and distinguished journalist widely read, Corde engages in heated debate over differing viewpoints while guests of the black American emissary and Romanian president in Bucharest. Upon returning to the U.S., Spangler criticizes Corde, forcing him to resign from the university. Corde's message for journalism to better suit the modern civilized world goes unheard amid Spangler's superior disturbance.

Corde sees ominous decadent times – the breaking of nations. Like a vizier proposing novel ideas for critical historical moments, Corde demands journalism changes suitable for our times, deploying fiction's devices and tackling central cultural issues. His suggestion incorporates literary space including thoroughness, imaginative realities, sensory oddity, lived experience density, language richness, narrative variety, and ethical responsibility. Corde demands journalism revive culture through philosophy and literature's 'glorious stuff' in writings by Swinburne, Wilde, Nietzsche, Whitman, Spinoza, Blake, Shakespeare, Vico, Hegel, and others. He believes journalism, as public education medium, must spare triviality for high culture's intellectuality to "prevent the American idea from being pounded into dust altogether" (Bellow 1983, 124).

Corde contemplates that if American ideas of liberty, equality, social justice, democracy, and emancipation are to be practiced and "works on the substance of every soul – the spirit of the time, in us by nature, working on every soul" (240), journalism's capacity proves insufficient; reliance on literature for lived experience and philosophy for thinking methods becomes necessary. Corde's apocalyptic message: "to recover the world that is buried under

the debris of false description and nonexperience" (240). He's concerned with stopping malicious, evil, miserable, cruel, hateful things while developing beauty, virtue, and good qualities so humanity may prevail. Journalism concerns itself with raw, unprocessed truth – mere information that leads nowhere, causes no difference, provokes no action. Nothing changes. Therefore, he calls for returning to literature and philosophy, always concerned and responsible for experiential truths.

Herzog explores the complications and tense emotions following Herzog's failed marriage to Madeleine. After being abandoned by Madeleine, now with his best friend, Herzog faces isolation and self-doubt regarding his sanity and identity. The novel unfolds during late spring and summer following divorce, showcasing Herzog's fragmented actions as he navigates relationships, heritage, sexuality, and his past's impact on his present. Herzog engages in scrappy actions and conversations with friends while writing fragmentary letters to relatives, associates, academics, presidents, and philosophers, hoping for resolution in his private, intellectual, and public life. None of these associations provides answers to his exploration of suffering. He seems fenced among 'reality instructors' like Himmelstein and Simkin – friends, philosophers, theoreticians, and leaders as talkers who "harangue, cajole, exhort, excoriate, throughout Bellow's fictions" (Rovit 1967, 19). This particular Bellowian assistant ironically illuminates rationality for specific faces of human existence, while their own lifestyles question their standpoints, as the protagonist observes. Reality instructors' (non)help rests in their absurd ironic perspective, expanding Herzog's understanding of life, truth, and existence.

Herzog leaves these (non)helpful talkers for letter-writing. He appears as a prophetic character warning about life occupied by reality instructors. Though dealing with afflictions caused by personal life – divorce being the last straw – he attempts resolution not only to his predicament but to doomed public life. He writes letters warning loved ones, acquaintances, and those in power and authority. In these letters, he introduces both minor and major problems and solutions. Living among reality instructors leads to madness, to which he verges. Historical limitations of every era threaten individuality when allowed to enlarge and occupy it. Herzog doesn't try accommodating them to achieve reality and sanity but tries overcoming them to recover himself. He writes to Tennie, Zelda, Asphalter, Edwig, Sandor, Monsignor, Nachman, and Sono exploring the past, talking into his "repressed feelings, confession, and self-apology" (Gurkin Altman 1982, 37–8). He writes to question Professor Hoyle's Gold-Pore theory's practicality, scorning the President for legislation causing discrimination and unemployment, criticizing Heidegger for ignoring ordinary life's value, or satirizing Nietzsche's promised unborn heroes. Herzog finally recognizes his ideals don't fit the real world, understanding reality as "*What they [intellectuals] love is an imaginary human situation invented by their own genius and which they believe is the only true and the only human reality*" (Bellow 2003, 330).

Herzog's condition as a vizier is inseparable from his identity as a Jewish intellectual in postwar America. His compulsive letter-writing – addressed to the living and the dead, to friends and to philosophers, to presidents and to God – enacts the Jewish tradition of disputation and commentary, the restless engagement with texts and ideas that character-

izes Talmudic scholarship. Yet Herzog's letters are never sent, his commentary reaches no audience, and his prophetic insights are absorbed into the noise of a society that has no use for them. He is, in Agamben's terms, a translator of the language of God whose translation goes unread. His foreignness is not that of the immigrant – Herzog is thoroughly American in his habits and anxieties – but that of the intellectual whose mode of engaging with the world belongs to a tradition that American modernity has rendered obsolete. His madness, or near-madness, is the vizier's affliction: the burden of seeing clearly in an age that rewards blindness.

Henderson, the most comic vizier, foreigner, and messenger among Bellow's assistants, enacts a narrative arc that mirrors, with striking precision, the parabolic logic Walter Benjamin identifies in a Hasidic tale. In *Henderson the Rain King* – Bellow's most unconventional novel, set not in Chicago or New York but in Africa – the protagonist appoints himself a messiah to the Arnewi tribe, whose sacred frogs have polluted their only water source and caused their cattle to die of thirst. His solution, an underwater bomb to eliminate the frogs, disastrously destroys the cistern itself. Fleeing the Arnewi, Henderson stumbles into kingship among the Wariri by lifting a statue of their mountain goddess, only to discover that this throne is no prize: the king must capture an untamed lion and ultimately meet an atoning death. Under the tutelage of King Dahfu, Henderson learns that he has been welcomed not as a savior but as a substitute – someone willing to occupy a position no one else wants. His grand African odyssey thus returns him to precisely where he began, changed only by a modest but hard-won insight into his own condition.

Benjamin's Hasidic tale allegorizes this circular trajectory with disarming economy. In a village inn on Sabbath evening, each man shares his deepest wish: one desires wealth, another a son-in-law, another a carpenter's bench. Only a poor, tattered stranger in a dim corner remains silent. When pressed, he answers:

> I wish I were a powerful king reigning over a big country. Then, some night while I was asleep in my palace, an enemy would invade my country, and by dawn, his horsemen would penetrate to my castle and meet with no resistance. Roused from my sleep, I wouldn't have time even to dress and I would have to flee in my shirt. Rushing over hill and dale and through forests day and night, I would finally arrive safely right here at the bench in this corner. This is my wish. Asked what good this would do, he replies: I'd have a shirt. (1999, 812)

Like the beggar, Henderson traverses an entire kingdom's worth of adventure and catastrophe only to arrive back at his starting point with the smallest, most essential gain – not a crown or a conquest, but a shirt, a bare insight, the irreducible remainder of an experience that justifies itself not by its grandeur but by the modest clarity it leaves behind. The assistant-figure, in both tales, does not transcend his condition; he circles through it and returns with just enough understanding to name what he lacked all along.

After failing with the Arnewi, he remains committed to ideality. When Dahfu educates him further, Henderson recognizes reality's limits in Dahfu's death by lion – Dahfu punished instead. Through African rituals, Henderson attempts to create an ideal world

replacing real life. His failure among the Arnewi stems from his reliance on egoistic action, which prevents the negative capability – the endurance of uncertainties, mysteries, and misgivings – that Queen Willatale embodies. His Wariri dream accomplishes this mission – enduring ideal sublimity and beauty while subject to limitation and powerlessness. His Wariri travel involves "delusion, imagination, dreaming. However, this is not dreaming and sleeping, but waking" (Bellow 1996b, 217). Like Benjamin's unknown man, he's a king returning to former life, yet with "my spirit was awake and it welcomed life anew. Damn the whole thing! Life anew!" (181).

Henderson is unique among Bellow's viziers in that he is not Jewish – he is a wealthy white Anglo-Saxon Protestant whose existential crisis drives him to seek wisdom in Africa rather than in the Jewish intellectual traditions that sustain characters like Herzog and Corde. Yet his function as an assistant-who-fails follows the same pattern: his attempt to help the Arnewi is catastrophic, his kingship among the Wariri is accidental and temporary, and his messianic self-image is systematically deflated by experience. Henderson's non-Jewish identity is itself significant for this study's argument: it suggests that the condition of the assistant – the unfinished, in-between figure whose help is always inadequate – is not exclusively a Jewish diasporic phenomenon but a universal condition of modernity that Bellow's Jewish characters experience with particular intensity. Henderson's journey to Africa and back mirrors the diasporic pattern of exile and return, but without the cultural weight of Jewish history; his "shirt" – the modest gain he brings back from his grandiose adventure – is the comic equivalent of the partial, compromised redemption that all of Bellow's assistant-viziers achieve.

3. *Conclusion*

Benjamin's critical reading of Kafka's novels and emphasis on assistants opens new prospects in studying characterization. Kafka masterfully represents assistants playing significant parts in protagonists' nightmarish, bizarre worlds. Agamben's philosophical elaboration of Benjamin's insight in *Profanations* extends the assistant from Kafka's fictional feature to broader literary and existential analysis, connecting it to messianic thought, oblivion dynamics, and the vizier figure. Together, Benjamin and Agamben provide a theoretical framework illuminating not only Kafka's fiction but writers inheriting and transforming the Kafkaesque tradition – among whom Saul Bellow is preeminent. Saul Bellow is the master of creating assistant-characters, accomplishing in each novel a specific assistant fitting the course of action and knowledge planned. He manages to use and contribute to this characterization type while developing more characteristics for assistant-characters in relation to the modern context.

Bellow's novels, influenced by Yiddish culture like Kafka's, cannot be imagined without assistants. Assistants are modern re-figurations of trickster archetypes – characters of high intelligence and exceptional powers appearing as both confidant and cunning. Like tricksters, assistants are shape-shifters in characterization, enabling them to reside and move easily in roles. They're not as helpful as expected since their claims and knowledge

don't match their boasts. A notable Renaissance example is Falstaff as Prince Hal's companion. Dr. Tamkin in *Seize the Day*, Gersbach in *Herzog*, and Cantabile in *Humboldt's Gift* represent Bellow's development of assistant-characters, adding Yiddish cultural flavors. This type exemplifies complex figures whose ambiguous identities both hinder and catalyze protagonists' self-discovery, revealing existential struggles between personal relevance and societal detachment in contemporary life. Later, this character develops into the picaro – a roguish but pleasing hero from marginalized societal spaces who outwits others. Bellow develops this assistant-character type through two admired writers. Melville's *The Confidence-Man* and Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* feature assistants as protagonists. Bellow's Augie March rebels against self-serving mentors, asserting individuality amidst external forces and forming fluid identity reflecting chaotic experiences. Bellow implies that what's forgotten is actually a gift requiring re-examination for personal and social development. This oblivion-gift relation is masterfully represented in *Humboldt's Gift* and *Ravelstein*, where death serves as reminder. Finally, Bellow creates characters Agamben calls viziers with messianic insight and knowledge. Typically intellectuals like Corde and Herzog with penetrating visions of human condition, they're messengers – though considered foreigners and outsiders – of relationships lost or forgotten by contemporary people. They attempt enlightenment, though ignored and disregarded as assistants by everyone.

The centrality of assistant-characters in Bellow's fiction reveals something fundamental about his understanding of Jewish diasporic existence in postwar America and the human condition in modernity. These unfinished, in-between figures – who cannot fully help because they themselves are incomplete – mirror subjects navigating a society simultaneously promising belonging and enforcing alienation. The assistant's half-knowledge, shape-shifting identity, and ultimate forgettability are literary embodiments of diasporic experience, where identity is perpetually provisional, community is fraught with betrayal and dependence, and help received from others is always partial, ambiguous, and double-edged.

The assistant-figure ultimately reveals the impossibility of traditional heroism in Bellow's fiction. In a world of assistants, there are no heroes – only helpers who cannot help, prophets unheard, and companions whose companionship is compromised by self-interest, incompetence, or historical circumstance's sheer weight. Yet this impossibility isn't nihilistic. Bellow's assistants, precisely because unfinished, remain open to possibility; precisely because they fail, they provoke self-examination leading to whatever redemption is available. The 'non' in '(non)assistants' isn't negation but paradox: through assistance's failure, assistance is achieved; through forgetting what matters, what matters is remembered; through the vizier's foreignness, the age's truth is spoken. Bellow's assistant-characters embody what might be called a diasporic ethics of imperfection – a vision where wholeness is neither possible nor desirable, and where the persistent, paradoxical presence of what's incomplete, forgotten, and in-between constitutes the only authentic form of companionship and redemption available in modern life.

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The Relevance of Textbooks in Relation to High School Learning Goals: an Overview of the Choices Made by Italian CFL Teaching Community and Potential Future Developments

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The integration of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) in Italian high school curricula has gradually promoted the publication of specific teaching materials (Gabbianelli 2021) that meet both learners' needs and the requirements set by the Italian regulations. In light of these objectives and considering the relevance of textbooks in the teaching-learning process, the present study aims at collecting data from the Italian CFL teaching community via an online survey to support the development of teaching materials that would increasingly align with national guidelines and teachers' expectations. Data analysis shows a polarization of needs within CFL teachers, split between simplified and more language-authentic materials, basic and advanced vocabulary, outcomes consistent with HSK3 or HSK4[1]. Grammar is highly valued yet underresourced while sourcing contents from a variety of textbooks seems to be the approach that balances accessibility and curricular goals most effectively.

Keywords: CFL Teaching Material Development, Chinese Language Teaching, Teaching-Learning Goals

1. *Introduction*

This preliminary research, the first of its kind in the Italian context, aims to provide empirical data and observations to support the development of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teaching materials for high schools that increasingly align with national guidelines and teachers' expectations.

Starting from the processing of data collected from the Italian CFL teaching community via an online survey featuring both closed and open-ended questions, our contribution expects to highlight the reasons behind the choices (or non-choices) of the textbooks cur-

[1] HSK stands for "Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi" (汉语水平考试), the Chinese Proficiency Test. HSK is an international standardized test for Chinese language proficiency, developed by the Chinese Ministry of Education, that assesses Chinese learners' abilities to use Chinese as a second language through a standardized examination and evaluation system. For further details see https://www.chinesetest.cn/hsk (last accessed February 25, 2026).

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rently available within the Italian publishing industry in order to identify gaps and potential opportunities for the development of CFL teaching materials specifically designed for Italian-speaking high school learners.

The widespread presence of CFL at all levels of education over the past decade has significantly stimulated the production of teaching materials dedicated to its study (Wang Guenier, Li 2022, 40), both in China and internationally; Italy is not an exception (Peracin 2024, 103; Romagnoli 2019). In our country, the number of high school students interested in studying CFL has steadily grown since the early 2000s, and, accordingly, a great variety of textbooks has been published (Masini 2022). Given the undeniable influence that textbooks exert in foreign language education (Sercu 2005, 91, 105) because of their capacity, first and foremost, to "dictate what takes place in classrooms" (Byrnes 1989 in Yu 2009, 76), it becomes essential to understand what teachers think about them. Such an approach enables a more systematic identification of the perceived shortcomings and supports the strategic development of areas which seem to require further advancement.

The paper is organized as follows: in Section 2 we define the theoretical background of the key themes relevant to the study, namely, history and status of CFL in Italian high schools (§ 2.1), regulations and norms concerning the subject within the Italian high school system (§ 2.2), and the role of textbooks in the teaching-learning process (§ 2.3). The research method is described in Section 3, while Section 4 contains an in-depth analysis of the empirical data collected through the research-questionnaire. The analysis presented is divided into sub-sections following the structure of the questionnaire itself: socio-demographic data about respondents and status of the discipline (§ 4.1), textbooks used in the first two years of instruction along with teachers' opinions about them (§ 4.2), textbooks used in the last three years of instruction along with teachers' opinions about them (§ 4.3), and open-ended questions concerning teachers' beliefs about skills to be acquired through textbooks to successfully pass the Final State Exam (§ 4.4). The fifth and last Section (§ 5) presents both the conclusions drawn from the data and the limits of this preliminary investigation.

2. *Theoretical framework*

2.1 CFL in Italian high schools: a recent history

Chinese as a Foreign Language was integrated into Italian high school curricula in 2003 thanks to a bottom-up process (Langé 2018, 22) and by 2017 had spread to over 150 state schools (Masini 2021, 473). Following a growing trend, in 2020/21 CFL has reached 179 secondary institutions all over Italy with only two regions, Basilicata and Molise, that apparently have no CFL classes (Scibetta et al. 2025, 110).

According to the 2024 report from the *National Observatory on School Internationalization and Student Mobility*, Chinese is the fifth most studied foreign language in Italian high schools, after English, French, Spanish, and German (IPSOS 2024) and it has surpassed Russian, which had a 20-year head start in institutional education (Langé 2018). Even if Chinese can also be a curricular subject in technical institutes and increasingly in vocational schools (Scibetta et al. 2025, 113), most schools where Chi-

nese is currently offered as a curricular subject are the so-called *Liceo Linguistico*, the high school track specializing in the study of three foreign languages over five years (Scibetta et al. 2025, 113–114). Consequently, our study will concentrate on this specific category of school due to quantitative factors.

In *Liceo Linguistico*, Chinese is typically offered as a second or third foreign language (out of three) and is studied over a five-year period, with 3 to 4 hours of instruction per week depending on the curricular choices made by individual schools. The teaching is primarily delivered by Italian teachers; however, in this type of school, they are supported by native Chinese-speaking teachers (Gabbianelli 2021, 21) who serve as conversation teachers[2]. By the end of their studies, students are expected to achieve a language proficiency level between B1 and B2, depending on whether Chinese is studied as a second (B2) or third (B1) foreign language (Presidential Decree No. 89 of March 15, 2010).

2.2 Regulatory framework

In Italy, CFL is a discipline taught both in *Licei* (high schools) and in technical institutes. From a regulatory perspective, there are three key references for teaching and learning goals in secondary education. This normative framework does not vary from region to region, as the expected proficiency levels are identical nationwide and all institutions adhere to the same regulatory standards.

The first and most binding one is the Presidential Decree No. 89 of March 15, 2010, a regulation concerning the revision of the regulatory, organizational, and educational structure of high schools. The second reference to be taken into consideration is the National Guidelines for high school education (Decree No. 211 of October 7, 2010)[3], a set of norms containing national guidelines about the specific learning goals related to the activities and subjects included in secondary school curricula. The third, not less imperative, reference is the "Reference Framework for the Design and Implementation of the Second Written Exam for the State Examination" attached to Ministerial Decree No. 769 of November 26, 2018, which provides frameworks and assessment grids for preparing and administering the first and second written tests of the State examination at the end of secondary education. In addition to this, in 2016 the MIUR[4] released a National Syllabus of Chinese Language, a further guideline the teaching community can follow to define the range of knowledge and competence to acquire during and by the end of high school[5].

[2] Conversation teachers are Chinese native teachers with at least a high school diploma in the country where Chinese is the first language. For this reason, they are often not specifically qualified for teaching CFL and do not always have a sufficient familiarity with the Italian educational system (Gabbianelli 2021). Despite teaching only one hour per week in each class (by themselves or together with the Italian teacher), they participate in student assessment and contribute to the development of speaking and listening skills.

[3] 2010 guidelines were republished in a revised and updated version in 2025 and will be in force from 2026/27.

[4] Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (today split into MIM for Education and MUR for University and Research).

[5] For further details see https://scuole.vda.it/images/news/sillabocinese.pdf (last accessed August 20, 2025).

According to Presidential Decree 89/2010, the highest-ranking rule among the above-mentioned references, the communicative competence to be acquired by the end of the five-year course must correspond at least to B2 Level of the Common European Framework of Reference in two foreign languages, and at least to B1 Level in the third (one language). Students' proficiency is ultimately assessed and determined during the final State Exam through reading comprehension of literary or non-literary excerpts, a writing task (Annex to Ministerial Decree 769/2018), and an oral exam.

2.3 The role of textbooks in the teaching-learning process

As just observed, Italy too has been affected by the so-called 'Chinese fever' (*hànyǔ rè* '汉语热') (Romagnoli 2019), and a growing number of Italian students have begun studying CFL in high schools. This trend has led to the incorporation of CFL into the national regulatory framework and has encouraged the publication of teaching materials specifically designed for upper secondary school students.

When Chinese became a curricular subject, and for quite a long time afterward, teachers found themselves in a challenging position because there were no shared guidelines or standard practices both on the pedagogical and regulatory aspects of teaching. Moreover, there were no *ad hoc* textbooks for the high school audience: at that time, teachers had to use university-level textbooks, textbooks published outside Italy, with necessary adjustments and adaptations (Scibetta 2024), or create their own teaching materials, especially when it came to teaching Chinese culture. In fact, until recently, the very few available textbooks were mainly focused on language teaching. This situation has now changed; although the offering is still not comparable to that available for other foreign languages long taught in Italian schools, and materials for teaching literature and developing specific competencies remain inadequate (Gabbianelli 2021, 31–32), according to Conti and Romagnoli (2021) we are witnessing growth and innovation in teaching materials tailored to different levels, types, audiences and learning contexts. Furthermore, alongside language-learning textbooks focused mainly on communicative functions, there are now also textbooks dedicated to the teaching of Chinese "knowledge culture" (Zhang 1990) as well as textbooks which employ only Chinese language to cover Chinese culture.

In pedagogy it is not unusual to speak of the so-called "pedagogical trinity" of student, teacher, and textbook (Kubler 2019, 321), and even if the first two are the most important, as Brown pointed out, "that textbooks have a great deal of power and authority in the language classroom does not seem in doubt" (Brown 2014, 658). Moreover, although foreign language teaching has been gradually supplemented by digital tools and online resources, several studies confirm not only that "textbooks are still crucial in the language classroom" (Gabbianelli 2023, 168), but also that "both teachers and students still rely on textbooks" (Garton, Graves 2014; Tomlinson 2012 in Gabbianelli 2023, 168). In general terms, it can be stated that textbooks play a prominent role in both the teaching and learning processes, catalyzing the achievement of specific goals, up to the point that some researchers have claimed that "without a textbook, it is difficult for teachers to teach systematically" (Ajideh, Panahi 2016 in Yue et al. 2020, 122).

However, as Hsiang stressed, "[i]f textbooks do not provide a good match to what students need to learn or teachers are expected to teach, then their effectiveness is likely to be limited" (Hsiang et al. 2023, 1652). It is probably for this reason that in the field of CFL, researchers are currently raising concerns about whether the CSL and CFL textbook series available today truly meet the needs of both teachers and students (Geng 2017; Gong 2018; Hsiang 2021; Li et al. 2021; Ying et al. 2018 in Hsiang et al. 2023, 1652). Building on this perspective, Gabbianelli (2021, 32) has emphasized the importance of new resources that address both students' needs and interests and help teachers in their curricular choices. In this light, and in order to provide empirical data and observations to support the development of CFL teaching materials, investigating teachers' perspectives is, in our view, of paramount importance.

3. *The research: method and tools*

The present research collects feedback from Italian CFL teaching community about the language and culture textbooks oriented to secondary education. Against the background of the requirements set by the national regulatory framework (§ 2.2), the data will primarily reveal teachers' perspectives on commercially available teaching materials and, through a deeper analysis, will be able to highlight the consistency between the pedagogical needs perceived by the teaching community and the disciplinary objectives pursued by the different textbooks, hence emphasizing their strengths and critical issues. The ultimate aim of this study is to contribute to the development of CFL teaching materials for upper secondary education that are closely aligned with national guidelines and responsive to teachers' needs.

The data that are shown in Section 4 were collected through a Google Form distributed between April and May 2025 to two professional figures within the CFL teaching community: teachers of Chinese language and culture (affiliated with class A22, as defined by the Italian national teaching qualification framework), and conversation teachers (class BI02), both working in Italian secondary schools. As clarified in 2.1, both categories of teachers worked together in CFL classes. This is the reason why we took into consideration both figures: even if with different roles and teaching hours, they both are responsible for the construction of students' communicative competence.

The questionnaire[6], which could be completed online using smart devices (smartphones, PCs, tablets) was sent to teachers with the support of ANIC[7] and via the authors' personal networks. The 18 questions of the survey (most of which are multiple-choice questions) were developed by the authors on the basis of their own personal teaching and academic experience, taking into account the objectives of the research and the areas of interest to be explored and, not least, drawing on input and feedback from the CFL teaching community emerged during training sessions, dedicated symposiums and exchange platforms. To

[6] https://forms.gle/nKMwaJj3n4jt1gsi7

[7] ANIC (Associazione Nazionale Insegnanti di Cinese, 意大利汉语教师协会 *Yìdàlì hànyǔ jiàoshī xiéhuì*) is the National Association of Chinese Teachers founded in 2017. For more info see: https://anicdocentidicinese.wordpress.com (last accessed August 12, 2025).

ensure better understanding of the questions by the respondents and to guarantee orderly and systematic data collection, the survey has been divided into four consecutive sections: the first (Questions 1–4) collects respondents' socio-demographic information. The second (Questions 5–10) addresses the textbooks employed for Chinese language, culture, and grammar[8] instruction during the first two years of study, as well as teachers' reasons for choosing these teaching materials. The third Section (Questions 11–15) mirrors the structure of the second but focuses on textbooks used in the final three years of education, along with the reasons behind their selection. According to the National Guidelines (§ 2.2), the linguistic and cultural objectives for students enrolled in high schools are conventionally divided between the first cycle (the first two years of study) and the second cycle (the final three years). This distinction exists because several aspects tend to change from one cycle to the other, such as the number of subjects in the curriculum, the number of teaching hours, their epistemological dimension, and consequently the teaching approach and the materials used. The questionnaire administered to teachers, therefore, follows this natural distinction and reflects the division into the two cycles.

The final Section (Questions 16–18) concentrates on the skills[9] to be acquired for the Final State Examination and investigates teachers' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the currently adopted textbooks in supporting students toward this objective. The State Examination represents the concluding moment of the secondary education cycle and requires the student to apply all the skills and competencies acquired over the years in a structured and coordinated way. It constitutes an important reference objective in the educational and training context, identical nationwide and regulated by multiple legal provisions (§ 2.2), and as such it is also highly taken into consideration in the structuring of the content and format of many textbooks. For these reasons, it was deemed appropriate to include a questionnaire section entirely dedicated to this topic. These last three Questions, along with n. 9 and n. 15, are open-ended questions while all the others are multiple-choice questions, even if in some cases (Questions n. 6, 8, 12, and 14) respondents can also express their opinions.

As far as the analysis of data is concerned, in order to have a clear understanding of the situation and to ensure clearly interpretable data, in the case of closed questions we relied both on aggregate data and on single answers. For example, for the first 4 questions we only relied on aggregate data, while for questions like n. 5, n.7, n.10, n.11, and n.13 we analyzed every single answer because the mere use of aggregate data obscured important patterns and did not provide a clear picture of the phenomenon under study.

[8] We use the expression 'Language textbooks' to refer to those books focused on the acquisition of language structures and communicative functions; these are the 'course-books' used as main support of the in-class teaching activity. 'Culture textbooks' are those that cover cultural contents (in Italian or in Chinese), while 'Grammar textbooks' are textbooks specifically designed to deliver grammar points.

[9] According to Ministerial Decree No. 769 of November 26, 2018 and Decree No. 127 of September 9, 2025, the Final State Exam requires students to master a set of competences. As for the written exam, students are required to go through a B1-level reading comprehension and a written production; as for the speaking part, they are supposed to discuss in Chinese (level B1 approximately) and/or answer questions about topics related to culture, history or literature covered during the last school year.

For open-ended questions, instead, we used open coding (Maykut, Morehouse 1994 in Asay et al. 2019). Hence, similar responses, analyzed one by one, were grouped into categories, and the number of responses in each category was tallied.

4. *Results*

4.1 Socio-demographic data

It should first be noted that the survey was filled out by a total of 44 participants. Given the importance of textbooks in the teaching and learning process stated earlier (§ 2.3), we had hoped for a higher number of responses; however, the feedback received still represents a meaningful sample for our analysis, especially in highlighting the teaching community's perception of textbooks available on the Italian publishing market and the potential areas for improvement.

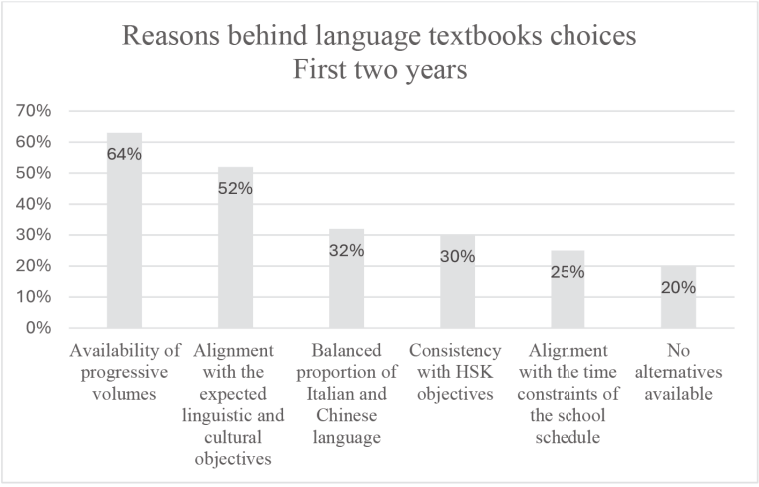
The first four questions of the questionnaire provide some information about the teachers and the status of the discipline: among the 44 respondents, 93% are teachers of Chinese language and culture, while 7% work as conversation teachers. The majority (82%) teach or have taught in *Liceo Linguistico*, 7% in *Convitto* (boarding schools) and 4% in Technical Institutes. Teaching experience of Chinese language and culture in Italian high schools ranges from less than one year to over 20 years, with an average of 8.6 years (range: <1–20; M = 8.6 years). The regions where respondents reported having taught most consistently are Veneto, Lombardy, and Emilia-Romagna (18% each), followed by Lazio, Tuscany, and Marche (7% each). Notably, no respondents reported having worked or currently working in Abruzzo, Basilicata, Molise, Trentino Alto Adige, and Valle d'Aosta. The geographical distribution of the respondents is useful only for identifying the Italian regions with the highest concentration of Chinese language teaching positions. However, it will not be used to detect different perceptions or needs at the territorial level, since all the secondary schools – public, private, and state-accredited – are subject to the same regulatory framework and to the same curricular objectives (§ 2.2).

4.2 First cycle of secondary education: textbooks and teachers' feedback

Shifting the focus to the core of the research, textbooks, in response to the fifth question of the questionnaire – "Which language textbook do you use or have you used in the first two years of instruction?" –, 36% of respondents report using *Parliamo Cinese, Vol. I* (Masini et al. 2018a), while 23% report using more than one textbook, sometimes published outside Italy. The only possible explanation for this last figure is that teachers probably adopt one textbook for students to use in class and then integrate it with several different materials taken from other textbooks that students do not have to buy. Another 16% report using both *Parliamo Cinese Vol. I* and *Parliamo Cinese, Vol. II* (Masini et al. 2018b); this third option suggests that some teachers probably start using the second volume of *Parliamo Cinese* during the second year. A noteworthy finding is that only one participant reports using a university-level textbook, rather than a high school one, as the basis for self-produced teaching material.

As for the reasons behind teachers' choices of the language textbooks (question n. 6), it can be stated that they are varied and reflect both pedagogical priorities and practical considerations. Considering that respondents were allowed to select multiple answers in the survey, the most frequently cited motivations are as follows: 64% of the teachers appreciate the possibility of adopting progressive volumes from the same series; 52% value alignment with the expected linguistic and cultural objectives, while 32% of respondents express appreciation for the balanced proportion of Italian (language) and Chinese (language). Another 30% value consistency with HSK[10] requirements, 25% think that textbooks are structured into compact teaching units, including word maps, tables and schemes, which align with the time constraints of the school schedule, and 20% underline the absence of alternative textbooks on the market. The high value placed on progressive volumes and curricular coherence suggests that teachers prioritize continuity and seek materials that support long-term language development. At the same time, the importance attributed to the presence of both languages, the alignment with HSK standards and textbooks' compact unit design reflect a practical concern about usability within the school context and alignment with institutional goals.

Fig. 1



Alongside this feedback, one particularly concerning finding that warrants attention is that nearly a quarter of the teachers, when asked to explain their language textbook choices, include among their reasons the fact that they have "no available alternative" – a response that reflects a broader sense of dissatisfaction with the textbooks currently on the market.

[10] The HSK is recognized worldwide as the official standard for certifying proficiency in Mandarin Chinese for non-native speakers. It has long been used as an official reference for acquired language competence in academic contexts, within the school system, and across various professional sectors. Consequently, many linguistic and cultural references contained in textbooks are related to the HSK standard, and numerous exercises are structured and graded according to the HSK grading system. Its major relevance therefore makes it an object of analysis within the questionnaire of this research as well.

As for the culture textbooks used in the first two years of high school (question n.7), the data show that 23% of respondents use *Destinazione Cina* (Buchetti, Man 2023) – a textbook that is approximately 40% in Chinese and 60% in Italian –, while 11% use either *Cina da scoprire* (Buchetti 2018) – roughly 90% in Italian –, or *Scopri e conosci la Cina* (Rossi, Rambaldini 2021) – 90% in Chinese. This last finding raises an immediate question: how is it possible to adopt a textbook primarily written in Chinese for students with upper-intermediate to advanced proficiency in the first two years of instruction?

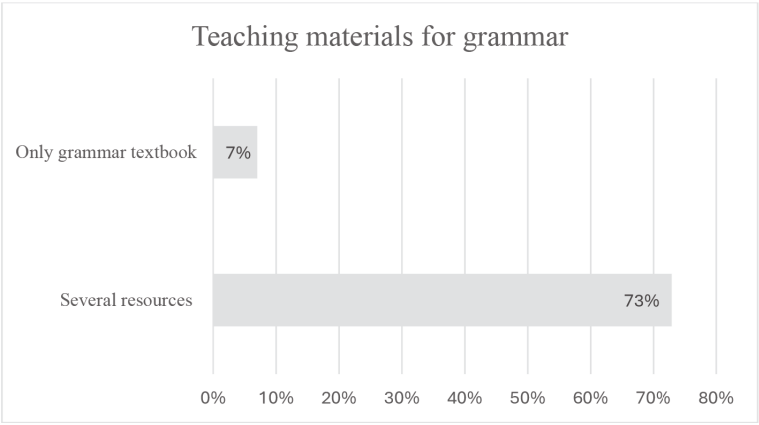
Beyond this concern, a couple of additional findings merit closer attention: 18% of teachers report using more than one textbook simultaneously, regardless of the language they are written in. However, considering the national budget limit for textbooks[11], it is fairly unlikely that students buy more than one culture book per year; hence, this figure suggests that teachers probably edit their own material drawing contents from all the books they state to adopt, but students probably buy just one or even none. Finally, 32% of respondents declare that they do not use any culture textbook at all in the first school cycle, which is not an encouraging result if we consider that "Culture is particularly crucial for CFL education" (Chen 2020, 18). In fact, since the 1980s, scholars have reflected on the role of culture teaching within the context of CSL pedagogy (Orton, Scrimgeour 2019; Qiao 2009, 215; Xing 2006) and have emphasized that not only are language and culture inseparable, but also that culture supports learners in developing intercultural communicative competence, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries (Zhang 2022, 2–61). The two most prominent reasons provided by teachers for not using a 'culture textbook' are, on one hand, that during the first two years the focus is mainly on language learning; on the other, that the budget limit does not allow the purchase of two books (question n. 9).

Further discussing the reasons behind textbook selection, the main factors cited by teachers for choosing the textbooks mentioned earlier (question n. 8) are as follows: 36% appreciate the good balance between the two languages (Italian and Chinese); 34% value the balanced combination of linguistic and cultural content; and 23% consider the contents sufficiently comprehensive, with no need for additional resources.

With regard to grammar textbooks (question n. 10), 39% of teachers report editing and adapting contents from a variety of resources (online, taken from other high school or university textbooks, or self-designed), often without even purchasing a grammar manual; 18% report using both language textbook and other materials drawn from various resources, another 18% report adopting a specific grammar manual, whereof more than half of them declare to integrate it with other materials. Figures thus show that only 7% of the respondents rely exclusively on a dedicated grammar textbook. Once again, the data lead us to believe that the materials currently available for grammar teaching do not fully meet teachers' needs or, alternatively, and probably this is the main reason, that the national budget limit, as in the case of culture textbooks, does not allow to buy an additional grammar textbook.

[11] The annual spending cap for textbooks to be adopted in lower and upper secondary school is established each year by Ministerial Decree. For example, the one for the 2025/2026 school year is established by Ministerial Decree No. 58 of March 19, 2025. See: https://www.mim.gov.it/-/decreto-ministeriale-n-58-del-19-marzo-2025 (last accessed June 12, 2026).

Fig. 2



4.3 Last three years of secondary education: textbooks and teachers' feedback

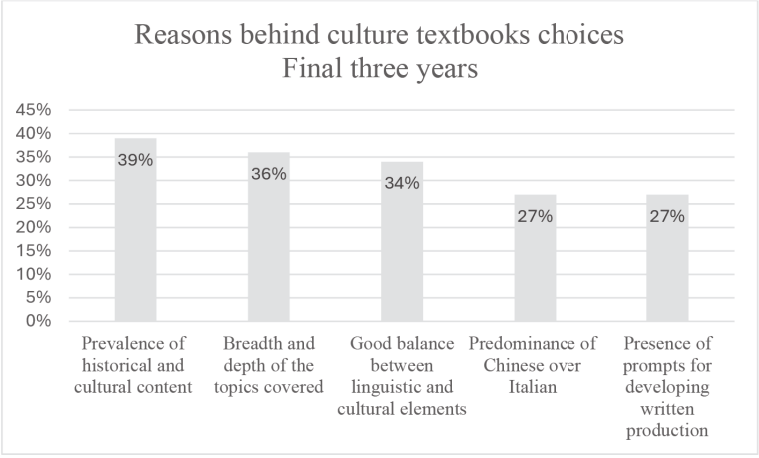
The data concerning the language textbooks chosen in the last three years of high school (question n. 11) show three main trends: over 36% of respondents report using the second volume of *Parliamo Cinese*, while 11% state they use both the second and third volumes of the same series. An interesting figure is that more than 20% of respondents report using a selection of volumes, probably requiring students to buy just one of them and selecting some supplemental material from other books if necessary.

As was the case in the first two years of high school, the respondents stated numerous reasons behind their choices (question n. 12): 39% of them report that a key factor is the availability of multiple volumes within the same series, while 34% highlight, on one hand, the importance of a good balance between Italian and Chinese language, and on the other hand, alignment with HSK objectives. 32% of respondents say that the chosen textbooks are consistent with the objectives of the last three years as outlined in the curriculum guidelines, and an additional 29% emphasize the good balance between linguistic and cultural elements. In light of these findings, it is worth noting that no respondent considers it important to choose textbooks in which Chinese predominates over Italian, or which place a strong emphasis on character writing. Likewise, only 9% of respondents consider the presence of inclusive elements for special educational needs to be relevant in the books.

In the section regarding culture textbooks, 36% of respondents report adopting *Scopri e Conosci la Cina*, 16% use *Destinazione Cina*, and 11% use both of these texts together (question n. 13). The survey reveals two additional noteworthy points: on one hand, over 20% of respondents report using a variety of textbooks (perhaps in an integrated way and not all officially adopted by students); on the other hand, 11% of respondents state that they do not use any textbook at all. These last two figures suggest that a large share of the teaching community uses materials drawn from various sources, adapting and reshaping them to suit the classroom context in which they work. Again, the reasons given are numerous (question n. 14): over 39% of respondents mention the prevalence of historical and cultural content in the books used, while 36%

state that the value lies in the breadth and depth of the topics covered. 34% highlight the good balance between linguistic and cultural elements, while 27% emphasize both the predominance of Chinese over Italian, as well as the presence of prompts for developing written production[12] and a fresher and more advanced lexical selection, capable of fostering a more authentic linguistic competence. Notably, at the lower end of the scale, no respondent underlines the relevance of the Italian language; only 2% find it important for the books to be inclusive and special educational needs oriented; and, finally, just one respondent openly states to use self-produced materials.

Fig. 3



4.4 Skills to be acquired through textbooks to successfully pass the Final State Exam

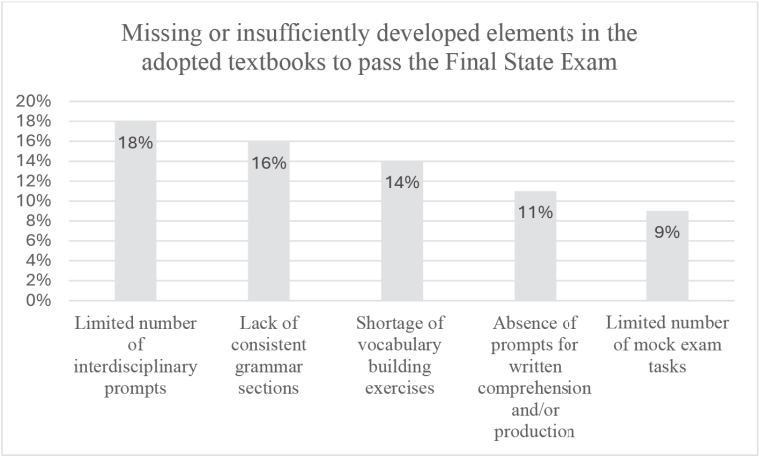
As stated earlier, the last section of the survey includes three open-ended questions which could provide an overview of the teaching community's perceptions and expectations. The first question (n. 16) inquiries about what teachers believe are the essential skills their students should acquire by the end of the fifth year in order to successfully pass the Chinese language and culture test in the Final State Exam. The Figures show three main strands, on the one hand, the triad of oral production (48%), reading comprehension (39%), and written production (36%); on the other, lexical and graphic skills (27%); and finally, knowledge of historical, cultural, and current affairs (25%). It is interesting to note that the skills mentioned by teachers closely mirror the structure of the State Exam itself: a written test focused on the comprehension and production of literary and non-literary texts, followed by an oral exam covering historical, cultural, and current topics (§ 2.2). This suggests a strong alignment between what the exam actually requires and what teachers believe students need in order to succeed.

[12] By 'written production' we mean the ability to compose a text of various types and lengths, based on a given prompt or a quotation to comment on. The present study does not specifically address characters handwriting, as, although this is a fundamental skill (Peracin, Rambaldini 2026), it is not an objective explicitly mentioned in the current regulations nor included in the reference frameworks for the State Examination.

The second open-ended question (n. 17) inquiries about the features teachers consider most useful in textbooks for developing the skills needed to pass the Chinese language tests in the Final State Exam. 29% of respondents underline that the key feature lies in the effective progression of grammar and vocabulary. The second most cited relevant factor, for almost 14% of respondents, is the presence of passages or texts on historical-cultural topics and current affairs; finally, 11% also indicate the presence of listening exercises as a significant feature. According to these figures, it is clear that respondents considered both language and culture textbooks in their feedback. Moreover, the data reveal a significant discrepancy concerning the importance of grammar in the teaching-learning process: while most respondents consider grammatical competence highly relevant for the Final State Exam, only 4% (first cycle) and 9% (second cycle) of them regard grammar as a key element in selecting language textbooks for the whole high school cycle, or have students purchase a dedicated grammar textbook (18%).

The third and final open-ended question (n. 18) investigates which elements are missing or insufficiently developed in the adopted textbooks. In this case, the most commonly cited shortcomings appear to be the limited number of interdisciplinary prompts[13] (18%), the lack of consistent grammar sections (16%), the shortage of vocabulary building exercises (14%), the absence of prompts for written comprehension and/or production (11%), and the limited number of mock exam tasks (9%). Once again, teachers' remarks seem perfectly aligned with the previous findings: what emerges in this case is a need for stronger grammar components and, with the Final Exam in mind, an increasing demand for books comprising a variety of approaches, as interdisciplinary as possible.

Fig. 4



[13] By 'interdisciplinary prompts' we refer to those resources found in textbooks that support students in establishing connections among the disciplines they study; these prompts may take various forms, such as images, excerpts, links to videos, and other similar materials. Their presence is linked to one of the requests of the Final State Exam as it was till the school year 2024/25: during the oral test students were required to establish connections among the disciplines on the basis of a prompt provided by the examination committee.

5. *Conclusions and future prospects*

From a global perspective, data analysis reveals significant heterogeneity of needs and perceptions within Italian CFL teaching community. In terms of language learning, a considerable percentage of respondents emphasize the need for simplified texts, more suitable to students' level, as the textbooks currently available on the market are considered too challenging. Nevertheless, a significant number of respondents would prefer more content-rich textbooks, possibly written in a more authentic Chinese.

Similarly, as for lexical competence, the teaching community appears divided between those who request texts with simpler vocabulary, organized schematically in word maps, and those who instead prefer texts with more advanced vocabulary and a faster progression. This discrepancy is also evident in various references made by respondents to the HSK certification system: many of them consider HSK3 the target level, while others indicate HSK4 as the expected outcome. This significant divergence can lead to two reflections: on the one hand, it seems that for many, the HSK system is still the benchmark for assessing CFL learning outcomes; on the other hand, regardless of the debate on the equivalence between HSK and the CEFR (Paternicò 2016)[14], there appear to be differences in the proficiency levels targeted by teachers by the end of the whole high school cycle. This difference is likely attributable to the placement of CFL within the curriculum – that is, whether CFL is offered as a second or third foreign language – and therefore associated with more or less advanced learning outcomes. As previously stated (§ 2.1, 2.2), in fact, students are expected to attain a level of language proficiency ranging from B1 to B2, depending on whether Chinese is studied as a second or third foreign language (Presidential Decree No. 89 of March 15, 2010).

As previously mentioned, grammar learning is also a point of contention. While many consider it a key competence for passing the Final State Exam, very few openly declare using specific grammar textbooks, despite acknowledging the scarcity of grammatical content in the main textbooks currently available. Another relevant aspect emerging from the analysis is the growing tendency, in line with end-of-cycle objectives, to favor an interdisciplinary approach and opt for textbooks able to integrate language learning with cultural knowledge.

Finally, one fifth of teachers report drawing on a variety of sources for both language and culture teaching. This could indicate a partial dissatisfaction with the current textbooks available on the market or suggest a widespread need to adopt a pluralistic teaching approach. According to this second interpretation, teachers would not necessarily rely on a single guidebook but rather be inclined to select the strengths of various textbooks in order to optimize and tailor their teaching approach more effectively.

The figures revealed by the analysis, along with the descriptive feedback and remarks provided by the respondents, may contribute to shaping editorial directions for secondary

[14] The different teaching and learning process for CFL compared to other European languages do not allow perfect correspondence between frameworks developed with distinct objectives, methodologies, and contextual applications (Paternicò 2016). For this reason, even if also the *National Syllabus of Chinese Language* gives a general indication of the target proficiency level for each school year, on the basis of the CEFR and HSK, the reference is purely indicative (National Syllabus of Chinese language 2016, 5).

school. In this manner, didactic publications will be able to render the teaching and learning processes more consistent and effective at the national level, more closely attuned to the specific needs of Chinese language learners and better aligned with the national guidelines for foreign language education.

Authorship Contributions

This work is the result of close collaboration between the two authors. For the concerns of the Italian academic evaluation processes, the writing of the article was divided as follows: Cristina Caterina Rambaldini is mainly responsible for Sections 1, 2.1, 2.3, 3, 4.1 and 4.2, while Tommaso Rossi is mainly responsible for Sections 2.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 5.

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