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Paratext in retranslation: Mapping the history of Slovak illustrations for *A Christmas Carol*

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Abstract

Charles Dickens' small volume titled *A Christmas Carol* published in December 1843 almost instantly became a seasonal classic, and in the following 181 years has been adapted and reimagined countless times for readers across the globe. Its popularity ensured not only a wealth of translations, but led to multiple retranslations as the seasonal classic required a fresh update for modern audiences. These retranslations renew not only the text of the *Carol* itself, but likewise provide a new paratext surrounding each edition; in the case of the *Carol*, these frequently involve images, mirroring the visually rich original volume with its iconic illustrations. This paper tests the retranslation hypothesis, originally suggested by Goethe and later developed by translation studies scholars, and its applicability to the paratextual features of a translation. The hypothesis posits that each new retranslation brings the target text closer to the source text, and this paper explores whether the illustrations associated with a retranslated text – such as the ten different Slovak versions of *A Christmas Carol* – likewise increasingly bring the visual aspects closer to the book's original form.

1. Introduction

Although grandiose statements, such as that Charles Dickens invented modern Christmas, (Standiford 2011) might not be wholly convincing, the fact remains that *A Christmas Carol* is not only one of most popular seasonal stories written in English, but also a cultural touchstone in most Christmas-celebrating countries. The short story, originally published on 19th December 1843, has a simple but memorable plot; an elderly curmudgeon who hates company as much as he hates celebrations is visited by spirits of Christmases Past, Present and Future, and the scenes he sees with these apparitions, ranging from sad childhood flashbacks to horror-filled visions of his own future, finally turn the miser into a Christmas-loving philanthropist. While the plot itself is hardly original – indeed, Dickens himself uses a similar motive in one of the stories-within-stories in *The Pickwick Papers*[1] – what makes the *Carol* such a lasting classic is simply the way it is written. Dickens' particular blend of almost maudlin sentimentality cleverly offset by sparklingly fresh wit has proven to be a timelessly endearing combination, and paired with his irresistible description of a picture-perfect Christmassy London, they create an unforgettable and lastingly vivid reading experience. This visual appeal of the original 1843 novel was further enhanced by a lavish cover and eight, by now iconic illustrations by Edward Leech, which later became the basis for the countless adaptations for screen, theatre and television the *Carol* inspired.

The *Carol's* popularity quickly crossed the borders of its country of origin and spread through translations into other linguistic areas. As the original book, these new versions of the short story adapted not only the text to the tastes and expectations of their audiences, but also the paratextual features surrounding the novel. The concept of paratext as an umbrella term for everything surrounding a particular text stems originally from Gérard Genette's work (1997). This paper uses an updated model of paratext modified specifically for the purposes of translation studies, defined as 'a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received' (Batchelor 2018, 142). The conceptualisation of paratext as a threshold is particularly interesting in the case of books associated with strong visual elements, such as the *Carol*. The relative attractiveness of a cover is for many readers the impetus for picking up a physical book in a bookstore or for choosing it in the process of online browsing, and the opening of this illustrated cover becomes the perfect metaphor for the crossing over a mythical threshold into the story itself. Like translations, paratextual elements are subjected to trends and norms in publishing, and as such change the way a book is viewed by different readers. This becomes particularly interesting when viewed on a

[1] Chapter 29, 'The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton'.

historical timeline with several retranslations, which are a common phenomenon in the case of literary classics such as the *Carol*. This paper studies the trajectories of these chronological developments in the *Carol's* illustrations using the retranslation hypothesis as its framework.

The retranslation hypothesis is traditionally associated with Goethe's early works on translation (Goethe 1992), but was introduced into translation studies primarily through Antoine Berman's article originally published in a special issue of the journal *Palimpsestes* (Berman 1990). At its core, retranslation hypothesis posits that translations become progressively more 'complete' with each retranslation – richer in language, deeper in significance and with an ever-improving relationship to the original (ibid., 6). Berman claims that each new translation seeks to, consciously or subconsciously, amend the failures of its predecessors in achieving a better functioning and better integrated source text, following a linear development towards an imaginary ideal (ibid., 3).While this logocentric, teleological view of translation history has later been criticised by several translation theorists (Brisset 2004; Gambier 1994), and its usefulness in practical research has likewise been questioned (Deane-Cox 2014; O'Driscoll 2011), it remains a useful model through which to explore a series of different translations of the same source text along historical timelines. The idea to combine retranslation theory with paratextual material has already been partly explored in a collection by Albachten & Gürçağlar (2019), however none of these works focus solely on paratext in the form of illustrations. The *Carol* as a literary classic closely associated with visual imagery and one that has been translated numerous times into other languages is a great subject for such a study, and this paper will use four Slovak translations of the *Carol* in ten different editions in order to explore the temporal shifts and norms in the visual appearance of the story.

2. Charles Dickens and the original *Carol* illustrations

Despite the fact that most of Dickens' novels are nowadays published without pictorial paratext in English and translated contexts alike, the symbiotic relationship between his work and its original illustrators remains embedded in the wider consciousness of his readership. Dickens' first major literary breakthrough, *The Pickwick Papers*, was originally envisioned as a series of illustrated sporting scenes accompanied by short articles written by Dickens. The textual accompaniment quickly turned out to be more the more popular element amongst the Victorian public, but the illustrations provided by Hablot Knight Browne alias 'Phiz' play a significant role in the lasting cultural impact of the book. *The Pickwick Papers* were also the start of a lasting partnership between Dickens and Browne, who illustrated ten out of fifteen of Dickens' novels including *David Copperfield*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*. Brown's black and white etchings with their realistic depictions of Victorian lives and their strong sense for personal

idiosyncrasies perfectly complement Dickens' character-driven novels, and in many ways formed not only how we still imagine Dickens' stories, but Victorian England in general. Aside from this fruitful collaboration with Browne, Dickens worked with a number of famous Victorian illustrators including George Cruikshank (*Oliver Twist*), Marcus Stone (*Our Mutual Friend*), Luke Fildes (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*) and others.

Dickens' most famous short story – and arguably the most famous Christmas tale ever written in English – was however not illustrated by Browne, but by Edward Leech, a well-established cartoonist primarily associated with that most renowned of British 19th century satire magazines, *Punch*. The reason why Dickens deviated from his usual collaboration with Browne lies in the fact that Browne was already commissioned to illustrate *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the novel Dickens was serialising at the time of the *Carol*'s conception. Leech had been interested in Dickens' works since *The Pickwick Paper*s when he had entered the competition for its illustrations that was ultimately won by Browne, and Dickens had likewise watched Leech's illustrating progress with interest, as their correspondence from 1842 shows (Hearn 2004, xliii). The *Carol* became a fortuitous occasion for Dickens and Leech to finally collaborate, and four wood engravings together with four hand-coloured etchings were ordered to accompany the story.

Given that the *Carol* is not even 40,000 words long and usually occupies less than a hundred pages, the number of illustrations was fairly extravagant, as Dickens' work was usually illustrated with one image per serialised chapter or less. This indulgent choice is associated with the whole concept of the *Carol* as envisioned by Dickens; the book was to be his first 'self-published' work as we would call it now, as the book was funded by Dickens in its entirety without the usual middleman in the form of a publishing house. The reason for this unusual decision was an argument Dickens had with his publishers Chapman and Hall, following the dwindling sales of the serialised *Martin Chuzzlewit* which remains to this day one of Dickens' least popular novels. Incensed by the publisher's threat to cut his regular income, Dickens decided to publish this newest work on his own, expecting to earn significantly more than the usual commission from his serialised novels. The fact that one of the most famous stories condemning human greed came into being because its author was short on money, partly because his wife was pregnant with his fifth child, remains one of the greatest ironies of literary history.

Dickens' plan to become rich from the sales of the *Carol* were certainly not overly ambitious, given that the *Carol's* sales exceeded expectations and reached 9,000 by the 1st of January 1844 (Hearn 2004, ii), but the actual financial gain from the enterprise was deeply disappointing. The total earnings after paying all fees associated with printing were barely 230 pounds, where Dickens expected at least 1,000. As is clear from the detailed bill included in the appendix to Dickens'

biography by John Forster (1875, 87), the problem rested in Dickens' aspiration to produce a story for the everyman – prized at only five shillings per volume – but at the same time, to create a high-quality, visually pleasing book. It was the choice to use four wood-engravings and four etchings that had to be coloured by hand that were the reason for the steep production price, together with a red cloth binding, gold edges and gold lettering on the spine.

Although the financial results were a disappointment, the overall appearance of the volume was well-received, and the illustrations in particular solidified the image of the *Carol's* world for generations to come. Especially the four coloured illustrations depicting Scrooge's meeting with 'Marley's Ghost', the cheerful atmosphere of 'Mr Fezziwig's Ball', the feast accompanying 'Scrooge's third Visitor' as the Ghost of Christmas Present, and the shadowy figure pointing Scrooge to his potential grave as 'the Last of the Spirits' became cultural and literary touchstones. The *Carol* has been adapted for film and television more than 150 times (Guida 2000), and while many of these adaptations position the *Carol* into a modified, modern environment, the ones choosing Dickensian London only rarely depart from the instantly recognisable elements from Leech's drawings, including Scrooge's unmistakable pointy nightcap and Fezziwig's striped stockings[2]. The illustrations also underscore the curious chimeric quality of the *Carol*, which typically eludes neat genre conventions. While structured as a typical fairy story where the good ultimately defeats evil featuring magic, ghosts and time travel, it was not primarily meant for children, and Leech's illustrations – imaginative, full of character but never infantilising or cloying – clearly aim at a universal readership. This elusive aspect of the genre and audience of the *Carol* is one of the most prominent factors in its later reimagining, and contributes to the multiplicity of forms and shapes the story took on in its translated versions.

[2] Interestingly, Leech – or Dickens, the exact details of their collaboration are not documented – decided not to include the arguably most iconic scene from the *Carol*: the vision of a Christmas dinner as celebrated by Scooge's clerk Bob Cratchit. This idealised description of how middle-class readers expected to see a good and deserving working-class family – poor but neat, with too many mouths to feed but a limitless well of good cheer, and with that stock figure of Victorian sentiment, a disabled child in its midst – was clearly a favourite of Dickens himself, who performed the scene countless times as part of his public readings. The image of Bob Cratchit holding his son on his shoulders, likewise reimagined countless times in *Carol* adaptations and illustrations, comes originally from the American illustrator Solomon Etynge Junior in 1867.

3. Translating – and illustrating - *The Christmas Carol* for Slovak readers

Four complete translations3 of A Christmas Carol into Slovak exist to this date. Only Oliver Twist and The Pickwick Papers have a similarly large number of Slovak retranslations (four each), but it is still relatively low especially compared with the neighbouring Czech Republic with 10 different translations of A Christmas *Carol*. As was the case with many translations published in the former Czechoslovakia, the linguistic similarities between the two languages and the overall cultural hegemony of the Czech side of the country frequently caused diminished interest in Slovak translations, and the numbers are comparable with other retranslations of English classics. The following section will consider each of these translations and their possible reeditions with an emphasis on the visual elements of each edition, framing these in a comparison with Dickens' original 1843 version.

4. Kalina and the Felbers – Dickens sans illustrations

The first of these translations was published in 1907 and is the work of the Slovak writer, journalist and translator Ján Smetanay, working under the pseudonym Ján Kalina. The volume was published in Kníhtlačiarsky účastinársky spolok [Letterpress Join-stock Company] in Turčiansky Sv. Martin, an institution founded with the express aim to publish literature in Slovak and to spread national culture and consciousness at a time when present-day Slovakia was still part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. The physical shape of the volume bears the closest resemblance to Dicken's original work, in the sense that it was published in small (A5) format and bound in brown cloth. The only illustrative element is a simple stylised motive of lilies arranged around the text on the title page in Art Nouveau style characteristic for the era of its publication. Taking into account that the publishing house's main aim was to broaden Slovak national consciousness and the publication of world classics was only seen as a side project, as well as the numerous financial difficulties of this shareholder-based institution (see e.g. Trnkóci 2019), it is understandable that a relatively short story from an English author did not merit a higher budget for its visual appeal.

The second Slovak translation of the *Carol* was the work of a husband-and-wife team Eugénia and Stanislav Felber. Both were teachers in Eastern Slovakia, and their collaborative effort brought to Slovak readers

[3] A version of the *Carol* abridged by Shona McKellar and translated by Helena Sumbalová from the English *Eyewitness Classics* series was published in 1998. As this version is heavily abridged and the majority of the text focuses on explaining various trivia of Victorian life to a child reader, it was not included in this comparison.

some of the first translations of Walter Scott (*Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*), as well as Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*. Their translation of the *Carol* was first published in 1939 into the newly established, Nazi Germany-controlled Slovak Republic, and later republished in 1948, the year of the communist coup d'etat and the beginning of four decades of communist rule in Czechoslovakia. Both versions were published in Spolok Sv. Vojtecha [Society of St. Adalbert], a Slovak publishing house focusing on the publication of Christian literature. The size of both volumes is more substantial than the slim 1907 version, as they include four stories, all translated by the Felbers: aside from the *Carol*, they include *The Chimes*, Dickens' second Christmas story[4], and two stories from Dickens' short story collections: 'Picking Up Evening Shadows' from *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, and the first two untitled chapters from *Mugby Junction*.

As was the case in the first edition of the *Carol*, this second translation does not contain any illustrations in the text of the story itself. This fact can be ascribed both to the financial difficulties publishing houses inevitably faced shortly before and after the Second World War, as well as to the audience at which the volume was aimed. The short anonymous foreword to the volume briefly describes Dickens' humble beginnings and his role in changing the plight of Victorian working classes in a style that clearly suggest that the volume is aimed at an adult reader. Taken together with the fact that the volume is the work of a publishing house focusing on Christian literature, it is clear that it was conceptualised as a representative work of English realist writing, rather than a whimsical story with ghosts and time travel that should provoke the reader's imagination.

The only pictorial element that is associated with this translation appears in the second edition of the book in 1948. The volume itself carries a small image of a bell tower on the front cover, presumably tying in with the story of *The Chimes* where the main character undergoes a series of visions after he climbs into the bell chamber of his local church. The volume is also the first one to have a paper cover, and this is adorned by an image by the well-known Slovak painter and illustrator, Edita Ambrušová. The image shows a stylised city landscape, architecturally closer to a Central European town with reddish roofs and square housefronts than to the iconic thin structures with coal-fed chimneys of Victorian London. The landscape is rendered in bright warm hues against the dark blue backdrop, evoking the image of a night sky and houses glowing with lit fires. This highly domesticating illustration clearly does not aim to bring the reader closer to

[4] Following up on the success of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens published four more Christmas stories in December of each year until 1848. Although these were highly popular at the time of their publications, the themes and moral messages aged significantly less successfully than the *Carol*, and they largely fell into obscurity as a result.

the original, but instead carries Dickens' story of Christmas redemption into the familiar environment of a small Slovak town.

5. Six times Žáryová

The third translation of the *Carol* was the work of Magda Žáryová, one of Slovakia's most prolific translators from English during the four decades of the communist rule. Her works include translations of Emily Brönte, Thomas Hardy, William Faulkner and Roald Dahl, and I dishe translated Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield*. Her translation of the *Carol* was first published in 1985, towards the end of her professional career. Despite Žáryová's broad experiences with Victorian classics, the translation does not deal particularly skilfully with Dickes' frequent wordplay, and contains several mistranslations where the translator struggled with some of the more complex English phrases[5]. It is perhaps unfortunate that this version became the de facto only Slovak translation of the *Carol* for more than thirty years, as it has been republished and repackaged into six different editions without any further editorial interventions.

The first of these versions, and the only one published in former Czechoslovakia, was published by Tatran, a major publishing house focusing on Slovak and world classics. The book is small, barely larger than format A6, reflecting the era's popular pocketbooks frequently used for poetry, and contains fourteen illustrations by the Slovak illustrator and artist Martin Kellenberger. The illustrations are conceptualised as monochrome sketches, and while some of them clearly depict objects such as lit candles or the profile of a man with a large beard and a top hat, most of them veer towards the abstract. While the images are visually striking and the harsh, black lines give the world of the *Carol* a curiously sinister atmosphere, they are clearly an accompaniment to the text aimed at an adult reader, rather than a selling point in its own right. This translation comes close to Dicken's original version in the number of images: it features two illustrations per 'stave', as the chapters in the *Carol* are named, alongside further images in the paratext. Their black and white colour scheme likewise resembles the four wood engravings in the original book.

The second edition from 1993 was a joined volume, combining Žáryová's *Carol* with a translation of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, the third of Dickens' Christmas stories, translated by Tatiana Ruppeldová. The volume was published by Spolok Sv. Vojtecha, the same publishing house that

[5] Such as when she wrongly interprets the sentence 'Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler.' (Dickens 2006, 83) as Bob nearing a human leader [*k svojmu vládcovi*] (Dickens 1985, 148) instead of nearing a wooden measuring tool Bob is about to grasp to defend himself.

published the Felbers' translation. The thin paperback volume has two images on the front and the back cover, both by the Slovak artist Jana Cvetanová. As was the case with the 1985 edition, the image is highly stylised in shades of yellow and grey; the front image includes a clock set to just before midnight and two horse-drawn carriages, one of which resembles a hearse. The second image once again depicts a man with a beard and a top hat, together with three burning candles. Although the images are not as starkly artistic as the 1985 Tatran edition, they have an eerie quality that would clearly not suit a child reader but fits well with the editorial series *Dobré slovo* [Good word] aiming to publish world classics with Christian themes.

The first version of the *Carol* that comes close to the original version as a visual as well as a textual experience is the third iteration of Žáryová's text, published by the short-lived and now defunct publishing house Champagne Avantgarde in 1994. The translation was used for a popular new illustrated version of the *Carol* by the Italian illustrator Roberto Innocenti, and the same illustrated edition was published simultaneously in Italian, Spanish, English, German, Czech, and other languages. The edition is richly illustrated with 18 full colour and full page (in three cases two-page spread) images, together with smaller pictures used for chapter headings. The pages too have a coloured ombré effect, and the overall quality of the paper together with the large format of the book (A4) create an effect of an indulgent bookish purchase that is attractive to both children and adult readers. However, despite the fact that the book is clearly made with younger readers in mind, given the large size of the font and the generous spacing of the lines, the illustrations themselves are perhaps not typical for a child reader. While Innocenti is known for his illustrations of children's stories, including *Pinocchio*, *The Nutcracker* or *Cinderella*, his depiction of these fantastical landscapes tends to be gloomy, verging on unsettling. Instead of the streets filled with smiling faces, enticing food and warmly glowing windows described by Dickens, Innocenti's London is a dark and vicious place. Already the first illustration depicting the seat of the firm Scrooge and Marley reveals a dingy, narrow street populated with emaciated beggars in discoloured rags, centred around a figure of a crouching man pulling a dead rat on a string through nearly-melted snow. Even cheerful scenes, such as Fezziwig's Ball, are rendered in dark shades of beige and grey and have a rather melancholy feel, and the sentimental warmth of the Cratchit's Christmas dinner is diminished by the emptiness of the rooms and the hollow-eyed expressions of the family. While there are of course children fascinated by similarly dark scenes, most would presumably not find this version of the *Carol* particularly appealing. Dickens is of course known as the great realist author and never shied away from depicting the London poor with unflinching detail, but his verbal descriptions are always alleviated through his use of sympathetic humour. Leech as the original illustrator of the *Carol* perfectly encapsulates this

duality in his images; even the most naturalistic of the illustrations, such as the personification of Ignorance and Want Scrooge encounters in one of his vision, are still rendered with some measure of kindness and pathos. Innocenti's version, while close in shape and quality of the volume, lacks the warmth and kindness of the original.

The fourth of Žáryová's reeditions was published in 2000 by Nestor. This Czecho-Slovak publishing house focuses on the publication of literary classics as well as works of philosophy and other non-fiction titles printed in small volumes stylised after the image of 'old books': they are hand-crafted, leather bound, furnished with ribbon bookmarks and small leather ties and printed in bright red or blue. Their uniform style and formatting heightens their collective potential, and they are frequently marketed as the ideal present for book lovers. Apart from an image of an evergreen branch with a burning candle that is depicted on the spine of the volume, and the same motive reprinted on the heading of every page, this edition does not contain any illustration. What is of more interest, however, is the format of the book itself, as Dickens definitely envisioned his *Carol* as a work that would look well displayed on a shelf in a middle-class household; indeed, Dickens bragged to his friend that he receives letters from readers about how the *Carol* is 'read aloud there, and kept on a very little shelf by itself' (Hearn 2004, li). Nestor, while not fulfilling the illustratory requirements of the original book, clearly fits Dickens' physical requirements for the volume.

The fifth use of Žáryová's translation was made in 2005 by the publishing house Petit Press, which owns a number of Slovak print media including the daily newspaper SME and regional newspapers MY. The *Carol* was chosen for a 2004 project titled *Svetová knižnica SME* [SME World Library], where the publishing house chose 20[6] classics of 19th century literature and reprinted them in matching covers, to be sold weekly together with the newspapers. The series combined Žáryová's *Carol* with another existing translation of *Oliver Twist* by Margita Príbusová originally from 1991, and published them as the fourth volume in this series. The edition is once again without illustrations with the exception of the front page, with an image of a man in a top hat holding the hand of a small boy in Victorian clothes, seen from behind. Curiously, the image is a simple rendering of an illustration of Mr Micawber and David from an illustrated version of *David Copperfield* by the British illustrator Frank Reynolds, and as such has nothing to do with the *Carol* or with *Oliver Twist*. The lack of illustrations is in this case explained by the book series itself; the aim was clearly to create a high-brow collection of world literature which included Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* or Balzac's *Père Goriot*, and as such is the absence of illustrations that are still primarily viewed as unsuitable for 'serious' literature understandable.

[6] The list was later expanded to 30.

The so far last iteration of Žáryová's 1985 translation was published in 2015 by Verbarium, a Slovak publishing house primarily oriented at literature for children and younger audiences. This is thus far the only version of the *Carol* clearly marketed for the age category young adult, confirmed by a large YA logo on the front cover. In a stark contrast to Innocenti's grim vision of Victorian London, or the stylised artwork of the earlier translations, the editorial team chose illustrations by Zsolt Lukács, who is primarily known for his political caricatures. As a result, the illustrations have a definite cartoonish feel, rendered with quick strokes of the pen and coloured with primary colours. It is also clear that Lukács is not used to drawing (or was not asked to include) any background images, so that most characters simply float in white space. While Lukács as a caricaturist has a great eye for human faces and especially Scrooge's grimaces retain the playful jovialness of Dickens' writing, the illustrations feel jarring or wholly unsuitable in the more serious scenes. The aim of the publishing house was clearly to bring the *Carol* closer to a teenaged reader, and the inclusion of less formal illustrations might be a great way to accomplish this. However, as a paratextual tool bringing the original vision of the *Carol* to 21st century readers, it is signally unsuccessful.

6. Lisa Aisato and the return of the sentimental carol

After nearly forty years of various iterations of Žáryová's translation, the year 2023 finally brought a new Slovak translation of the *Carol*. The translation is the work of Alexandra Strelková and the volume was published by Tatran, the same publishing house that brought out the very first of Žáryová's translations in 1985. The new translation is highly competent – Strelková effortlessly deals with Dickens' wordplay, uses a well-judged combination of slightly archaic terms with diminutives that lend it a more intimate atmosphere, and in general uses fresh, lively language that suits the translation as well as the edition. However, the impetus for this new version of the *Carol* clearly stems once again from illustrations, as was the case with the Innocenti version; these are based on the work of the Norwegian artist Lisa Aisato, and the copyright for a reprint of these illustrations has at the time of writing been sold to eleven countries, including Hungary, Poland, South Korea or Estonia (Oslo Literary Agency 2023). It is no surprise that this version of the *Carol* brought so much international attention, as is truly one of the most imaginative and visually striking versions of the story to date. Everything is larger and shinier than in real life – Scrooge's nephew's cheeks and nose are red as the proverbial apples, the sea scene where Scrooge visits a lighthouse seems to swallow the whole page, and Fezziwig's ball bursts with colours and glitters in a way no amount of candles could provide. The watercolour images focus strongly on faces and the gradual transformation from the scowling, hard-featured Scrooge in the first pages of the novel into the smiling, bright-eyed

reformed version of him at its end was clearly a thematic focus of the work[7]. At times, this becomes too much, especially in the more sentimental scenes; the first image of Tiny Tim with his anaemic face turned towards the reader as we watch him from an adult's perspective, his shiny eyes full of naive trust, can be matched only by a close-up image where he sings, eyes closed, his song about a little child lost in snow, rendered by the illustrator as golden sparks flying from his mouth. Exuberance of emotionally charged images aside, the book remains a highly pleasant reading experience with images on nearly all pages, printed on high quality paper and with gold foiling on the hardback cover. Interestingly, and in spite of the lush illustrations, the book is clearly not meant solely for children; the book's format is relatively large, but the font is small, the text clearly leaving the illustrations to stand in the forefront. The price of the book during its first season was quite steep – around 30 euros, which is unusual for a 140-page volume. However, the reviews from Slovakia's largest bookstore chain Martinus shows that the book was extremely well received[8] and the book was also featured at place 11 in the book chain's list of the most-sold books of the year (Martinus 2023); given that it was published towards the end of the year, this remains impressive.

While not bound in red leather and furnished with engraved illustrations in a clearly recognizable Victorian style, Strelková's translation of the *Carol* comes so far the closest to the visual and physical impression the original book must have left on its first purchasers[9]. It is a carefully crafted volume calculated to look and feel luxurious and entice customers

[7] One of the most interesting features of Aisato's illustrations is her subtle but effective inclusion of racial diversity into the world of the *Carol*. One of the two gentlemen who come to ask Scrooge for a charitable donation as well as the lost love from Scrooge's past are both Black, the Ghost of Christmas Past has distinctly East-Asian facial features, and both Fezziwig's Ball and the Christmas scene at Scrooge's nephew contain visibly non-white characters in the crowd. While these are obvious to an attentive reader, they remain relatively unobtrusive; dressed up in historical clothes with bonnets and top hats, these characters blend seamlessly into the familiar scenes. Aisato has a Norwegian mother and a Gambian father so it can be assumed that her inclusion of people of colour into the Carol had personal reasons, however it can also be argued that this depiction of a 19th century London that was verifiably full of non-white inhabitants is long overdue.

[8] The average rating of 4.6 out of 169 reviews at the time of writing this paper, https://www.martinus.sk/14649-vianocna-koleda/kniha (Accessed on: 14 January 2024).

[9] Strelková confirmed in a personal email exchange that she consulted not only the new Norwegian edition while translating the Carol, but also Leech's original illustrations, further contributing to the idea of a translation engaged in a clear dialogue with its original form.

in bookstores to buy it as a thoughtful gift, or perhaps as an indulgent treat for one's own library. The illustrations are bursting with colour, suit the sentimental nature of the text, and would appeal equally well to a child as to an adult. The marketing too does not present the volume as a high-brow classic, nor as a book for young readers; instead, the blurb on the back simply titles it 'the most famous Christmas story of all times', an epithet Dickens would surely have appreciated nearly two centuries after his work's publication.

7. Conclusion

Exploring a series of retranslations spanning more than a century opens up fruitful spaces for comparing translation history, norms, and approaches, but seeing these translations in their physical paper form lined up next to each other is just as striking; the size of each volume and the quality of paper used can indicate the size of the budget of the publishing house or large-scale changes in a country's fiscal and economic history. The choice of the fonts, the typesetting and the graphic design of the cover tell just as much about the contemporary fashion trends in publishing houses as they do about the intended target audience the publishing house had in mind. Above all, the illustrations – or their lack – can shape the *Carol* in a number of different ways: as a serious representative of 19th century British realism, as a fantasy story with ghosts, as a fairytale for children, as a collectible object, as a book about Christmas palatable even at a time when religion was dismissed by the state. It is difficult to say which one of these iterations is the closest to the original version in the sense used within translation studies, especially as editorial teams rarely aim at such closeness. There are such cases, such as the *Annotated Christmas Carol* edited by Michael Hearn (2004), which is consciously formatted and shaped as closely to the original as possible, down to the use of a red cover with golden lettering and green ink as was Dickens' choice, however these are exceptions to the rule. Indeed, the main difference in comparing the original text or the *Carol* with its translation and comparing the original paratext with its foreign iterations is that most publishing houses are not working directly with the original volume. A translated text does not change whether it is taken from a fragile, centuries-old page or from its digitised version, but publishing houses are under no obligation to reference Dickens' original vision of his work when preparing a new edition. With these caveats in mind however, we can still discuss the relative closeness of the visual paratext to the original book, while taking the spatial and temporal differences of these two objects in mind.

The conclusions to be drawn from the chronological overview of Slovak editions of the *Carol* is that they started with minimal to no illustrations in 1907 and 1939, and gradually progressed towards increasingly more elaborately embellished versions until the most recent

2023 translation. While this development is by no means linear – indeed, the six versions of Žáryová's translation veer between fully illustrated to no illustrations at all – the overall trend to return the *Carol* to its original illustrated form can be clearly traced in the editorial decisions. In this case, the closeness is not defined by actual physical similarities between the illustrations. Rather, what is measured is how the original threshold of the story created by the paratext as defined by Batchelor (2018, 142) compares with the threshold created as part of Dickens's vision and Leech's illustrations. While elements such as emotional impact are notoriously difficult to measure and cannot be generalised for every reader, the contextual clues described in this overview create a clear picture of the kind of first impressions the publishing house planned to impart on its target readers in order to capture their attention and ease their way into the story itself.

These results then confirm the central idea of this paper: if we approach the paratextual material in books through the prism of retranslation, this small case study shows that each new retranslation brings the target text closer to the original, as suggested by the retranslation hypothesis. This singular enquiry naturally cannot represent the confirmation of an overall trend, especially as the *Carol* with its uncertain positioning between a literary classic and a children's book occupies an atypical position in translated literary systems. There are also a number of other factors that contribute to the paratextual choices made by editorial teams, including budgetary planning, copyright issues, changes of formats from physical to e-books and audiobooks and, increasingly, the availability of AI-generated art. All of these however open further possibilities for research combining translation history with paratextual elements, whether within specific genres (such as children's books, speculative fiction, or the recent changes in the paratextual marketing of romance novels) and across different language combinations or historical eras. The arrival of electronic books has brought a perhaps unexpected return of books as special objects, as e-readers and audiobook subscription services make mass market paperbacks, printed to last one or two readings, obsolete. Instead, the new generation of readers increasingly considers – or perhaps reconsiders – books as collectible objects, with special editions adorning a carefully curated personal library. These new developments are already resulting in an unprecedented interest in the production of illustrated volumes, and will create future spaces for the exploration of illustrations on a time space continuum.

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