

Introduction

The shadow heroes of translation: On translators of Slovak literature into English

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Abstract

The art of translation has been one of the most important stimuli for the progress of civilisations. In the past, translators often were hidden characters, unnamed people who paved the way for some of the greatest contributions to the dissemination of ideas, knowledge and theories throughout the ages. The title of this paper is inspired by popular American writer and translator, Paul Auster, who described the translators as the shadow heroes of literature, the often forgotten instruments that make it possible for different cultures to talk to one another. The aim of our research is to describe the history and current situation in the field of English translations of Slovak literature. Particular focus is paid to the classification and characterisation of their translators.

1. Introduction

The first recorded translation of Slovak literature into English appeared in anthology called *Cheskian Anthology; Being a History of the Poetical Literature of Bohemia with Translated Specimens* published in 1832 in London. The anthology was edited and published by Sir John Bowring. But who was this man and why did he decide to translate and publish the collection of the Czech and Slovak poetry few years before these languages and their nations got legitimate right for their official use and (co)existence? Was he a descendant of Czech or Slovak immigrants determined to reveal his roots? No. It was his passion and love for foreign languages that led this English political economist, traveller, writer, literary translator and polyglot to translate the folk-songs of most European nations into English and hence to open the doors into the English-speaking world for "small" European literatures. The story of translating Slovak literature into English has been an adventurous one. Many times, the translators and publishers have had to overcome a lot of struggles and unfavourable cultural, political and social circumstances to succeed in publishing Slovak literature abroad. The purpose of this article is to present translators of Slovak literature into English and the way how their translations have helped to shape the image of Slovak literature in the English-speaking world.

2. Review of previous research on the subject and research methodology

A lot of research has been conducted to investigate the translation methods. Since the late 1970s, the linguistic approach of translation substituted for the originally dominated word-to-word method. The dynamic equivalence was put forward by Nida, which marked a new advance in translation studies (Nida 1964). Later Itamar Even-Zohar's division of literature and translation on "centre" and "periphery" was introduced. However, there was a dispute whether to distinguish between centre and periphery of literature according to political or literary criteria. In the 1990s, *Translation, History and Culture* written by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere put forward the idea of culture turn, which aroused many scholars' attention. They preferred a cultural approach in translation studies to combine cultural factors such as sociology, psychology with the translation. Cultural turn in translation meant a milestone for further research since it emphasised the role of culture in translation and influence of translation in a target culture. The book as a collection of essays written by different authors, reflects a shift from a mere descriptive form of translation into the understanding of the manipulative processes that operate in both oral and written texts to function in a given culture in a given way. Lefevere (1992) sees translation as an act carried out under the influence of particular categories and norms constituent to systems in a society. In the context of our research, the most important aspect was the role of ideology in the shaping of a translation and the power of patronage, which is related to the fact that in the former Czechoslovakia, the communist regime significantly imposed its will on book publishing, translation and distribution opportunities. During this period, censorship was state controlled and was part of the processes of *canon formation* of literature that was considered officially valuable. During the reign of communism, translation served as a means of *cultural enrichment*, with a special purpose that was shaped by a leading political party. The translation activity was all organised, manipulated and conducted by the state itself; from the selection of the works to be translated, right through to the establishment of the guidelines in the translation process. Literature was believed to be a powerful political tool which led to systematic censorship of most foreign literature. Government constraints produced lists of *libri prohibiti*. In the 1950s, the government established a censorship office, the Main Board for Publishing Control (HSTD) that was replaced by the Office for Publishing and Information, which prescribed guidelines for members of the publishing institutions in the 1960s (Engelbrecht 2020). In spite of the fact that a lot of research has been done on this topic, some questions still remain to be further clarified. One of them is the ideology, patronage, and manipulation in terms of foreign translations of Slovak literature before 1989, which will be the subject of our further research in the future.

In recent years, the sociological turn in translation studies has yielded a broader view of translation as a social activity and of translators as socialised individuals (Angelelli 2014). As Wolf (2007) further adds, "The view of translation as social practice is also central to the work of André Lefevere. In particular, the notion of 'rewriting' is one that denotes both the manipulative interventions on the level of the text and the cultural (literary) devices which direct and control the production procedure in the interplay of social forces" (Wolf 2007, 10).

Any translation is necessarily embedded within social contexts, because the act of translating is carried out by individuals who belong to a social system. In addition, the translation phenomenon is inevitably implicated in social institutions, which determine the selection, production and distribution of translation and, as a result, the strategies adopted in the translation itself. As a result, sociology of translation not only considers the intersecting spaces within the translation process, but also gives voice to the translators and other agents of this process as subjects ensuing from particular cultural dynamics. In addition, it reveals problems of cultural representation and the contribution made by translation to the construction of cultures (Wolf 2007). As can be seen, the recent sociological turn in translation studies has encouraged the exploration of the relation between the agents involved in the translation process, product and function, which has the potential to influence the production and reception of translations. Our research, focused on translators of Slovak literature into English, is based on Chesterman's division of the sociology of translation (2006), out of which the present paper puts an emphasis on the sociology of translators whose beliefs, interests, and individualities play an important part in the translation process. Descriptive and quantitative research methods have been applied in our research with the purpose to analyse history and current situation in the field of English translations of Slovak literature and to introduce translators of Slovak literature into English.

Looking back through the history of translation studies in Slovakia, little had been done before 1989 during the reign of Communism. Ten years after the end of the Second World War, Jozef Kuzmík published four volumes of general bibliography listing foreign books related to Slovakia as a country and its inhabitants (Kuzmík 1980).

A decade later, bibliography mapping the translations of Slovak literature into foreign languages from 1945 to 1966 called *Slovenská literatúra v prekladoch 1945 - 1966*, compiled by Libor Knězek, was released. According to the records, Slovak literature had been translated to more than forty different foreign languages. The bibliography listed about 1145 publications out of which more than thirty percent had been translated into the Czech language, followed by Hungarian, Russian, Ukrainian and German. Besides dozens of translations into Slavic languages such as Polish, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Belarusian, Slovenian and Serbian, there were several Slovak books translated into Spanish, Italian, French and Portuguese. Despite not very favourable political and

social circumstances, few translations into English appeared, representing two percent of the total translation production recorded in the bibliography (1970). However, Knězek was aware of the fact that his bibliography was not complete due to missing information about translations published abroad as well as due to insufficient evidence of foreign-language translations in Slovakia then (Knězek 1970).

Later, in 1984, George J. Kovtun published a far more complex bibliography called *Czech and Slovak Literature in English* in Washington, DC. As he writes in the *Preface to the First Edition*: "Czech and Slovak Literature in English, which is a bibliography of translations published in monographic form that includes belles lettres and folklore. Several items dealing with journalism are also listed because of the close relationship between journalistic and literary work that is typical of some of the represented authors. Children's literature is excluded except for works of special importance or works by poets or prose writers known for significant contributions to adult literature" (Kovtun 1988, vii). George J. Kovtun was born in Horincevo, which was then part of the Czechoslovak province of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, on April 23, 1927. In 1948, he left Czechoslovakia and in 1976 he started to work as an editor at *Voice of America* in Washington, DC. Later he earned a degree in library science at Pratt Institute in New York, and started to work as an area specialist in the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, where he prepared several important bibliographies including *Czech and Slovak Literature in English* (1984, 1988). His effort was to compile his bibliography "as completely as possible," listing all translated writings from the first known works by English translators to the end of 1982 (Kovtun 1988, vii). The first edition of the bibliography was issued in 1984. Four years later, a newly revised, expanded, and updated version was published, "While the main reason for compiling a second edition was to meet reader demand which had exhausted the first edition, a secondary reason arose in the interval between the editions when a special honour was bestowed on Czech literature: Jaroslav Seifert (born 1901) was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1984. The present publication is dedicated to the memory of this great poet who died on January 10, 1986" (Kovtun 1988, v). In spite of the remarkable effort of Kovtun and Knězek, both of the bibliographies are limited by the political and cultural circumstances of their compilation. While Knězek's bibliography contained mainly (but not only) the English translations published in former Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1966, Kovtun's bibliography missed the translations of books for children and young adults, and some of the English translations of Slovak literature published in former Czechoslovakia before 1989.

The Communist Party tried to control not only its own media and literary output, but also translations of "western" works – poetry, drama, and fiction written by European and American authors. This activity stems from their belief that to control the language means to control the knowledge of the people, which was one of the ultimate powers a state or a political regime could obtain (Huba 2016). Before the fall of

communism, translation of books among the Eastern Bloc countries was hugely supported, so several publications mapping the literary relations and translations from and into languages of the Eastern Bloc had been published, for example, Michal Molnár's bibliography on Slovak-Ukrainian literary translations up to 1945 *K slovensko-ukrajinským literárnym vzťahom do roku 1945* (1970), Rudolf Chmel's study on Slovak and Hungarian literary relations *Literatúry v kontaktoch. Štúdie o slovensko-maďarských literárnych vzťahoch* (1972), Soňa Lesňáková's book on Slovak and Russian literary contacts and translations *Slovenská a ruská próza. (Kontakty a preklady)* (1983), publications by the Slovak Academy of Sciences focusing on analysis of Slovak and Polish literary contacts *Vzťahy slovenskej a poľskej literatúry od klasicizmu po súčasnosť* (1972), as well as Slovak and Russian literary relations *Slovenská a ruská literatúra. Vzťahy a súvislosti* (1973).

The "velvet" revolution in 1989 caused huge changes in all aspects of life, including literature. In 1996 the *Slovak Literary Review* was established. The magazine, published twice a year in English and German, is nowadays considered to be the most significant periodical devoted to translation of Slovak literature and its promotion abroad.

In the same year, the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic launched *Literárne informačné centrum* (The Centre for Information on Literature). Among its most important objectives, belongs cooperation with foreign publishers and institutions, promotion of Slovak literature in book fairs abroad, as well as financial support of translations through the SLOLIA Commission. More than eight hundred translations of Slovak literature into thirty-two different world languages have appeared over the past two decades. The majority of the books have been translated into Czech, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Serbian, and German. However, it is also quite interesting that translations into Arabic, Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish, Chinese, Hebrew and Turkish have increased recently. Nowadays, translations into English represent only about four percent of the total translation production supported by the Centre for Information on Literature and its SLOLIA Commission.

In 2000 - 2001 two volumes of *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English* were published in London, The United Kingdom, representing one of the first attempts at a large-scale charting of the field of English-language literary translations. As their editor, Olive Classe, the honorary senior research fellow in Department of French Language and Literature at University of Glasgow, wrote, their purpose was to provide a historical and analytical survey of the theory and practice of literary translation into English from the principal world languages and from the works of major writers and groups of writers in those languages (Classe 2001). In the case of Czech literature, there are not only general comments on their English translations, but also separate sections dedicated to well-known Czech writers such as Karel Čapek, Jaroslav Hašek, Václav Havel, Miroslav Holub, Bohumil Hrabal, Milan Kundera, Jaroslav Seifert and Jozef Škvorecký. However, the part focused on English translations of Slovak

literature contains only limited number of translations when it is compared to Kovtun's bibliography published almost twenty years earlier.

With the purpose to conduct our research as complex as possible, there were other important sources examined including an online international bibliography of translations, the Index Translationum. Furthermore, we also examined records, archives and collections of the Slovak National Library and UCL SSEES Library in London, The United Kingdom. We also contacted translators of Slovak literature into English personally or via e-mail.

The results of the basic research were in 2014 published in the book *Slovenská literatúra v anglickom preklade – história a súčasnosť (1832 – 2013)* (*Slovak literature in English translation – past and present (1832 – 2013)*) (Pánisová 2014). In addition, plenty of projects related to translation of literature into English have recently been conducted. For example, the research project *Slovenská literatúra v preklade (Slovak literature in translation)* (2014 – 2016) at the University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra, Slovakia, in which almost a dozen Slovak and foreign researchers examined the translation of Slovak literature into English, German, French, Russian, Romanian, and Ukrainian languages. The results of the research were published in conference proceedings *Slovenská literatúra v preklade* (2015) and in the monograph *Translating Slovak Literature into English: Approaches and Implications* (2016) by Ciprianová, Miššíková and Ruda.

Furthermore, since 2017 there has been the research project focusing on English translations of Slovak poetry called *Slovenská poézia v anglických prekladoch* led by professor Marián Andričík at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia. Moreover, the research project *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations*, conducted at the University of Bristol, The United Kingdom, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, was aimed at understanding both the challenges and opportunities that exist for works of literature written in less widely spoken languages as they try to break into the cultural mainstream in the United Kingdom. The results of this research have showed that the widespread and enduring pessimism about the prospects for translated literature in the United Kingdom is outdated as well as that the number of independent presses publishing translated literature has markedly increased in the past decade. The results of the research were published in a book *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations* edited by Rajendra Chitnis, Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen, Rhian Atkin, Zoran Milutinovic last year.

All the previously mentioned information clearly proves that interest in translation of Slovak literature into foreign languages has been increasing. There have been more than eight hundred books translated into more than thirty languages over more than two decades of support from the Centre for Information on Literature and its SLOLIA Commission. In terms of English as a target language, about sixty separate books containing English translations of Slovak literature before 1989 have

already been recorded within our research and more than a hundred English book translations have been published since 1989.

3. Research findings and evidence

In spite of the fact that interest in translation of Slovak literature into foreign languages has been increasing, only a little is known about their translators. Who are the translators of Slovak literature into English? What is the quality of their translations? These are the questions we would like to answer in the following lines. According to our research findings, there have been almost a hundred translators of Slovak literature into English. There are several possible criteria how to classify them: according to the literary genre - translators of poetry, fiction, and drama; according to their origin and mother tongue - Slovak translators, American Slovaks and their descendants, English native speakers; according to the political and historical milestones shaping the sphere of Slovak literature and translation - translators before and after 1989. Last but not least, there are quantitative and qualitative aspects of translations which need to be taken into consideration. Our aim is to introduce those translators who not only translated the highest number of literary works, but the quality of the books and their translations have been appreciated by literary or translation critics abroad. However, the last criterion can be applied almost exclusively on translations published since 1989, because earlier translations were only rarely noticed by foreign critics then. The only known exception is the Slovak writer of literature for children and young adults, Klára Jarunková, who was very popular abroad and her books have already been translated into thirty-eight foreign languages. In 1968, her novel *Don't cry for me* translated by George Theiner was released in New York, The United States, where it remained among bestsellers for almost two years. George (Jiří) Theiner was born in Czechoslovakia and came to London as a child in 1937 to escape the Nazis. After his return in 1945, he worked on literary magazines. Since he refused to join the Communist party, he was forced to work in the Silesian coal mines. After the Soviet invasion in 1968 he returned to England with his family and devoted his life to translating and promoting Czech literature abroad. He worked for various publishing houses before joining *Index on Censorship* in 1972 as an assistant editor where he worked until his death. As Václav Havel, a Czech writer, the last President of Czechoslovakia and later the first President of the Czech Republic, wrote, "[...]I knew his work as the author of excellent translations from Czech into English and as the editor of *Index of Censorship*. From all this, I formed an impression of him as an exceptionally nice and gentle, modest and hard-working man. I owe him much gratitude, as do many Czechoslovak writers" (Havel 1988).

Early Slovak literature had to overcome many obstacles because the Austro-Hungary Empire systematically suppressed the Slovak national culture until the beginning of the 19th century. Thus, the rule of Austro-

Hungarians over the Slovak minority had slowed down the evolution of the Slovak literature and thus, the nation itself. As Huba wrote, "It is a true tribute to the people's staunch spirit that such circumstances have obliterated neither cultural traditions of the Slovaks nor the development of their vernacular" (Huba 2016). The early English translations of Slovak literature appeared in anthologies of Czech literature.

The first known translation was published in 1832 in London, The United Kingdom, in the anthology called *Cheskian anthology; being a history of the poetical literature of Bohemia with translated specimens* compiled and translated by John Bowring. In spite of the fact that it was called *Cheskian anthology*, it contained translations of poems of two writers of Slovak origin, but writing in Czech: Pavel Jozef Šafárik (Šafařík – an alternative Czech spelling) and Ján Kollár. The reason is that Slovak literary language was officially established and standardised in 1843 during the Slovak revival. Before this time, the literary languages in the region had been Czech, Hungarian, Latin and German (Partridge 2000, 1292). Therefore, some of the writers could be considered not only Slovak, but also Czech. Its editor and translator was John Bowring, English political economist, traveller, writer, literary translator and polyglot. The anthology contains chapters on history and present of Czech literature with excerpts translated into English.

Bowring's admiration of Ján (or John, as he called him in this anthology) Kollár is quite obvious in a chapter introducing his literary works to English readers, "I have not scrupled to translate pretty largely from his works; and I am much mistaken if he will not be deemed worthy of praise and admiration. The affecting tenderness, the melancholy sweetness with which he dwells on the fate of his country, and the eager enthusiasm with which he rears up the dreams of her future power and happiness, appear to me full of the finest materials of thought and expression" (Bowring 1832, 195).

His introduction of Pavol Jozef (Joseph) Šafárik (Šafařík according to Czech spelling) is briefer, but still the appreciation of his work is evident, "His history of the Slavonian language and literature is a work of extraordinary research, and a truly valuable compendium" (Bowring 1832, 257). It is necessary to appreciate a remarkable attempt the editor and translator John Bowring made; however, the anthology contains a few historic inaccuracies including the information on Slovak language described by Bowring only as one of the Czech dialects spoken in upper Hungary (Bowring 1832).

However, this description of Slovak language can be also found in Paul Selver's *Anthology of modern Bohemian poetry* published in London, The United Kingdom, in 1912. He was another English writer and translator who helped to introduce Slovak literature to the English-speaking world through translation of excerpts of Ján Kollár's poetry. After his studies of English and German at the University of London, he became a translator from several Germanic and Slavonic languages. Selver is considered to be a prolific translator of Czech literature into English, who

edited and translated not only the anthologies of Czech literature, but also several books by Čapek.

The first anthology which paid more attention to Slovak literature dates from 1929 and was entitled *An Anthology of Czechoslovak poetry* published by Columbia University Press in New York, The United States of America. It was compiled by Clarence A. Manning in cooperation with Anna V. Čapek and Alois B. Koukol. The anthology contains excerpts from the works by Ján Kollár, Ján Botto, Svetozár Hurban Vajanský, Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav, Ľudmila Podjavorinská, Janko Jesenský, Ivan Krasko, and Ignác Grebáč-Orlov. To sum up, about twenty anthologies containing excerpts of Slovak literature were published before 1989.

One of the most extensive was *An Anthology of Slovak Literature*, published in 1976 in California, The United States of America. It was compiled by Andrew Cincura, who had also translated some excerpts by Slovak authors. Jaroslav J. Vajda, Andrew Bachleda and Martin M. Tybor had also collaborated on the translation. Although it was a very extensive anthology that contains translations of literary works written by more than sixty Slovak authors, the opinion of James Partridge, the British professor of Slovak and Czech language and literature, on this anthology is slightly contradictory. He appreciates it as useful, because it contains samples of the work of many otherwise unavailable Slovak authors in English, including the poets Valentín Beniák, Laco Novomeský, Rudolf Dilong and Máša Haľamová as well as fiction writers such as Milo Urban, Margita Figuli and František Švantner. On the other hand, he criticises the obvious targeting of the book at second or third generation American Slovaks wishing to rediscover their roots (Partridge 2000).

There were usually only excerpts of novels and short stories by Slovak authors translated in anthologies; however, more than twenty novels were completely translated and published in separate books before 1989 including Jozef Čiger Hronský's novels *Predavač talizmanov* (1947) and *Jozef Mak* (1933). The first one was translated by John J. Kester as *Seller of Talismans* and published in Scotch Plains, The United States of America, in 1978. Novel *Jozef Mak* from the inter-war period was translated by Andrew Cincura, who was his good friend and spent much time with him in Austria, Bavaria, and Italy in 1945-47 before Hronský moved to Argentina. As Partridge says, "[the novel] depicts the inner life of an 'ordinary man' from a Slovak village, submissive but ever resilient before the repeated blows of fate. At the same time, Hronský portrays the symbiosis between man and nature in a powerful almost mythical language. Andrew Cincura, the translator of *Jozef Mak*, does not fully capture this elemental power in the language, which tends to make some parts of the translation rather heavy going. Nevertheless, *Jozef Mak* is an important and interesting novel and Cincura's translation is welcome" (Partridge 2000, 1293).

In addition, some works by great Slovak novelists came out, for example, Janko Jesenský's long, wearily humorous social-satirical novel *The Democrats* translated by Jean Rosemary Edwards (1934, 1937,

1961). Furthermore, in 1960s, several World War II novels were translated into English including Rudolf Jašík's *Dead soldiers don't sing* (1963) by Karel Kornell and *St. Elizabeth's Square* (1964) by Margot Schierl as well as Ladislav Mňačko's *Death is called Engelchen* (1961) by George Theiner. In addition, it is worth noticing that some of the books had been translated into English from languages other than Slovak, mainly from Czech, for example, novels by Janko Jesenský, Rudolf Jašík, and Ladislav Mňačko.

The preference of Czech literature is typical for many of the early translators of (Czech and) Slovak literature into English. Jesenský's novel *The Democrats* appreciated for its verbal playfulness, irony, colloquial richness, and narratological complexity (Huba 2016) was translated by Jean Rosemary Edwards, an Englishwoman who married a Czech soldier, Pavel Kavan, and after the end of World War II she came to live with him in Czechoslovakia. As a member of the Communist Party, Pavel Kavan worked as a diplomat in London. However, during the 1950's he was recalled, put on a 'show' trial, and sentenced to twenty-five years. He was released just four years later, but the imprisonment had taken its toll on his health and he died not long after his release (Hinlicky Wilson 2019). Jean Rosemary Kavan stayed in Czechoslovakia working as a translator from Czech. After the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968 she was arrested and finally in 1971 fled the country as a refugee and repatriated to England. She wrote a memoir, *Freedom at a Price: An Englishwoman's Life in Czechoslovakia* (1985) about her insider experience as a Westerner in Communist Czechoslovakia (Hinlicky Wilson 2020).

Mňačko's novel *The Taste of Power* was translated into English from the Slovak manuscript and previously unpublished German translation and published in New York in 1967, one year earlier than it was officially published in Slovakia. Similarly, The English translation of Mňačko's political essay *The Seventh Night*, originally written in German, was published in New York, The United States of America, in 1969, twenty-one years earlier than it was published in Slovakia. As Partridge notes, Mňačko was the only Slovak writer from the 1950s and 1960s who had made any impression in English-speaking countries. He was a well-known and outspoken dissident who wrote as early as in 1964 about the abuses of Stalinism in Slovakia. All his books are considered to be fast-paced and provocative (Partridge 2000, 1294).

The fall of communism in 1989 caused huge changes in all aspects of life, including literature. As Sherwood (2013) writes, there has been a veritable explosion of writing in Slovakia, both by authors who rose to fame under the previous regime and by a new generation of writers. In addition, the works of the older generations of writers who could not have published their literary works due to political reasons before the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989 started to be officially released. For example, Slovak writer Martin M. Šimečka, a son of the notable Bratislava-based Czech dissident writer Milan Šimečka, wrote an autobiographical novel reflecting

the life of a dissident's child *Džin* before 1989, but it officially came out in 1990. In 1993, its English translation entitled *Year of the Frog* by Peter Petro was published. The book was awarded the *Pegasus Prize for Literature* which is a literary prize established in 1977 to honour works from countries whose literature is rarely translated into English.

Peter Petro studied at Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia, before emigrating to Canada and continuing his studies at the University of British Columbia and the University of Alberta in Edmonton. He taught Russian and Slavic literature at the University of British Columbia and held the Chair of Modern European Studies. Peter Petro translated several other Slovak contemporary fiction books which have been appreciated by literary critics in English-speaking countries, for example, translation of Peter Pišťanek's trilogy *Rivers of Babylon* (2007, 2008, London, The United Kingdom). The Scottish writer, William Boyd, marvelling at the genuine Pišťanek's novel and its translation by Peter Petro wrote, "Peter Pišťanek's novel *Rivers of Babylon* (Garnett Press) is an astonishing find. Brilliantly translated from Slovak by Peter Petro, this story of a small-town loser, turned enterprising bravura gangster in post-communist Slovakia, is fuelled with formidable energy and ice-cool satire. It displays a fierce black humour that is both ruthless and exhilarating" (Boyd 2007). In addition, the novel was compared to Gary Shteyngart's *Absurdistan* (Fischer 2008) and appreciated for its satire on both communism and capitalism, "It was a bombshell of a satire on both socialism and capitalism, a gangster novel high on the fumes of comic amorality, an anti-fable, a full-blown fairytale-nasty. It foretold a significant phase of Europe's post-Communist future and should have been seized for translation as fast as an alert British publisher could acquire the rights; as fast, say, as with Patrick Süskind's *Perfume*. Instead, 17 years later, a tiny university-backed publisher has brought out a small edition in a loving translation. It sold out within a week of its publication last month, and Garnett Press is reprinting. We are a slow lot" (Evans 2008). However, the second and the third part of the trilogy were not so successful, mainly due to the lack of an equally compelling narrative framework (Rutherford 2008).

Three years later, another English translation of Slovak fiction caught the eye of literary critics - Daniela Kapitáňová's debut *Samko Tále's Cemetery Book* (2000), which came out in 2011 in English translation by an award-winning translator, Julia Sherwood. As Boyd (2010) writes, "Samko Tále's *Cemetery Book* (Garnett Press) by the Slovak writer Daniela Kapitáňová offers us, in a superb translation by Julia Sherwood, one of the strangest and most compelling voices I have come across in years. Muriel Spark meets Russell Hoban. An astonishing, dark and scabrous novel." Julia Sherwood was born and grew up in Bratislava, Slovakia. After studying English and Slavonic languages and literature in Cologne, London and Munich she settled in the United Kingdom. While living in the United States from 2008 to 2014, she started translating fiction and non-fiction from and into Slovak and English and

nowadays is considered to be one of the most productive Slovak-English translators of fiction. Jointly with her husband Peter Sherwood, a translator, they have translated a dozen Slovak books by Daniela Kapitáňová, Jana Juráňová, Peter Krištúfek, Balla, Uršula Kovalyk, Pavel Vilikovský, Michal Hvorecký and Ivana Dobrakovová. In addition, she was awarded the *Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav prize* for translating and promoting Slovak literature in 2019. As Donald Rayfield in his review of their translation of novels by Balla (*Big Love*, 2019) and Dobrakovová (*Bellevue*, 2019) wrote, "But the key role in making Balla's – and Dobrakovová's – fiction so readable for a British audience is played by the translators, Julia and Peter Sherwood. With their linguistic skills and perfect pitch, they have done as much for the international reputation of Slovak prose as any single Slovak writer" (Rayfield 2019).

Regarding the English translations of Slovak poetry, two translators, James Sutherland-Smith and John Minahane need to be extolled. James Sutherland-Smith comes from the United Kingdom and he has been living in Slovakia for almost thirty years. Besides writing his own poetry, he is considered to be one of the most active translators of Slovak poetry into English, "I began translating Slovak poetry with the help of other people, notably Stefania Allen who was my co-translator for 'Not Waiting for Miracles', the first anthology ever of contemporary Slovak poets in English. Since then, with my wife, Viera, I have translated over 100 Slovak poets with significant collections of the work of Ivan Laučík, Ján Buzassy, Mila Haugová and Milan Rúfus" (Sutherland-Smith 2013).

The writer and translator John Minahane comes from Ireland and has been living in Slovakia for almost twenty years. Through self-study he gradually acquired Slovak, which enabled him to start working as a translator. He focuses mainly on translation of poetry. He translated a selection of poems written by Milan Rúfus *To Bear the Burden and Sing* (2008), Laco Novomeský's *Slovak Spring* (2004, Ireland) and Ján Buzássy's *Eighteen Poems* (2012, Slovakia). As John Minahane claims, Laco Novomeský belongs to his favourite Slovak writers and the translation of his poems into the English language was initiated by himself, "I found Novomeský fascinating both because of his poetry and for what he revealed about the history (political and intellectual) of his times. Because nothing had been written on these lines, I gradually came to feel I could/should do it myself. That was how I began" (John Minahane, personal communication, 26 January 2013). In addition, his translation of Hviezdoslav's *Bloody Sonnets*, published in 2018 in London, has been considered to be the best translation of his anti-war sonnets so far and it has been hugely marvelled by literary critics in English-speaking countries. As an editor Joseph Schreiber writes, "Translator John Minahane has taken on a formidable challenge here. Hviezdoslav, working within the constraints of the Petrarchan sonnet, was trying to express the intense emotions welling up inside. Rhymes are never easy to accommodate across linguistic borders but the results sing with overwhelming power, energy, and passion" (Schreiber 2018). In addition,

Queen Elizabeth II received a special edition of the book as a gift from the Slovak Embassy in London and she appreciated the strong humane message sent out by one of the most prominent poetic works of Slovak literature with an anti-war theme written by one of Slovakia's most celebrated poets (Minarechová 2018).

4. Conclusions

Our research of English translations of the Slovak literature and their translators is divided into two parts: translations before and after 1989, because the end of the communist regime came in that year. In terms of English translations of Czech and Slovak literature before 1989 there was an evident preference of Czech over Slovak literature from the side of the translators. Early translations of Slovak literature in anthologies of Czech literature were caused by unclear boundaries among the nations and languages in former Austro-Hungarian Empire. As a result, some of the first writers whose works were translated into English could be considered not only Slovak, but also Czech. The basic goal associated with the fall of communism was freedom in all aspects of human life including literature and its translation. As can be seen, the Slovak nation, together with their culture and literature, has overcome huge and turbulent changes over the past thirty years. As Rayfield wrote, "Until thirty years ago, a typical Slovak novel had a wise beekeeper and a virtuous matriarch as its heroes, their values surviving both wartime fascism and postwar communism. But even before the end of communist rule, existential despair was breaking through – notably in the very fine novels of Ján Johánides, unfortunately still untranslated, and in the iconoclastic novellas of the cynical and sexually obsessed Peter Pišťánek, who died in 2015. Slovak writers of the present generation are as cosmopolitan as they are Slovak" (Rayfield 2019). These factors, including the fact that English is a global language, with around 300 million native speakers and over 1.2 billion non-native speakers and students, should ensure a high demand for literary translators and translations into English into the foreseeable future (Classe 2001). However, the role of translators of Slovak literature into English is very difficult, because many times the translators have to look for foreign publishers of the translated books. Our research has revealed that more than two hundred books containing English translation of Slovak literature have been published from 1832 by 2020 and this figure is constantly increasing, despite the unfavourable political and cultural circumstances, the limited funding of translations, their publication, promotion as well as distribution. To improve the situation, it is necessary to continue in publishing and promoting English translations of Slovak literature as well as to increase the awareness of foreign readers about Slovak literature, but also the awareness of Slovak writers and English translators about the possibilities of publishing Slovak literature abroad (Sampson 2004). The translators have always been the most important allies who have

introduced Slovak literature to the world. Without them, Slovak literature would be limited to the borders of our own country. It is the reason why they deserve to be brought out of the shadows into the spotlight of Slovak translation studies.

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