

The Effects of Translation

A Reading of Rilke-quotes in *Gravity's Rainbow*

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ABSTRACT:

In this article, I will examine the role of literary citation in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, as well as its Hungarian translation. This will be achieved through an analysis of selected citations from Rainer Maria Rilke's late poems in the novel. First, I will employ the notion of intertextuality developed by the Tel Quel circle to demonstrate how it becomes a defining characteristic of Pynchon's postmodernist writing. Following that, I will provide a reading of the various contexts and connotations Rilke's *Duino Elegies* evoke in Pynchon's text. My intention is to highlight the multifaceted nature of the intertextual landscape in Pynchon's work, its complex use of references, and the differences between this landscape and that of the Hungarian translation.

RESUMO:

Neste artigo, estuda-se o papel das citações literárias no romance *Gravity's Rainbow* de Thomas Pynchon, assim como na respectiva tradução húngara, analisando um conjunto de citações seleccionadas dos poemas tardios de Rainer Maria Rilke no romance. Primeiramente, explora-se a noção de intertextualidade conforme desenvolvida pelo círculo Tel Quel, para demonstrar que se trata de uma

característica definidora da escrita pós-modernista de Pynchon. Em seguida, propõe-se uma leitura dos vários contextos e conotações que as *Elegias de Duíno* de Rilke evocam no texto de Pynchon. É meu propósito destacar a natureza multifacetada da paisagem intertextual patente na obra de Pynchon, assim como o seu uso complexo de referências, e as diferenças que existem entre essa paisagem e a da tradução húngara.

KEYWORDS:

citacionality; intertextuality; translation; postmodern

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

citacionalidade; intertextualidade; tradução; pós-moderno

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Thomas Pynchon's main work, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), contains an extensive number of references that are presented in a lavish and exhaustive manner, captivating readers with their variety and diversity. These references bear such significance to the comprehension of the novel that they have influenced critical readings from the beginning (as in Mendelsohn, 1976) to the present day (for example, Daalsgard, 2019). They draw upon a vast spectrum of disciplines, encompassing literature, history, science, technology, popular and material culture.

Scholars have approached these allusions and references through various lenses; from a more traditionalist perspective, analysing the genetic connections between passages and their original texts or concepts, establishing a kind of cause-and-effect relationship (Coward, 1980, and Hohman, 1986) to the task of collecting, aiming to identify every conceivable source and reference, as Weisenburger's enormous work (2006 [1988]) and the Pynchon Wiki page, based on his findings, demonstrate. Studies have been dedicated to examining the historical and scientific backdrop of the novel, as well as the classification of film, music, and literary references, with particular attention to the presence of texts from Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke.

In this article I shall undertake a comparative examination of a few selected citations from Rilke's works found within Pynchon's text and observe the presence of these citations in the Hungarian translation of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Drawing upon the concept of intertextuality based on the approaches of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida, my analysis aims to illuminate the connections between Pynchon's text and other realms of discourse, how they intersect, and what readings can emerge from these intersections. I shall also try to illustrate how these discursive interactions manifest within the Hungarian translation of the novel, and how they establish differences between the interpretations of the two texts.

1. Intertextuality, citationality, translation

"[A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" — states Kristeva (1980: 66) introducing the notion of intertextuality. In her essay built upon Bakhtin's model of dialogism, she visualizes the word in a three-dimensional space, the dimensions being the writing subject, the addressee, and exterior texts. On the subject–addressee plane, the "text" is being formed as it actualizes through reading, and on the text–context plane it is shaped by any other preceding or contemporary text it relates to. The point of intersection between these axes is the "literary word". This intersection amplifies the word by encapsulating the function it represented in previous texts or utterances, weaves it into the web of relations in the actual text, and thus transforms diachrony into synchrony, showing the abstract nature of the traditional view of linear history or causality.

For Kristeva, the (Saussurean) notion of sign is a logical abstraction that she marks with the 0–1 sequence, where 1 stands for denotation or identification, and 0 for nothingness or unmarkedness. She argues that in fact no sign has exactly one identifiable meaning, but it is always already transgressed towards other meanings in its relation to other signs of the text. This is implied in Bakhtin's term "dialogism",

defined as “the logic of distance and relationship between the different units of a sentence or narrative structure” (1980: 71), emphasizing the ambivalent nature of the word by having no solid meaning and being polysemic at once. Kristeva thus replaces the 0–1 dichotomy of signature with the 0–2 interval or “the power of the continuum”, which indicates that one sign (word) has always more than one denotative meaning, therefore any meaning is “implicitly transgressed” (1980: 70).

Barthes' preliminary ideas that contributed to his concept of intertextuality can be found in his essay “Writing Degree Zero”, where he also imagines a kind of coordinate system with language as the horizontal, and individual style as the vertical axis. Comparing the function of the word within classical texts and in modern poetry, he shows the classical word in its relatedness as “it extends, as soon as it is uttered, toward other words, so as to form a superficial chain of intentions” (Barthes, 1982: 55), whereas the word of modern poetry “is like a monolith, or a pillar which plunges into a totality of meanings, reflexes, and recollections: it is a sign which stands” (1982: 58). The elements of classical language form an evenly dense structure while modern poetry appears as a succession of verticalities pregnant with the totality of the possible meanings of the words it includes. This total content of any past and future connotations is what he calls the “zero degree” of the written word. Meaning is “an ever-deferred project” in classical language because the word is carried on and on by textual connections, while in modern poetry these connections are abolished, the word stands alone, surrounded by its reflections.

The comparison of classical and modern use of language comes forth differently in his later essays, but the visualization of a word's potentialities and connections remain similar. In the “Theory of the Text”, the previously mentioned qualities of classical language and the modern word intertwine in a new model of textuality, where the classical sign is a similarly abstract category just like in Kristeva's approach: “[A] sealed unit, whose closure arrests meaning, prevents it from trembling or becoming double, or wandering” (Barthes, 1981: 33). The motionlessness of what he calls “work”, based on classical denotation, is opposed to the play of the signifier, the constant deferral and disruption of meaning produced in writing that forms the “text”. “Any text is a new tissue of past citations” — writes Barthes echoing Kristeva — “Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text” (Barthes, 1981: 39). The qualities of the two types of utterance (classical and modern) Barthes visualized in “Writing Degree Zero” helps us to imagine the tissue of the text as “the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers” (Barthes, 1997: 159), which also gives the impression of a coordinate system, a scale of points with different values of density, or connotations. Stereography is the projection of a three-dimensional picture by a slight difference (movement or deferral) of two two-dimensional surfaces (this is what we see in a 3D cinema when we take off our colored glasses), and this way Barthes shows the qualities of the text as a tissue with changing density of knots or layers. This intertextual surface for Barthes is not a source of retrospective genealogy of influences and origins, but a constant movement in an ever-surrounding texture of language that manifests through reading, as the (re)producing practice of the text. Barthes' model of textuality moves the emphasis from the author–text to the text–

reader relationship, and the process of reading is akin to writing, that is, cutting and disseminating the text, delving into it, and taking part in its movement of unmarked quotations.

Derrida addresses this textual movement as “citationality” and imagines the contextual connectedness and the potential plurality of the sign that is cut from its context:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written, [...] in a small or large unit, can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring. (Derrida, 1988: 12)

The act of citation represents a process of iteration, whereby a word, mark, or sign taken out of a context changes its “meaning” and becomes open to other connections and connotations. Kristeva in her later texts suggested replacing the word “intertextuality” (because it often meant the process of finding other textual sources in a given text rather than the expression of difference and relation) with “transposition”, which stresses the shifts, or movements, taking place in the text.

Similar movements can be observed when one translates a text between languages, which points toward the approaching of translation as a transposition or intertextuality. The transposition of “meaning” in the process of iteration can be best seen in the cases when the translator cites directly from the source text, takes a phrase without “proper translation”, or uses the same quotation in the same language. These are the cases which Haun Saussy deals with in his book *Translation as Citation: Zhuangzi Inside Out*. He employs a conceptual framework in his approach to translation that can also be likened to a coordinate system:

When describing a text as put together from bits of other texts, we naturally reach for such similes as the patchwork and the mosaic; but to represent the double perspective here put forth, we would have to add that every piece of the mosaic retains a vestigial string connecting it to its previous home in the slab of (linguistic) stone. Imagine, then, that by tugging on the strings we could cause the mosaic pieces to pivot between their two contexts. (Saussy, 2017: 3)

In accordance with the theories of intertextuality, he argues that “translations do not so much make an expression in the target language as find it (thus reversing the sequence in which the original necessarily precedes the translation)” (Saussy, 2017: 2). To illustrate his theoretical framework, he examines citations and transcriptions within a body of translations, highlighting their interactions with other texts, cultural discourses, or traditions. In doing so, he effectively integrates the concept of intertextuality into the practice of reading translation. According to Saussy, a translation is unable to express the entirety of the original text, let alone do so faithfully. Instead, a translation becomes a manifestation of a series of choices made among utterances sourced from the target language.

The logic of dialogism finds its source in carnivalesque and Menippean discourse and self-consciously appears again in modernist writing, which Kristeva

and Barthes often refer to while they explain intertextuality. The citationality and intertextuality of language come to the foreground by putting writing (*écriture*) and the play of the signifier ahead, and this is what we find in modern and perhaps even more visibly in postmodern narratives. Citationality is one of the major characteristics of postmodern discourse, as it is stated in John Barth's programmatic essay "The Literature of Exhaustion". Pynchon's major opus is a prominent example of this kind of writing.

2. *Gravity's Rainbow*, the text in motion

Some of the metaphors or symbols theorists used to demonstrate intertextuality have their similar counterparts in Pynchon's text. They serve as points of origin for certain readings and contribute to the self-referentiality of the novel's language, although, counter to a characteristic mostly attributed to modernist writing, these "clues" cannot be taken completely seriously. They offer possible interpretations but at the same time confuse or invalidate them. The following examples are thus not proposing a definitive system of self-referential reading of the text (as there would be no such system possible).

Perhaps the most obvious example is the distance between words and meanings ("words are only an eye-twitch away from the things they stand for" — Pynchon, 1973: 100, hereby cited as GR), and lost messages. This distance — articulated by the notion of calculus, or delta-t — is associated with language, personal integrity, and movement, as we can see in the trajectory of the rocket drawn by a series of approximations to its location, which is analogous to early filmic movement, captured as a series of "successive stills" (GR: 407). The 0–1 dichotomy is also represented in the novel, though not only as a symbol of signification but of probabilities. For the Pavlovian character Edward Pointsman, only two possible answers seem valid to a certain stimulus: 0 (no answer) or 1 (any answer). Contrary to his thinking, the statistician Robert Mexico works with the continuum between 0 and 1, stating that we can only get probabilities of a future event (as a rocket strike in a certain area) to happen, and never a "yes" or "no". The answer is not a certainty but a continuum, which affects Mexico's way of thinking on science, and Pynchon's way of thinking on language. Continuity is connected to transgression, for every realm we see (earthly life, positive integers, the arc of the rainbow, language or "reality") has another side that we do not necessarily see, but the text is in constant wobbling motion between these realms. This effect of the texts can be best observed through the various allusions it employs.

"The story is not what we read; what we read is written around a story which is not told" — asserts János Széky (Jenei, 2022), the Hungarian translator of *Gravity's Rainbow* (Súlyszivárvány, 2009). Széky's overall impression of the book arises from the extensive presence of elements deliberately used to divert and diffuse the reader's attention. *Gravity's Rainbow* embodies the dissolution of a linear narrative structure through the incorporation of fragmentary quotations, self-referential attributes, oscillations between stylistic registers, and a penchant for encyclopedic allusions. The proliferation of the text is "represented as being indiscriminately absorbed by, if not in love with, texts not only performed or sung

but also printed — novels, poems, silly collections of this and that, recondite articles on all manner of things” (Caesar, 1997: 126). The abundance of references within the text points to the inherently citational nature of the book, a characteristic embraced by numerous mock-citations and the incorporation of fictitious texts. Examples include Mitchell Prettyplace’s extensive eighteen-volume study on the film *King Kong*, a brochure detailing the chemical named Kryptosam invented by Laszlo Jamf, or the correspondence between Tyrone Slothrop and the enigmatic Kenosha Kid. Furthermore, the inclusion of newspaper and magazine excerpts, grounded in actual historical events such as the initial V-2 strikes on London during World War II, Teutonic mythology, and scientific theories, serves as an effect of citationality as well as a source for the formation of the narrative. Throughout Pynchon’s text, one encounters quotations from unidentified and likely fabricated sources, such as the epigraph in the fourth section attributed to Richard Nixon, or two lines of a poem allegedly written by Jorge Luis Borges. The interweaving of diverse “texts” whether preexisting or entirely invented, blurs the boundaries between individual literary works, thus leaving both the reader and many characters yearning for a “real text” or decipherable message.

The term “cite” derives from the Latin word *citare*, which means to summon, urge, call forth, or put into sudden motion. Its origins can be traced back to the hypothetical Proto-Indo-European root **keie-*, which denotes setting in motion or moving to and fro. The words “citation” and “cinema” share a common root, with “cinema” stemming from the Greek word *kinein*. This connection suggests a potential similarity in the structure or functioning of these two concepts. In the case of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, this assumption proves fruitful, as the novel incorporates film significantly. Film not only serves as a source of references within the narrative but also acts as an organizing principle, employing cinematic cuts and topoi. It functions metaphorically, representing the textual world of the novel. Film offers a way of experiencing a realm beyond language, where time does not necessarily adhere to linear progression. For instance, Gerhardt von Göll’s fictitious movie, *New Dope*, presents a reverse world where “guns are like vacuum cleaners operating in the direction of life” (GR: 745). This utilization of hysteron proteron, or the reverse of causality, significantly shapes the narrative and thematic structure of the novel. The influence of film permeates the events of the book. For example, the birth of “movie children”, conceived because of their fathers returning home to their wives from the cinema aroused by Greta Erdmann’s acting in the film *Alpdrücken*, or a propaganda film featuring a fictional troop of Africans called the Schwarzkommando, who reside in the German Zone. Both films were created by von Göll, and interestingly, the latter also proves to have real-world (meaning the world of the novel) implications.

Film serves as an interface that blurs the boundary between real and unreal within *Gravity’s Rainbow*. It acts as a reflective surface, akin to a mirror, that duplicates and multiplies images. This doubling effect is exemplified in characters like Katje Borgesius, who is filmed to condition the octopus Grigori to later attack her, or Greta Erdmann, who attempts to reenact her experience of filming a rape scene in *Alpdrücken* twenty-five years later, amidst the remnants of the same movie set. These cinematic effects highlight one of the central themes of the novel, namely the notion of opposites and the inherent inability to fully comprehend or penetrate

different realms of the “other”. Language itself represents one of these orders, while film, operating in an analogical relationship to reality — though still distinct from it — can offer an escape from the oppressive influence of rationalized bureaucracy. The realm of film serves as an escape from language as well: an alternative path that transcends the limitations of linguistic systems (Berressem, 1993: 153ff).

As observed with intertexts, a citation functions similarly as an intersection or interface between different textual worlds. The act of setting in motion involves the transposition of signs from one signifying system to another as described by Kristeva (1984: 59ff). This transposition can occur from reality to film and vice versa, or from one context to another. Such transposition inevitably introduces a difference, leading to a shift and a displacement of meaning and style. This transformative process sets the entire context in motion, opening possibilities for new contextual meanings and connotations to emerge. The different orders of things can be observed in the way language is employed and reflected upon within the novel, for instance through the inclusion of foreign languages, particularly those of tribal origin like Herero and Kazakh. Additionally, numerous literary allusions within the text revolve around the theme of death, emphasizing an obvious distinction between two worlds or realms. Notable examples include references to Rilke, Emily Dickinson’s epitaph on Slothrop’s grandfather’s grave, or allusions to T.S. Eliot’s work, *The Waste Land*.

Most literary references employed by Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow* are not direct quotations. Instead, they serve as sources for thematic elements and patterns woven into the expansive thematic landscape of the novel. These references not only establish connections between different literary works but also multiply these connections through cross-references. However, Pynchon’s narrative approach also destabilizes these connections, leaving the reader uncertain as to whether they lead to a clearer understanding or leave them perplexed and disoriented. This self-reflective operation is highlighted as one of the central themes of the novel: paranoia. Paranoia is depicted as the catalyst for the realization that everything is interconnected — thus urging characters and the reader to unveil these connections and to attempt to draw a meaning or message from them. Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books provide an example of this interplay, as they are mentioned or alluded to within the narrative. For instance, Slothrop’s dream about Llandudno, “where Lewis Carroll wrote that *Alice in Wonderland*”, and where the White Rabbit talks to Slothrop, although “on the way up to waking he loses it all” (468), paralleling the lost messages of the Herero people. Similarly, the evocation of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* is established through the resemblance of the obscure and menacing human figures found at the end of both texts, as well as the association of whiteness with death. In this regard, Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is also a potential connection.

A multitude of texts, including the ones mentioned, play a crucial role in shaping both the thematic and structural landscape of the novel. While these texts may not be directly cited, their presence is felt through the allusions they evoke, which in turn prompt readers to shift their perception to other contexts and sources of meaning. However, it is the direct citations within the text that have a more pronounced impact on the reader, especially when they are typographically marked (being separated from the main text, enclosed in quotation marks, presented in verse forms, or italicized). They draw from many different sources, including poetry (from

the authors mentioned above), the Bible, nursery rhymes, popular songs or carols from the period in which the narrative is set, and quotes and bywords from historical figures like Napoleon, Wernher von Braun, Thomas Hooker, as well as fictional characters like Dr. Mabuse, Dorothy, and Superman.

In the subsequent paragraphs, I will analyse a selection of examples that illustrate the various shifts and connections brought about by the citations in *Gravity's Rainbow*. While it is not feasible to discuss every single citation in detail within the scope of this article, I have chosen these examples to provide a glimpse into the intricate interplay between the text and its surrounding contexts in both Pynchon's novel and Székely's translation. Intertextual reading, as Barthes shows, is itself a production, a process of "signifiante" when the reading subject enters the text and explores its work through him/herself. It has no ends, no linear history, it is a production that continues the unlimited play of writing. Therefore, the reading that I am going to propose here has obvious limitations to claiming itself "intertextual", although I hope that it can shed light on a few relations and contexts that reflect the writerly nature of Pynchon's text and point towards the direction of a wider textual universe.

3. Rilke and Pynchon

One of the most prominent literary references in *Gravity's Rainbow* revolves around the work of Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Throughout Pynchon's novel, we encounter literal quotations and allusions from Rilke's works, especially the late series, the *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, which leave a profound impact on the thematic and stylistic fabric of the entire narrative. Pynchon's engagement with Rilke's poetry is not isolated within English or American literature. Rilke's poems have been subject to numerous translations (with at least five versions of the *Elegies* available at the time of writing *Gravity's Rainbow* and more than twenty today), and his search for poetic expression that expands the boundaries of language has served as a source of inspiration for poets such as Robert Lowell, Randall Jarrell, Robert Bly, as well as novelists and playwrights including Ernest Hemingway, Tennessee Williams, and a few of Pynchon's contemporaries such as William Gaddis and William Gass. Rilke's influence has even extended to American popular culture, thereby adding new dimensions to the possibilities of intertextual readings.

Pynchon's reading of Rilke is regarded as a major artistic inspiration for *Gravity's Rainbow*. Themes such as death, love, angels, and transcendence permeate the novel and significantly contribute to its thematic structure. Some scholars have even suggested that a reading that frames Pynchon's text within the first and last lines of the *Duino Elegies* is possible (Haynes, 2012), or that the entire novel can be seen as an expansion of the "Tenth Elegy" (Hohman, 1986). About the origin of his poem "Death" he writes:

I recalled the moment, when (at night I stood on the wonderful bridge of Toledo) in a tense, long arc almost through outer space a star has fallen into the inner world-space [Weltinnenraum] [...] And as through the eyes now, this unity has been revealed to me through hearing before: once in Capri, when I stood in the garden at night, under the olive trees, and a bird's cry — I had to close my eyes in the while — was present inside

and outside of me at the same time, as in one perfectly extent and clear space!... (Szabó, 1979: 184; my translation)

The view of death as the merging of a human's inner world and the outer space, or two different realms can be seen along Rilke's writings, and it is a central theme of Pynchon's book. It is also worth noting the two symbolic experiences that this letter points at: the arc and the cry. The arc in Pynchon's text connects to the parabola, the trajectory of the rocket, or the rainbow (the visible side of a full circle), and the cry to the novel's first sentence, arguably an allusion to the "First Elegy".

In the *Duino Elegies*, human self-consciousness is depicted as a barrier that keeps individuals confined within an "interpreted world". Only a select few, such as lovers, heroes, children, and those who die young, can transcend this confinement by surrendering themselves to a different state of consciousness. Rilke's notion of transformation evolves around the term "Verwandlung", taken from the philosophy of Rilke's friend Rudolf Kassner, whom he met several times at his visits to Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis-Hohenlohe's Duino castle (a name that also rings a bell for Pynchon readers). It aligns with the idea of a cycle in which life and death, inside and outside, visible and invisible converge, and the linearity of time leading from birth to extinction is substituted to an eternal present (Komar, 2010). It is much different from the Christian concept of transcendence, often criticised by Rilke in his letters, where the afterlife remains polarized, and the greatness and beauty of earthly life are rejected in the name of sin. The fullness of life, according to Rilke, can be reached through earthly life and death, when these two unite as two sides of the same thing. Death fulfils life not in the sense of redemption but that of transformation and completion. This idea also resonates with the epigraph from Wernher von Braun at the beginning of Pynchon's novel: "Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation" (GR: 7).

4. Rilke's "Schicksal" and Pynchon as a translator

The recurring quotations from Rilke's poetry in *Gravity's Rainbow* revolve around two main characters: Major Weissmann (also known as Dominus Blicero) and Tyrone Slothrop. The first edition of the *Duino Elegies* — the "work" itself — appears in the novel as part of Weissmann's military kit, which he carries with him to the Südwest, the place of the German colonization and the first genocide of the twentieth century, involving the Herero people (which we also find in Pynchon's first novel *V.*). Weissmann, who can be considered the primary antagonist of the book, fulfils his duty as a lieutenant during his travels and later becomes a captain in Germany, conducting V-2 rocket tests. In his personal life, he maintains a sadomasochistic relationship with two victims, Gottfried and Katje. Weissmann's engagement with Rilke's poetry can be viewed as an expression of his longing for personal transcendence, as seen in the "First Elegy", where the desire to reach the angelic orders is juxtaposed with the impossibility of escaping the dividing polarities of human consciousness.

In the I/14 episode, structured as a multiply embedded narrative framed by a camera view, the focal point is on the triple-agent Katje Borgesius. Through her

perspective, by a metaleptic leap, we arrive at Blicero's thoughts regarding their relationship, his connection with Gottfried and the girl, and the looming possibility of Katje's betrayal, which could lead to the end of their games and lives. While Blicero experiences a sense of fear, there is also an element of amusement present. Throughout this passage, Blicero invokes the words of Rilke, quoting the twelfth sonnet from the second part of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, then a line from the "Tenth Elegy", initially in German and then translated into English:

Und nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los.... Of all Rilke's poetry it's this Tenth Elegy he most loves, can feel the bitter lager of Yearning begin to prickle behind eyes and sinuses at remembering any passage of... the newly-dead youth embracing his Lament, his last link, leaving now ever her marginally human touch, forever, climbing all alone, terminally alone, up and up into the mountains of primal Pain, with the wildly alien constellations overhead.... *And not once does his step ring from the soundless Destiny....* (GR: 98)

The Hungarian translation at this place reads:

Und nicht einmal sein Schritt klingt aus dem tonlosen Los.... Rilke költészetéből ezt a Tizedik elégiát szereti a legjobban, érzi a Sóvárgás keserű ászkát szeme és melléküregei mögött, ha csak eszébe jut akármelyik sora... az újonnan-holt ifjú, amint átöleli Panaszát, az utolsó kötődést, és még ezt a marginálisan emberi érintést is elhagyja örökre, és kapaszkodik egyes-egyedül, végleges-egyedül, följebb, egyre följebb, az Ős-Kín bércei közé, feje fölött dermesztően idegen csillagzatok.... *Vissza se csendül a lépte a hangtalan Végzet öléből....* (S: 103)

It is possible that Pynchon made his own translation of Rilke's line here. While the first edition of *Gravity's Rainbow* credits the 1939 Leishman and Spender translation, the quoted passages in the novel differ significantly from that text, as well as from other translations available from before 1973. If Pynchon had used an existing translation, the edition would likely have been indicated in the preliminary pages of the book. Leishman and Spender's translation, at this place, reads: "And never once does his step resound from the soundless fate" (Rilke, 1939: 85). The changes made by Pynchon may have been influenced by considerations such as maintaining the iambic rhythm of the line. It is also possible that the inclusion of the word "Destiny" in the translation carries additional significance. Given that the word appears in capitalized and non-capitalized versions throughout the text of *Gravity's Rainbow*, it suggests that Pynchon intentionally employed this term as a recurring motif or thematic element. By incorporating it into his translation, Pynchon may have sought to establish a thematic connection between the concepts explored in Rilke's poetry and the broader themes and motifs of his own novel.

Rilke uses the word "Los", producing a clash of sound and sense in "tonlosen Los", while Pynchon's translation is attached to another Rilkean word: "Schicksal." The evidence of this connection is Leishman and Spender's translation of the *Elegies*, where they consistently used the word "Destiny" (capital D) where the German uses "Schicksal". The word "Los" comes back in a rather puzzling way that marks another possible allusion to Andrei Voznesenky's poem, the "Ballad of the Parabola" (Weisenburger, 2006 [1988]: 256–257). It is worth noting that in the German translation by Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Piltz (*Die Enden der Parabel*, 1981), the

foreignness of the German terms, such as “Schicksal”, is lost. The word occurs over thirty times in the German translation, and the Rilke passage is repeated without any changes. In Pynchon’s text, “Schicksal” shows up once more, in connection with Franz Pökler, another prominently German character.

In the narrative of a central episode revolving around Pökler, a filmic metaphor is employed to depict the sequence of events as “the rapid flashing of successive stills to counterfeit movement” (GR: 407). This metaphor is revealed in Pökler’s annual encounters with his daughter Ilse, who is a “movie child”. Each summer, Ilse visits her father, but she appears to be markedly different each time, to the point where she may not even be the same child. Pökler’s sentiments regarding the rocket program are conveyed through free indirect speech in this episode, and the intertextual web of Rilke references in the novel is set in motion by the word “Schicksal”: “It was impossible not to think of the Rocket without thinking of *Schicksal*, of growing towards a shape predestined and perhaps a little otherworldly” (GR: 416; emphasis in the original). This otherworldliness, along with the notion of separated orders of being within human consciousness, resonates with Rilke’s concept of transformation. The passage also establishes a link between film and the German psyche, which appears elsewhere as a separating force “dividing Creation finer and finer, analyzing, setting namer more hopelessly apart from named...” (GR: 391).

The appearance of the word “Destiny” is repeated in Pökler’s context, particularly in an episode infused with German words: “Destiny waits, a darkness latent in the texture of the summer wind. Destiny will betray you, crush your ideals, deliver you in the same detestable *Bürgerlichkeit* as your father...” (GR: 162). The Hungarian translation renders “Destiny” as “Sors”, but intriguingly, it also uses the German “Schicksal” in one instance. These words and concepts are intertwined with the portrayal of pre-war Germany, emphasizing the link between Destiny, bourgeoisie, darkness, and indifference. Franz Pökler sees his wife Leni as an angelic figure — he refers to her wings — who ought to free him, to “carry him on her back, away to a place where Destiny couldn’t reach. As if it were gravity” (GR: 127).

The presence of the Grimm brothers’ tale “Hänsel und Gretel” adds another layer of significance to the thematic cluster centered around the word “Destiny”. Within the passage quoted above, where Blicero reflects on the potential danger of Katje’s betrayal, there are several references and allusions that evoke the tale. These references create a metaphorical connection between the psychological and sexual bondage of characters, a game that “shall be their preserving routine, their shelter against what outside none of them can bear” (GR: 96), that is the surrounding terror of the war. In the metaphorical framework of the tale, Blicero takes on the role of the Witch, anticipating Katje’s potential act of betrayal by pushing him into the Oven, “his Destiny” (97). Pynchon employs fragments of German language within this passage, similar to the earlier Pökler episode, to emphasize the German character. Weissmann quotes from Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* (II/12) a few lines above: “Want the change. [...] O be inspired by the Flame” (GR: 97), thinking about the “Reich’s flame” which “he embraced” (GR: 98), but which, along with the growing threat of the war and the falling bombs, has slowly given his place to another flame, that of the Oven. Blicero’s longing “to be taken, to embrace, to fall toward the flame

growing to fill all the senses...” (GR: 97), is reminiscent of the themes of acting and love as depicted in Rilke’s *Elegies*. In the *Elegies*, the hero can escape the confines of human consciousness through action, while the lover finds solace in unrequited love. These ideas of death, life, and transfiguration are transposed onto the rocket program in Blicero’s interpretation, influenced by his readings of Rilke. The Rocket represents both the Oven and the aspiration to transcend gravity. It becomes a symbol of destiny and the pursuit of overcoming earthly limitations. Another connection between the Rocket and Destiny emerges through the fantasy of the Zone–Hereros (the Schwarzkommando) and their concept of the Real Text:

[S]ay that’s our real Destiny, to be the scholar–magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it’s all squeezed limp of its last drop... well we assumed — natürlich! — that this holy Text had to be the Rocket [...]. (GR: 520)

The Rocket holds a significant role as a central symbol that encompasses these motifs. It stands at the intersection of references to the Oven, Destiny, and the concept of opposites, representing a convergence of these ideas. Moreover, the Rocket symbolizes a vehicle for transcendence, offering the potential to overcome the force of gravity, but what, in the end, will be “betrayed to Gravity” (GR: 758). Into all these ideas influenced by Rilke, Blicero weaves his relationship with his lover Gottfried, which culminates in the dramatic event of the firing of the Rocket 00000 with the boy inside.

The “Eighth Elegy” — dedicated to Rudolf Kassner — provides a definition of “Destiny” as follows:

Dieses heißt Schicksal: gegenüber sein
und nichts als das und immer gegenüber

That’s what Destiny means: being opposite,
and nothing else, and always opposite. (Rilke, 1939: 68–69)

The idea of the opposites is a pervasive theme throughout the novel, from which even the language that points to it cannot exclude itself. The word “Destiny” is thus an intersection between Rilke’s intertexts and some of the main themes of the novel, but it is also a marker of the insoluble poetic problem that places the language that criticises binary opposites within the horizon of opposition.

5. Effects of translation

In the Hungarian text, Széky followed Ede Szabó’s translation of Rilke’s poem (as he used Szabó’s translations at every other occurrence of Rilke) and did not change the word “végzet” (doom, fate, destiny), although he translated the word “destiny” mostly throughout the book as “sors” (destiny, fate, lot; see Pynchon, 2009: 59, 103, 324, 576; hereby cited as S). However, he also translates “fate/fatal” in this way (S: 18, 93, 138, 303, 304, 328, etc.) and “doom” in several places (31, 350, 478,

539, etc.) as well. Ede Szabó in his translations of the *Elegies* also gives “sors” where the German uses “Schicksal”.

Ede Szabó's translations are not the only “canonical” Hungarian Rilke renderings. Széky — by his own account — chose them because they were more “pragmatic” than the others and followed better the wording of the German lines (Jenei, 2022). Another quite pragmatic reason for choosing Szabó's translations could be that since Rilke's texts appear in Hungarian as an incomplete set of various translations, Ede Szabó was the one who endeavoured to collect and systemize the poems for a collective volume published in 1983, which represents an important contribution to Rilke's reception in Hungary. It gathers the works of thirteen translators from different eras, including Dezső Kosztolányi from the first half of the twentieth century, and Ágnes Nemes Nagy and Dezső Tandori from the 1980s and later. They were not only distinguished translators but — in the Hungarian literary scene mainly — poets, and their understanding of Rilke as well as their translation practices were different. The merit of the anthology is that where several translations of a given poem were available, they were all included in the volume. This can be seen as an important interpretative gesture, which is also necessitated by Rilke's complex and inventive poetry, a reflection on the fact of translation. Szabó's work is complemented by a biographical and interpretative volume on Rilke's poetry, published in 1979. He also published a collection of essays on translation in 1968, which was rather a summary of the existing understanding of translation in its own time, and according to a profound scholar of Hungarian translation theory of the period, “it proved to be forgettable by the end of the 20th century” (Józán, 2009: 177). This does not mean, of course, that the knowledge he collected cannot be fruitful for the practice of literary translation today, as Széky also said to have benefited from it (Jenei, 2022).

After the 1983 collection, Ágnes Nemes Nagy claimed that the task of translating Rilke should have been done earlier or is still to be done later — really (Nemes Nagy, 1989). If she meant a collaborative and contemporary (re)translation, it is only a demand to this day. However, several complete translations of the *Elegies* were published since, one in 1988 as a joint volume by Dezső Tandori and Gyula Tellér. Tandori devoted two more volumes to Rilke, in 2007 and 2009, the latter including new translations of some of the late poems along with his own texts, as a sort of homage to the poet and as a continuation of his works, in a gesture of self-mythologizing. These translations — according to one of its interpreters — made Tandori the most authentic Hungarian translator of Rilke's later poetry (Zsellér, 2010).

The appearance of Rilke-citations and numerous other quotes and excerpts and the recurrent use of different languages, including German, Herero, Spanish, Dutch, French, and others, along with the exposure of translation processes, creates a reflexive effect on the reader's engagement with translation. As readers encounter foreign cultural environments, names, and transliterations, they are prompted to reflect on the act of translation itself. Pynchon's text deliberately stages foreignness and translation, emphasizing their role in shaping the narrative. Towards the end of the book, the narrator presents a story that revolves around a pun and highlights the issue of translation. A woman intending to cry out “Hübsch Räuber!” (meaning

“Pretty robber!”) mispronounces it as “Hubschrauber” (helicopter) due to her difficulty with umlauts. Nobody in the 1920s — when the story takes place — understands the phrase, except for “one finger-biting paranoid aerodynamics student”, who hears it through the sound of the German hymn practiced by a harmonica novice. The student translates it as “liftscrew” and interprets it as a prophecy (GR: 683–684). This episode grotesquely exposes the challenges and complexities of translation to the reader, paralleling the effect of the Rilke passage mentioned earlier.

In the context of translation and intertextuality, Gábor Tamás Molnár (2022) has suggested the presence of a Goethe poem in the quoted Rilke passage, particularly through the word “Yearning” (which stands out with a capital letter). This connection is established by the translation of “yearning” into German as “Sehnsucht” within a passage that encompasses both German and translation. The image of the moth falling towards the flame evokes Goethe’s concept of “Flammentod” and the romantic notion of love and death, which is also reflected in the quoted passage and Goethe’s poem. Similarly, the awareness of other languages and translations while reading could lead to the interpretation of the first line of the poem as a paraphrase or allusion to the opening line of the *Elegies*, connecting “screaming” to the German word “schrie” (to cry out).

The initial episode of this analysis (I/14) is a complexly layered filmic narrative, as noted by Weisenburger (1994). The narrative is framed by a camera view of Katje, and various elements within the episode, such as mirrors and the concept of mirror–metaphysics (the idea that everything and everyone have their counterparts on the other sphere of the Earth), allude to the duplication of characters. In the Hungarian translation, an interesting intertextual reading emerges, albeit possibly incidentally. We read: “What is framed, dirt-blurry, in the prisms, the ritual, the daily iteration inside these newly cleared triangles in the forests, has taken over what used to be memory’s random walk, its innocent image-gathering” (GR: 101). This passage continues Blicero’s thoughts and recollections of the Südwest. The “daily iteration” framed in the prisms refers to photographs taken of rocket motion, arranged as successive stills, invoking the concepts of film, simulated movement, and separation (see the Pökler episodes above). In the Hungarian translation, Széky uses the phrase “maszat által homályosan” (blurred by dirt) to translate “dirt-blurry”. Interestingly, this phrase immediately connects the Hungarian reader to a biblical intertext: “Mert most *tükör által homályosan* látunk” (Cor1 13,12; my emphasis), from Saint Paul’s love hymn, which in English translates to “For now we see in a mirror dimly” (RSV Cor1 13,12). By turning on this biblical connection, the Hungarian text evokes the context of Christian transcendence and offers the possibility of connecting it to Blicero and, through Blicero, to Pynchon’s engagement with Rilke, which can be read as an irony of the Christian or the Rilkean vision of transcendence.

Conclusion

The effects of the constant motion in the production of meaning in a text can be described with various tools, among them geometrical and mathematical metaphors of coordinate systems and movement, as can be seen in the works of

Kristeva, Barthes and Derrida. These theories show the central role of citation as the point of intersection between contexts. Thomas Pynchon's major opus, *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a prominent example of postmodern intertextuality, and it shows a similarity with the mentioned theories in its self-reflexive use of mathematical imagery connected to textuality and language. The novel contains numerous quotations, among which the lines by the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke stand out, which are embedded and reinterpreted in the text in a variety of ways. The quotations discussed here raise the question of translation in themselves, suggesting that Pynchon himself produced the English lines with a possible purpose of the emphatic use of the word "Destiny", a word that appears as a focal point of possible interpretations of the novel. In the Hungarian translation of Pynchon's text, further movements and shifts in the development of Rilke's reading can be observed, as well as the evocation of new contexts as an effect of translation as an intertextual practice.

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