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(Post)Soviet Russia vs the West: The Ideological Enemy's Image in English Translations of Fiction

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Abstract. The Russo-Ukrainian war, especially the full-scale invasion of 2022, made the issue of manipulation particularly topical, including skewed representation in translation. On the basis of a detailed analysis of linguistic choices of translators, considered within the broad historical-political and ideological context, the paper demonstrates the discrepancies between the images of the (post) Soviet Russian and Western societies created in the novels by the contemporary Russian authors Oleg Pavlov, Viktor Pelevin, Vladimir Sorokin and Lyudmila Ulitskaya and those reproduced in the English translations. The ramifications of such modification acquire special significance under the circumstances, especially due to the increased attention to translation as an "ideological weapon" on the part of the Russian scholars and critics.
Keywords: literary translation, ideology, representation, contemporary Russian literature.

(Po)sovietinė Rusija ir Vakarai. Ideologinio priešo įvaizdis prozos vertimuose į anglų kalbą

Santrauka. Vykstant Rusijos karui su Ukraina, ypač po plataus masto Rusijos invazijos į Ukrainą 2022 m., manipuliavimo klausimas, įskaitant ir iškreiptą reprezentaciją vertimuose, tapo itin aktualus. Remiantis išsamia vertėjų kalbinių pasirinkimų analize, straipsnyje parodoma, kokius (po) sovietinės Rusijos ir Vakarų visuomenių įvaizdžius savo romanuose kuria šiuolaikiniai rusų autoriai Olegas Pavlovas, Viktoras Pelevinas, Vladimiras Sorokinas ir Lyudmila Ulitskaya bei kaip šie įvaizdžiai perteikiami vertimuose į anglų kalbą. Vertimo ir originalo neatitikimai nagrinėjami plačiame istoriniame-politiniame ir ideologiniame kontekste. Šiandienos aplinkybėmis vertimuose atsirandančių tokių modifikacijų padariniai yra itin reikšmingi, ypač dėl padidėjusio rusų mokslininkų ir kritikų dėmesio vertimui kaip „ideologiniam ginklui".
Pagrindiniai žodžiai: literatūrinis vertimas, ideologija, reprezentacija, šiuolaikinė rusų literatūra.

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Introduction

In recent years, translation as an instrument of imposing ideologies and an object of ideological pressure has received considerable attention by translation scholars, and many of them focus on the USSR and East Europe, where such pressure was especially strong (Baer 2010; Kalnychenko & Kalnychenko 2020; Khotimsky 2011; Kuhiwczak 2011; Rundle et al. 2022; Sherry 2012; Striha 2006; Witt 2011 and others). During the period of the strong ideological opposition between the Soviet block and the old democracies, the sphere of literary translation in the UK and the USA was not completely free of ideological pressure, which influenced the choice of works by the authors from the USSR and the Eastern block for translation and resulted in ideological manipulations, too (see Flotow 2013; France 2000; Kates 2008; Kundera 1978; Woods 2006).

After the dissolution of the USSR, it would seem only natural if literary translations published in these countries were not ideologically manipulated any more, or if translators found some material inappropriate and introduced changes, they would explain their strategies in the foreword or commentaries.[1] However, in recent decades, literary translations, which bear no indication of the introduced changes, have been published both in the RF, the UK and the USA. The manipulative strategies, used by translators in the contemporary RF, have been analyzed in a number of publications (Harding 2011; Kolomiyets 2020; Rudnytska 2021: 323–347); some Russian researchers and critics, on the contrary, claim that translations, including literary ones, are used as "an ideological weapon" against the RF (see Chanysheva 2017; Vorontsov 2008; Zolotussky 2009).

According to Rudnytska (2021: 402–423), the images of the USSR and the Western democracies often got manipulated in translation during the period of strong ideological opposition between these states. Hypothetically, the images of the (post) Soviet Russian and Western societies in contemporary Russian literature may also appear sensitive issues, prone to misrepresentation in recent English translations. Thus, the aim of the present study is to analyze these images in the novels by the leading contemporary Russian writers and their reproduction in the English translations by the British and North-American translators.

The theoretical basis of the study is the works of Teun A. van Dijk, who underlines the influence of ideologies on "a specific understanding of the world in general" (1998: 5), ideological polarization, and "self-serving positive self-presentation and negative

[1] The practice, typical for the feminist translation (see Godard 1983; Johnson 1981; Lotbinière-Harwood 1990).

other-presentation" (1998: 317), which "may be implemented by a large variety of forms and meanings that emphasize (or mitigate) positive (or negative) properties of the ingroup and the outgroup, respectively" (1998: 318).

The research is based on a detailed analysis of linguistic choices of translators, which are considered within the broad historical-political and ideological context. The parallel corpus contains the novels *Дело Матюшина* ['The Matiushin Case'] by Oleg Pavlov, *Священная книга оборотня* ['The Sacred Book of the Werewolf'] and *Generation П* by Viktor Pelevin, *День опричника* ['Day of the Oprichnik'] by Vladimir Sorokin, and *Зелёный шатёр* ['The Big Green Tent'] by Lyudmila Ulitskaya and their English translations by Andrew Bromfield, Polly Gannon, and Jamey Gambrell.

The findings will add to our understanding of the scale and significance of modification of national images in contemporary literary translations under the influence of ideological factors.

"The Decaying West"

Contemporary Russian authors often describe characters whose opinions about the West were formed by the Soviet propaganda. As a result, the images of the Western society, created in these works, do not correspond to the reality and the self-image of the Westerners; they can be grotesque. In English translations, everything that can be viewed as negative characterization of the Western society and its influence on the post-Soviet RF tends to be manipulated. To avoid or at least mitigate the negative characteristics, the translators omit certain words, word combinations or bigger fragments of the source texts, use substitutions and sometimes even additions.

For example, Lyudmila Ulitskaya in her novel *Зелёный шатёр* ['The Big Green Tent'] among other themes dwells upon the issue of the Russian emigration to the West during the Soviet period. In the next fragment, her protagonist is contemplating on the fate of his friend Liza, who left Soviet Russia with its rich cultural life and found herself in the West—"behind the looking-glass," deprived of such cultural wealth, as the main character sees that; then, he remembers the achievements of the Austrian culture:

> "*..живет теперь в зазеркалье.* ***Впрочем почему в зазеркалье?*** *В Вене и Моцарт, и Шуберт, и вся венская школа гуляет по Рингу.*" (Ulitskaya 2011)
> ['…is living behind the looking-glass now. **But why behind the looking-glass?** In Vienna, both Mozart, and Shubert, and all the Viennese school walk along the Ring.']

In the translation by Polly Gannon, the second sentence is omitted, so there is no contrast between the *richness* of the Russian culture and the *cultural poverty of the West* which the Soviet citizen first sees in his imagination. Due to this omission, "*в*

зазеркалье" ['behind the looking-glass'] in the target text can be understood quite differently—as if Liza finally found herself in a place of the rich cultural heritage: "She (…) lived now on the other side of the looking glass. In Vienna, Mozart, Schubert, and the entire Viennese School promenaded along the Ringstrasse" (Ulitskaya 2015).

The West as the main enemy of the future Russia is one of the central images of the satirical novel *День опричника*[2] ['Day of the Oprichnik'] by Vladimir Sorokin; in the translation by Jamey Gambrell its image has been modified considerably. For example, the writer uses the Soviet ideologeme "*загнивающий Запад*" ['the decaying West'] in the inner speech of his main character: "*А **Запад гниющий** подыгрывает нашим подпольным матерщинникам*" (Sorokin 2007) ['and the **decaying West** plays up our underground foul-mouths'].

In the translated text the ideologeme is substituted with an epithet characterizing not the West itself but the Russians' attitude to it: "And the **loathsome West** plays up to our underground foul-mouths" (Sorokin 2011).

Further, Sorokin's character says about Europeans that they have accumulated much *malice* against Russia: "*Сколько **злобы** накопили господа европейцы*!" (Sorokin 2007) ['How much **malice** European gentlemen have accumulated'].

The main character, living in the future Russia, which Sorokin pictures xenophobic and hostile to the West, characterizes Europeans as "malicious." The translator, however, among numerous synonyms (*malice, wickedness, spite* and others) chooses "anger" which can also be righteous; besides, Gambrell adds "gentlemen:" "How much **anger** those European **gentlemen** have accumulated!" (Sorokin 2011). As a result, the negative characteristics are mitigated and the character's opinion of Europeans is not reproduced.

Another author, Viktor Pelevin, also writes about the contemporary Western society and its influence on the RF. For instance, in the novel *Священная книга оборотня* ['The Sacred Book of the Werewolf'], Pelevin's character counterposes Russians to the citizens of the Western states, whom he defines as "contemporary **market** men:"

> "*Загадки существования мучают нас куда сильнее, чем современного **человека рыночного**.*"
> (Pelevin 2009)
> ['Riddles of existence torment us much more than the contemporary **Market Man**.']

Andrew Bromfield omits the word "market," so in the English text the Russians are counterposed to "modern humans," which radically changes the implied evaluation:

2 Historically, *oprichniks* were members of the bodyguard corps of the Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584); their main task was to oppress people opposed to the Tsar. Sorokin's future Russia reminds archaic Muscovy: the sovereign's power is unlimited, and his *oprichniks* are free to employ the most barbaric and cruel methods against those who do not demonstrate enough loyalty.

"We are far more tormented by the riddles of existence than **modern humans**" (Pelevin 2005).

In the next example, Pelevin's main character defines the history of the West as "shameful, infamous:"

> "*Это, на мой взгляд, единственная верная мысль, которая посетила западный ум за всю его* ***позорную*** *историю.*" (Pelevin 2009)
> ['In my view, this is the only true thought that has visited the Western mind in its **shameful** history.']

Although the skepticism of the remark is preserved in the translated text, the insulting attribute is substituted: "In my view, this is the only true thought that has visited the Western mind in its **long and funny** history" (Pelevin 2005).

In Pelevin's other novel *Generation П* ('*Homo Zapiens*' in Bromfield's translation), his character analyzes Pepsi's commercial where "guys from Madison Avenue advertising agencies" show their audience as "monkeys;" he states that this commercial became "*the turning point in the development of the world culture.*" This fragment about four hundred words long is omitted in the translation.

Also omitted is the fragment where the character writes down his ideas on shooting commercials using images of Mussolini, Otto Skorzeny, Stalin, Maxim Gorky, and the Statue of Liberty; it should be mentioned that the symbol of American liberty in this commercial "instead of the torch" holds "a cathode ray tube of a TV set" and "instead of the book—a TV program guide:" "*вместо факела – сверкающая трубка телевизора (...), а вместо книги – программа телепередач*" (Pelevin 2010).

Pelevin's next sentence implies that marketing—a Western finding and an important factor of market economy, alien to the planned economy—is grounded solely on base instincts: "*А если в клиенте проснется самое высокое, мы потеряем клиента, это знает любой маркетолог*" (Pelevin 2010) ['And if the highest [aspirations] wake up in the client, we are going to lose him, every marketer knows that']. The sentence is omitted in the target text.

Another instance of omitting is the fragment where the etymology of the Russian slang word *"лаве (лэвэ)"* is analyzed. This word, meaning "money," is defined as an abbreviation of *liberal values*:

> "*А ты не знаешь случайно, откуда это слово взялось – «лэвэ»? (...) – Случайно знаю (...) Это от латинских букв «L» и «V». Аббревиатура liberal values.*" (Pelevin 2010)
> ['Do you happen to know where this word came from— leve*? (…)*—I happen to know. It's from the Latin letters L and V. An abbreviation from 'liberal values.']

Bromfield also omits the sentences where Pelevin's characters, Russians, discuss the existence of anti-Russian conspiracy: "*Глупо искать здесь следы антирусского заговора.*

Антирусский заговор, безусловно, существует" (Pelevin 2010) ['It is stupid to look for the traces of anti-Russian conspiracy here. Anti-Russian conspiracy definitely exists'].

Unlike the previous examples, the next fragment does not contain any negative characterization of the West but describes the reverential attitude of Russian emigrants to their historical motherland:

> "*...назначение его на дипломатическую работу в Россию их* ***взволновало*** *– он был первый, кто пересек границу родины в* ***обратном*** *направлении после восемнадцатого года."* (Ulitskaya 2011)
> ['They were **very excited** by his appointment to the diplomatic mission in Moscow: He was the first one to cross the border of the Motherland in the **return** direction after 1918.']

"*Взволновало*" in the source text has a positive meaning: the characters felt excitement due to the opportunity to touch their roots. Nevertheless, Polly Gannon translates it as "disturbed:" "they were **very disturbed** by his appointment to the diplomatic mission in Moscow. He was the first one in their family to cross the border of the Motherland in the **wrong** direction after 1918" (Ulitskaya 2015).

It is also important that the translator defines the direction of crossing the Russian border as "wrong" although in the original it is just "reverse/return direction."

The USSR/Russia vs the USA: (Un)probable Equals

Another sensitive issue, causing manipulations in translation, is the (potentially) *equal* economic status of the USSR/Russia and the USA. Irrespective of the facts and statistics, the Soviet regime tried hard to prove the economic power of the country, and an average Soviet citizen tended to believe that; the same, unreasonably optimistic attitude could be met in the post-Soviet RF. This very attitude is mentioned by Ulitskaya and Pelevin in their novels, but in English translations it is presented differently.

For example, Ulitskaya uses an allusion to the famous Soviet slogan "*Догоним и перегоним Америку!*" ['Catch up and surpass America']: "*стояла нестерпимая политическая трескотня о свершениях и победах –* ***уже догнали и почти перегнали****"* (Ulitskaya 2011) ['There was unbearable political blather about achievements and victories–**we have already caught up and nearly surpassed America**'].

In Gannon's translation, the USSR is still *behind* and only *wants to catch up*: "and the unbearable political blather about achievements and victories—that **soon we would catch up with America**—continued unabated" (Ulitskaya 2015).

In *Generation П*, Pelevin's character equals the Russian ruble to the US dollar: "*Короче, сейчас еще не все ясно до конца, – сказал он, явно сворачивая разговор, – но я думаю, что в принципе* ***рубль так же неисчерпаем, как и доллар****"* (Pelevin 2010) ["In

short, it's not clear yet," *he said,* obviously finishing the conversation, "but I think **the ruble,** in principle, **is as inexhaustible as the dollar**"].

In Bromfield's translation, you can see that this comparison is omitted together with the bigger part of the remark, semantically connected with the latter: "Now go and get some work done" (Pelevin 2000).

Thus, although the Russian writers present *misconceptions*, characteristic of the society they describe, the translators prefer making corrections to reproducing the authentic opinions.

The USSR: "But for the Soviet Power, He Wouldn't Have Survived"

In the original texts of the novels under analysis, readers can see multifaceted and controversial images of the Soviet society as it was, with its typical features: social and ethnic inequality, power relations based on violence and fear, blind belief and even love of some people for the "Soviet Motherland" and its leaders, and quite a critical attitude on the part of the other citizens. In the translated versions, however, these images lose some of their complexity while sheer love for their country and its regime, expressed by some characters, is not reproduced.

For example, Oleg Pavlov in his novel *Дело Матюшина* ['The Matiushin Case'] gives a detailed description of the life of Soviet servicemen and their families as well as a broader picture of the society in general, but Andrew Bromfield omits numerous fragments demonstrating the specific power of Soviet officials of all levels, violence and fear as the basis of relations within the power vertical, the special status of Moscow, social and ethnic inequality of "Soviet citizens" and at the same time their strong belief in Communism and the Soviet power.

Among others, the translator omits the following fragment, where the author describes the motivation of the main character's father in his professional activity which also characterizes the specific power and at the same time vulnerability of a Soviet military official:

> "*Ради того он и боролся (...), чтобы обрасти вдруг в одном таком незаметном местечке покоем. Чтобы сделаться самому-то незаметным, спрятаться от жизни, и только как укрытием окружить себя таким вот городишком и подвластным, где пикнуть не смеют без его слова, гарнизоном.*"
> ['That's what he has been fighting for (…) – to acquire calmness in such an inconspicuous place. To become invisible, to hide from life, and to surround himself with a town like that and the subservient garrison, where they don't dare to utter a word without his permission.']

Dwelling on the attitude of the father to Matiushin's wife, the author points out to the social and ethnic inequality of the Soviet society, where all kinds of state and military officials had a special status as well as the Russian people in comparison to the other "Soviet peoples;" Pavlov also mentions the opposition between Moscow and the provinces:

> "*О ней ему довольно было знать, что она не москвичка, и он, верно, полагал уже так, что ей, хохлушке безродной, большая честь породниться с человеком государственного масштаба... Ему же она не ровня, не родня, а приживалка, что и борисоглебские. Пропала Москва задарма: что учился, что нет. Такого добра везде хватает, и в Ельске таких что навоза, мог и тут жениться. Раз ты из грязи в люди выбился, так чего же опять лезешь-то в навоз.*"
> ['It was enough for him to know that she was not a Muscovite, and he guessed it was a great honor for her, a lowborn khokhlushka,[3] to become related to a man of national importance… She isn't an equal to him, not a relative, just a tenant like those [relatives] from Borisoglebsk. Moscow education was all in vain. There are enough girls like that everywhere, heaps of them—like manure—in Eisk; he could have married here. If you managed to get from zero to hero, why would you go back to manure again.']

Bromfield omitted this paragraph as well as the greater part of the one where Pavlov describes the specific power which in the Soviet society had any state employee who controlled something, even if it was just a cleaner, responsible for some area:

> "*Он отлип виновато от асфальта, куда-то пополз, ему хотелось уползти домой. В далеке платформы, осанисто, размашисто шагая по ней метлой, возникнув, будто прыщ, выметала-сеяла пылищу здоровая баба, точно поезд проходной навредил чистоте. Баба обмерла, присела, взмахнула наотмашь метлой и с ором, так и приседая, полоща выцветшим желтым флагом путейки, понеслась на него с кровавой мордой, от нее рванулся Матюшин неведомо куда.*" (Pavlov 2013)
> ['He guiltily unglued himself from the asphalt, crawled somewhere; he wanted to crawl home. Far on the platform, a huge woman, having emerged as a pimple, was sweeping and sowing dust with a broom, stately and widely, as if the passing train had harmed the cleanness. [Having seen Matiushin,] The woman stiffened, crouched down, swished her broom and **rushed at him, shouting, with her blood-coloured snout and her robe fluttering as a yellow flag; Matiushin dashed away from her**, he didn't know where.']

Bromfield translated only the first sentence: "He guiltily unglued himself from the asphalt" (Pavlov 2014).

Despite all the negative sides of the life in the USSR, described in the novel, its

[3] "*Khokhlushka*" (feminine) and "*hokhol*" (masculine) are derogatory words for Ukrainians, broadly used by Russians both in the USSR and the RF.

characters demonstrate extremely positive attitude. For example, a Soviet serviceman comments:

> "*А вот у меня все есть: хозяйство, здоровье, жена, служба (...)* ***К тому наша страна и стремится, к победе коммунизма, чтобы у всех все было.*** " (Pavlov 2013)
> ['And I have everything: a household, good health, my wife, employment (…) **That's what our country aims at—the victory of Communism, for everybody to have everything**.']
> In Bromfield's translation the passage is omitted.

The protagonist's father "kept saying that he was an orphan, and **but for the Soviet power**, he wouldn't have survived and achieved anything:" "*все рассказывал, что был сиротой и что* ***не будь советской власти, то не выжил бы он и ничего бы в жизни не достиг"*** (Pavlov 2013). Nevertheless, in the translated text he only recalls his youth: "recalled his own youthful days with him, and how he himself **joined the army**" (Pavlov 2014).

Lyudmila Ulitskaya's characters, on the contrary, do not always identify themselves with the Soviet state, but in Gannon's translation this inhomogeneity is not reproduced:

> "*Да что ты? У нас? (...) –* ***У вас, у вас!*** " (Ulitskaya 2011) ["What are you saying? Do **we** have that? (...)—**You** do, **you** do!]. In the translated text, there's no opposition "we"—"you:" "What are you saying? **Here?** (…)—**Of course, here**!" (Ulitskaya 2015).

In the following fragment, an elderly lady, born in one of the aristocratic families of the Russian empire, tells her grandson and his schoolmates, born and educated in the USSR, about the tragic Russian history: "*История у нас в России,* ***вне всякого сомнения,*** *паршивая, но то время было не самым худшим*" (Ulitskaya 2011) ['The Russian history is rotten, no doubt, but that time was not the worst one'].

Gannon replaces the word combination "*no doubt*" with "*no matter how you look at it;*" the latter phrase implies that the schoolchildren have a different opinion, based on what they are taught, and are unable to think critically: "***No matter how you look at it****, the history of Russia has been rotten, but those times were not the worst imaginable*" (Ulitskaya 2015).

The Post-Soviet RF: Democrats, Liberals, Werewolves

A number of omissions, substitutions and additions in the target texts are connected with the representation of the post-Soviet RF in the novels by Viktor Pelevin and Lyudmila Ulitskaya. Their characters speak about liberals and werewolves, democracy and the involvement of law enforcement and the state security in organized crime. The use of such notions in the same context often produces the effect of absurdity; taken seriously, it looks inappropriate.

For instance, in *The Sacred Book of the Werewolf,* Pelevin describes how this state operates, where law enforcement agencies perform a number of unlawful functions, including protection racket in business and politics. In the next fragment, Interior Ministry colonel comments on this function while discussing a democratic society: "*Должны же мы знать, кому крышу даем. (...) Я не хочу сказать, что демократия – это плохо*" (Pelevin 2009) ['We must know whom we give "cover." (…) I don't mean to say that democracy is bad']. In the translated text, the first sentence, where the character demonstrates his wholehearted confidence that such protection racket is quite appropriate in a democratic society, is omitted: "I don't mean to say that democracy is bad" (Pelevin 2005).

Pelevin's characters quite seriously discuss the theory that the power in the post-Soviet Russia belongs to werewolves (literally!):

> "*Среди нас живут существа иной природы (...) Так вот,* ***этих омерзительных оборотней, как вы выразились****, не занимают пустяки, о которых вы говорите с таким жаром.* ***И они не прикрываются либеральной вывеской – тут вы ошиблись****.*" (Pelevin 2009)
> ['There are creatures living among us who are of a different nature. (…) So, **these disgusting werewolves, as you put it,** are not occupied with the petty matters of which you speak with such fervour. **And they aren't hiding behind the liberal cover**.']

In the target text the fragments in bold are omitted; as a result, "liberalism" is not used in the description of the werewolves in power: "There are creatures living among us who are of a different nature. (…) I know that they are not occupied with the petty matters of which you speak with such fervour" (Pelevin 2005).

In *Generation P*, one of Pelevin's characters mentions that Russian business will be regulated not by "free shooters" but by "serious institutions:" "*Вместо вольных стрелков будут* ***серьезные конторы****"* (Pelevin 2010) ['Instead of free shooters there will be **serious institutions**']. It means that in the RF criminal activity will be controlled by some "serious institutions," which for a post-Soviet reader suggests organized crime connected to the state, first of all, the federal security service. Bromfield changes the idea, emphasizing the probable corruption activity of former party secretaries, who became officials of the post-Soviet RF: "Instead of five hundred grammes the former party secretaries will be demanding five hundred grand" (Pelevin 2000). Describing the setting of the story, Pelevin mentions:

> "*На ее двери висела металлическая табличка со словами «Идеологический отдел» – явное советское наследство."* (Pelevin 2010)
> ['On her door was a metal plate with the words "Ideological department"—apparently a left-over from the Soviet times.']

In the target text, a sentence is added to hint at the institutional ideological control in the contemporary RF: "There was a metal plate on the door bearing the words: 'Ideological Department'—apparently a left-over from Soviet times. **'Or maybe not,' thought Tatarsky**" (Pelevin 2000). Although the presence of such control in Putin's Russia today seems obvious, over two decades ago, when the novel was written and translated, the situation was different and was presented in the source text accordingly; the addition in the target text manipulates Pelevin's vision.

Power Relations in "This Inhuman and Shameless State"

Power relations also proved to be one of the sensitive issues which tend to be misrepresented in the translations under analysis. Power and the state are among the main themes of *The Big Green Tent* by Ulitskaya. In the next example, her character contemplates about the life in the Soviet state:

> "*Он давно уже вывел, что плодить новых людей в* ***этом бесчеловечном и бесстыдном государстве****, для жизни нищей, грязной и бессмысленной, нельзя."* (Ulitskaya 2011)
> ['He realized long ago that one must not produce new people in this **inhuman and shameless state**, for a poor, filthy, and senseless life.']

In Gannon's translation, "inhuman and shameless" is not the *state*, but the *government*, which transforms the idea because governments rule for a few years, but the character sees these qualities as permanent for the USSR: "producing new human beings in this country, **ruled by an inhuman and shameless government**, in which they would be destined to a life of poverty, filth, and meaningless, was wrong" (Ulitskaya 2015).

This character also states that in the USSR, people can feel safe only if *they are* in power: "*Деньги жизнь сохраняли. Теперь не сохраняют. Теперь* ***власть*** *жизнь сохраняет"* (Ulitskaya 2011). ['Money used to save life. Now it doesn't. Now [being in] power saves life']. In the translated text it is the *authorities* that can save life, which undermines the idea that nobody is safe but for those in power: "Now it's only the **authorities** who can protect you and save your life" (Ulitskaya 2015).

Ulitskaya describes methods, employed by the KGB to "influence" one of the characters: "*Но на нее надавили, обещали лишить общежития, объявить проституткой и вообще* ***сгноить****"* (Ulitskaya 2011). ['*They had pressured her, threatened to kick her out of the dormitory, to expose her as a prostitute, and* ***to rot in jail***']. Instead of the last threat, the translator chose a more abstract and less ominous "to make her life generally miserable:" "*They had pressured her, though, threatening to kick her out of the dormitory, to expose her as a prostitute, and to* ***make her life generally miserable.***" (Ulitskaya 2015)

Vladimir Sorokin in his dystopia considers power relations in *future* Russia. For the main character the head of the country is the embodiment of the state power in its entirety. He says, 'I hate our mama for embarrassing the Sovereign, for undermining people's belief **in the Power**:' "*Ненавижу я маму нашу за то, что Государя позорит, веру народную **во Власть** подрывает"* (Sorokin 2007).

It is symptomatic that the writer uses capitalization to underline the reverential attitude: for the Russians, the state power is something that can belong only to the Tsar. In Gambrell's translation "*the power"* is replaced with the "*sovereign:*" "I hate our mama because she shames His Majesty, undermines the people's belief in their **sovereign**" (Sorokin 2011).

The main character, an oprichnik, describes how one of his colleagues mutilates their opponent after he has already defeated the latter:

> "*Погода сапожком фасонистым на грудь, нож из ножен вытягивает, да и по морде с размаху – чирк! Вот так. **Для науки**"* (Sorokin 2007)
> ['Pogoda puts his trendy boot on the [opponent's] chest, pulls his knife out of the sheaf and on the snout—with a swing—snick! That's it. **To make know**.']

It is important that the oprichnik explains the motivation behind such cruelty: *to make the opponent know* that he must not resist, for that is the basis of the state power in their country. But this explanation is replaced in the English translation ("*For the art of it"),* so it looks like a display of the character's *personal brutality*: "*Pogoda steps on his chest with his fashionable boot, draws a knife out of its sheath, and snick! Right across his face with a flourish! **For the art of it***" (Sorokin 2011).

The oprichnik hates his servant's unpleasant body odour, and he finds it natural to combat it with *birching* even if it does not help: "*Розги тут не помогают"* (Sorokin 2007) ['Birches don't help here']. In the context of the whole novel, this detail adds to the picture of the archaic and barbaric society, based on abuse of power. The translator adds *steam baths,* which implies the Russian tradition of using birch branches in baths as a kind of scrubbing, thus the oprichnik's attitude to corporal punishment as a *natural reaction* to his servant's imperfection is eliminated: "Birch branches and steam baths won't help" (Sorokin 2011).

Conclusion

As is known, the skewed representation does not necessarily result from a deliberate intention of a translator (see Mason 1994; Kolomiyets 2020) as "no agent of a translation can hope to anticipate its every consequence, the uses to which it is put, the interests served" (Venuti 1998: 3). Although the analysed misinterpretations are hardly the effect of deliberate manipulations on the translator's part, such modification of the

images of the Western and (post)-Soviet societies and power relations in the latter in the English translations have a number of consequences:

1) the image of the Western society in the target texts is more positive than in the source texts;
2) the image of the Soviet society is simplified and doesn't show the real heterogeneous character of the latter while the purely positive attitude of some Soviet citizens to their state is not reproduced;
3) the specific combination of the Soviet heritage, some democratic features and real political and economic power of government-aligned gangs, typical for the image of the post-Soviet RF created by the contemporary Russian authors, is not reproduced in the English translations;
4) the peculiar power relations in the source texts, which apparently do not correspond to the values of the target society, are modified in the English translations.

The Russo-Ukrainian war, and especially the full-scale invasion of 2022 made the issue of manipulation particularly topical, including skewed representation in translation. An analysis of today's research in Russian Translation Studies demonstrates absence of works dedicated to ideological manipulations in the translations among those published in the RF. Nevertheless, translation is viewed as "a weapon of ideological diversion" *against* Russia in the hands of Western media (e.g. Chanysheva 2017); the Russian literary critics and academics Andrei Manoilo (Ekspert 2015), Andrei Vorontsov (2008), Igor Zolotussky (2009) point out "cases of ideological manipulations" in Ukrainian translations while previously published Russian translations of contemporary Ukrainian literature are estimated as "ideological destruction fire at the Russian World" (Minakov 2011).[4] Thus, any modification of the images of Russia and the West in English translations, which can be viewed as manipulative, acquires special significance due to the current sharp confrontation. The skewed representation of the opposing societies in the Russian literary works, translated and published in the West, corresponds to the above-mentioned vision of translation as "a weapon of ideological diversion" against Russia, imposed in the Russian public and academic discourse, which makes such modifications absolutely undesirable, especially without notifying the reader on the changes introduced.

Equally significant, however, is the fact that due to such modifications, the readers of the English versions of the contemporary Russian novels may get a wrong impression of the (post)Soviet Russian society and their attitude towards the West, which does not promote better understanding between the nations and, in some cases, may even create more favourable conditions for the effective influence of the Russian propaganda.

4 For more details on the use of literary translation in the Russo-Ukrainian war, see Rudnytska (2022).

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