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REWRITING FRENCH CLASSIC LITERATURE IN THE STALIN ERA:
STRATEGIES AND METHODOLOGIES FROM PARATEXTS TO 'TEXTS' (WITH
A CASE STUDY ON THE SOVIET RECEPTION OF VICTOR HUGO, 1937–1952)¹

Summary

This essay investigates the reception and manipulation of French classic literature in the Soviet Union during the Stalin era (1930–1953). Drawing on André Lefevere's concept of translation as "rewriting" and Gérard Genette's theory of "paratexts", the study analyzes how prefaces and commentaries served as compulsory vehicles for mediating Western texts into the Soviet cultural sphere. This research, part of an Italian PRIN PNRR 2022 project, maps the strategies used by Soviet critics to adapt foreign canons to the shifting strictures of Socialist Realism. The paper first deconstructs the "Stalinist era" into distinct chronological phases, ranging from the debates on literary realism in the early 1930s to the anti-cosmopolitan campaigns of the late 1940s. Quantitative analysis of the *GICHL* and *Academia* publishing houses reveals a significant contraction in the variety of translated authors after the mid-1930s, as the political climate forced a retreat from modernism toward "safe" 19th-century classics. The core of the study focuses on Victor Hugo as a case study, comparing two key paratexts: Konstantin Loks's afterword to *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1937) and Ivan Anisimov's preface to Hugo's *Selected Works* (1952). Loks's 1937 text exemplifies a strategy of "dialectical oscillation", alternating between praise for Hugo's progressive politics and criticism of his "gothic" romanticism to negotiate his inclusion in the canon. Conversely, Anisimov's 1952 text reflects the rigid, anti-Western propaganda of the Cold War era. The earlier dialectic disappears, replaced by a "two-dimensional" celebration of Hugo as a revolutionary weapon against the bourgeois West, rendering the stylistic "struggle against Romanticism" obsolete. Ultimately, the essay argues that these paratexts transcend their liminal function. They shift from being subservient accompaniments to becoming independent, tendentious "texts" in their own right. Through this profound rewriting, Soviet critics often created a parallel literary reality, reshaping Western authors to mirror the regime's ideological requirements and generating a distinct corpus of "Soviet foreign literature".

Key words: *Paratexts, Soviet Literature, Reception of the Classics, Shaping Literary Canon, Translation Studies, Victor Hugo in URSS*

Kopsavilkums

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Atslēgvārdi: ...,

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In his work *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, André Lefevere noted that translation, like any other social and cultural activity, is subject to ideological and political pressures. This implies that, depending on the historical period and cultural context, certain texts are selected for translation over others, and translators are continually faced with crucial choices dictated by specific cultural (or socio-political) trends and systemic constraints.² Considering that translated texts do not exist *outside* of 'literary polysystems'³, it can be argued that it is precisely the *paratexts*⁴ (prefaces, postfaces, reviews, essays, etc.) that shape not only the reception of individual texts but also that of an entire corpus of foreign literature.⁵ By introducing foreign works into the target culture, paratexts *rewrite* them, manipulating and adapting books, authors, or entire canons to fit the ideological attitudes or frameworks of the *receiving society*. The present essay investigates such paratexts, with particular regard to the reception of French classic literature in the Stalin era. This work is one of the outcomes of the Italian National Research Project (PRIN PNRR 2022), focusing on the rewriting and manipulation of Western literatures (French, British, and Italian) in the USSR during the Stalinist period (1930–1953). The project aims to analyze how Soviet strategies and strict politico-cultural directives of the time influenced: