POETICS OF TITLES: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON LITERARY TRANSLATIONS FROM RUSSIAN INTO ITALIAN

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*I never really know the title of a book
until it's finished.*
Mary Wesley

Abstract: The present article is devoted to the poetics of literary titles and their manifold meanings and functions in literary works. Due to their formal, stylistic and/or semantic characteristics, titles represent one of the most challenging and controversial elements in literary translations. In fact, they often refer to specific cultural aspects, idiomatic expressions or *realia* coming from the original linguistic context, which are not so easy to reproduce in translation with the same effects. Moreover, in some cases, editors or publishers prefer to propose specific titles slightly or consistently different from the originals for "marketing" strategies. Starting from Gerard Genette's (1930-2018) seminal study on the topic, we will focus on some titles of Italian translations of Russian literary works of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, aiming to analyse the reasons underlying different choices. We will also propose reflections on the complex intertextual and cross-cultural dynamics connected to literary titles' history and their translation processes.

Key words: literary titles, poetics, Russian literature, Italian translations, cross-cultural and intertextual dynamics

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, in the domain of literary works titles have always had a peculiar, hybrid and complex nature, which in recent years has attracted the attention of scholars from different countries and disciplinary fields (Bobadilla Pérez 2007; Bogolembska 2004; Briffa and Caruana 2009; Castelli 2020; Lodge 1992; Roy 2008; Weinrich 2000). A title can be used to identify a work, put it in a certain context, convey a summary of its contents, or arouse the reader's curiosity. As pointed out in several studies, literary titles may be considered both elements of the formal structure of a text – at the crossroads of linguistics, rhetoric and stylistic characterisation – and metonymies of its semantic contents. In fact, even though titles are integral parts of the whole body of fictional

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works, from a graphic and aesthetic point of view they also belong to what Genette defined as paratextual elements, such as epigraphs, prefaces, subtitles, intertitles and notes (Genette 1997: 7).

A title has got a dual function in the eyes of readers: it represents at the same time a formal 'threshold' (i.e. a concrete 'transition' into the text) and a symbolic clue to its inner meanings (that is to say, a semantic 'transaction'). At a general level, the relevance of titles as integral parts of literary works needs to be underlined: since the whole headline is unmediated by a narrative voice, it may be, in concrete terms, as close as we come within that text to an authorial voice. This is the reason why in the present paper we talk of 'poetics' of titles (Kellman 1975: 158-160), because in many cases they convey and condense in a few words meaningful thematic instances connected to the poetics of the author. As Bogolembska remarks,

> "Заглавие, хотя по сушеству принадлежит к идейно-тематическому уровню текста, оно – как элемент *inventio* – вызывает интерес также и с точки зрения риторического исскуства слова. Являясь неотъемлемой/интегральной частью текста, оно называет и символически представляет его содержание. Кроме представляющей функции, заглавие выполняет также импрессивную функцию (*persuasio*) – в нем может проявляться индивидуальная оценочная позиция автора, может оно аппеллировать к определенной иерархии ценностей, к сфере чувств и эмоций."
> ["Even if titles essentially belong to the conceptual-thematic level of a text, as elements of *invention* they attract interest also from the point of view of the rhetorical art of the word. Being an integral/inseparable part of the text, they name and symbolically represent its contents. In addition to their representative function, titles also perform an argumentative function (*persuasio*): they may express the individual evaluative position of the author, appealing to a certain hierarchy of values or to the realm of feelings and emotions."] (Bogolembska 2004: 7; my translation, *I.R.*[1])

We can identify different stages of development in the origins and historical evolution of literary titles. As it is known ancient works, like those of the Old Testament, were not realized by single authors. Consequently, they did not have proper title lines as we intend them today, and were usually referred to by their first words (*incipit*). When books were written on a scroll (or roll), as in the case of the Torah, it was not common and rather impractical to distinguish an initial page, because it was rolled up, and would not be readable unless unrolled. For that reason, scrolls were marked with external identifying decorations, which under certain aspects can be considered as the oldest precursors of titles. Later on in cultural history books were gradually composed on codices, a stack of pages bound together. Among other reasons, codices replaced scrolls because they were more comfortable to use: the appearance of a 'title page,' then, is directly connected with bound books having a set of pages. In Ancient Greek literature works had generally one-word titles that did not coincide with the initial words of the works, but alluded to toponyms (*Iliad* as the 'story of Ilion'), to the names of the main characters (*Odysseia*)[2] or to a sheer genre indication (*Stories*). The Latin word *titulus/tituli*, ('label' or

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, all the English translations in the present work are mine, *I. R.*

[2] As Maiorino observes, «whether the narratives be popular or aristocratic, novelistic characters often bear names that stand out as points of entry into the reading of literary texts» (Maiorino 2008: 34).

'inscription'), was originally employed to designate labels or captions naming figures or subjects in art, which were commonly added in classical and medieval works and are still present in Eastern Orthodox icons. In particular, the term described some conventional inscriptions on marble or stone that listed the honours of an individual, or that identified boundaries in the Roman Empire[3]. Then, at least since Western Renaissance most literary works became the product of single authors. The concept progressively took hold, but the authorship of books which were (or were believed to be) non-fiction was not considered as the same of a novel one. The notion of intellectual property did not exist; in fact, copying another writer's work was considered normal. The invention of printing changed the economics of the literary market, making it possible for the owner of a manuscript to make money selling printed copies. Therefore, authorship became more important, and the name (or pseudonym) of the author would appear on front pages. To make the content of a book easy to ascertain there also came the custom of printing on the cover page a title, i. e. a few words in larger letters than the body, and thus readable from a greater distance. Sometimes the headline continued at length, becoming a sort of 'advertisement' for the work which a possible purchaser would see in a bookshop (see Gibbons 2010: 12-22).

2.   Evolution, Main Functions and Classification of Literary Titles

In a diachronical perspective, different social, cultural and stylistic trends have deeply influenced titles composition techniques. In the Eighteenth century, for example, were on fashion long titles-summaries, which in many cases contained explanations, analepses or anticipations of the narratives; as we already remarked, they often coincided with literary genre indications (Zyrjanova 2014). In the nineteenth and especially in the twentieth century, title lines gradually became shorter and more "impressive," with a recurrent usage of hyperonims, *Leitmotives* or figures of speech. Titles-anthroponyms were still common (let us think of *Asja* by I. S. Turgenev, 1858), as well as titles-questions (*Chto delat'?*, *What is to be Done?* by N. G. Chernishevskij, 1863). On the whole, literary headings tended to be composed of symbolic key-words that reflected more directly the main images/thematic issues of the works or authors' free creativity on a stylistic level:

> "More legitimate, in theory, and quite inevitable, was the abbreviation of the long summary titles characteristic of the neoclassical, or perhaps especially of the eighteenth century. One could not these titles quoted *in extenso* in a conversation or even in request, and their shortening was undoubtedly planned, if not intended by the authors. To tell the truth, some of those original titles lend themselves easily to analysis into elements of differing status and various importance." (Genette 1997: 47)

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[3] A *titulus pictus*, for example, was a merchant's mark or other commercial inscription. It is interesting to notice that in modern English the current meaning of "book title" comes from this earlier artistic substratum, just as the legal connotation of the term derives from plainer record inscriptions.

With the affirmation of the principles of socialist realism, in Soviet times prevailed a choice of titles with a clear social orientation (as *Razgrom*, *The Rout*, 1927, and *Molodaja gvardija*, *The Young Guard* 1946, rev. ed. 1951 by A. A. Fadeyev, 1901-1956), and an ever-growing tendency to use acronyms or abbreviations often connected with political slogans. Nowadays, contemporary authors are more inclined towards symbolic titles, which may contain veiled or direct literary quotations, intertextual allusions and/or metaphors (consider, for example, *Generation 'P'* by V. O. Pelevin, published in 1999 and translated into both English and Italian as *Babylon*).

In his insightful study, Genette identified three major functions of the title: designation, indication of the content, and seduction of the public (Genette 1997: 51). In the last years, in line with reader response criticism approaches, several studies have also evidenced informative, instructive, manipulative, provoking and anticipating functions of headlines (see Karrer 1991). Anyway, in literary and reading practice a title is much more than a book's name but, further still, it is much more than the sum of its single functions. The word title, in fact, also evokes a complex of expectations, assumptions and ideals: titles should be relatively short in length; they should be discrete and autonomous; they should occupy positions prior to the text itself (the front cover, the spine, the half title-page, the title-page and the top of the first page, for example). Literary heading lines, in particular, should relate to and describe the work they entitle; they should offer, as Umberto Eco's suggests, "a key to interpretation"; they should securely identify the work, by not changing from copy to copy and only occasionally from edition to edition (Gibbons 2010: 2). As contemporary researchers highlight, today literary titles have a multi-functional potential. In fact, a headline may have numerous and varied functions in relation to the text, resulting from diverse considerations. One of the major and most common ones is identification: more than any other paratextual element, titles reveal and name concrete books (or films), they impress themselves in readers' minds and even when they are misleading, they tend to catalyse memory and interest. Beyond this, any headline has a dimension of focusing, summarizing and representing the plot, the characters, key thematic instances and in some cases also the formal structure of a work. Fisher especially underlined the 'representative' function of titles: in his view, in fact, they «are names for a purpose, but not merely for the purpose of identification and designation, in spite of the important practical role which indexical names play in the designative process. The unique purpose of titling is hermeneutical: titles are names which function as guides to interpretation» (Fisher 1984: 288). The 'focusing' feature, instead, has been highlighted by Levinson:

> "What a focusing title does is to select from among the main elements of core content one theme to stand as the leading one of the work. […] What a focusing title does then is suggest which of the contending themes should be given central place in interpreting the work and organizing one's appreciation of it." (Levinson 1985: 44)

On a theoretical level, the term 'titology' was first coined in 1977 by the comparatist and literary critic Harry Levin[4]. Literary studies were among the first to focus on the significance of a title in establishing the stylistic and thematic developments of the

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[4] H. Levin, "The Title as a Literary Genre," *Modern Language Review* 72 (1977): xxiii–xxxv.

following pages of a work. This term has been used in the scientific community for forty years now to define the multi-faceted approaches and critical discussion on the complex nature of titles (Maiorino 2008: 3-4). It is important to note that, in the Slavic cultural context, the writer Sigizmund Krzhizhanovskij (1887-1950) devoted an insightful critical essay to the poetics of titles (1931), which anticipated at least thirty-five years Western theoretical observations. As a real forerunner in the studies on the topic, he analysed the interdependent relationships between titles, text and paratext, the connections between titles and the literary genesis of a work, authors' complicated relations with their headlines and how the formulation of certain titles could influence readers' reception (Krzhizhanovskij 2006). As further evidence of the transversal interest in the subject and of its current relevance, it is worth mentioning two international conferences on the theme organised in Russia in the last years[5].

As we already said, a classical title often constitutes a veritable description of the book, an effective summary of its action, a definition of its subject, etc. In Genette's classification, a literary title is usually composed of three sections, which may be all present or not on the front page: the actual 'title-line,' the 'subtitle,' and a 'genre indication' (Genette 1997: 33). Much like a façade to a building, the title page metaphorically represents the frontispiece of a literary work, a sign that offers diverse perspectives and demands interpretation. As Weinrich observes, in general the titles of scientific works tend to be longer and less polysemic than literary ones, because they usually contain the key words of the text (Weinrich 2000: 10-11). In relation to their main functions and formal characteristics (Zyrjanova 2014: 293), we can distinguish different types of literary titles:

- titles that coincide with the names and surnames of the protagonists (*Anna Karenina*, *Netochka Nezvanova*, *Oblomov*, *Moll Flanders*)[6]. On some occasions, the chosen proper names evoke clear intertextual references (*Ulysses* by J. Joyce)
- headlines which include (or are made of) toponyms (*Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*, *Moscow-Petushki*, *Petushinskij prolom* [The Breach of Petushicha])
- thematic titles, which allude to one or some of the *Leitmotivs* present in the text (*War and Peace*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *The Thaw*, *Life and Destiny*);

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[5] See "Vserossijskaja nauchnaja konferencija *Zaglavie i zagolovochnyj kompleks v literature, muzyke, kino, plasticheskich iskusstvach*," Moskva, Uchebno-nauchnaja laboratorija mandel'chtamovedenija RGGU, Otdel teorii IMLI im. A. M. Gor'kogo RAN, 3-4 aprelja 2014 goda and Mezhdunarodnaja nauchnaja konferencija iz cikla «*Fenomen Zagliavija*» po lestnice zaglavij, Moskva, Institut filologii i istorii RGGU, Uchebno-nauchnaja laboratorija mandel'shtamovedenija RGGU, Otdel teorii IMLI RAN, 4-5 aprelja 2019 goda.

[6] In general, these types of titles do not create difficulties in translations, as they are usually transliterated and preserved as they are from the source language into the target one. However, among other Italian translations of Dostoevsky's unfinished novel, for his version Rinaldo Küfferle (Torino: UTET, 1956) chose to translate the title as *L'Orfana* (The Orphan), and the name of the protagonist as *Anna*, instead of using the diminutive *Netochka*, to save his readers supposed difficulties of reading and pronunciation.

- oxymoronic (or antonymic) titles, whose key words really are or only seem to be in direct conflict with the contents of the work. In this case, the title line may hide ironic or parodic intentions, or even a sort of 'provocation' to contemporary readers on the part of the writer[7]: *Zoo or Letters not about Love*, *Watermark* ("*Foundations of the Incurable*"), *Dom Pushkina*;

- rhematic titles usually contain literary genre indications in the wake of classicist literary works of the Eighteenth century: *Oda na vzjatie Khotina* (*Ode on the Seizure of Khotin*), *Yevgeniy Onegin, a Novel in verse*, *Le Rouge et le Noir. Chronique du XIX*ᵉ *siècle*, *Dvoynik. Peterburgskaya poema* (*The Double: A Petersburg Poem*)[8];

- headings that contain literary quotations/intertextual allusions (*Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Where Angels fear to Tread*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*) (on this aspect, see Karrer 1991);

- titles which contain proverbs or idiomatic expressions, as A. N. Ostrovskij's ones (1823-1886): *Pravda chorosho, a schaste luchshe (Truth is Good, but Happiness is Better)*, *Ne v svoi sani ne sadis'* (*A Baker Shouldn't be a Butter-Head*), *Ne tak zhivi, kak chochetsja* (*Do not live, as you would like to*);

- 'transparent' *vs.* 'opaque' titles: the last ones may hide a kind of Chinese box game of references of the author with the readers. In the headline of the two-volumes collection of thoughts *Opavshie list'ja* (*Fallen Leaves*) by Vasily Rozanov, for example, the opacity is connected to the morphologic affinity, in Russian, between the words *list'ja* (leaves) and *listy* (sheets of paper), deliberately alluded to by the writer in this title-line, but not easy to express in translation[9]. Let us also think about *Kotik Letaev* (literally "Little-Tomcat-Fly"), which is the proper name of the three-year-old main character of Belyj's novel, but is also the childish and playful pseudonym that the writer used between 1917 and 1922[10].

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[7] In these cases the title is opposed to the overall meanings of the work; the writer deliberately creates a deviation from the denotative plan and an effect of estrangement to provoke readers' reactions. The conflict can be real or apparent, it can have satirical character, or the images evoked by the headline may correspond to a deeper, symbolic reading of the text.

[8] As we already observed, while in the Eighteenth-century literary genre indications often coincided with titles-lines themselves, nowadays this element, if present, tends to appear as a secondary or sub-title.

[9] It is interesting to notice that in Russian the term *list'ja* may mean both "leaves" and "sheets," even though nowadays it is more commonly used referring to leaves. Vasily Rozanov (1856-1919) effectively wrote his aphoristic fragments on tiny leaflets of paper, which in their volatility and fragility symbolically reminded autumn leaves: on the topic see C. De Lotto, "…«come ti siedi a scrivere una cosa»… Cose solitarie e fugaci di Vasilij Rozanov," in *Forme brevi, frammenti, intarsi*, edited by S. Genetti, *Primo quaderno del Dottorato in Letterature Straniere e Scienze della Letteratura*, Università degli Studi di Verona, Verona: Fiorini, 2006, 178-179.

[10] In his translation of the work, Janecek remarks: «Kotik's name as a whole has been designed to be meaningful as well. Although, as we later learn in the sequel, his given name is supposed to be Nikolai, the nickname for which would be Kolya or a variety of other diminutives, he never refers to himself or is referred to in the novel as anything other than Kotik (Little Tomcat) or some diminutive of this pet

Even from this short and non-exhaustive list, we can perceive the rich and articulated network of cultural references displayed by literary titles, in many cases closely interwoven with the poetics of the works they are selected to represent (Andreeva, Ivanchenko, Orlickij 2005). In Maiorino's words,

"As the most enduring of literary microstructures, titles are the etymologies of literature. I would like to believe that, when it comes to practical criticism, titles provide a degree of accuracy in matters of literary interpretation that is comparable to the certainty that DNA provides to our understanding of biological codes." (Maiorino 2008: 5)

For a novelist choosing a title may be an essential part of the creative process, bringing into sharper focus what the work is supposed to be about. Some writers have difficulty in finding an adequate headline and change it more than once along the way[11], 'playing' with word meanings and sounds until they reach an effective synthesis. Some others, instead, "build" around a specific title line, concept or image they have in mind the main contents of the following text. In both cases, then, a title may be rejected by editors or publishers because it is considered unattractive to readers, or because it does not respond to marketing strategies (Castelli 2020: 36). It is a rather frequent incident today, which differentiates contemporary literature from ancient and modern ones; in fact, as Lodge remarks, apart from their cultural value, literary works are books, that is, material 'products' intended for sale: "novels have always been commodities as well as works of art, and commercial considerations can affect titles, or cause them to be changed." (Lodge 1992: 195). In this perspective, along with cover pages, titles are conceived as a sort of 'bait' to seduce readers and influence their initial reception of the work.

3.   Russian Literary Titles and Their Italian Translations: Case Studies

Due to their dense linguistic and semantic mixture, literary titles are one of the most complex and problematic elements in translation. In Eco's view, translation itself is seen as a constant, creative and multi-level negotiation process:

"Il concetto di fedeltà ha a che fare con la persuasione che la traduzione sia una delle forme dell'interpretazione e che debba sempre mirare, sia pure partendo dalla sensibilità e dalla cultura del lettore, a ritrovare non dico l'intenzione dell'autore, ma *l'intenzione del testo*,

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name his mother actually used for him. […] His surname, close in structure to his actual surname, Bugaev, replaces the root *bugai* (stood bull), which is contextually inappropriate, with the root *let* (to fly), thus allowing for the sprouting of spiritual wings. And this is only one instance of the significant use of root meanings. Bely the child and the adult plays with them constantly, excavating them for their primeval meanings and bringing these subterranean meanings to the surface, sometimes in new compounds.» (G. J. Janecek, "Introduction: From the Depths of Memory" to A. Bely, *Kotik Letaev*, Evanston, Illinois: Nothwestern University Press, XV-XVI).

[11] Genette defines these different options as of "pre-titles" or "working titles": even if they are temporary versions, in most cases they are never completely insignificant, because they tend to highlight several thematic aspects inevitably sacrificed by the definitive title. This "pre-paratext," therefore, is legitimately part of the subsequent paratext. (Genette 1997: 42).

quello che il testo dice o suggerisce in rapporto alla lingua in cui è espresso e al contesto culturale in cui è nato."

["The concept of fidelity is connected to the conviction that translation is one of the forms of interpretation and that, although it starts from the culture and sensitivity of readers, it should always aim at rediscovering I do not say the intention of the author, but *the intention of the text*, what it says or suggests in relation to the language in which it is expressed and to the cultural context in which it was born."] (Eco 2003: 16)

In basic terms, translating means making the text understandable to a different language reader. If every act of translation implies a deep insight into the linguistic structures, stylistic devices and meanings of a work, one of the translator's main aims should be to reproduce as much as possible in the target audience the cognitive processes evoked by the author in the source audience (Bobadilla Pérez 2007: 119). In other words, if we want a new reading public to understand the semiotic universe of the original, we have to 'transform' it by adapting it to the semiotic context of these readers. Linguistic structures, pragmatics, and style in literary prose are closely related, and the translator must be conscious of their relationship. Syntactic differences between the source text and the target one must be kept to a minimum to produce a translated text that is very close stylistically to the original (Viezzi 2013: 376-378). In addition to this, it seems very clear that literary style and culture are often interdependent and that literary style reflects the poetics of an author/character. Understanding style can help the translator reconstruct the author's underlying cognitive aspect, which is influenced by an array of factors that include culture. So when we speak of cultural elements in literature, we must consider how they are reflected both in the original text style and in the target text. There is no single rule to rely on for **source-oriented or target-oriented translations,** but it is preferable to use the two criteria alternately, depending on the concrete problems posed by the text:

"tradurre vuole dire capire il sistema interno di una lingua e la struttura di un testo dato in quella lingua, e costruire un doppio del sistema testuale che, *sotto una certa descrizione*, possa produrre effetti analoghi nel lettore, sia sul piano semantico e sintattico che su quello stilistico, metrico, fonosimbolico, e quanto agli effetti passionali a cui il testo fonte tendeva."

["to translate means to understand the internal system of a language and the structure of a given text in that language, and build a double of the textual system that, *to a certain extent*, may have similar effects on the readers, both on the syntactic and semantic levels and on the stylistic, metric and phono-symbolic levels. This also concerns the reproduction of the emotive effects to which the source text tended."] (Eco 2003: 16)

To the hybrid and complex nature of translation, the specific semiotic essence of titles has to be added (Malingret 1998: 398), usually characterised by a semantic gap, a "linguistic deviation" that gives them the effect of 'mini-engraved logos.' As Caramitti effectively points out, in a generalising perspective, the possible approaches to the translation of isolated literary titles may be traced back to three main strategies: a tendency to conservatism and non-intervention, a maximally fluid insertion of the

translation both in the morphosyntax of the target language and in the syntagmatic continuum of the text or a complete remodulation of the title in the target language (Caramitti 2020: 2). How is it possible to preserve the tangled web of formal and semantic associations of original titles in another language? Which criteria do usually guide translators coping with titles? What does get irreparably lost?[12] To answer these questions, we will analyse some famous headlines of Russian literary works of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries and examples of their Italian translations, which provide useful examples of different choices and orientations.

The work widely recognised as Nikolaj Gogol's (1809-1852) masterpiece was published in Moscow in 1842 with the complete title *Pochozhdenija Chichikova, ili Mertvye dushi. Poèma* (*The Wanderings of Chichikov, or Dead Souls. Poem*). The first part of this co-validating headline[13] focusing on the protagonist of the prose poem was imposed by censorship, which found blasphemous the thematic juxtaposition between the immortality of the soul and the image of death. In fact, in Russian the expression '*dusha*' was also used to define a peasant servant of the land, and to count serfs (and people in general). As it is well known, the plot of the work relies on the linguistic and cultural *realia* of the 'dead souls' (i.e., 'dead serfs') who are still accounted for in property registers. On another plan, the profound interconnection between life and death at the centre of the title is a fundamental trait of Gogol's poetics: the choice of such a formula also refers to the 'dead souls' of his characters, all of which represent different aspects of *poshlost'* (which can be rendered as 'commonplace, moral and spiritual vulgarity,' with overtones of middle-class pretentiousness, fake significance and philistinism). The addition of the first part of the title suggested a satirical, picaresque interpretation of the novel equally present in the text, but far from the author's inner conception[14]. In fact, with all its polysemic and symbolic thickness, Gogol's thematic label expressed the absence of boundaries between life and death in his creative vision[15]. This aspect emerges in the recent Italian translation of the prose poem by the writer Paolo Nori (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009), who, differently from previous versions, proposes only

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[12] The major risks may be related to the loss of polysemy or of ironic/satirical sub- or intertextual implications present in the original titles. On this topic see Orlickij: 2011.

[13] In his analysis of titles different structures and typologies, Genette defines "co-validating" (or integrated) headlines (with a first and a second, distinct, part) the ones graphically divided by the conjunction 'or,' which in his view connects much more than it actually separates (Genette 1997: 34).

[14] In fact, since its first successful publication Gogol's work has been known both by scholars and common readers, and mostly translated, only with the shortened authorial title *Dead Souls. Poem*, without the previous slightly misleading part imposed by tsarist censorship. This seems to confirm what Genette defines as the "erosion of the title" through readers' reception: describing a number of examples, the French literary critic considers that, in general terms, the main responsible for this phenomenon is the posthumous reading public (Genette 1997: 45).

[15] In general Gogol's titles, as Rozanov rightly observed, are characterized by constant, recurring elements that also serve as marvellous and "visual" auto-definitions of his works. Consider, for example, *Arabesques*, an image that effectively reminds the writer's style, so rich in involutions, ramifications and lyrical digressions.

Anime morte (*Dead Souls*) in the title, without the definite article 'le' (the), that draws readers' attention more on the concrete *realia* of the serfs[16]. As Caramitti observes,

> "ogni citazione occasionale di titolo si inserisce in un contesto, e molto spesso la sua traduzione è interamente funzionale a quel contesto, e in parte maggiore o minore a quel contesto è demandata. Elementi integrativi e di raccordo che non possono trovare spazio nel titolo vengono trasferiti in posizione di contiguità sintagmatica non immediata. In quest'ottica, prima di tradurre si pensa a cosa serve quella traduzione, a cosa va finalizzata e indirizzata. Un giornalista o un divulgatore potrebbe voler far comparire nomi o toponimi che motivano l'inserimento, chi scrive dell'intertestualità cercherà di farla emergere, se si è sottolineata una determinata caratteristica dell'autore o del testo, sarà istintivo provare a ribadirla nel titolo."

> ["each occasional title citation fits into a context, and very often its translation is entirely functional to that context, and to a greater or lesser extent is linked to that context. Supplementary and connecting elements that cannot be included in the title are transferred to a position of non-immediate syntagmatic contiguity. In this perspective, before translating we think about what that translation is for, to what it is aimed and addressed. A journalist or populariser may want to bring up names or toponyms that motivate the insertion, who writes of intertextuality will try to make it emerge, if one has underlined a certain characteristic of the author or text, it will be instinctive to attempt to reiterate it in the title."] (Caramitti 2020: 3)

Another meaningful example for our analysis is *Vojna i mir* (*War and Peace*, 1863-1869), the title of the world-famous epic novel by Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910). Also due to the long and complex creative process of his major works, the writer confessed in a letter (1870) that he always struggled to find adequate titles, and that he usually put definitive ones only in the end. It is known that the first heading of *War and Peace* was *Tri pora* (Three Epochs), which referred to the three historical periods evoked in the novel (1812, 1825 and 1856); the subtitle *From 1804 to 1814* illustrated the actual timespan of the plot. Then the first part of the work was published in serial form in the journal "Russkij vestnik" ("The Russian Messenger," 1865-1867), with the title shortened to *The Year 1805*[17]. A later complete version was titled with the idiomatic expression *Vse chorosho, chto chorosho konchaetsja* (*All is Well that Ends Well*), which can also be considered a literary quotation, since its English equivalent was chosen by Shakespeare as the headline of one of his comedies (*All is Well that Ends Well*, 1823)[18]. For what concerns the final thematic label, which appeared on the front page of the 1869 volume edition of the work, it gave rise to a series of controversies in literary debate that still continue today. In fact, despite the semantic relevance of the two oximoric concepts 'war' and 'peace' to the contents of the whole text, other interpretations have been proposed. As it

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[16] Among the other Italian versions, see the critical edition N. V. Gogol,' *Le anime morte*, trans. and edited by S. Prina, Milano: Mondadori, 1996 and N. V. Gogol,' *Le anime morte*, trans. and edited by N. Marcialis, Roma: la Biblioteca dell'Espresso, 2013.

[17] This first version has been translated and published into Italian as *1805. La prima redazione di «Guerra e Pace."* Introduction by P. C. Bori, trans. by G. Miozzi, Venezia: Marsilio, 2001.

[18] On the genesis and the significance of Shakespeare's title in relation to the text of the play see https://www.shakespearestudyguide.com/AllWell.html.

is known, owing to their common etymological origin, the Russian words for 'peace' (pre-1918 миръ) and 'universe, human world' (pre-1918 міръ) were homonyms, and since the 1918 reforms which abolished the grapheme 'i' they have been spelt identically. The term originally spelt міръ, besides, in Russian also means community, and refers in particular to the ancient rural village one (*obshchina*), but it can also be used to indicate a nation or a whole world intended as 'human community'[19]. So, as some scholars claim, there are high probabilities that the original manuscript title would be correctly intended and translated as "War and the World," and that Tolstoy initially intended to maintain the ambivalence of meaning of the word, which better expressed the variety of themes, ideas and images that he wanted his novel to embrace[20]. However, as it results from bio-bibliographic sources between 1868 and 1869 the writer changed the spelling into 'миръ'[21], and he himself translated the title into French as *La guerre et la paix*. Tolstoy knew several languages, including English, and was often consulted by translators; so other critics point out that if he truly meant the headline to be "War and Society" he would have suggested this version. The novel arrived for the first time in the Italian cultural context in 1891, in the Fratelli Treves edition translated as *Guerra e pace* (*War and Peace*). Only three Italian versions of the early Twentieth century added the determinate articles 'the' (*La guerra e la pace*), while all the numerous others reflect the Russian definitive line with no articles[22]. The formal structure of the headline itself is characterised by the presence of the conjunction 'and,' which indicates at the same time the complementarity of the two words, 'war' and 'peace,' and their opposition. The two concepts interact with each other, and their interaction symbolically shows us the concrete reality in which human masses act in the text: even the soldiers of the army, in fact, are depicted as single human beings. In this case the linearity of the title corresponds to the "horizontal" rhythm that pervades the epic novel and makes it similar to a large fresco. It is interesting to note that in an insightful study on the genesis of Tolstoy's work based on several Moscow archive materials, the Italian scholar Raffaella Faggionato, after a fascinating *excursus* on manuscripts, hermetic texts and Masonic rituals which

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[19] In our view, this "community" meaning of the word becomes particularly apparent when Kutuzov encourages his troops to me merciful to the starved French prisoners, and when the Russian soldiers are depicted as being kind and understanding to captain Morel and his servant: a soldier says that they are also human beings and that even weeds grow on familiar ground. This emphasizes Tolstoy's poetic conception of the whole world as a close-knit community of brothers.

[20] Many others think, instead, that the 'world' meaning is only a sort of urban legend probably fuelled by the Soviet popular TV quiz show *Chto? Gde? Kogda?* (*What? Where? When?*), that in 1982 (and later on also in 2000) presented as "correct" answer the 'world/society' variant, based on a 1913 edition of *War and Peace* with a typo in one of its pages.

[21] It is important to underline that the actual meaning of the word '*mir*' in Russian is quite different from its lexical equivalents in most Western languages (peace, paix, pace): it has more to do with an "absence of active conflicts" which closely reminds the *Pax Romana* (*Roman Peace*, also called *Pax Augusta*), a roughly 200-year-long period of Roman history which is defined as a golden age of increased as well as sustained Roman imperialism, relative peace and order, prosperous stability, hegemonial power and regional expansion, despite a number of wars and revolts at the boundaries.

[22] Among the best and most recent Italian versions, see *Guerra e pace*, edited and transl. by G. Pacini, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014; *Guerra e pace*, transl. by E. Guercetti, Torino: Einaudi, 2018.

have nurtured the creative imagination of the writer, proposes to interpret and translate the title as "*La guerra e l'universo umano*" (The War and the Human Universe)[23].

Also *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (*Crime and Punishment*, 1866), title of one of the most famous among Fyodor Dostoevsky's (1821-1881) works, has a similar linear structure. In Italy it is one of the most known and translated Russian novels ever, and all Italian editions present in the frontpage *Delitto e castigo* (*Crime and Punishment*)[24], a title widely familiar to Italian readers and in force since the first 1889 version[25]. However, manifold scholars pointed out that it should be more adequately rendered as *Il delitto e la pena* (*The Crime and the Penalty)*[26], because the original Russian headline was closely connected to the title of the famous treatise by Cesare Beccaria *Dei delitti e delle pene* (*On Crimes and Punishments*, 1765), translated in Russian as *O prestuplenijach i nakazanijach* in 1803, and then taken up by V. Popov for his essay *Prestuplenija I nakazanija. Eskizy iz istorii ugolovnogo prava* (*Crimes and Punishments. Sketches of History of Criminal Law*)[27]. The essay was published in Dostoevsky's journal «*Vremja*» («*Time*») in 1863, while in Russia there was much public debate on judicial reform. The question, therefore, lies in the choice of the second noun ("castigo" instead of "pena"), that prevents readers from grasping the reference to Beccaria. This is due to the fact that the first Italian translation of the novel was conducted not on the Russian original, but on the previous French one (*Le crime et le châtiment*, 1884). The Russian word *nakazanie* can be rendered in French both as '*peine*' and '*châtiment*,' but the translator V. Derély did not perceive the intertextual reference, and chose the option that in Italian may only correspond to 'castigo'[28]. It is not irrelevant, because, as we already remarked, paratextual elements' functions are not neutral, and if the complex passage from 'crime'

[23] See R. Faggionato, *L'alambicco di Lev Tolstoj. «Guerra e pace» e la massoneria russa*, Roma: Viella, 2015.

[24] With its twenty-six versions to date, *Crime and Punishment* is one of the most translated foreign literary works into Italian. Among the best Italian translations, see *Delitto e castigo*, transl. by S. Prina, Milano: Mondadori, 1994, new edition 2021; *Delitto e castigo*, transl. by E. Guercetti, Torino: Einaudi, 2013 and *Delitto e castigo*, transl. by D. Rebecchini, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2013 [this edition received the International Translation Award "Italia-Russia attraverso i secoli" ("Italy-Russia through the centuries")].

[25] F. M. Dostoevskij, *Il delitto e il castigo (Raskolnikoff). Romanzo*, Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1889. As can be easily seen, the headline presents after the first part the name of the protagonist transliterated following the French norms of the time and the rhematic genre indication "novel," which is a shortened version of what appeared in the original.

[26] See the introduction to *Delitto e castigo. Romanzo in sei parti e un epilogo*, Introduction and transl. by C. G. De Michelis, Roma: Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, 2004, vi. The slavist De Michelis chose to reproduce the complete original rhematic headline chosen by Dostoevsky, adding the subtitle "*Novel in six parts and an epilogue*."

[27] Cf. E. Gherbezza, *Dei delitti e delle pene nella traduzione di Michail M. Sherbatov*, Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2007, xi.

[28] On this topic see also G. Baselica, *Alla scoperta del «genio russo,"* Tradurre, spring 2011, https://rivistatradurre.it/tradurre-dal-russo-2/. It is not always the title of the first translation to assert itself in the target context: let us think, for example, about *L'armata a cavallo* (*The Mounted Army*: cf. *L'Armata a cavallo e altri racconti*, transl. by R. Poggioli, Torino: Frassinelli, 1932), which established itself in the Italian reception as the most familiar translation of Isaac Babel's (1894-1940) *Konarmija* (*Red Cavalry*, 1926) at the expense of the previous *L'armata di cavalleria* (*The Cavalry Army*).

to 'punishment' represents a major theme of the novel[29], in any case it should not be already set out in the title (Fedorova, Bolognani 2015: 82-84).

An example of contamination and close interrelations between the Italian and Russian cultural contexts is represented by the famous children's tale *Pinocchio* (1883) by Carlo Collodi (pseudonym of the Florentine writer and journalist Carlo Lorenzini, 1826-1890) and its Russian re-elaboration by Aleksey Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1883-1945). A first (1881) part of Collodi's story came out in serial form with the title *La storia di un burattino* (*The Story of a Puppet*) on the children's weekly magazine "Giornale per i bambini' ('Children's Magazine'). In the following months, also thanks to several young readers' letters addressed to the editorial staff, the writer was induced to widen and continue the work, and the new episodes came out in the magazine until 25th January 1883. The whole text was then published as a single book in February 1883 with the definitive title *The Adventures of Pinocchio. The Story of a Puppet*[30], and had great success. Collodi's novel was translated into Russian for the first time in 1906 and aroused a lot of interest, so much that in the first twenty-five years of the century several other Russian translations appeared. A. Tolstoy himself collaborated on a translation-adaptation of the novel that came out only in Berlin in 1924[31]. Due to his deep knowledge and fondness for the Italian fairy-tale, in 1935 the Soviet writer devoted himself to what was initially meant to be a new translation of it, but which soon became a work in its own right. His version of the fairy-tale was published at first in the children's magazine

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[29] The author himself wrote about it in detail in a famous letter to M. N. Katkov, editor of the Moscow journal «The Russian Messenger»: F. M. Dostoevskij, *Pis'ma*, 98. M. N. Katkovu 10(22)—15(27) sentjabrja 1865, Weisbaden, in F. M. Dostoevskij, *Sobranie sochinenij v 15 tomach*, SPb: Nauka, 1996, 273-276.

[30] C. Collodi, *Le avventure di Pinocchio. Storia di un burattino* (*The Adventures of Pinocchio. The Story of a Puppet*), illustrated by E. Mazzanti, Firenze: Felice Paggi, 1883.

[31] The first Russian translation of *Pinocchio* was made by Kamill Danini, and was published in Saint Petersburg in 1906 on the children's weekly magazine «Zadushevnoe slovo» [«Sincere Word», 1, pp. 14-16] with the title *Priklyucheniya derevyannogo malchika* [The Adventures of a Wooden Boy]. Later this version came out in volume by O. M. Volf with the title *PINOKKIO. Prikljucheniya derevyannogo malchika* (Saint Petersburg, 1908), and recently it has been re-issued by Eksmo Press (Moscow, 2014). In 1907 a second translation of Collodi's novel was published in Moscow with the title *Priklyucheniya Fistashki. Zhizneopisanie Petrushki-marionetki* [Pistachio's Adventures. The Life of a Petrushka-Marionette], realized by S. E. Pavlovsky and published by I. N. Kushnerëv's editing company. In this case the title highlights the references to the popular Russian marionette *Petrushka* and to the Italian Comedy of Art. Among other Russian translations of the early Twentieth century is noteworthy the version by the writer Nina Petrovskaya with the collaboration of the same Aleksey Tolstoy, that came out only on a Russian *émigré* magazine in Berlin with the title *Priklyucheniya Pinokkio* (1924). In the Stalinist era Collodi's novel was highly unpopular for ideological reasons, and in fact a new full Russian translation was only published in 1959. It was carried out by the poet and writer E. G. Kazakevich with the brilliant illustrations by V. Alfeyevskiy: K. Kollodi, Priklyucheniya *Pinokkio. Istoriya derevyannogo chelovechka* [The Adventures of Pinocchio. Story of a Wooden Little Man], Moscow, «Detskaya literatura». This renowned translation had twenty-two re-issues, and it is the version in which the vast majority of Soviet readers knew the work for the first time; it was also the most complete and faithful to the original text. Considering the international success of the tale and its various theatrical and cinematographic adaptations, after the fall of the USSR a growing number of Russian translations have been made, among which should be mentioned the recent versions by N. Kray (2017) and M. Volchonsky (2021): see https://fantlab.ru/work195407.

"Pionerskaya Pravda" ("The Pioneer Truth") with the title *Zolotoj klyuchik, ili Priklyucheniya Buratino* (*The Little Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino*). The first revised volume edition dates back to a few months later (1936)[32], and it is interesting to notice that in its frontispiece the author added the highly allusive rhematic subtitle "novyj roman dlja detej i vzroslych," "a new novel for children and adults." On one hand the most direct implied readers are the new generation of Soviet children, seen as cheerful and strong *pioneers*, positive builders of a different society from the previous ones in which friendship, progress and a sense of community are the most significant values (De Florio 2021). On the other hand there are adult recipients able to read between the lines, who can make emerge and interact with their cultural and experiential baggage a series of allusions and references to contemporary reality. In general terms, during the drafting of his literary reworking A. Tolstoy reduced the moralistic and didactic message of Collodi's fairy-tale, adapting at the same time to the Russian-Soviet cultural context a number of ideas and references coming from the Italian original background. In fact, the Soviet version is shorter (twenty-nine *vs.* thirty-six chapters), as tend to be chapters intertitles, which in the Italian source have the function of detailed "titles-summaries," with anticipations and analepses of the events that attract and surprise readers at the same time. Considering the Italian translations of A. Tolstoy's *povest,'* we can talk about a metaphorical "circular route" of Pinocchio/Burattino's image – from Italy to Russia and backwards –, which expresses the literary dialogue between the two children's works and their titles (Gavriilidis Spiridis: 2016). *Zolotoj klyuchik* has been translated into Italian twice in the same decade, respectively with the title *Il compagno Pinocchio. La piccola chiave d'oro o le avventure di Burattino* (The Comrade Pinocchio. The Little Golden Key or the Adventures of Burattino), and *La chiavina d'oro, ovvero le avventure di Burattino* (The Little Golden Key, or the Adventures of Burattino)[33]. It is evident that the addition of the word 'comrade' in the first version is a choice which reflects a "political" and propagandistic interpretation of the work now outdated in critical reception, and not present in the original title[34]. The second version, conducted on the original Russian source, is distinguished by a greater fidelity to the original text, rich in idioms and expressions typical of the spoken language.

The case of the only Italian translation up to now of Valentin Rasputin's (1937-2015) *Proshchanie s Matëroj. Povest'* (*Farewell to Matyora*) is rather different. The original novella was published towards the end of 1976 in the literary magazine «Nash sovremennik» («Our contemporary»), and it is considered a classic example of the so-

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[32] A. N. Tolstoy, A. N. 1948. *Zolotoj klyuchik, ili Priklyucheniya Buratino* (The Little Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino), in Id., *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenij* (Complete collection of the Works), t. 12, Moskva: izd. Khudozhestvennoj literatury, pp. 59-136.

[33] See A. Tolstoy, *Il compagno Pinocchio. La piccola chiave d'oro o le avventure di Burattino* (The Comrade Pinocchio. The Little Golden Key or the Adventures of Burattino), transl. into Italian indirectly form the German version by L. Garzone, Roma: Stampa alternativa, 1981 and 1992, and A. Tolstoy, *La chiavina d'oro, ovvero le avventure di Burattino* (The Little Golden Key, or the Adventures of Burattino), Italian transl. from the Russian text by G. Cerrai, «Rassegna sovietica», 1, 1986, 17-84.

[34] This politicized undertone that "says something more" and misleads from the original may have been added also for 'marketing' reasons connected to the orientations of the publishing house Stampa Alternativa. In fact, even the headline of the German 1947 translation, to what we are given to know, was *Die Abenteuer des Burattino oder das goldene Schlüsselchen*.

called "village prose" literary movement. As it is known, the work treats the writer's major theme of the baneful impact of industrialisation and urbanisation on Siberian peasant life. Probably in order to avoid possible confusion with the name of the Italian town of Matera, the title has been translated as *Il villaggio sommerso* (The Flooded Village),[35] that is clearly linked to a central event in the plot, but obscures both the name Matëra, with its meaningful and symbolically consistent assonances with the words *mat'* (mother) and *materik* (continent), and the lyrical 'farewell,' a real refrain and *leitmotiv* in the text pages[36]. Its presence in the headline has a deep thematic relevance at several levels because it reflects the narrative tone and the point of view of the author and of his characters, bound to leave forever their little homeland.

As it is known, the original title of the famous prose poem by Venedikt Yerofeyev (1938-1990) *Moskva-Petushki* (Moscow-Petushki, 1970) refers to the local railway route on which travels the narrating self, Venichka, in some ways an artistic *alter ego* of the writer. The text is an account of a journey by a local electric train, one of many futile attempts to visit his little son: each time such a journey becomes soaked in alcohol and fails. During the trip, the hero becomes involved in philosophical discussions about drinking, recounts some of the fantastic escapades he participated in, including declaring war on Norway, charting the drinking statistics of his colleagues when leader of a cable-laying crew and brooding about the woman he loves (Lekmanov, Sverdlov: 2018). Also due to the lack of knowledge both about the Soviet dissident author and the work – first published only in *tamizdat* on a Russian journal in Israel, «Ami," in 1973[37] – the book appeared in Italian with the flashy, redundant and misleading title *Mosca-sulla-vodka. Romanzo* (Moscow-on-vodka)[38]. This headline, borrowed on the French version (*Moscou-sur-Vodka*, Paris: Albin Michel 1976), "says more" than the original title (Venuti 2008: 126-128), and puts the reference to the railway section in the background. This title was probably considered more appealing than an unknown local toponym for the target audience[39]. In this way the alcoholic theme acquires a centrality that risks obscuring and trivialising other significant motives of the text. The second Italian version in chronological order is titled *Tra Mosca e Petushki. Romanzo* (Between Moscow and

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[35] V. Rasputin, *Il villaggio sommerso. Romanzo*, transl. by C. Muschio, Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1980. As we can see this edition, now linguistically a little dated and available only in libraries, next to the modified headline reports the rhematic subtitle 'romanzo' (novel), which anyway does not exactly correspond to the Russian term povest,' usually rendered as novella or short novel.

[36] It is no coincidence that the formally beautiful and elegiac film transposition of the work realized by L. Shepit'ko and E. Klimov in 1981 was titled *Farewell*.

[37] *Moskva-Petushki* will be published for the first time in Russia only in 1990, in a periodical oddly called *Trezvost' I kul'tura* (Sobriety and culture).

[38] V. Erofeev, *Mosca-sulla-vodka*, trans. and edited by P. Zveteremich, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1977.

[39] Similar views were evidently shared by English and American translators (and publishers): cf. V. Erofeev, (1981) *Moscow Circles*, trans. by J. R. Dorrell, London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1981; V. Erofeev, *Moscow to the End of the Line*, trans. by H. W. Tjalsma, London: Penguin Paperback (1st ed. New York: Taplinger, 1980) and V. Yerofeev, *Moscow Stations*, trans. by St. Mulrine, London: Faber, 1997. In the last two versions the title keeps a clear reference to the real name of the railway route, while literary intertextual allusions are overshadowed. The first translation has a rather sibylline title (*Moscow Circles*), which is clearly different and far from the original (see Remonato 2013: 8).

Petushki)[40]: through this headline the translator and editor Mario Caramitti expresses a concept coherent with his overall interpretation of the work. In his view, in fact, the essential is not the rampant and uninterrupted drinking[41], nor the actual goal of the journey, but all that happens in the middle of it, "in-between" the two phantasmatic and visionary poles evoked (see Remonato 2004: 160). A third Italian version, which came out shortly afterwards, but which was mainly realised in the 1990s, displays the "faithful" title *Mosca-Petushki e altre opere* (Moscow-Petushki and other works)[42]. It is a rich critical edition which along the prose poem presents for the first time to the Italian public also other works by the writer. It is the only version up to that moment that instead of 'novel' has the rhematic subtitle 'poema,' put by the author as an ironic late-Soviet reference to Gogol's *Dead Souls* (see Remonato: 2013). On the thread of intertextual and postmodern allusions, the fourth Italian translation of the work is titled *Mosca-Petushki. Poema ferroviario* (*Moscow-Petushki. Railway Poem*)[43]: on one hand the choice of this title is aimed at highlighting Erofeev's genre label. On the other, even if it tends to "says something more" than the original, through this subtitle Nori artistically links between them the chapters intertitles, which coincide with the single sections of the humble local line. As in Sterne, these captions – see *Serp i Molot-Karačarovo*, i. e. *Hammer and Sickle-Karacharovo* – often do not interrupt the picturesque flow of the narrative on board the wagons, and contribute to convey the surreal atmosphere of "non-travel" (see Remonato: 2015).

Our last sample cases deal with some literary titles based on linguistic and cultural *realia*. As Triberio observes,

> "the process of translating from a source language into a target language involves linguistic and cultural factors in both languages. Any language, indeed, reflects and creates a national culture; this implies not only a bilingual, but, crucially, a bicultural approach. *Realia* represent, in this complex bicultural context, a striking challenge for the translator-lexicographer; they are lexical items denoting objects or concepts specific to one culture, for which the target language typically lacks an equivalent." (Triberio 2021: 56).

The Soviet-dissident writer Sergej Dovlatov (1941-1990) named his first *povest'* *Zona: zapiski nadziratelja* (The Zone: Notes from a Guard, 1982), inspired from his personal experience as a prison guard in high-security camps (1962-1965). The sadly famous term '*zona*' in Russian prison camp jargon indicates the walled and fenced area in which the camp itself stands, so much that it is commonly used instead of the word

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[40] V. Erofeev, *Tra Mosca e Petushki*, trans. and edited by M. Caramitti, Roma: Fanucci, 2003.

[41] On the cover page of the edition, though, there is an image of the vodka Stolichnaya. This evidences that the previous translation had already asserted a certain "alcoholic mythic halo" around the work to which the publisher considered it profitable to allude.

[42] V. V. Erofeev, *Mosca-Petushki e altre opere*, trans. and edited by G. Zappi, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004. The other works contained in the edition are: the essay *Vasilij Rozanov visto da un eccentrico* (Vasilij Rozanov with the eyes of an eccentric, 1989), *Sasha Chernyj e altri* (*Sasha Chernyj and others,* 1982), the tragedy *La notte di Valpurga o I passi del Commendatore* (*Walpurgisnacht, or "The Steps of the Commander,"* 1985) and *La mia piccola leniniana* (*My Little Leniniana*, 1988).

[43] V. Erofeev, *Mosca-Petushki. Poema ferroviario*, transl. and edited by P. Nori, Macerata: Quodlibet Extra, 2014.

itself. In this sense, it may be considered an example of linguistic and cultural *realia*, which poses some problems for its translation in another language in which the word does not have this connotation (Remonato 2005: 188-190). In fact, «*Realia* identify not only objects, but signs, words characteristic of each particular culture, typical or exclusive of the material, spiritual and historical heritage of a nation, lexical items which lack of the so-to-say 'heteronym' in the linguistic theory» (Triberio 2021: 57). Dovlatov's Italian translator Laura Salmon chose to render this title as *Regime speciale. Appunti di un sorvegliante* (Special Regime. Notes of a guardian)[44], compensating what gets lost of the term 'zone' with a bi-nominal formula that conveys a similar meaning in Italian. Another popular novella by the writer is named *Zapovednik: povest'* (Pushkin Heritage Park, 1983)[45]. In Russian 'zapovednik' is a *realia*, because it alludes to a famous Pushkin thematic park near Pskov where the writer occasionally worked in the summer as a touristic and cultural guide. In our view, even if it is longer than the original, the Italian version *Il Parco di Puškin* (Pushkin's Heritage Park)[46] with its capital letters tries to preserve the idea that the term refers to something similar to a thematic park, adding for target readers the important information that it is devoted to the great poet Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837), whom Dovlatov knew and loved very much.

4.   Conclusion

Through the analysis of the selected sample cases we can conclude that in the Italian translations of Russian literary titles a variety of elements, choices and strategies may intervene. The interpretation of the title means in fact a discussion of the entire text, and it also shows that the question/title has equally informative, rhetorical, provocative and communicative facets. As such, our examination grants it great summarizing and representational power. When all this power is given to the title as pre-text, it in essence also makes the title a 'post-textual' element, as stated by Mary Wesley. Moreover, as we saw in many cases editors and publishers influence or openly 'impose' certain titles far from the originals for marketing strategies. There is not a single, canonical orientation to guide translators, and even the well-known conceptual and practical juxtaposition between "source-oriented" and "target-oriented" versions is quite blurred today[47]. As Derrida claimed, "presumably by a real author, the title still is part of a so-called literary fiction; but it does not play a role in the same fashion as what is found inside the same fiction." (Derrida 1981: 14). In contemporary Italian versions we can notice more space for individual interpretations based on translation sciences, and this can be caught more

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[44] S. Dovlatov, *Regime speciale. Appunti di un sorvegliante*, trans. and edited by L. Salmon, Palermo: Sellerio, 2002. Compare the headline of the English version, which sticks to the original: S. Dovlatov, *The Zone*: *A Prison Camp Guard's Story*, trans. by A. Frydman, New York: Knopf, 1985.

[45] The work has been translated in English by the author's daughter Katherine Dovlatov (1966) with the slightly misleading title *Pushkin Hills* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2014); the same year the translation was nominated for the Best Translated Book Award.

[46] S. Dovlatov, *Il Parco di Puškin,* trans. and edited by L. Salmon, Palermo: Sellerio, 2004.

[47] Let us also consider the importance of the numerous language loans between the two languages, which reflect the close relationships of the two cultural contexts: on this topic see Fedorova, Bolognani 2015: 74-76.

easily comparing different translations of the same work (see Remonato 2013). In general terms, in a diachronic view we can remark that contemporary translators, also favoured by the developments and the ever-growing level of refinement and specialization in the field of Slavistic research, show a deeper intercultural insight and awareness. Having the possibility to access and study a lot of materials about the authors, the compositive process and the original Russian context[48] they can deepen more on the cultural meanings underlying the writers' choices, and try to re-create in Italian similar effects. The linguistic, aestehetic, and above all stylistic peculiarities of Russian literary title lines tend to be better recreated than in the past: this is also due to the evolution in Italian linguistics and in the common, everyday usage of the language that nowadays, especially if we consider the oral expression, is more "free" and less strictly conditioned by a flattening, standardized norm. In our view, especially when title lines are composed by *realia* or other types of symbolically connotated terms, a Russian-Italian intercultural approach rooted in clear metodological principles makes the difference.

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[48] As is known, in Soviet times the information about the works belonging to the so-called "underground" or *samizdat* literature, which in some cases reached Italy and other Western countries in a clandestine and fortuitous way, was often scarce. Translations, then, had a sort of "pioneristic" halo, while today, also thanks to the meaningful contributions in the field of translation theory and translation studies, many aspects have received proper critical attention and more effective equivalents into Italian.

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