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The Presence of Swift in Slovene Translation and Commentary

ABSTRACT

Although the Slovene milieu has yet to afford Swift's works a multi-volume critical translation of the kind available in other European languages, this paper argues that Slovene representations of Swift's writings illuminate crucial aspects of his meaning. This can be seen especially in Mladen Dolar's afterword to a new unabridged translation of *Gulliver's Travels*, in which he approaches Swift through a versatile and profoundly contemporary – yet still accessible – conceptual vocabulary, and in the first Slovene translation of Swift's *Modest Proposal*, which retains and transmits the original's power as a political act. The essay surveys the enduring international presence of Swift in translation and translation studies, outlines aspects of translation theory that prove relevant to its own inquiry, and proceeds to consider the Slovene contribution to Swift's legacy.

Keywords: Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, translation, Mladen Dolar, parallax, voice, *A Modest Proposal*, Tina Mahkota, *Mladina*

Prisotnost Swifta v slovenskem prevodu in spremni besedi

IZVLEČEK

Čeprav v slovenskem prostoru Swiftova dela še ne obstajajo v obliki obsežnih kritičnih prevodov, kot jih poznamo v drugih evropskih jezikih, članek zagovarja tezo, da slovenske reprezentacije Swiftovega pisanja osvetljujejo ključne vidike njegovega pomena. To je razvidno tudi iz spremne besede Mladena Dolarja k novemu slovenskemu prevodu celotnih Gulliverjevih potovanj, ki k Swiftu pristopi z uporabo večnamenskega in izjemno sodobnega, a še vedno dostopnega, konceptualnega besedišča. Prav tako kot dober primer služi prvi slovenski prevod Swiftovega esaja Skromen predlog, leta 2013 objavljen v slovenskem političnem tedniku Mladina, ki uspešno ohrani in bralstvu posreduje moč izvirnika kot političnega dejanja. Prispevek ponudi pregled dolge in vztrajne mednarodne prisotnosti Swifta v prevodu in prevodoslovju, predstavi relevantne vidike prevodoslovne teorije in obravnava slovenski prispevek k Swiftovi dediščini.

Ključne besede: Jonathan Swift, Gulliverjeva potovanja, prevod, Mladen Dolar, paralaksa, glas, Skromen predlog, Tina Mahkota, Mladina

1 Introduction

My first concern here will be to consider the enduring international presence of Swift in both translation and translation studies. I will then address Swift's place within Slovene translation culture. Although the Slovene milieu has yet to afford Swift's works a multi-volume critical translation of the kind scholars have supplied in other European languages, I will argue that Slovene representations illuminate crucial aspects of Swift's meaning. An essay on *Gulliver's Travels* by the philosopher Mladen Dolar that accompanies a new unabridged translation of this work enables a reader to comprehend Swift's fiction in terms of parallax. Dolar's versatile theory of voice, while not overtly considering Swift, opens a tantalizing perspective on the longstanding problem of Swift's bearing, as author, on the personae he assumes. The publication of *A Modest Proposal* in the Slovene political journal *Mladina*, meanwhile, precisely captures the spirit of the Swiftian text as an act, indeed as a deeply political intervention. Together, I will suggest, these Slovene contributions reaffirm why Swift remains a presence in contemporary culture.

2 Swift's International Presence in Translation and Translation Studies

Jonathan Swift's "Irishness" is a matter of longstanding academic discussion. It was a sore point, for much of his life, for Swift himself. Yet, notwithstanding his complex sense of national identity, and his not uncomplicated meaning within Irish culture, he remains one of the best known of all writers born in and firmly associated with his country of birth. In Ireland, his image has haunted banknotes, souvenirs, and tourist information of all kinds; one mass-produced poster in particular, which depicts an array of (exclusively male) Irish writers – set together like a panel of Interpol's most wanted – seems to turn up everywhere.¹ Those of a certain age with family in Dublin will remember a "life-size" (that is, fifty-foot) inflatable Gulliver floating down the Liffey during the city's millennial celebrations in 1988. However, Swift's writings and associated iconography have long roamed and resided beyond his native land, in Europe and beyond.

Even a cursory survey of Swift's continuing international presence in translation and commentary tells us that he remains a significant, vital and relevant figure within "world literature". On the whole, studies of Swift in adaptation and translation reflect a synthesis (although at times a conflict) of two common methodologies. This can be seen in Herman J. Real's extremely interesting anthology of considerations of Swift's reception in Europe (Real 2013). The essays in this important volume continue work of the kind begun by L.H.C. Thomas's sortie into the field of Swift's presence in nineteenth-century German literature (Thomas 1967). They reflect a mode of engagement in "translation criticism" typical of what the theorist Antoine Berman called the "Tel Avivian" or socio-critical school: the appraisal of translations and adaptations that attunes itself to the cultural "norms" translators follow and the cultural discourses in which they participate (Berman 2009, 39–43).

¹ Having grown up with this poster on my bedroom wall, I encountered it in bars and bookshops across Europe and, finally, hanging in the classroom where I do most of my teaching in Ljubljana. It was printed by "Real Ireland Design" in the 1980s and '90s. Mahony 1995 is a reliable guide to such manifestations; Ferguson 1962 provides the classic commentary on Swift's relationship with the Irish historical context.

Such commentary reflects to a lesser extent the traditional rigorist preoccupation with exactitude and accuracy that characterizes “philological” scholars of translation, as Katherine Reiß defined that older and historically more prevalent school of thought (Reiß and Vermeer 2014, 124–25). Reiß’s conception of “philological” translation scholarship bears comparison with a school of translation criticism that Berman defines as “*engagé*”. *Engagé* analyses, as he calls them, are all about denunciation; “denouncing,” moreover, “with precision”. They involve the “meticulous tracking of the incoherencies, poor systematicity, and biases of the translators” (Berman, 2009, 32–33). He insists that socio-critical studies, however, should by no means disregard this methodology. The danger with the socio-critical approach, for Berman, lies with a temptation to condone whatever the target culture accepts as translation, and as such to license bowdlerized versions of the source text. Berman warns that translations can all too easily sacrifice challenging content to “the literary norms of the receptor culture” (2009, 43). An example of the socio-critical trend in scholarship that Berman would surely have admired would be Elisa Fortunato’s account of how Italian translations of Swift reflected the pressures of Fascist authoritarianism. Equally, Olga Borovaia, beginning a very different study, epitomized socio-critical priorities in describing how “Aleksander Ben Ghiat’s translation of *Gulliver’s Travels* is an important literary document as well as a valuable resource for the student of Sephardic social and intellectual history” (Borovaia 2001, 149). Such work places the stress on the position, or as Berman would have it, the “hermeneutical horizon” of the translator (Berman 2009, 63).

More traditional, “philologically” and bibliographically oriented studies still perform their necessary task, although in practice the methodologies interact and often meld. Fortunato grounds her appraisal of Fascist treatments of Swift, for instance, on textual details in his original texts that the regime’s censors doctored. José Luis Chamosa González gives an invaluable round-up of Spanish translations and editions of Swift, while admitting that his survey is only a first approach upon a dense and largely uncharted terrain (Chamosa González 2007) – evidence of how the diversity and robustness of target culture norms, the province of the socio-critical scholar, confound the more clinical philologist. Other papers in the volume to which Chamosa González contributed (Navarro and Hornero 2007) accordingly pursue more openly socio-critical approaches, but a basic awareness of what exactly has been done with the source text remains essential.² Further afield, it becomes clear that a similar philological drive frames and regulates Xiao Yang’s chronicling of Chinese translations of the *Travels* (Yang 2021), while a concern for the target culture’s norms informs the entire discussion. I hope to strike a similar balance between the two perspectives in the remarks I offer here on Swift’s presence in Slovene translation and commentary.³

Some professional areas, nevertheless, leave little space for compromise. The preparation of reliable scholarly translations remains the purlieu of the philological specialist, especially when one bears in mind Sir Harold Williams’ stark warning, in his 1952 Sanders Lectures, on the

² The affinities of Gulliver and Quixote made Spain especially ready to read, adapt and occasionally rewrite Swift as early devotees did Cervantes; reciprocally, Swift’s willingness to pun in Spanish, often obscenely (as with the floating island of *Laputa*, *la puta* being “the whore”), adds particular pungency to the relationship.

³ In Stubbs 2023 and 2024 I offer further perspective on these broad schools of translation theory in relation to Slovene treatments of Shakespeare and Donne, respectively.

onerous labours awaiting any diligent editor of *Gulliver's Travels*: establishing a stable text is a notorious challenge (Williams 2013).⁴ The continuing emergence of such critical editions of a writer's oeuvre remains a steady indicator of that author's presence within a literary culture; while multi-volume editions of a foreign-language author – ancient, medieval or modern – reflect and bestow a still more rarefied status. Some authors, naturally, place a greater demand on resources than others, and some target language cultures have more reserves to bestow.

Swift has respectable form when it comes to multi-volume critical translations. There are lovingly produced compendiums in both French and German, for example (Swift 1965 and 1967), yet both are selective. To my knowledge, there is no complete translation of all Swift's published works (let alone his letters, which fill several volumes). It might seem absurd to expect a Slovene-language equivalent to the editions produced by French and German Swiftians, as Slovenia is one of Europe's smaller countries, by land mass and population. Closer consideration of the field proves, however, that such assumptions are misplaced if not condescending. Substantial Slovene-speaking populations exist in neighbouring countries, with university departments of Slovene studies in Trieste (or Trst) and other close-lying cities. Slovenia has a thriving translation culture – Martina Ožbot even speaks of a “translation-oriented culture” (Ožbot 2021, 97–114) – with a record of remarkable translators who have single-handedly produced versions of several huge works or indeed entire corpuses. Marjan Strojan, the critically acclaimed translator of *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Paradise Lost*, among a great range of other texts, is perhaps the exemplar in the field of Slovene-language renditions of English-language classics.

The university publisher in Ljubljana may never issue a large-scale edition of Swift in Slovene with exhaustive annotations. Slovene-language engagement with his writing nevertheless indicates that Swift's authorial presence, and his historical standing, remain important, and that his texts still have the power to move, entertain and chasten. Let us consider his translator Tina Mahkota's answer to the question “Why Swift Now?”, in a biographical headnote to her version of *A Modest Proposal*:

The Anglo-Irish writer, raconteur, political pamphleteer and polemicist Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), who with *Gulliver's Travels* assumed a permanent place in the western literary canon, is regarded as one of the great masters of English prose style and one of the most prolific and vehement satirists of human stupidity and arrogance. *A Tale of a Tub*, *The Battle of the Books*, *A Modest Proposal*, *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, *An Argument against Abolishing Christianity*, *Upon Falling Asleep in Church*, *The Drapier's Letters* and *Directions to Servants*, to name only a few titles, are superlative satires, which indisputably rank among the masterpieces of eighteenth-century prose. In these he launched unflinching and on many occasions rawly defamatory attacks on his political enemies and other personages, and scourged common human failings. Despite acquiring the reputation of a curmudgeonly and

⁴ See also Williams' introduction to Swift 1939–74, XI, ix–xxviii. Herbert Davis supports Williams' conclusions in his textual notes to the same volume, echoing a remark of Swift's on his own text: “Gulliver vexeth me more than any” (1939–74, XI. 302).

insensitive cynic, misanthrope and misogynist, he did not lack humour or light-heartedness. (Mahkota 2013, 49)⁵

Mahkota's translation appeared in one of Slovenia's principal political and cultural magazines, *Mladina*: she accordingly informed readers unfamiliar with Swift of his historical significance. "Why Swift Now?" was nevertheless a question to be answered by Swift's text, and Mahkota's handling of it.

The works Mahkota lists above would furnish a selection of the sort compiled by Swift's French and German translators. Mladen Dolar, in his afterword to a new translation of the *Travels*, recommends much the same works (for the most part still unavailable in Slovene). While speaking of Swift's overall achievement in similar terms to Mahkota, he is able to devote greater space to the Augustan intellectual context and, for example, Swift's relationship with the genre of travel writing his masterpiece parodied. Dolar also points out that Swift lived long enough to see his works receive the multi-volume treatment.

His book [*Gulliver's Travels*] enjoyed instant success. The first edition [1726] sold out in a matter of days, reprints followed in subsequent weeks and by the end of the year some 20,000 copies of the work existed (to give some context, London at that time was home to around a million inhabitants); many more appeared in the years that followed. The work became one of English literature's greatest best-sellers (outdoing close competition from *Robinson Crusoe* – published in 1719 and written by a rival Swift despised, [Daniel] Defoe): indeed, one of all literature's great best-sellers. The second edition, corrected and revised, was published in Dublin in 1735, this time as the third volume of Swift's collected works. (Dolar 2020, 318)

These recent Slovene commentators thus acknowledge Swift's stature and international appeal and, in the absence of a larger critical translation of his work, do him considerable justice. The next section will approach Slovene treatments of Swift's best-known best-seller, and address more particularly Mladen Dolar's stimulating consideration of it in terms of "parallax".

To conclude the present section, and to return to the slightly vexed symbiosis of "socio-critical" and *engagé* translation studies, Swift himself might be given the final word on whether the norms of the source or target culture should carry precedence. It was a question on which he had distinct views. His forthright response to one of the first translators of the *Travels*, Pierre-François Guyot Desfontaines, would appear to reject equally the claims of both philological and socio-critical approaches. Desfontaines, while excited by Swift's sales, found much to tailor and redact in the text itself. Here is Irvin Ehrenpreis' summation of the translator's crimes:

In the first edition of his translation [1727], [Desfontaines] had devoted a section of the preface to the coarseness and obscurity of the original book; and in the body of his version he ruthlessly abridged, enlarged, and distorted Swift's narrative in order to fit it to what he regarded as the French taste. (Ehrenpreis 1983, 521)

⁵ Translations from Slovene are mine unless otherwise stated.

It was not long before a copy of the Parisian translation reached Swift's hands. Later, on learning that Swift planned a journey to Paris, where he had friends and admirers, Desfontaines was embarrassed by the prospect of a meeting. Corresponding with Desfontaines beforehand, Swift declined the translator's invitation to brush off the changes he had made as side effects of superficial cultural differences. Swift's French was equal to the task of transmitting his acidity:

You have not feared to present the public with the translation of a work which, you aver, is full of pranks, nonsense and infantilism [*puérilités*: Swift is citing the preface to Desfontaines's translation], etc. Here we agree that the taste of nations is not always the same. But we are brought to the belief that *good* taste is the same wherever there are people of spirit, judgement and discernment. As such, if the books of *Sieur Gulliver* are deemed fit only for the British Isles, this traveller will pass for a very poor scribbler. The same vices, the same follies reign everywhere, or in all the civilized countries of Europe at least, and the author who writes only for one town, one province, one kingdom, or even one century, has so little claim to be translated that he does not deserve even to be read. (Swift 1965–72, III, 217; my translation)⁶

Since Swift posits that vices are universal, so is the moral law that governs them; so too is the standard of good taste which determines whether resources of wit have succeeded in exposing the vices in their breach of moral law. Swift is outraged much less on behalf of his own text than of principles he sees as universal, in particular the capacity of literary meaning to transcend cultural settings and the ability of people of sense and taste to discern that meaning. He is accusing his translator, in short, of violating essential codes of practice. Swift's outlook and vocabulary are assuredly High Augustan, yet his position is also pragmatic. He has accepted unequivocally that nations will differ in tastes and customs, and, as such, that his fiction may seem strange or invite censure beyond the "British" Isles. More than implicitly, he appears to accept, too, that his writing will have to adapt in manner and dress in order to gain an audience overseas. His Master Gulliver will need to become "*Sieur Gulliver*". Up to this point, the socio-critical school might claim Swift as one of their own. His willingness to compromise makes the point on which he insists all the more trenchant, however. Swift demands that his translator honour his text sufficiently in letter and spirit for it to bear scrutiny under the criteria of *good taste*, which he sees as unifying nations. His vision of translation is one that puts faith in the ability of what he frames as intelligent readers, regardless of their background, to come to terms with, and perhaps transcend, issues of cultural difference. In this manner, it might be said that Swift engages with and brings together the approaches of the "socio-critical" and *engagé* schools of translation studies.

3 *Gulliver's Travels* in Slovenia: Adaptations, Translations and a "Parallax" View

In places, the Slovene tradition of translation and commentary inevitably disappoints the requirements Swift made of Desfontaines and the Frenchman's successors. In others,

⁶ As the endnotes to more recent studies such as Just 2002 bear witness, Goulding 1924 remains the standard work on Swift's French encounters: on Swift's clash with Desfontaines, see 60–71. In the end, Swift never made his projected journey to Paris.

especially in work of the last ten or twelve years, Slovene representations of Swift's writing arguably exceed his demands.

It is commonplace to lament the abridgement of the *Travels*, and children's editions traditionally contain only truncated versions of books I and II of the original, the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag. Yet one popular post-war Slovene version for children, a translation by Jože Zupančič (1968) of a Serbian retelling by Slobodan Lazić, with colour illustrations by Giorgio Scarato, contains compressed accounts of all four original books. Zupančič did not, admittedly, find space for Gulliver's necromantic encounters in Book III, but he evidently felt that his young readers were equal to learning about the Yahoos and also hearing Gulliver confess his difficulty readjusting to life in England.

Living in the Houyhnhnms' Land altered me so much that I needed a long time before I could again accustom myself to people, among whom I discovered many Yahoos, and also many good and noble Houyhnhnms.

This children's book ends with Gulliver declaring, "My main intention has been to teach, not entertain you" (Swift 1968, fol.17^v); it thus preserves Gulliver's original valediction to the reader at the beginning of Book IV, chapter XII ("my principal design was to inform, not to amuse thee" [Swift 2005, 272]).

An earlier adaptation, prepared by Pavle Flerè "za slovensko mladino" – for the young people of Slovenia – performed the standard curtailments. The 1926 volume has real charm for its wood-cut illustrations and Flerè's transparently paternal clarifications. Lilliput becomes "Dežela Pedenmožičkov" (Land of the Inch-high-manlings) and Brobdingnag "Dežela Goljatov" (the Land of the Goliaths). Yet the story ends, as with most abridgements of the *Travels*, with a lie.

I live a peaceful life within my family circle, who all wept from joy when they saw me alive and well. When we had greeted one another and dried our tears of joy, I had to make a sacred promise to my wife that I would stay with them and never go again – never abroad again.

And I have kept my word to this day. (Swift 1927, 203)

Perhaps Flerè counted on some readers interpreting "this day" ("danes") intuitively and pro-actively: that is, as a day which heralded the voyages of the still untranslated second half of *Gulliver's Travels*.

In any case, a full Slovene version of the *Travels* was in print, and ready to divert if not entirely satisfy such readers, before Zupančič's later children's version appeared. Barbara Simoniti established that by 1991 seventeen adaptations of the *Travels* for children existed in Slovene, dating back to the nineteenth century. Among them was an abridged retelling by Izidor Cankar, who had also produced the first full translation of the work (Swift 1951). For Simoniti, Cankar's subsequent willingness to tailor Swift's text (in Swift 1953), in order to sustain the Slovene tradition's image of Gulliver as "a fairy tale hero", reveals a great deal about his approach as literary translator. Her study of Cankar's full translation thus pays close attention to what she

terms his stylistic “miseffects” (Simoniti 1991, 327). She notes that his overall approach is “painfully old-fashioned” and led to “intolerable mistakes” – “adaptations of names and titles, changes of punctuation, even changes in the formation of paragraphs”. Simoniti’s own approach suggests alignment with Reiß’s philological school of translation scholarship. She observes that Cankar was working from a faulty English text and, where his solutions are accurate as well as innovative, she suspects him of relying on a German crib (1991, 345).⁷

A new complete treatment of the work by Andrej E. Skubic (Swift 2020) has sought to redress the weakness Simoniti identified. Skubic had previously translated works as diverse as Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* and Norman Davies’s *Europe: A History*, and on that basis would seem ideally qualified to cope both with Gulliver’s overtly factual narrative register and the teasing sub-tones that perforate it.

A further article would be called for to explore the nuances of this new treatment, alongside that of Izidor Cankar, in sufficient detail, and to set their efforts concisely in the wider European tradition of translation of the *Travels*. I should defer that task to a “native” Slovene scholar of translation, who would be more qualified than I am to extend Simoniti’s analysis to Skubic’s achievement: at present, to the best of my knowledge, there is no such study on which I can report. For now, as such, my concern is with the basic completeness of the Slovene text currently available. With respect to Skubic’s translation, a checklist of contentious passages regularly redacted or distorted in early editions, and bowdlerized translations, may be duly ticked off. Skubic reproduces the notorious fourth voyage in its sometimes distressing entirety. “Scandalous” passages, such as the one in which Gulliver confesses his horror (and possibly Swift’s, too) at the Brobdingnagian gentlewomen who undress before him and pet him in Book II, chapter 5, are unflinchingly rendered (Swift 2020, 125–26). Skubic allows Swift, meanwhile, the barbs against Whig ministers, notably Walpole, which his early publishers deleted. Those libels will be invisible to most contemporary readers, but there is always a delayed justice to savour in their inclusion. Equally, Skubic ensures that no attentive reader should miss the strange lurches of attitude, and the jolts from lucidity to dim-wittedness (and, at a few moments, outright monstrosity) that characterize – and complicate – Gulliver. He preserves the Gulliver who is at one moment capable of shrewdly perceiving the avarice and stark moral pragmatism of his Brobdingnagian captor (“who apprehended that I could not live a month”, Book II, chapter 3), and, in the next, is fatuously disdainful about the astronomical fortune in gold the Queen of Brobdingnag pays for his release. Skubic as such joins a tradition that respects what must be the cardinal imperative for any translator of Swift, namely Swift’s own professed desire, as set out to Desfontaines, that his book expose the universal “follies and vices” for people of discernment beyond the “British Isles”. Accordingly, Skubic’s treatment preserves the *Travels*’ pranks and *puérilités* as well as the work’s not infrequent moments of perspicuity, humaneness and something close to grandeur.

No explanatory notes accompany the translation, which is unfortunate. An afterword to the translation by the Slovene philosopher, Mladen Dolar, nevertheless draws the reader’s attention to the narrative games in which Swift involves his reader. This essay is arguably

⁷ I quote from Simoniti’s English introduction and summary.

of still greater interest to Swift scholars than Skubic's adept translation. We are very far, in this afterword (entitled "Parallax") from an involvement with Gulliver as a hero of fairy tale; indeed, Dolar is incredulous that the book was ever presented to children (Dolar 2020, 332). He pays particular attention to Gulliver's changing viewpoint. That ongoing shift of perspective is for Dolar the chief formal mechanism of Swift's fiction. Dolar describes and explains it as a device offering instances of "parallax", a term heard often in contemporary theoretical exchanges, particularly in the writings of Dolar's colleague, Slavoj Žižek. A parallax is an object's seeming shift in location when it is in fact the observer whose position has changed. The simplest demonstration is given by a raised thumb, viewed first with one eye closed, and then the other. Below, Dolar comments on the most famous discrepancy in perspective in *Gulliver's Travels*, that of the little Lilliputians and the giant Brobdingnagians:

Each of those journeys offers a particular parallax, for example a simple shift in perspective, which renders foreign [*potuji*] all that is taken by default and assumed to be self-evident and allows us to see our existence in a radically different light. In a parallaxic shift we see things from two perspectives, which are in themselves irreconcilable:⁸ there can be no synthesis or compromise between them and we cannot adopt the position that either, or a combination of both, is true – the sting of truth lies in the parallax itself. (2020, 324)

Parallax provides Dolar with an elegant means of gathering together the sharp transitions and contrasts with which Gulliver's journeys present the reader. The concept also allows him to discriminate precisely between the kinds of transition Swift's grand performance involves. "The parallaxes offered by the third and fourth books", Dolar continues, "are decidedly more demanding and unusual; indeed, all serious readers and interpreters agree that the essence of Swift's message is to be found in the fourth book". As one ventures beyond the earlier sections of the work, Dolar argues, the parallaxes encountered throw one between modes of thought rather than differences in scale.

The first two parts [of the *Travels*] have offered a shift in perspective that operates like the Brechtian alienation effect [*potujitveni učinek: verfremdungseffekt*] – that which is self-evident, will seem unusual and foreign to us, contrary to received [*nasproti tradiranim*] ways and patterns of thinking. The parallax at work in the third book [in which Gulliver is stranded in Laputa, a land where impractical science dominates the kingdom's thinking and its madcap intellectual and political culture] goes in the opposite direction, not underpinning the alienation effect with which modern science has profoundly shaken our perception of the world, but as a quite contradictory defence of common sense, the acceptance of obvious, healthy reason and common experience, everything that science has undermined. Here the shaking of old certainties becomes ambiguous, and the point seems to be this: we know everything that we need to, and need not search elsewhere. In contradiction to his century, Swift has no faith at all in progress. (Dolar 2020, 328)

⁸ Rendering Dolar's exact sense idiomatically is a challenge here, since a literal translation of "v paralaktnem zamiku vidimo stvari v dveh perspektivah" would be "in a parallaxic shift we see things in two perspectives". The nuance seems significant, and so I note it here.

Dolar then applies the parallax metaphor to the radical inversion of values seen in Gulliver's fourth book. The nobler elements of humanity are (apparently, at least) to be found in the equine Houhnhnynms and its degraded, bestial aspects in the Houhnhnynms' biologically human slaves, the Yahoos: "here there is a basic parallax between human and animals, a radical exchange of perspective" (2020, 329).

Dolar's afterword absorbs the *Travels* into a critical and philosophical lexis that is both versatile and profoundly contemporary. Nevertheless, he does not pursue one area on which one might have expected him to comment further: namely the problem of Gulliver's mutability and unreliability as a narrator. Instead, towards the end of his essay Dolar asks:

But where amid all these parallaxes is Swift, what is his voice, where does he lead us, what does he defend? Does his voice blend with Gulliver, the first-person narrator? Is Gulliver his alter ego? By no means. Gulliver is above all, as his name says, *gullible*, and in his common-sensical naivety does not understand what happens to him (although the last part of his name, *ver*, hints at *veracity*, love of truth and trustworthiness [...]). That we always see more than the narrator, who often does not realise the implications of what he says, is part of Swift's narratorial mastery. (Dolar 2020, 332)

The critical consensus is that there is somewhat more to the matter than that. Gulliver is, as Herbert Davis put it long ago, a "bundle of inconsistencies" (Swift 1939–74, XI, xlvi). As commentators such as Allan Bloom and Hugh Kenner observed, Gulliver is a flickering hologram, one of literature's most unreliable narrative voices.⁹ Dolar's point about the echoes of *gullibility* and *veracity* in *Gulliver's Travels* is indisputable, yet another, simpler pun is also present in that name, one reflecting Swift's love of more child-like wordplay. Gulliver is certainly the butt, the gull of countless jokes; however, it is also Gulliver who gulls, who constantly deceives, who is *Gull-ever*. At moments he is Swift's marionette, as when he explains European civilization to the king of Brobdingnag or his Houyhnhnm master; at others, when he spots sharp dealing or comments on specimens of villainy, and especially when he denounces the British colonial enterprise as mere piracy in the final chapter of Book IV, he is manifestly Swift's alter ego, an acute observer of humanity. In those last pages, with their denunciation of "the proud", the persona is close to collapsing altogether. Swift's irony shimmers on and off; such ripples and breaches in the vocal performance mean that as readers of the *Travels* we undergo countless micro-parallaxes, as it were, not only from voyage to voyage, but often several times within the space of a single page.

Dolar has written extensively in a theoretical vein on the question of vocal mutability. His monograph (in English) *A Voice and Nothing More* (Dolar 2006) stands as a paradigmatic work on "the voice" as a problem of philosophy. While the book does not comment explicitly on Swift, the theory it develops has resounding implications for the difficulties he presents. "Voice" for Dolar is a purely phonic aspect of utterance that is entirely separable from *logos* or meaning:

⁹ For a brief bibliographical summary of this critical tradition, see Stubbs 2017, 658.

It is, rather, something like the vanishing mediator (to use the term made famous by Frederic Jameson for a different purpose) – it makes the utterance possible, but it disappears in it, it goes up in smoke in the meaning being produced. (Dolar 2006, 15)

Such remarks are rich in implication for Swift's often enigmatic status with respect to Gulliver and many of his other personae. His vanishing act – his constant anonymity, along with the elaborate and sometimes theatrical self-concealment that accompanied his major publications – is a precondition of the "utterance" his text conveys.

Dolar's chapter on "the Metaphysics of the Voice" is especially relevant to Swift's case. There Dolar postulates a voice that underlies the voice we hear, as the terrifying authority of God is heard through the sound of the Judaic shofar, a horn blown at dawn during Elul and four long times when Yom Kippur comes to a close. By means of Lacan's conception of vocalization as a signifier's *passage à l'acte*, which allows the speaker to avoid confronting unconscious anguish by re-enacting traumatic experience in symbolic form, Dolar argues that such a voice, one that carries the force of moral law, "is what endows the letter with authority, making it not just a signifier, but an act" (Dolar 2006, 54–55). Applying this very complex mesh of thought to the Swiftian voice is naturally to take a great liberty with Dolar's intended meaning. Yet Dolar would seem to invite such interpretations. The trope of the shofar, firstly, encapsulates both Swift's obsession with mystery and his deep (at times, grandiose) sense of the dignity of his satirical vocation – as expressed, for example, in the letter to Desfontaines discussed earlier. Turning Dolar's theory to Swift furthermore deepens the sense so many of Swift's writings convey of being acts, events, even stunts, in which Swift participated as a silent vocalist or invisible actor. In the Lacanian terms Dolar invokes, Swift's text required him to absent or negate himself, to re-enact some formative torment that consigned him to invisibility or symbolic non-existence: his writing, in those terms, is the sign that is in itself a performance of this *passage à l'acte*. The outcome was a further act – communal, public, ethical and political as well as literary. The nature of that act may of course be understood as a deliberated Austinian speech act; Swift's publishing tactics also make sense in behaviourist terms, indeed as very sound responses to the great legal and bodily risks that satire in his time incurred. Yet those theories do not account for the performative nature of Swift's self-silencing, or the anonymity he invariably made use of, both within his text and in the great shows of stealth that accompanied publication – often with the equivalent of a trumpet blast if not the shofar itself. The Lacanian angle offers something more when Dolar's metaphysics of voice is mapped on to Swift's text. From the elaborate stage management that went into publishing the *Travels*, to the sustained guerrilla campaign Swift waged against Walpole's government in the guise of "the Drapier", to the unanswerable interjection made by the *Modest Proposal*, Swift's major publications were deeds, but with an intentionality and manifestation more complex (and more tortured) than the Austinian or behaviourist models adequately describe. The Swiftian performance has an ethical scope and directedness, even in its *puerilités*, that Dolar's theory, if applied to it, restores with singular acuity. His metaphysics of voice captures Swift's paradoxically exhibitionistic, yet still personally and artistically sacred strategy of self-effacement.

This is to pursue a path of conjecture. The conceptual focus of Dolar's afterword to the *Travels* remains parallax, which has provided a rich source of relativistic reflection since Joyce adopted

it as one of his astronomical motifs in *Ulysses* (Gilbert 1955, 33, 200–1, 377). The cultural discourses that have employed the term emphasize the mutual indeterminacy of observer and observed, and the non-definitive status of any perspective. Slavoj Žižek speaks, for example, of the “Kantian parallax” derived from the impossibility of reconciling “phenomenal” and “noumenal” levels of perception (Žižek 2006, 21–22). Such theory is arguably somewhat selective in its uses of parallax. In its original astronomical context, the phenomenon provides the standard basis for measuring the distance of a star from the Earth (Moché 2009, 66–67). As a term of science, it offers a means of reaching fairly stable, rather than uncertain, observations. Yet the overall point Dolar uses parallax to make is clear: reading the *Travels* involves radical shifts in viewpoint – with respect to the reader, Gulliver, his varying location and the very different customs and attitudes he encounters. Above all, Swift’s intellectual relevance is never in doubt, in Dolar’s account.

Parallax is an infectious idea. Considering that Dolar’s essay accompanies a translation, some might wonder whether translation itself is parallaxic. At an intuitive level, the shift of perspective implied in the transition from source to translated text, indeed even in the conceptual and cultural distance that separates a single pair of cognates, surely involves a parallax of a sort, as may the further changes of viewpoint that emerge in successive translations. The consciousness of one translator of another implies a parallaxic relationship, between twin observers of a single entity. There is possibly a danger, nevertheless, of seeing parallaxes everywhere, which would dilute the precision and thus the value of this versatile term. It is worth bearing in mind the distinct and not altogether compatible notion of shift or transport ascribed to the highly diverse structures and practices defined as translation since antiquity. *Translatio* (as metaphor) historically involves the conjoining of two entities through a transfer of qualities, rather than the singular object of a parallax;¹⁰ the practice of translation, for which the word was in time selectively adopted, accordingly does more than offer a shift in perspective on the text with which it begins. In translation, the text is said to be *carried* “over or across” (*trans* + *latus*, past participle of *ferre*) – into another region of linguistic or cultural space. The same movement is inherent in the still more forceful term *traductio* (*trans* + *duco* “to haul or draw across or over”).¹¹ Translation is, as it were, more hands-on labour than observation: and one cannot experience parallax with respect to something one has rendered composite, and which one is carrying or dragging. That principle must apply both to the act of translating and any analysis of a given translation. Overlaying parallax onto the longstanding conceptual metaphor that inheres to translation is, as such, perhaps less helpful than it might at first appear. If we spoke of parallax in translation, then strictly we would cease to speak of translation.

4 Swift’s *Modest Proposal* in Slovene

Dolar’s theories of parallax and voice will remain relevant in this closing section, in which I turn to Swift’s second best known work. The first Slovene translation of *A Modest Proposal*

¹⁰ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 8.6.4–18 and the *Ad Herennium*, 4.34.45 are standard reference points.

¹¹ Berman (2009, 7–11) is illuminating on the intersecting provenances of this terminology (*translatio* initially denoted poetic “adaptation” or *imitatio*, such as Virgil’s treatment of Theocritus, Hesiod and Homer). He points out, moreover, that the transfer inherent in translation/*traduction* is more complex than that summarized above, since it goes “in two directions that are to a certain extent opposed” (2009, 7).

(“Skromni Predlog” in Slovene) preserved the social and political power of the original, as it too was published in the midst of a national emergency. Swift’s text famously suggested that Ireland might eliminate poverty and over-population by farming the infants of Catholic peasants as a delicacy for the tables of the rich. By means of the irony to which he subjects his persona, Swift essentially told his readers what the Anglo-Irish establishment was in effect already doing. The Slovene translation appeared in an issue of *Mladina*, a magazine devoted to social and political journalism that also allots considerable space to cultural commentary, reviews and satire, a setting distinctly congenial to Swiftian interrogations of power. The magazine published Tina Mahkota’s treatment of the *Proposal* early in 2013, deep in the aftermath of the 2008-9 financial crisis, and in the midst of the Europe-wide programmes of “austerity” that ensued. The name of the journal (which means “youth”) lent an accidental but still significant pathos to Swift’s satire. The exposure to a national readership brought by the place of publication, the status of the original text and the urgency of the socio-political background called for a translation of some distinction. Responding to those pressures, Mahkota caught both the rationalistic coolness and the moralistic shrillness of Swift’s sociopathic projector. Readers of Slovene will appreciate, for instance, the vibrato she gives the following flutter of self-satisfied indignation:

There is likewise another great Advantage in my *Scheme*, that it will prevent those *voluntary Abortions*, and that horrid Practice of *Women murdering their Bastard Children*; alas! Too frequent among us. (Swift 1939–74, XII, 111)

Moj načrt ima še eno veliko prednost, in sicer to, da bo zaježil hotene splave in tisto odvratno navado žensk, da umorijo svoje pankrte, ki pa jo, žalibog!, pri nas še vedno vse prepogosto srečujemo. (Swift 2013, 48)

Mahkota has domesticated Swift’s syntax to some extent, but to no substantial loss. The somewhat archaic expostulation “*žalibog*” (“lamentably”, rendering “alas!”) is exquisite. The harpsichord tremor of the expression is exactly right, and it is a well-judged pairing on Mahkota’s part.¹² Swift’s register might tempt the translator to overplay the comedy at such moments: a lure Mahkota resists. The proposer’s expressive restraint, his pleasure in dry and numerical data, are integral to Swift’s illusion; accordingly, there is a danger of parodying in translation what is a carefully understated parody in the original. Mahkota’s phrasing in the quotation above is typical of the way she avoids such excess. *Zaježiti* (“thwart, impede”) invokes an arguably more elevated register than Swift’s “prevent”, but only to the extent that it captures the proposer’s undeniably formal mode.

In all, Mahkota preserves both the expostulatory and mordantly reserved tone of the original. Simultaneously, the publication context of the translation, as I suggested above, invests the text with forceful and quite intentional contemporaneity. A politically mindful reader would be hard put to avoid reflecting on this particular passage in the light of the US Supreme Court’s recent disabling (in 2022) of the 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade*. The view that emerges here, through the prism of Swift’s irony, is in fact a startling one. As Mahkota recognizes

¹² Etymologically, “*žalibog*” involves an appeal to sadden (*žaliti*) (or stir the pity of) God (*bog*) (Slovenski etimološki slovar, 1 and 2).

in her biographical headnote on Swift (quoted above), he has often been regarded as a misogynist.¹³ However, his sympathy and solidarity with the position of women is often lost. In the proposer's horrified reflection on "voluntary abortions", Swift's irony floats the idea, radical for a churchman in any age but extraordinary in his own, that women living in extreme poverty who deliberately ended their pregnancies may have acted quite reasonably, indeed morally. The implication of that stagey "alas!", too, is that the conception of "Bastard Children" was a lesser crime, for Swift, than others being perpetrated at that moment in Ireland. It would be interesting to know how this often overlooked passage resonated with a Slovene readership – in a country where the Roman Catholic Church is influential, yet where a woman's right to abortion enjoys constitutional protection.¹⁴

Such densely nuanced and profoundly contentious moments naturally complicate the more generic image of Swift that Mahkota's headnote supplies. It is obviously beyond such a summary, however accurate and valuable, to account for what a leading Swiftian has called "the mercurial indirections of the satirist's voice" (Rawson 2017). All a translator can do is try to preserve those switches of tenor. At times, Swift in fact offers assistance by his way of slipping out of persona and drawing attention to what Dolar calls the voice of the "jouissant father", the voice that accompanies a moral law (Dolar 2006, 55). Swift does this in the *Modest Proposal* when the proposer concedes that "this Food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very *proper for Landlords*; who, as they have already devoured most of the Parents, seem to have the best Title to the Children" (Swift 1939–74, XII, 112). The proposer's loyalties hitherto have lain entirely on the side of capital and property, rather than the impoverished tenants or itinerants whose babies are to be eaten. Swift's sympathies, we now discover, rested elsewhere. The satirical shofar, as it were, has been sounded. The effect is surely a case of parallax: our view is split between an image of the proposer and a glimpse of the satirist who has used him to deceive us. Yet the result is a clarification, rather than a crisis of meaning, as the text's presiding irony becomes clear. Without this calculated breakdown of the vocal illusion, one wonders if *Mladina* would have commissioned the translation. Indeed, this moment is arguably crucial to the modern reputation Mahkota's note on Swift enshrines.

As it is, Mahkota's translation and its appearance in the pages of *Mladina* both preserve and renew Swift's vocal presence. The very ephemerality of the setting brings one closer to that of Swift's anonymously published pamphlet of 1729. If Swift's text lacked its original advantage of surprise in its new iteration, it carried the gravitas of a classic, and made its own contribution to the journal's concern for truth and informed commentary. If you missed *Mladina* that week, then *A Modest Proposal* will have passed you by; if you read it, however, you are likely to remember the strange missive from eighteenth-century Ireland that it contained, and the warning it offered contemporary Europe. Encountering the translation reminded me of a similarity Edmund Wilson observed between Swift and Marx, in a comparison supported recently by Leo Damrosch. Those two very different observers of life shared, for Wilson, "a

¹³ Swift's reputation for misogyny derives in large part (though by no means exclusively) from a number of notorious late poems such as "The Lady's Dressing Room". These are as yet untranslated in Slovene.

¹⁴ A very recent decision by the Slovenian Constitutional Court (RSUS 2024, paragraph 32), reaffirmed this right, referring to Article 55 of the country's constitution.

deadly sense of the infinite capacity of human nature for remaining oblivious or indifferent to the pains we inflict on others, when we have a chance to get something out of them for ourselves" (Damrosch 2013, 419; citing Wilson 1940, 46). The editors of *Mladina* evidently recognized and shared Swift's hatred of that "infinite capacity" for indifference.

5 Conclusion

These remarks have considered how Swift has fared in translation and commentary in the wider European and specific Slovene contexts. Swift's presence in Slovenia throws competing methods of translation into sharp relief, and invites, I have suggested, scholars of translation to strike a balance between "philological" and "socio-critical" expectations. Swift himself expected such a balance. The Slovene milieu looks unlikely to support extensive scholarly translation of his lesser known works, but has nevertheless offered fascinating responses for Swift scholars to consider. In particular, Andrej E. Skubic's recent translation of *Gulliver's Travels*, which has made the unexpurgated work newly accessible to Slovene readers, provided an occasion for Mladen Dolar to demonstrate the enduring relevance of Gulliver's distinctly parallactic voyages. Elsewhere, Dolar's work on voice offers implicit but invaluable insight into the nature of the Swiftian persona, and casts tantalizing light on the complex phenomenology of the acts his publications often comprised. Still more strikingly, Tina Mahkota's translation of the *Modest Proposal* is remarkably faithful to Swift's own understanding of his mission as a *vindicator*, literally, an avenger of liberty – indeed of the unfree, the voiceless.¹⁵ Her version of the *Proposal* illustrates how a text translated with meticulous, "philological" care can reflect the "socio-critical" concerns of the culture into which it is brought. At the level of theoretical inquiry and of cultural event, Slovene translation and commentary demonstrates why, with or without the multi-volume treatment, Swift is still with us.

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¹⁵ As per the Latin epitaph he composed for Swift's memorial in St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin: on the wording of the epitaph see especially Rawson 2014, 262–64.

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