ROCZNIKI HUMANISTYCZNE
Tom LXXIII, zeszyt 11 – 2025
ZESZYT SPECJALNY/SPECIAL ISSUE
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18290/rh257311.11s

JERZY SKWARZYŃSKI

DEVELOPING A HERMENEUTIC MODEL OF TRANSLATING FANTASY LITERATURE: A CASE STUDY OF REFERENCES TO POLISHNESS IN *UPROOTED* BY NAOMI NOVIK AND ITS POLISH TRANSLATION

Abstract. The paper aims to present a model of translating and studying translation of fantasy literature aligned with the purpose of writing or reading it. The model is formulated by aligning the parallels between J. R. R. Tolkien's set of values of fantasy literature with the hermeneutic method of translating and reading translations based on George Steiner's hermeneutic motion and Antoine Berman's text-deforming tendencies. To illustrate it, the translation of the lexical references to Polishness in the novel *Uprooted* is analysed. According to the proposed hermeneutic model of translating fantasy literature, the translators' general task connects the insistence to mirror the original and meet the readers' expectations considering the challenges unique to a particular literary text. This advocates for the composition of translation series in which subsequent versions do not aim to outplace one another but create a pool of interpretations which grows with every new rendition.

Keywords: literary translation; hermeneutic motion; text-deforming tendencies; translation of fantasy; translation series; cultural references

KU HERMENEUTYCZNEMU MODELOWI TŁUMACZENIA LITERATURY FANTASY. STUDIUM PRZYPADKU ODNIESIEŃ DO POLSKOŚCI W POWIEŚCI *UPROOTED* NAOMI NOVIK I JEJ POLSKIM PRZEKŁADZIE

Abstrakt. Artykuł ma za zadanie przedstawienie modelu przekładania i badania przekładu literatury fantasy spójnego z celem pisania i czytania tekstów tego gatunku. Model został stworzony poprzez zestawienie podobieństw między wartościami fantastyki według J. R. R. Tolkiena

JERZY SKWARZYŃSKI, PhD, Assistant Professor at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Institute of Linguistics, Department of the History of English and Translation Studies; correspondence address: Instytut Językoznawstwa KUL, Al. Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland; e-mail: jerzy.skwarzyński@kul.pl; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7607-5744.

z modelem przekładania i badania przekładu opartego na ruchu hermeneutycznym George'a Steinera oraz tendencji deformujących tekst Antoine'a Bermana. By go zobrazować, analizie poddano przekład językowych odniesień do kultury polskiej występujących w powieści *Uprooted*. Zgodnie z prezentowanym hermeneutycznym modelem tłumaczenia literatury fantasy, szeroko pojęte zadanie tłumacza łączy w sobie konieczność odzwierciedlenia oryginału oraz spełnienie oczekiwań czytelników, mając na uwadze szczególne wyzwania stawiane przez konkretne teksty. Z tej perspektywy tworzenie serii przekładowej, w której kolejne wersje nie mają zastąpić poprzednich, a wzbogacić istniejący już zbiór tłumaczeniowych interpretacji danego utworu, jawi się jako trafne określenie celu pracy tłumacza.

Słowa kluczowe: przekład literacki; ruch hermeneutyczny; tendencje deformujące tekst; przekład fantastyki; seria tłumaczeniowa; odniesienia kulturowe

INTRODUCTION

Uprooted is a 2015 fantasy novel by the American author Naomi Novik, heavily influenced by Polish culture. Arguably, markers of Polishness are foreign to the average Anglophone reader, thus they fulfil the escapist purpose of fantasy literature in the novel. Any attempt at a Polish translation must contend with the fact that those references may cease to be unfamiliar to the target text readers, thereby potentially affecting their escapist function in the text.

This paper presents an observation of a phenomenon and its consequences, rather than an attempt to evaluate an existing Polish translation or offer "the appropriate" translation solution. It aims to present a hermeneutic method of translating and reading translations of fantasy based on George Steiner's hermeneutic motion, Antoine Berman's text-deforming tendencies and J. R. R. Tolkien's ideas presented in his essay *On Fairy-Stories*. As signalled above, the focus in this paper is on escapism expected in fantasy; the analysed material is cultural markers in the source text (ST) and target text (TT) that refer to Polishness. The underlying objective of the present study is to suggest shifting the focus in academic discussion on translation from the often arbitrary and ideological process of hierarchising, accepting or rejecting particular renditions by academia onto the more practical and less hermetic readers' response and its implications. Importantly, the discussion and conclusions do not purport to be universally applicable, as it is believed that translation challenges are largely unique to expectations particular to various types of literature.

1. ESCAPISM AS A FUNCTION OF FANTASY LITERATURE

Readers have numerous expectations of fantasy (and any other literary genre), but escapism seems its central feature, as the following section aims to prove. The evaluation or even understanding of this function varies between authors, critics and readers. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, John Clute (1997) defines it as a "derogatory term much used in descriptions of genre literature in general and fantasy in particular" (p. 321). He notes that the term describes primarily the motivations behind the reading, rather than the features of the text. However, those features are often why the readers choose to read a particular narrative.

This is the underlying argument of Farah Mendlesohn's (2008) monograph *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. She states that "a fantasy succeeds when the literary techniques employed are most appropriate to the reader expectations of that category of fantasy" (p. xiii). She suggests the existence of a dialectic in which the author creates a secondary world and a fantasy story desired by readers, while the readers approach the text assuming that some of their expectations might be subverted but the overall adherence to the mode and formula will make it tolerable. The goal is to create "a sense of wonder" (p. xiii). In other words, fantasy "is a fiction of consensual construction of belief" (p. xiii).

In his influential book *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery (1992) begins formulating a more complex definition of fantasy as a genre with a discussion of fantasy as a mode, when it is used as a platform to reflect on social and intellectual issues critically, subversively and intertextually, and as a formula, when its role is to provide readers with another iteration of a plot constructed with their preferred elements, or, as Attebery puts it, when it is "a mass-produced supplier of wish fulfilment" (p. 1).

Even though this language seems pejorative, Attebery does not consider the formulaic elements of fantasy negative by default (p. 10). Arguably, the functions ascribed to fantasy as a mode can be served by other—possibly all other—literary texts. Without a distinctive template or plot devices, the readers are unlikely to see a given text as a fantasy story. Attebery formulates three key defining features of fantasy: the world or events in the story must be magical, impossible, out of the world known to the readers, or the primary world (pp. 14–15), the structure of the plot resembles that of comedy, as the conclusion is not tragic but it is a resolution of the conflict desired by the protagonists (p. 15), and, finally, evoking the feeling of wonder or estrangement among the readers (p. 15).

These three elements reflect a single overarching quality of fantasy—escapism. "The impossible" makes a fantasy narrative divorced from the reader's experience in the primary world—it "demands a sharper break with reality" (p. 15) than stories that are simply not likely to occur. Regarding the third element, Attebery argues that literary experience facilitates seeing the familiar in a new light, sometimes even as something uncommon or strange (p. 16). To sum up, fantasy literature is based on what the readers know or imagine about certain aspects of the primary world, but set in an impossible, monomythical and strange environment. Ultimately, this leads to the conclusion that fantasy, much like other mass-market genres such as crime or historical fiction, is shaped by readers' expectations derived from reactions to existing publications.

In his seminal essay *On Fairy-Stories*, Tolkien (2006a) presents two ways of thinking about escape as a feature of fantasy. On the one hand, it may be seen as a cowardly flight from modern life where technological progress is rejected wholesale and replaced with a simplistically cheerful substitute; on the other hand, it may be understood as moving away from the decay and dullness of everyday life into the world which by no means is free from difficulty, challenge or terror (pp. 147–153). Arguably, the former tends to be considered the sole purpose of much fantasy, especially by those who spurn it, while the latter, Tolkien argues, is what fantasy really achieves. He claims that mere suspension of disbelief does not accurately describe the scale of the reader's acceptance of the literary world nor their immersion in it (p. 132). He argues that a fantasy story is not believable and engrossing, if the reader does not see what they read as "true", if they do not manage to escape into the presented secondary world, then the narrative is a failure.

The reactions to Tolkien's opus magnum *The Lord of the Rings* (hereinafter referred to as *LOTR*) showed that this type of literature was in high demand upon its publication between 1954 and 1955. As Tolkien (2006b) famously remarked in a letter to a reader: "it remains an unfailing delight to me to find my own belief justified: that the 'fairy-story' is really an adult genre, and one for which a starving audience exists" (p. 209). Recent studies confirm the need for escapist literature. One of the observations made by Christopher Benjamin Menadue and Susan Jacups (2018) is that the general decline in reading is not observed among science fiction and fantasy enthusiasts (pp. 9–10). Moreover, according to the study by Katherine Wilkinson et al. (2020, p. 160), escapism is one of the main functions of fiction that inspires adolescents to read. Drawing on the 2015 International Study of Avid Book Readers, Margaret Kristin

Merga (2017, pp. 151–152) shows that some consciously pursue escapism in reading for various reasons, including regulating emotion and improving mental health. Similarly, a duoethnographic study by Cammie J. Lawton and Leia K. Cain (2022, p. 2949) reveals that the escapist features of Young Adult literature provide a safe space, especially considering current dramatic world events. Moniek Kuijpers et al. (2019) demonstrate that absorbed reading may be predicted based on the readers' personality traits and reading habits; here, absorption is the "predisposition to become transported into a story world" (p. 75). The results of their investigation "point toward open and receptive imaginal engagement, intellectual curiosity, and emotional responsiveness as sources of absorbed narrative fiction reading" (p. 86).

In light of this research, it is particularly interesting that *LOTR* and Tolkien's popularity met with hostile reactions from critics (Curry, 2014, pp. 370–373). Importantly, most of the negative evaluations were presented by Marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic thinkers. For example, Rosemary Jackson (1981) writes that "for Tolkien, the only way is backwards: the chauvinistic, totalitarian effects of his vision are conveniently removed from present material conditions, by providing 'escape' from them" (p. 156); in a very dismissive tone, Michael Moorcock (1988) describes *LOTR* as a badly written and infantile promotion of Christan sentimentalism (pp. 184–185), and its author as a neophobe and xenophobe (188) for his rejection of modernity and the portrayal of Middle-Earth, the novel's secondary world. What *LOTR* offers goes against the ideological programme of the late 20th-century academia.

Especially the critics' reactions to the polls conducted in the UK at the end of the 1990s, which indicated that *LOTR* is the nation's favourite novel, show that the escapist value of this work is at the heart of their frustration (Curry, 2014, pp. 373–374). The reasons behind this might be that the novel ignores socio-cultural issues that were at the centre of critical and academic debates such as politics of gender or race; the struggle of many critics to make sense of the narrative due to its strong reliance on language linking the present with the past; the snobbery of those who refuse to see a fantasy story to be a literary text worthy of serious consideration (p. 377). However, it is Tolkien's wholesale rejection of modernism that causes the most common accusations of "infantilism, nostalgia, escapism" (p. 378).

A close and dispassionate study of Tolkien's work can dispel most of these attacks; however, Curry (2014) argues that the critics often failed to read the text carefully or did not read it at all (p. 376). It seems these reprimands were

caused by a form of cognitive dissonance: the scholars often espouse poststructuralist interpretative approaches which are used for political revisions of classic literature, but the most beloved text of the modernist and postmodernist century is a piece of nostalgic escapism rooted in tradition and set in an effectively made-up world. The success of *LOTR* went against an ideological mainstream of the 20th-century humanities—including translation studies.

2. THE HERMENEUTIC METHOD OF TRANSLATING AND READING TRANSLATIONS

After the cultural turn of the 1990s, poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches informed much of the academic thought about translation—the question of power became central (Bassnett, 2014, pp. 85–86). One of the most influential thinkers representing this wave is Lawrence Venuti (2008), who famously advocated for the translator's visibility and called for employing foreignization to combat translation methods that lead to standardized and uniform renditions. Later, he started to perceive this perspective as partly based on an instrumental approach to translating (Venuti, 2013, p. 3) and proposed a hermeneutic model (2012; 2013, p. 3). The name might be misleading, as he openly states that he rejects Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013, p. 4), arguably the founders of philosophical hermeneutics.

There are, however, academic works on translation based on Gadamerian hermeneutics, the most well-known being *After Babel* by George Steiner (1998), first published in 1975. It presents a model of translating and thinking about translation consisting of four stages: initial trust, aggression, embodiment and restitution (pp. 312–319). In the first stage, the translator believes that the source text has something of value to be transferred to the receiving culture; this can only be revealed in the translation process. Then, the translator reads and interprets the text. This interpretation is violent appropriation, which, to a significant extent, is subjective. In Steiner's words, this stage is "incursive and extractive" (p. 313). Embodiment is an introduction of the target text into a web of contexts of the receiving culture often very different to that of the source culture (pp. 314–215). This violent extraction of a cultural artefact, its transformation and introduction to a different system upsets the balance (p. 316). The translator attempts to restore it in the fourth step, which is not an action to be performed, but a consequence of the translation process which aims to create a target text that mirrors the source text in all possible

respects (p. 318). Even though achieving this fully is impossible, one should see it as their goal. As Steiner puts it, "the ideal makes explicit the demand for equity in the hermeneutic process" (p. 318). The attempt to produce a "total counterpart" (p. 318) at every stage of the translation process is at the heart of the hermeneutic motion.

An attempt to add methodological clarity to Steiner's hermeneutic motion was made by aligning it with Berman's (2012) text-deforming tendencies (p. 244) and thus proposing the hermeneutic method of translating and reading translations (Skwarzyński, 2023). Berman's (2012) idea was to identify the often unconscious deformations of the text made by the translator that conceal its foreignness, meaning, and truth, understood metaphorically by him as "the foreign work's most original kernel" (p. 240). He defines twelve translator's tendencies to deform the text: rationalization, clarification, expansion, ennoblement, qualitative impoverishment, quantitative impoverishment, the destruction of rhythms, the destruction of underlying networks of signification, the destruction of linguistic patternings, destruction of vernacular networks or their exoticization, the destruction of expressions and idioms and the effacement of the superimposition of languages. (Most of these categories are self-explanatory; for a brief overview see Skwarzyński, 2023, pp. 35–36; for the original detailed discussion see Berman, 2012, pp. 244–253.) The fact that Berman's proposal combines hermeneutics and psychoanalysis was a justification for applying it to the hermeneutic motion in the analysis of a literary translation. It facilitates a more precise assessment of whether a (potential) translation solution fulfils the reciprocal step of the hermeneutic motion (Skwarzyński, 2023, p. 34)—as the analysis of the Polish translation of Sue Townsend's *The Queen and I* demonstrated (Skwarzyński, 2023, pp. 37–47). The present study develops this research by employing the method to the analysis of another issue concerned with translating cultural references, but this time focused on a specific feature of a particular genre and readers' potential expectations towards it.

Steiner's literary orientation, the use of charged metaphors in his writing and rejection of then-current ideologies have been criticized and sometimes his work was marginalized and unacknowledged (see Skwarzyński, 2023, p. 30). Interestingly, the reasons behind this were similar to the academics' scathing critiques of Tolkien: non-compliance with the dominant academic perspectives, focus on the readers' expectations, warm popular reception and even the writing style. This observation leads to considering more nuanced parallels between the thoughts of the two scholars.

3. TOLKIEN'S FOUR VALUES OF FANTASY

Tolkien's (2006a) essay *On Fairy-Stories* discusses four "values and functions" (p. 138) of fantasy, which create a type of "motion" resembling that of Steiner. There are obvious differences between both sequences, for example, Tolkien's set does not share the metaphors of violence present in Steiner's writing. Moreover, the inspiration behind both motions was entirely different. However, they both focus on implied readers of source texts (Tolkien) and target texts (Steiner). Moreover, the assumptions made by the individual who decides to complete either cycle as well as the effects of this completion bear crucial similarities. In this comparison, I will attempt to reveal them.

Tolkien (2006a) begins his overview with the function simply called "fantasy". For Tolkien, fantasy is a space for making the most powerful, effective art, which is provided by the creation—or "Sub-creation" (p. 139)—of the secondary world within the logical confines of the primary world. It assumes that the fantastic is not a chaotic fancy contradictory to reason or science, as some claim in attempts to discredit it (p. 139). Rather, it offers "arresting strangeness" (p. 139); a feeling of believable and engrossing novelty based on the logic known from the primary world. The fact that some reject this strangeness is a manifestation of distrust. Deviation from the mechanics of material reality is met with suspicion. Tolkien argues that fantasy does not contradict science or reason; in fact, the more grounded it is in logic, the more effective the arresting strangeness (p. 144).

By "recovery", Tolkien means "the regaining of a clear view" (p. 146). If one trusts fantasy and immerses in the narrative, they may look at aspects of the everyday from a new perspective. Some of them may be trivial, some profound; some previously unaddressed. Fantasy literature, says Tolkien, has the capacity to observe new phenomena and see what we considered certain in a new light (p. 147). Recovery is concerned with transformation through cognition and comprehension, much as aggression, the second step of the hermeneutic motion. In both cycles, the second step implies that the pursuit of understanding is a cognitive challenge. This is likely why Tolkien mentions that another path to recovery leads through humility (p. 146), a default mode of any intellectual pursuit that employs philosophical hermeneutics, including Steiner's cycle.

Tolkien's third value is escape. It is a temporary release from the dread and unattractiveness of our present reality and not, as many claim, an immature rejection of all things modern for the sake of insubstantial make-believe. It is

also a realization of common longings and desires to experience what is beyond human capacity (pp. 151–152). This often manifests itself in fantasy narratives by unity with nature through, for example, the ability to communicate with animals (p. 152). It is a return to imagined innocence often fuelled by nostalgia or idealized notions regarding the past—another common aspect of human experience.

This bears a resemblance to Steiner's (1998) third movement. Recovery, like aggression, is a violent release; escape, like embodiment, is a form of organization of what has been released. The implied reader of fantasy allows for the challenging of their conceptualization of the world or themselves which may influence—or be incorporated into—their worldview or value system, but they also try to make sense of the ensuing chaos of novelty by positioning it in the context of the believable and thus, to an extent, familiar secondary world. Similarly, the implied translator considers what was forcibly extracted by aggression and incorporates it into the web of texts and contexts existing in the target culture (pp. 314–316). The implied translator has some control over how the translated text will orient itself relative to the target culture, but that control is limited.

Tolkien's (2006a) cycle ends with consolation brought by a happy ending, a moment in a narrative that he calls Eucatastrophe (p. 153). It is "the sudden joyous 'turn'" (p. 153), but it is not definitive. Even though this usually marks the cathartic finale of most fantasy stories, the feeling that the work is not fully done (or it did not constitute the final task) lingers. It shares a feature of Tolkien's escape: reading fantasy is not a naïve jump into bliss.

Steiner's (1998) restitution offers a similar result. After the appropriative savagery of the previous two movements, an attempt to restore the balance is needed. Importantly, it is not an act, but rather a consequence of the careful execution of the previous steps: "being methodical, penetrative, analytic, enumerative, the process of translation, like all modes of focused understanding, will detail, illumine, and generally body forth its object" (p. 316). The ST is presented to a new group of potential recipients, which is a practical benefit of the text (this has positive financial consequences to the real author, too). Moreover, the decision to translate a text methodically, penetratively, etc. manifests respect for the ST. It signals that it is worth disseminating. A translation created as a result of such work will likely evoke the feeling of Eucatastrophe—and, in fantasy, Eucatastrophe is a form of reciprocation—as a consequence of completing the hermeneutic motion.

These similarities show the connection between the effects of reading fantasy literature and the effects of translating it. As explained above, Steiner's hermeneutic motion, supported by Berman's typology of textual deformations, forms the hermeneutic model of translating and reading translations which helps in identifying and discussing translation decisions in the context of potential reception without strong technical or ideological bias. Combined with Tolkien's values, this analytical perspective focuses on a particular problem of a defined genre and the specific expectations of its readers. This results in a narrower model which may be referred to as a hermeneutic model of translating fantasy literature. To evaluate its effectiveness let us apply it to the translation of culture-specific elements in *Uprooted* that serve the escapist function.

4. *UPROOTED* BY NAOMI NOVIK AND ITS POLISH TRANSLATION

The material used in the study is the original English text and the Polish translation of *Uprooted* by Naomi Novik, a 2015 novel which received numerous accolades and was warmly received by critics and readers. It tells the story of Agnieszka, a peasant girl and a wizard's apprentice, who manifests extraordinary talent for magic. Her power allows her to challenge the Wood—a sentient forest which encroaches on neighbouring lands, possessing or killing all living beings.

The novel was inspired by the immigrant experience of Novik's Polish mother (Jackson, 2018) and the Polish fairy stories that her mother read to her in her childhood (Porter Square Books, n.d.). *Uprooted* includes numerous references to the Polish culture; it is safe to assume that these connotations are foreign to an average Anglophone reader of the ST. However, in the TT, a Polish translation by Zbigniew A. Królicki, *Wybrana* ["The Chosen One"] (2023), most of them serve a completely different function and thus are likely to evoke an opposite reaction: that of familiarity rather than strangeness.

The present case study focuses on the potential reception of those cultural references in two respects: their escapist function in the original and the shifts of that effect that occur in the Polish translation. The Polish cultural markers in *Uprooted* have been categorized into five groups: character names (Table 1), geography (Table 2), clothing (Table 3), cuisine (Table 4) and miscellaneous (Table 5). For the tables with full lists of references including the page

numbers where they appear or appear for the first time in the sources, see the Appendix.

The analysis of selected examples of those categories is based on the hermeneutic model of translating fantasy literature discussed above. Firstly, Berman's text-deforming tendencies as they appear in the Polish translation of the cultural markers in *Uprooted* are discussed. The observations made as a result of this analysis are considered in light of Steiner's hermeneutic motion and Tolkien's values of fantasy.

5. DISCUSSION

As seen in Table 1, many names have the same spelling in both columns; all those are common contemporary Polish names, such as "Agnieszka", "Kasia", "Hanna" or "Marta". This is sometimes the case with items representing locations (see Table 2), e.g. "Smolnik" or "Radomsko", and miscellaneous references (see Table 5), e.g. "Baba Jaga" or "Mama".

In the ST, some names are spelled in a way that facilitates their pronunciation in English, e.g., "Andrey", "Michal", "Danushek" or "Bartosh". In TT, they are polonized, e.g., "Andrzej", "Michał", "Danuszek" or "Bartosz", respectively. In some cases of diminutive forms, the ST items are replaced with an alternative form, e.g., "Nieshka" was translated as "Agnisia". This is common in names of locations, e.g., "Zatochek"—"Zatoczek" or "Varsha"—"Warsza" occurs in references to clothing, e.g., "zupan"—"żupan" is prevalent in names of food items, e.g., "kasha"—"kasza", "nalevka"—"nalewka" and happens in miscellaneous references, e.g., "Mamusha"—"mamusia" or "Kasimir"—"Kazimierz".

A translation of "Zamek Orla" into "Zamek Orle Gniazdo" is a particularly interesting example. In this context, "zamek" means "castle". "Orla" is an adjective which means "of an eagle" or "eagle's" in the feminine. "Zamek Orle Gniazdo" translates as "Castle Eagle's Nest". The Polish translation adds a reference to a famous sequence of Polish castles or castle ruins between Częstochowa and Kraków known as *Orle Gniazda* ("Eagles' Nests").

All these are instances of clarification, the second item on Berman's list of deformations. The translator recognized the connection to the Polish culture and maintained it or, in the cases where the anglicized references were polonized in the translation, reinforced it. This clarifies those connotations, makes them more explicitly Polish to the average TT reader.

This influences the escapist function of these references in the TT. The names for people, places, culinary and other cultural items no longer have the unfamiliar feel which, in the context of fantasy, has the potential for the escapist effect. In the TT, their result is opposite: they create a strong link to the readers' everyday experience. For example, "Agnieszka", the protagonist's name, was the third most common name given to female newborns in the 1980s in Poland (Swoboda, 2013, p. 29). It is safe to assume that every Polish reader of *Wybrana* knows people who bear this and many other names appearing in the story. The translation of the castle's name is an example of clarification in which a reference to well-known historical monuments which are currently a tourist attraction was added. A hint at an animal that features on the Polish coat of arms and is a symbol of the country was replaced with an explicit link to an element of Polish landscape and cultural heritage.

Clarification also occurs in the treatment of references to the Russian culture, which is relevant in the context of Polishness. There is a long-standing cultural conflict between Poland and Russia, or at least a general Polish animosity towards Russia founded in the Russian role in the partitions of Poland, the atrocities committed by Russians against Poles in the second world war and the fact that, after the war, Poland became a communist satellite state of the Russian regime. This is clearly illustrated in *Uprooted* by calling the realm of the protagonist "Polnya" and its main antagonist "Rosya".

Many references to the Russian culture have been clarified to match the prevalent references to Polishness. This is exclusively the case with proper names, e.g. "Vladimir"—"Włodzimierz" or "Vlad"—"Włodek". Just like with clarified references to Polishness, these translation solutions make the reference to the Russian culture more familiar to the average Polish reader. In fact, they remove the connotation fully, as "Włodzimierz" and "Włodek" are idiomatic Polish names (in fact, the latter is a diminutive version of the former).

However, some modifications of Russian references in the TT take a more radical form; they are replaced with a different, Polish-oriented item. For example, the Russian name "Oleg" was translated as "Olek", which sounds similar, but is a diminutive form of "Aleksander", a different name, which is common in Poland. This also occurred in references to the cuisine. "Blini", a plural form of "blin", are Eastern European pancakes; the word is used in Belarussian and Russian. It was translated as "pierogi", a Polish word signifying a different dish, similar to dumplings. These are not clarifications, but instances of qualitative impoverishment, as the Russian references are removed and replaced with Polish variants.

Qualitative impoverishment manifests itself in other cases, too. Two notable examples are the translations of "letnik", an obsolete word which means a light summer item of clothing, often a dress, and "Masha", a Russian diminutive of the name "Maria". The former appears in the text three times. Each time it was translated differently: "kiecka", "sukienka" and "suknia". All these variants are hypernyms, as they all mean "dress"; they vary in terms of register and, consequently, in the context of usage ("kiecka" is informal, "sukienka" is neutral, "suknia" is formal, usually used in the context of a wedding dress or a ball gown). The latter was translated as "sierotka", which means "a little orphan". Both translations remove a culturally significant reference with a generic notion, which, in Berman's (2012, p. 291) terms, removes the "'iconic' richness" of the notion used in the ST.

Quantitative impoverishment, or "a lexical loss" (Berman, 2012, p. 291) is less common, but it appears. A clear example is the treatment of "taigla cake", a Jewish dessert. The term was not translated; what remained was a description of it, which is also featured in the original. The reference to a culinary item of the Jewish cuisine arguably lesser known in Poland was lost.

On the other hand, there are instances of expansion often caused, as Berman posits, by two other deformations: rationalization and clarification (p. 290). An example is the translation of a reference to a common element of various stories featuring *Baba Jaga*, which can be described as a model antagonist of Slavic folklore, who is often portrayed as living in a hut standing on a hen's leg. In the ST, only the fact that her hut is known to stand on legs is mentioned. The TT clarifies and expands this by describing the hut as standing on a single leg of a hen.

Some translation solutions are difficult to categorize. For example, a number of Russian names in translation preserve their Russian feel, but the spelling is polonized. Some instances include "Nichkov"—"Niczkow", "Maria Olshankina"—"Maria Olszankina", "Ludmila"—"Ludmiła". On the one hand, these are references to the Russian culture, which, fundamentally, is foreign to an average Polish reader, especially compared to the Polish culture. On the other hand, the potential reception of the references to the Russian culture is likely to be different between Poland and the Anglophone countries considering the historical contexts briefly mentioned above. Moreover, the names are still polonized: the format of the Russian names in the ST and TT adheres to the rules of the spelling of Russian names in English and Polish, respectively. Thus, it can be argued that it is a form of clarification.

However, there is a number of translation solutions where, arguably, deformations do not occur. The translation of "Rosya", a name of a country in *Uprooted*, is an illustrative example. The spelling in the ST is a close reflection of the Polish pronunciation of "Rosja", which is "Russia" in Polish. However, the translator decided against using the name of the real country, even though it sounds just like it in the original. The solution is "Rusja"; the reference to *Rosja* is preserved, but an element of the real life—here: the name of a real country—does not appear in the text. Another instance of no deformation is the translation of "stewed cabbage and sausage" which is a periphrasis of "bigos", a staple of Polish cuisine. It is important to address them, as they contrast with deforming translation solutions discussed above.

A deformation that seems to overarch most of the translations is the destruction of expressions and idioms. Berman (2012) defines it as replacing forms of expression of the ST language with idiomatic expressions of the TT language that signify more or less the same; he illustrates it with translating ST idioms with TT idioms of equivalent meaning (pp. 250–251). In the case of *Uprooted*, this manifests itself in a non-standard way. The expressions in question are not natural to the ST culture. The point of the references to Polishness is to create the feeling of unfamiliarity, which, in the context of fantasy, has the potential to facilitate escapism. In the majority of cases, the TT retains the familiarity of the references and, consequently, removes their contextual function. Arguably, this is a tempting solution: the TT readers are likely to understand all those references and feel strongly about their presence in an originally American mainstream fantasy novel. This is another manifestation of ethnocentrism mentioned by Berman in his discussion of this deformation (p. 251).

The proposed framework dictates that the above analysis be considered from the hermeneutic perspective of pursuing truth. Once focused on the reception, this truth may be understood as the characteristics of a given genre that evoke a certain affect; once limited to fantasy literature, this affect, according to Tolkien, may be defined as escape. In the particular situation of translating *Uprooted* into Polish, the general strategy of rendering the cultural references may evoke a reaction which would not occur in the translation into any other language.

Let us consider the issue focusing on the stages of the Steiner's and Tolkien's cycles, i.e., trust-aggression-embodiment-restitution and fantasy-recovery-escape-consolation, respectively. The decision to keep all the references to the current Polish culture and to further polonize many of them seems

like an act of distrust regarding the potential reception. Arguably, the ethnocentric deformations point towards the imperative to overexplain and avoid any potential ambiguity or unfamiliarity in the cultural references. Consequently, this potentially hinders the effectiveness of creating the fantastical secondary world. It is no longer a new realm based on the mechanics of the primary world, as too many elements of the latter occur as concrete elements of the former.

Here, Steiner's aggression means taking the elements of the ST that are familiar to the TT readership with seemingly little consideration of the role they play in the genre-specific context of the ST. This limits the possibility of Tolkien's recovery through immersion in the secondary world, as what the TT readers are confronted with—unlike the ST readers—is elements of their everyday experience present in a fantasy narrative, which, potentially, produces a jarring effect.

Consequently, this influences embodiment, Steiner's third step immediately following aggression, which is an incorporation of the ST into the TT culture. In the context of fantasy, this reconstruction should offer a nostalgic effect which enables the reader to momentarily override the mundane everyday existence. The strong connotations to the contemporary Polish society, geography and art have the potential to produce an opposite result.

Both motions end in an attempt to restore balance: for Steiner, it is restitution, for Tolkien, consolation or Eucatastrophe. Arguably, considering Polish references, this was not achieved. In the context of the social and cultural context of the TT readers, the ethnocentric deformations that occur in the translation tilt it towards evoking familiarity rather than arresting strangeness.

However, an element of Tolkien's Eucatastrophe is a certain incompleteness of catharsis. The resolution is not entirely fulfilling; no single narrative exhausts the possibilities of fantasy literature. This points to the general conclusion of this discussion. It must be clearly stated that it is not that the Polish translation of the novel was unsuccessful. Such a judgment—or any judgment—would counter the hermeneutic perspective. Rather, Tolkien's view on Eucatastrophe goes in tandem with Steiner's assumption regarding restitution: that it is an attempt at a reciprocal translation and never a definitive solution.

Considering this, a tentative conclusion of this discussion might be that the translators' task is to produce translation series. The polyphonic nature of multiple translations—rather than "retranslations", which suggests a hierarchical approach in which the first translation is a type of reference point for all subsequent translations—allows for consideration and reconsideration of

various translation solutions as well as their potential and actual reception in the contexts of specific cultural and temporal contexts. It also assumes that there is no one "correct" translation and points to the dialogic nature of multiple attempts to complete the hermeneutic motion.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to develop a hermeneutic model of translating fantasy literature based on the more general model combining George Steiner's hermeneutic motion with Antoine Berman's text-deforming tendencies and focused on fantasy literature by employing J. R. R. Tolkien's four functions of fantasy literature. The model was applied in the case study of translating references to Polishness in the Polish version of the 2015 fantasy novel *Uprooted* by Naomi Novik.

The analysis revealed that the model may help in discussing translations of fantasy in the context of their potential effectiveness as escapist texts. The discussion of text-deforming tendencies in translation of cultural markers adds detail to the consideration of the ST-TT pairs from the perspective of Steiner's hermeneutic motion. Moreover, Tolkien's values of fantasy contextualise Steiner's cycle, making it specifically aligned to studying fantasy literature. The model helps to avoid the definitive prescriptions for translating on the lexical level. The discussion points to producing translation series as the recommendation.

More studies of other ST-TT pairs of fantasy fiction need to be conducted to confirm the replicability of the model; they could be focused on more detailed or technical aspects of fantasy, such as elements of worldbuilding or intertextuality. Moreover, this discussion invites empirical research in reader reception to develop these findings. It is also worth investigating the effects that the existence of translation series has on the reception of a given text in the TT culture. Finally, developing similar, focused models for analysing translations of texts representing other genres might facilitate academic discussions which would help in bridging the gap between generally hermetic theory and translation practice.

REFERENCES

Attebery, B. (1992). *Strategies of fantasy*. Indiana University Press.

Bassnett, S. (2014). *Translation studies* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Berman, A. (2012). Translation and the trials of the foreign. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (3rd ed., pp. 240–253). Routledge.

Clute, J. (1997). Escapism. In J. Clute & J. Grant (Eds.), *The encyclopedia of fantasy* (p. 321). St. Martin's Press.

Curry, P. (2014). The critical response to Tolkien's fiction. In S. D. Lee (Ed.), *A companion to J.R.R. Tolkien* (pp. 369–388). Wiley Blackwell.

Jackson, F. (2018, July 10). Naomi Novik talks *Spinning Silver*, Her Rumpelstiltskin-Inspired Novel. *Paste*. https://www.pastemagazine.com/books/naomi-novik/naomi-novik-talks-spinning-silver.

Jackson, R. (1981). *Fantasy. The Literature of Subversion*. Methuen.

James, E. (2012). Tolkien, Lewis and the explosion of genre fantasy. In E. James & F. Mendlesohn (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to fantasy literature* (pp. 62–78). Cambridge University Press.

Kuijpers, M, Shawn D, & Kuiken, D. (2019). Personality traits and reading habits that predict absorbed narrative fiction reading. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, *13*(1), 74–88. http://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000168

Lawton, C. J., & Cain, L. K. (2022). Fictional escapism and identity formation: A duoethnographic exploration of stories and adolescent development. *The Qualitative Report*, *27*(12), 2938–2955. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5742

Menadue, C. B., & Jacups, S. (2018, June 5). Who reads science fiction and fantasy, and how do they feel about science? Preliminary findings from an online survey. *SAGE Open*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018780946

Mendlesohn, F. (2008). *Rhetorics of fantasy*. Wesleyan University Press.

Merga, M. K. (2017). What motivates avid readers to maintain a regular reading habit in adulthood? *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, *40*(2), 146–156. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03651992

Moorcock, M. (1988). *Wizardry and wild romance. A study of epic fantasy*. VGSF.

Novik, N. (2015). *Uprooted*. Pan Books.

Novik, N. (2023). *Wybrana* (Z. A. Królicki, Trans.). Dom Wydawniczy Rebis.

Porter Square Books. (n.d.) *Interview with Naomi Novik* [Archived material]. Porter Square Books. Retrieved November 5, 2025, from https://web.archive.org/web/20231117134425/https://www.portersquarebooks.com/interview-naomi-novik

Skwarzyński, J. (2023). The hermeneutic method of translating and reading translations: Rendering cultural references in Sue Townsend's *The Queen and I* into Polish. *New Voices in Translation Studies*, *28*(1), 29–49. https://newvoices.arts.chula.ac.th/index.php/en/article/view/273/562

Steiner, G. (1998). *After Babel. Aspects of language and translation* (3rd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Swoboda, P. (2013). Imiona częste w Polsce w latach 1995–2010 oraz ich zróżnicowanie w czasie i przestrzeni. *Onomastica*, *57*, 19–69. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311607879_Imiona_czeste_w_Polsce_w_latach_1995-2010_oraz_ich_zroznicowanie_w_czasie_i_przestrzeni

Tolkien, J. R. R. (2006a). On fairy-stories. In C. Tolkien (Ed.), *The monsters and the critics and other essays* (pp. 109–161). Harper Collins Publishers.

Tolkien, J. R. R. (2006b). *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (H. Carpenter, Ed.). Harper Collins Publishers.

Venuti, L. (2008). *The translator's invisibility. A history of translation* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Venuti, L. (2012). Genealogies of translation theory: Jerome. In L. Venuti (Ed.), *The translation studies reader* (3rd ed., pp. 483–502). Routledge.

Venuti, L. (2013). *Translation changes everything. Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Wilkinson, K., Andries, V., Howarth, D., Bonsall, J., Sabeti, S., & McGeown, S. (2020). Reading during adolescence: Why adolescents choose (or do not choose) books. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *64*(2), 157–166. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1065

APPENDIX

Below are full lists of references to Polishness in *Uprooted*. The numbers in brackets are page numbers in respective books where the reference appeared (or appeared for the first time). Wherever necessary, explanatory comments are provided in the third column.

Table 1. References to Polishness in the names of characters in *Uprooted* and *Wybrana*

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
Jadwiga Bach (4)	Jadwiga Bach (6)	—
Kasia (5)	Kasia (7)	Diminutive of "Katarzyna"
Agnieszka (6)	Agnieszka (9)	—
Danka (11)	Danka (14)	Diminutive of "Danuta"
Borys (12)	Borys (16)	—
Marek (40)	Marek (50)	—
Sigmund (40)	Zygmunt (50)	—
Hanna (49)	Hanna (60)	—
Vasily (49)	Wasyl (60)	Russian name
Borys (61)	Borys (73)	—
Marta (61)	Marta (73)	—
Andrey (61)	Andrzej (73)	—
Danushek (61)	Danuszek (73)	Diminutive of "Danuta"
Masha (65)	sierotka [little orphan] (77)	Russian name, diminutive of "Maria"
Jerzy (66)	Jerzy (78)	—
Krystyna (66)	Krystyna (78)	—
Nieshka (66)	Agnisia (79)	Diminutive of "Agnieszka"
Hanka (70)	Hanka (83)	Diminutive of "Hanna"
Eva (78)	Ewa (92)	—
Vladimir (89)	Włodzimierz (105)	—
Agata (130)	Agata (155)	—
Nichkov (170)	Niczkow (200)	Russian surname
Anatol (176)	Anatol (207)	—
Michal (177)	Michał (208)	—
Janos (177)	Janusz (208)	—
Marechek (179)	Mareczek (211)	Diminutive of "Marek"
Ludmila (127)	Ludmiła (151)	Russian name
Tomasz (220)	Tomasz (256)	—
Oleg (220)	Olek (256)	"Oleg" is a Russian name; "Olek" is a diminutive form of a different name (Aleksander), even though the pronunciation is similar.
Alosha (243)	Aleksa (283)	"Alosha" is a Russian masculine name, a diminutive form of "Alexei"; in *Uprooted* it is a name of a female character. "Aleksa" is a different name and not popular in Poland.

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
Bartosh (251)	Bartosz (293)	—
Spytko (252)	Spytko (293)	Diminutive of "Spycimir", an Old Polish name
Boguslava (255)	Bogusława (296)	—
Alicja (257)	Alicja (299)	—
Maria Olshankina (273)	Maria Olszankina (318)	Russian surname
Jakub (307)	Jakub (358)	—
Malgorzhata (313)	Małgorzata (366)	—
Marisha (313)	Marysia (366)	Diminutive of "Maria"
Stashek (314)	Staszek (366)	Diminutive of "Stanisław"
Golshkin (314)	Golszkin (366)	Russian surname
Lizbeta (319)	Elżbieta (373)	—
Vlad (357)	Włodek (418)	Diminutive of "Włodzimierz"
Natalya (391)	Natalia (455)	—
Malgosia (392)	Małgosia (456)	Diminutive of "Małgorzata"
little Anton (432)	mały Antoś [little Antoś] (503)	"Antoś" is a diminutive of "Antoni"
Ludek (434)	Ludek (505)	Diminutive of "Ludwik"

Table 2. References to Polishness in the geography of *Uprooted* and *Wybrana*

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
Dvernik (4)	Dwiernik (6)	"Dwernik" is the name of a village in Poland
Kralia (4)	Kralia (6)	Reference to the real city of "Kraków": both are known for a famous university (Jagiellonian University in Kraków)
Polnya (7)	Polnia (10)	Reference to "Poland", pronunciation resembles that of "Polonia" (the Polish diaspora)
Rosya (9)	Rusja (13)	Reference to "Russia"
Olshanka (10)	Olszanka (13)	"Olszanka" is the name of a village in Poland
Poniets (15)	Poniec (19)	"Poniec" is the name of a town in Poland
Radomsko (15)	Radomsko (19)	Name of a city in Poland
Smolnik (56)	Smolnik (67)	Name of a village in Poland
Vyosna (64)	Wiosna (76)	"Wiosna" means "spring"
Zatochek (100)	Zatoczek (117)	"Zatoczek" means "the great ramshorn", a snail common in Poland
Porosna (129)	Porosna (154)	Reference to the verb "porastać" ["to overgrow something"]
Kyeva Province (131)	prowincja kijawska (157)	Reference to the real city of "Kijów" in Ukraine
Kamik (216)	Kamyk (252)	"Kamyk" is the name of a village in Poland ("a little rock")

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
Zamek Orla (229)	Zamek Orle Gniazdo (267)	"Orla" is a feminine adjective derived from the noun "orzeł" ["eagle"]; the back translation of the Polish version is "Castle Eagle's Nest". This is a reference to "The Eagle's Nests" ["Orle Gniazda"], a chain of medieval castles and castle ruins which once protected the borders of the Kingdom of Poland on the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland
Varsha (347)	Warsza (406)	Reference to the real city of "Warszawa"
Gidna (284)	Gidna (331)	Reference to the real city of "Gdynia": both are port cities in the north of the country
Debna (346)	Dębno (405)	"Dębno" is the name of a city in Poland

Table 3. References to Polishness in the names of clothing in *Uprooted* and *Wybrana*

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
zupan (11)	żupan (15)	Type of robe worn by upper-class men in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 16th–18th centuries
letnik (37)	kiecka (45), sukienka (64), suknia (74)	A piece of clothing, a dress, a skirt or a shirt, often light and made of linen, worn in summer, as the name suggests ("letni" is an adjective derived from "lato" ["summer"]); "kiecka" is an informal term for an everyday, casual dress; "suknia" describes an elegant, elaborate dress, for example, a wedding dress; "sukienka" is its diminutive form and commonly used in a neutral sense

Table 4. References to Polishness in the cuisine in *Uprooted* and *Wybrana*

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
senkach cake (56)	sękacz (67)	A type of spit cake in Poland and Lithuania
kasha (56)	kasza (67)	"Kasza" commonly means "buckwheat" but it may refer to other cooked groats
taigla cake (56)	— (68)	A type of Jewish dessert with nuts and honey, which may be prepared as a tray bake
nalevka (308)	nalewka (359)	"Nalewka" is a type of traditionally Polish strong alcoholic beverage
zhurek (434)	żurek (505)	"Żurek" is a classic Polish sour cereal soup usually served with boiled eggs
stewed cabbage and sausage (434)	gotowana kapusta z kiełbasą (505)	A description of "bigos", a classic Polish dish
blini (434)	pierogi (505)	"Blini" is an Eastern European pancake; "pierogi" means a dish similar to dumplings
samovar (366)	samowar (427)	A traditional Russian container used to boil water for tea; well-known in Eastern European countries
vodka (434)	wódka (505)	—

Table 5. Miscellaneous references to Polishness in *Uprooted* and *Wybrana*

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
[…] I bent down and sang *Tihas, tihas, kai tihas, kai tihas*, over and over, and found myself falling into the sound of the birthday song about living a hundred years. (85)	[…] pochyliłam się nad chorym, powtarzając raz po raz: „*Tihas, tihas, kai tihas, kai tihas*", aż przyłapałam się na tym, że nucę je na melodię piosenki *Sto lat*. (100)	The song "Sto lat" ["Hundred Years"] is customarily sung during birthday parties; the lyrics are a repeated wish that the person who celebrates their birthday may live for a hundred years
"Many Years" (88)	*Sto lat* (103)	
Jaga (91)	Jaga (108)	"Jaga" or "Baba Jaga" is a villainous female character in many Slavic fairy tales
Old Jaga (91)	Baba Jaga (108)	
Baba Jaga (258)	Baba Jaga (300)	
vampyr (33)	wampir (41)	"Vampire" in Polish
Mamusha (67)	mamusia (80)	Diminutive form of "mama" ["mother"]
Mama (122)	mama (145)	—
The remains of the shield lay across the body, barely marked with a black double-headed eagle: the royal crest of Rosya. (201)	Na zwłokach leżały resztki tarczy z ledwie widocznym czarnym dwugłowym orłem, królewskim herbem Rusji. (235)	A black double-headed eagle was the central element of the Russian coat of arms between the 18th and early 20th centuries
Saint Jadwiga's veil (232)	welon Świętej Jadwigi (270)	A historical figure (1374–1399), the first female monarch of the Kingdom of Poland, crowned in 1384
Saint Kasimir's armour (233)	napierśnik Świętego Kazimierza (271)	A historical figure (1458–1484), a prince of the Kingdom of Poland
Saint Jacek's golden cup (233)	złoty puchar Świętego Jacka (271)	A historical figure (1185–1257), a Dominican missionary
Charovnikov (242)	Sala Czarowników (281)	"Sala Czarowników" means "The Room of Wizards"; the pronunciation of "Charovnikov" resembles that of "Czarowników"
suka (434)	cymbały (505)	"Suka" means a traditional Polish musical instrument, a type of proto-fiddle; "cymbały" ["cimbalom"] is another chordophone instrument, but not a variant of suka

Uprooted	*Wybrana*	Comments
[…] slowly I began to hum the old song about the spark on the hearth, telling its long stories: *Once there was a golden princess, loved a simple player; the king gave them a splendid wedding, and the story ends there! Once there was old Baba Yaga, house made out of butter; and in that house so many wonders – tsk! The spark is gone now*. (309)	[…] powoli zaczęłam nucić starą piosenkę o iskierce w popielniku: — Była sobie raz królewna, pokochała grajka; król wyprawił im wesele i skończona bajka! Była sobie Baba Jaga, miała domek z masła, a w tym domku same dziwy – psyk! – iskierka zgasła. (360–361)	The song is a verse by Janina Porazińska first published in 1925, one of the most famous Polish lullabies
[…] I didn't want to spend my days roaming the world on a hut built on legs, like the stories said of Jaga […] (356)	[…] nie chcę przez całe życie przemierzać świata w chatce na kurzej nóżce, jak bajano o Jadze […] (417)	According to many Slavic folktales, Baba Jaga lived in a hut built on a hen's leg. This is obliquely referenced in the original—the leg is not described in any way—but in the translation the detail of the leg being that of a hen—"kurza nóżka" ["hen's leg"]—is overt
harvest tables (433)	stoły dożynkowe (504)	"Dożynki" is a Slavic celebration of the end of the harvest season
village festival (433)	dożynki naszej wioski (505)	