

Stylistic reasons and problematic translators

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Post-Socialist Translation Practices: Ideological struggle in children's literature

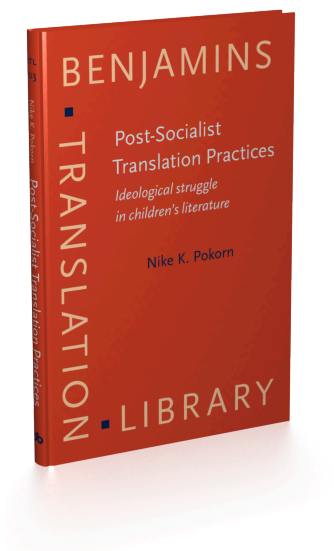
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Stylistic reasons and problematic translators

For just as the tenor and the significance of the great works of literature undergo a complete transformation over the centuries, the mother tongue of the translator is transformed as well. While a poet's words endure in his own language, even the greatest translation is destined to become part of the growth of its own language and eventually to be absorbed by its renewal. (Benjamin [1923] 2000: 18)

Re-translations for stylistic and linguistic reasons

There are several explanations as to why and how we retranslate: some scholars focus on the strategy used in retranslations and claim that first translations tend to be more domesticating than retranslations (e.g. Bensimon 1990:ix; Berman 1990: 1–7); others claim that, through their insistence on some definable and fixed meaning of the text, the partisans of the retranslation hypothesis reveal their deep-rooted logocentric bias (Gambier 1994:414; see also 2011); another view is that many other factors, not just the order of appearance, influence the translation strategy used in retranslations (cf. Paloposki and Koskinen 2004: 27–38). However, it is not uncommon, following on from Walter Benjamin's thought, for us to be led to believe that retranslations occur mainly because of the constantly evolving and changing target language: we retranslate because the target audience considers an existing version as obsolete. In particular, retranslations of children's literature seem to adopt a prototypical approach to rewriting the text (Desmidt 2009:669–683) and tend to comply with up-to-date linguistic norms, obeying primarily the imperative of the “readability” of the target text (Du-Nour 1995:327–346).

Surprisingly, our corpus did not fulfil our expectations in this regard: only two works from the catalogue clearly fell into the category of retranslations for stylistic and linguistic reasons: *The Jungle Books* by Rudyard Kipling and, to some extent, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. In order to shed some light on the reasons for commissioning retranslations, we will have to look more closely at the patrons of these new translations and the ideology of the new society, by focusing on the biographies of the translators, the political situation at the time of retranslation, and the influence of other agents that all constructed the translatorial field of children's literature in Slovenia in the decade after World War 2.

The Jungle Books

Kipling's classic for children *The Jungle Book* was first translated into Slovene in 1908; however, the translator of this earliest translation is not known. The language of the book, in accordance with the date of publication, comes across as archaic and outdated to the contemporary reader. The book was translated again in 1927 by Ivan Mulaček (1874–1951),³ who studied natural sciences in Vienna and Graz, and moved in 1903 to the United States of America, where he worked as an editor of Slovene immigrant journals. After a few years he returned to Europe, studied English in Prague, Graz and Vienna, and started teaching English, interpreted at court, wrote English course books, and translated extensively from English. His Slovene translation of *The Jungle Book* is fluent and does not use archaic or out-of-date expressions and turns of phrase.

In 1943 the translation of *The Second Jungle Book* by Jan Baukart (1889–1974) appeared for the first time in Slovene. Jan Baukart was a teacher who, at the end of his career in 1952, was the head teacher of a school in Ljutomer, in the north-east of Slovenia. He wrote some educational works, a book for children, and translated literary works and works for children from Czech and English. His translation of *The Second Jungle Book* abounds in Croatisms and stylistically awkward turns of phrase. Not surprisingly, then, the post-war translation from 1951, which included both *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle Book*, attempted to correct these stylistic blunders. The 1951 translation was attributed to Jan Baukart and Pavel Holeček, but analysis of the text seems to suggest that the translation from 1943 was taken as the basis and that the stylistic reworking was done by Pavel Holeček (1882–1964), a renowned translator from English at that time. Holeček studied Classical Philology at the University of Vienna and spent most of his life teaching in Ljubljana, Austria and Celje. In addition, he devoted himself to translating from Czech, German, English and Ukrainian, in particular children's literature. Analysis of the new version of *The Jungle Books*, which was reprinted in 1960, revealed that Baukart's translation was still retained and that the new text mainly attempted to eliminate Croatisms and make certain turns of phrase more stylistically acceptable.

It seems, however, that even this new version was not radical enough in its corrections, so that there appeared new translations of *The Jungle Book* and *The Second Jungle* in 1965 and 1967 respectively. Both were translated by Janez Gradišnik (1917–2009), one of the most renowned Slovene translators of the

3. Unless otherwise stated, biographical data for all translators are taken from the latest and most comprehensive Slovene biographical lexicons *Osebnosti: Veliki slovenski biografski leksikon* (Stanonik and Brenk 2008) and *Slovenski biografski leksikon* (Cankar 1925–1991).

post-war period. Before the war he was a member of the Christian Socialist circles which were instrumental in setting up the Liberation Front that successfully opposed the occupying forces and was victorious at the end of the war. During the Second World War, he lived in exile in Croatia and spent the last months of the war in Croatian jail. In 1943 Christian Socialists signed the so-called Dolomite Declaration in which they renounced independent political activity after the war and recognised the primacy of the Communist Party of Slovenia. This meant that their post-war position was increasingly weakened. For example, the most prominent Slovene Christian Socialist and a co-founder of the Liberation Front and of the Socialist Yugoslavia, Edvard Kocbek, was immediately after the war given the prominent position of the first Yugoslav Minister for Slovenia in Belgrade, but when he became critical of some of the methods of the Communists, he soon fell into disgrace. In 1952 he was forced to resign, was completely removed from public life, and had to endure constant police surveillance until his death (Omerza 2010). Janez Gradišnik became Kocbek's secretary after the war and then the editor at one of the four most important publishing houses in Slovenia. When Kocbek lost the support of the ruling clique, Gradišnik was no longer allowed any prominent employment. In 1952 he lost his job as editor and was forced to turn to translating. During his long career he wrote novels and children's literature, and translated the works of prominent German, English, French, Russian, Serbian and Croatian authors into Slovene. For his lifetime work he received in 2008 Slovenia's highest award for cultural achievements. In his introduction to *The Jungle Book* the translator Gradišnik writes about the reasons for the new translation and claims that it was created in order to convey the original to Slovene readers more faithfully (Gradišnik 1965: 147). And indeed, a comparison of the texts reveals that not only stylistic changes were made, but also that semantic errors were rectified (i.e. unmotivated and inexplicable shifts, see Malmkjaer 2004). All post-war translations of Kipling's *Jungle Books* thus focussed on correcting the pre-war translations because they either used archaic language or were stylistically awkward and contained semantic errors.

Although this brief overview shows us that certain individuals were more or less forced to devote themselves to translating by being pushed from political life to the margins of the society, the reasons for these retranslations are common to all ages and could not be attributed to the changed political situation after the war but purely to the stylistic and linguistic out-datedness of the previous translations. At first sight, the reasons for the retranslations of *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain and *Pünktchen und Anton* by Erich Kästner seem more enigmatic.

Re-translations triggered by “problematic” and unacceptable translators

Pinocchio

Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi, i.e. Carlo Lorenzini, was first translated into Slovene in 1926 by Joža Lovrenčič. It was then retranslated in 1943 by Josip Meze, and a third translation appeared in 1951, this time by Albert Širok. The translations from 1926 and 1943 translated the original text without major adaptations or deletions; and the original text itself does not reveal any ideologically problematic passages for the Socialist order. Why then commission a new translation so soon after the war? The answer lies in the unacceptability of the pre-war translators for the post-war system. Joža Lovrenčič (1890–1952), the author of the first translation, belonged to a group of pre-war Catholic poets. Although not a member of any political organisation during the war, he nevertheless openly opposed some of the actions of the Liberation Front. For example, when in 1942 the Liberation Front called for an “artistic silence” and prohibited participation in any cultural event organised by the occupying forces or publication of any books in the state publishing houses, Lovrenčič ignored this call. Moreover, in 1944 he became the head teacher of the Slovene high school in Gorizia, whose functioning was allowed by the German occupying forces. In 1946, the new government accused Lovrenčič of having collaborated with the occupiers: he was forced to retire and sentenced to two years hard labour. Although his sentence was then reduced to two months, his books were no longer available in public libraries, and he was pushed to the margins of the new society. He died in 1952 (Lovrenčič 2010) and was rehabilitated only after the collapse of Yugoslavia. The author of the second translation, Josip Meze (1882–1951), was a Salesian priest – which was, as we have seen, not acceptable to the new society. Since the two pre-war translators were not in line with the new ideology, the first post-war translation of this children's classic was therefore entrusted to a more acceptable candidate. Albert Širok (1895–1985), a qualified teacher who worked as a librarian, as well as treasurer and director of the Slovene Theatre in Trieste, was interned in an Italian concentration camp during the war, and after the war worked at the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Slovenia and became an editor at the newly established Mladinska knjiga, the publishing house for children's literature in Ljubljana. His new translation of *Pinocchio* became a hit and was reprinted 14 times from 1951 to 2002. It seems that the translation of such an important and popular a work for children was allowed to be attributed only to an “untarnished” translator who belonged to the right circle of society.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

A similar fate befell the translator of the next work, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. The first translation of this classical work for children was done by Ivan Mulaček in 1921. The translation is a faithful rendering of the original, but the language is archaic and not in accordance with the contemporary stylistic rules of the Slovene language. There was a need for a new translation which appeared in 1947, and was done by Milena Mohorič (1905–1972), a graduate in Germanic languages and literature and Slovene literature from the University of Ljubljana, who taught at different schools around Slovenia. Milena Mohorič led a life with very few compromises: in 1929, when King Alexander I staged the coup that ended the parliamentary period in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and proclaimed a royal dictatorship, Milena Mohorič, in protest at these events, left her government-paid teaching job and became a free-lance author and translator. During that time she translated with her husband Vladimir Premru (1902–1949), a chemist, physicist and expressionist poet, Friedrich Engels's *Anti Dühring* (1933). She also wrote her own prose work in a realist and social-realist manner. She joined the Liberation Front at the beginning of the war, became a Communist in 1942, and was consequently sent to an Italian concentration camp. In 1944 she joined the Partisan forces, where she held several important leading positions. Her creative work during and after the war was strongly influenced by her war-time experience and became propagandist in nature. After the war she was first the deputy minister for social affairs in the post-war government, and then became a teacher at the teacher-training college. In 1949 she was arrested and charged of siding with the resolution of the Cominform (or the Informbureau), a Soviet-lead organisation which in 1947 replaced the third Communist international. Initially, the seat of the Cominform was in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia, but soon problems occurred: first Stalin strongly and openly disapproved of some of the decisions taken by Tito, and when the Yugoslav leader refused to back down, the Cominform expelled Yugoslavia from the organisation in 1948. This created much confusion among Yugoslav Communists, since some of them felt a loyalty to the Soviet Union, but the events following the Informbureau resolution also triggered a paranoid reaction in Yugoslavia, so that more than 16 000 people were, mostly without foundation, accused of being "Informbureau" supporters and were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps. Milena Mohorič, together with her husband and son, was one of 556 members of the Slovene Communist Party who were thus accused. Her husband died in concentration camp, while she, after being moved from one prison to the other, spent most of the rest of her life in psychiatric hospital. As a consequence, she has been almost completely erased from Slovene public records: for example, her work was

not mentioned in any of the anthologies or other works on Slovene literature that appeared in Socialist times (Sturm-Schnabl 1997/1998; Kralj 2010: 160–169). The revolution ate its children. And the same process of elimination also occurred in the field of translation: despite the fact that her translation of *Tom Sawyer* was fluent and accurate, it was not reprinted. Indeed, in 1960 there appeared a new translation by Janez Gradišnik, which was then reprinted nine times between 1960 and 1994.

Pünktchen und Anton

The pre-war translator of Erich Kästner's work *Pünktchen und Anton* was replaced for yet other reasons. Erich Kästner (1899–1974) was a German poet, novelist and satirist, nowadays primarily famous for his children's books. By profession a teacher, Kästner worked also as a journalist and from 1927 as a free-lance writer. After the brutal experience of the First World War, Kästner became a pacifist, fiercely opposed to all totalitarian regimes. As such, he was not allowed to publish his works in Germany during the Nazi regime (1933–1945), and even saw his books burned in May 1933. After spending the war in Germany, he became magazine editor of *Die Neue Zeitung* of Munich and a founder of a periodical for children. His high reputation was also reflected in the fact that he also became president of the German PEN (1952–1962). Although his work for the adults was criticised by some for not being radical enough and for nostalgically flirting with the past (Benjamin 1931: 181–184), his reputation as one of the most influential authors of children's literature of his time has remained undisputed (Hunushek 1999; Bemmman 1983; Schneyder 1982).

Because of the social philosophy expressed in his works that was close to Socialist ethics, Erich Kästner was immensely popular in post-war Slovenia and Croatia. His works, however, were judged to be "light" fiction, not high quality literature, so that, for example, in the early 1980s during my obligatory school work placement in the specialized library for children's literature, Pionirska knjižnica in Ljubljana, I was told by the senior librarians never to recommend his works (or works connected to Disney production that were also considered "kitsch") to children who did not know what to choose.

Pünktchen und Anton was first published in 1931 and its intent is clear: it attempts to show that nobility of character is not connected with the individual's social status. The novel describes the friendship between Anton, a poor but a clever boy who lives with his ailing mother, and has to sell shoelaces in the evening to bring in some money, and Pünktchen, a girl from a privileged bourgeois family who is neglected by her parents. After many trials and tribulations, Anton prevents Pünktchen's home from being robbed. As a reward, Pünktchen's father

invites Anton's mother to become their new domestic help, and Pünktchen's parents are again happily re-united. The final lesson of the book is that Earth might again become heaven if people treated each other nobly and generously. There are very few "problematic" passages in this novel from the point of view of Communist ethics, since in fact the whole story could be read as a didactic Socialist work.

The first translation of the work into Slovene appeared in 1937, just a few years after its publication. It was published in Ljubljana and translated by Mirko Kunčič. The translation uses contemporary language and is fairly faithful. There are only two instances when religious undertones are either added or strengthened in the Slovene translation. For example, in the following passage when Pünktchen addresses her governess as if she were her grandfather:

Sie /.../ sagte, als sie sei ihr eigner Grossvater: »Na, nun schütten Sie mal Ihr Herz aus.« (Kästner 1999: 60)
(She /.../ said, as if she were her grandfather: "Well, unburden your heart now.")

the Slovene translator changed "grandfather" into "confessor":

Potem je rekla s takšnim glasom, kakor da je njen spovednik: "Povejte mi, kaj vam leži na srcu?" (Kästner 1937b: 48)
(As if she were her confessor, she said to her: "Tell me, what burdens your heart?")⁴

And then also at the very end where the conjectural sentence

Die Erde soll früher einmal ein Paradies gewesen sein. Möglich ist alles. (Kästner 1999: 155)
(The Earth used to be Paradise, *they say*. Everything is possible.)
(Emphasis added)

is changed into a firm statement:

Zemlja je bila nekoč raj. Vse je mogoče. (Kästner 1937b: 127)
(The Earth used to be Paradise. Everything is possible.)

Soon after the war, in 1955, there appeared a new Slovene translation of this work. The above-mentioned passages are amended to correspond to the original, but there also occurred other changes. Different chapters in the novel *Püncthen und Anton* have short introductions in which the narrator addresses the readers directly. In those introductions, the narrator emphasises different didactic aspects of the story. In the introduction to Chapter VI, he warns the reader not to read the ending of this or any other novel beforehand, since this kind of impatience can

4. This and all subsequent translations into English are by me, unless otherwise stated.

spoil the fun. He compares such actions to the secret opening of presents before Christmas:

Das ist nämlich so, als wenn ihr vierzehn Tage vor Weihnachten in Mutters Schrank stöbert, um vorher zu erfahren, was ihr geschenkt kriegt. Und wenn ihr dann zur Bescherung gerufen werdet, wisst ihr schon alles. Ist das nicht schrecklich? Da müsst ihr dann überrascht tun, aber ihr wisst ja längst, was ihr bekommt, und eure Eltern wundern sich, warum ihr euch gar nicht richtig freut. Euch ist das Weihnachtsfest verdorben, und ihnen auch. (Kästner 1999: 64)

(It is as if you pried into your mother's closet two weeks before Christmas in order to find out what kind of presents you shall get. And when you are finally called to open the gifts, you already know everything. Isn't that awful? Then you are obliged to pretend to be surprised, although you have known for quite a while what you shall get, and your parents are surprised when they see that you are not really happy. Christmas holidays are spoiled for your parents and for you as well.)

The post-war Slovene translator changed all instances when Christmas was mentioned into "New Year", "Grandfather Frost" is introduced, i.e. the Socialist replacement of "Father Christmas", and the strangely sounding "Holidays of the New Year Tree" replace Christmas holidays.

To je namreč prav tako, kakor če bi štirinajst dni pred novim letom šli stikat v materino omaro, da bi zvedeli že poprej, kaj vam prinese dedek Mraz. In ko vas potem obdaruje, veste že vse. Kaj ni to strašno? Potem se morate pretvarjati, da ste presenečeni, pa vendar veste že več dni, kaj boste dobili, in vaši starši se čudijo, kako da niste bolj zares veseli. Praznik novoletne jelke je pokvarjen vam in staršem tudi. (Kästner 1955: 45)

(It is as if you pried into your mother's closet two weeks before New Year in order to find out what Grandfather Frost is going to bring you. And when he finally gives you your presents, you already know. Isn't that awful? Then you are obliged to pretend to be surprised, although you have known for days what you shall get, and your parents are surprised when they see that you are not really happy. The Holidays of the New Year Tree are spoiled for you and your parents as well.)

This new translation proved to be immensely popular in Slovenia: between 1955 and 1993 there appeared 8 reprints (in 1965, 1967, 1972 (twice), 1975 (twice), 1985, 1993). After the change of regime, however, the ideological interventions did not go completely unnoticed. In 2008 there appeared a revised version of the text, published by the Christian publishing house Mohorjeva družba, where the above section was corrected, reintroducing Christmas into the text (Kästner 2008: 46).

The novel *Pünktchen und Anton* was not published in Serbia (at least there are no entries in the common Serbian electronic online bibliographic source catalogue (www.vbs.rs/opac)). It was, however, very popular in Croatia. The first Croatian translation by Tomislav Prpić appeared as early as 1933 in Zagreb and it offered a faithful and thorough rendition. It was then reprinted after the war in 1956, 1959, 1963, 1969, 1972 and 1974, with only one notable correction: in the above mentioned passage, the edition from 1933 talks about Christmas holidays (Kästner 1933: 63), while in all subsequent reprints from 1950s to 1970s, this passage is changed, so that Christmas is no longer mentioned and is replaced by New Year (Kästner 1956: 33, 1959: 36, 1963: 36, 1969: 42, 1972: 42, 1974: 42).

Pokvarili ste Božić sebi, a i njima. (Kästner 1933: 63)
(You have spoiled Christmas for you and for them.)

Pokvarili ste Novu godinu sebi, a i njima. (Kästner 1956: 33)
(You have spoiled New Year for you and for them.)

And the same happens in the Macedonian translation by Branko Pendovski from 1959 – Christmas is replaced by New Year (Kästner 1959: 36).

The Croatian adaptation of the translation after the war could be explained by the fact that Christmas holidays were not officially celebrated in Yugoslavia (Christmas was cancelled in 1953; in 1955 January 1st and 2nd became public holidays, focusing on the celebration of the New Year's Tree and Grandfather Frost; Christmas holidays were again reintroduced only after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s). Indeed, similar corrections – we might even call them cultural equivalents – in translations could also be seen, for example, in the Slovene translation of *Pippi Longstocking* (see Pokorn 2008). What seems much more curious is the fact that the Slovene translation of *Pünktchen und Anton* from 1955 was completely re-worked: in other words, the post-war translation is not only a corrected pre-war version, but a new translation altogether. The answer most probably lies in the biography of the translator of the first version in 1937, Mirko Kunčič (1899–1984). Before the war Kunčič was an editor of the youth section in the right-wing Catholic newspaper *Slovenec*, a poet and an author of Slovene children's literature. After the war in 1945, he emigrated to Argentina, and is nowadays seen as one of the most important poets of Slovene political emigration (Blatnik et al. 1996; Glušič 1996; Glušič et al. 1999). It seemed that it was this political profile of the translator that was the most disturbing feature that triggered the new, post-war translation, which was entrusted to a renowned Communist, Mile Klopčič (1905–1984). Klopčič was a soc-realist poet and a translator from Russian and German. He worked in publishing, was the director of the Slovene National Theatre, and a researcher at the Academy of Sciences and Arts. He also received the highest national awards for his artistic

and translational activity. Not only that, according to the minutes of the meetings of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia (Drnovšek 2000), Klopčič was in 1950 a member of one of the subcommittees of the Agitprop Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovenia (meeting on 22 December 1950); he remained on the committee in 1951 (meeting on 12 October 1951) and in 1952 (meeting on 13 February 1952). Although he was not completely trusted by the main ideologist of the Party, Boris Zihlerl, who described him somewhat disparagingly as a “wandering individualist” (meeting on 20 December 1951), he nevertheless belonged to the inner circle of power of the society of the time. For quite a while he was also a member of the Publishing Council at Mladinska knjiga publishing house, i.e. the committee that defined the programme of the main publishing house for children's literature in Slovenia after the war and whose members were selected by the Party through the newly established Socialist Alliance of the Working People (SAWP) (Meeting of the Committee for Press at the Presidency of SAWP on 25 August 1955 (AS 537, a.u. 176), on 7 August 1959 (AS 537, a.u. 211)). Therefore, the most probable explanation of the fact that a completely new translation was commissioned after the war is that the translator from 1937 was not supposed to be mentioned again in the new state because of his political background.

The same happened with Kunčič's pre-war translation of *Emil und die Detektive* (1929), the most famous of Kästner's works for children that is also listed among the 30 or 50 titles of the world children's classics by O'Sullivan (2006: 147, 155). In this translation Kunčič again added religious elements: for example, while Emil replies to his grandmother with a simple “Thank you” (“Ich danke auch schön, Grossmutter” (Kästner 2008: 153)), in Kunčič's translation he says: “Bog ti povrni, stara mati.” (“May God repay you, Grandmother.”) (Kästner 1937a: 117). Kunčič also translates Emil's mother's “Hoppla!” (Kästner 2008: 36) with “Moj Bog!” (“My God!”) (Kästner 1937a: 29), etc. These additions, however, are minor and could easily be corrected. Instead of that, a completely new translation was commissioned in 1968. The translation was done by Vital Klabus (1932–), a dissident critic and renowned translator, who was a member of the editorial board of two magazines that were both prohibited by the state in the 1950s and 1960s (Repe 1990; Gabrič 1995: 268), but who was, nevertheless, allowed to continue working as one of the editors at Državna založba Publishing House, one of the main publishing houses in Socialist Slovenia. His translation reveals no ideological additions or omissions.

All in all, in our corpus of 13 titles that were retranslated in the first post-war decade, in only two cases (i.e. *The Jungle Books* and *Tom Sawyer*) could the retranslation be attributed purely to the linguistic out-datedness of the pre-war translation. As we have seen, often the unacceptability of the pre-war translator

to the new political position led to new translations. These new post-war translations were thus “carried out in service of power” (Lefevere 1992:vii): patronage in this case seems to have been mainly exerted by the publishing house and its structure, where important agents constituting the translatorial field of translated children’s literature assumed multiple roles. For example, Klobčič, the new post-war translator of Kästner’s *Pünktchen und Anton* acted as a translator, as a member of the editorial structure at the publishing house that had a monitoring role over the publications of children’s literature after the war and as a representative of the hidden ideological control over the entire cultural activity exerted by the Communist Party through its agitprop committee. The case of Kästner is particularly interesting, since there seems to be an important difference between the two post-war translations of his books: while the translation by Klabus does not introduce any ideological changes into the text, Klopčič’s translation not only eliminated the pre-war translator, but also changed the text in line with the new ideological stance. And this specific translation strategy leads us to the next group of translations from our catalogue.

