

Antonia PINTARIĆ  
University of Zadar

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## Re-Siting Gogol's Jews: Roman Šovary's Translation of *Taras Bulba*

### Introduction

Translator invisibility is a well-documented phenomenon in translation studies. Even with highly visible, sometimes controversial, texts, the translator's role is often reduced to brief remarks on fluency or transparency (Venuti 2008: 7). Nikolay Gogol's *Taras Bulba*, given its mythopoetic ambition and the inescapability of politicized discussions regarding Russian imperialism and Orthodoxy, is a quintessential example of such a controversial, frequently censored work. Yet, its Croatian translation has remained unexamined, let alone the translator behind it – Roman Šovary.<sup>1</sup> Investigating the “who, how, and why” of this translation is particularly vital given the translator's own identity. Namely, Šovary belonged to the very community whose identity this work historically fixed through negative imagery, the consequences of which he likely experienced firsthand in a different, yet continuous, historical moment.

### Ethics, Power, and Identity

Translation inevitably involves social agents, the obvious ones, such as authors and translators, and those less so, such as editors, publishers, or readers. All exist within and enact the sociocultural intricacies of their world. Far from a mere transfer of text, translation is radically contingent upon the sociocultural landscape; it does not merely transfer but re-articulates the text within a complex web

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<sup>1</sup> Also cited as *Romano Šovari* (Goldstein 2024). This study adopts the spelling used by the translator in the published work in the hope that it reflects his preference.

of ethical responsibilities, historical legacies, and identity politics. It is a process through which values are affirmed, negated, or negotiated. Since the “cultural turn” in Translation Studies (Bassnett and Lefevere 1995: 1–13), foregrounding these forces has become increasingly relevant in a global context where information is constantly adapted and shaped by divergent interests.

Lefevere defines translation as a form of rewriting that manipulates the original according to certain, usually dominant, ideological and/or poetological motivations and constraints (2017: 4). Because the original is often unavailable to the reader, the translator holds significant power in constructing the image of a work, an author, or a people. Consequently, much scholarship – from the Schleiermacher-inspired Berman (2021) to Venuti (2008)<sup>2</sup> – focuses on resisting the “deforming tendencies” and “ethnocentric violence” of translation, usually through the preservation of the Foreign as the ethical translation strategy. A similar call to acknowledge the identity-forming power of translation constitutes the core of Post-Colonial Translation Studies. Niranjana specifically argues that an obsessive focus on fidelity often obscures the “*force* of a translation” (1992: 58) to subjugate the image of the translated. Emphasizing the inherent asymmetry of systems and rejecting the idea of a neutral act of expressing universal experience, Niranjana advocates re-translation as an act of resistance against colonial representation and a reclamation of post-colonial agency and identity (1992). While these theories are typically tied to the hegemonic English translation tradition, they demonstrate that translation is a site where identities are constructed and power is contested.

The aim of the paper is to examine one such site, i.e. a more nuanced context, in which the source text itself is violently ethnocentric, fixing the identity of a community to which the translator belongs. More specifically, it aims to identify translation decisions related to antisemitic discourse and explain the consequences of Šovary’s strategy within the framework of translation as a site of resistance and redistribution of power. Ultimately, we seek to determine whether the translation becomes a site of retribution or rehabilitation. We examine antisemitic expressions in the source text and their translated counterparts to evaluate individual procedures and the overall strategy.<sup>3</sup> We focus on the textual results rather than the translator’s conscious intent.

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<sup>2</sup> The order of references reflects their initial publication years: Berman’s essay was first published in French in 1985, while Venuti’s monograph was published in 1995, with its revised edition released in 2008.

<sup>3</sup> This study does not subscribe to infinite relativism. We posit that meaning is shaped by cultural practices but anchored by universal biological constraints. Acknowledging the necessity of maximal possible context, we employ terms like “accurate” or “optimal” in the analysis.

## The Translator

Roman Šovary (1892–1957) was a Croatian translator and linguist of Jewish origin whose life spanned the Second World War and persecution of Jews in the Independent State of Croatia. In July 1944, Nazi authorities pressured the Ustashe regime to establish Šovary's "racial affiliation"<sup>4</sup> and justify his continued employment; a September response from the Ministry of the Interior's Department for Racial Policy officially designated him a "protected" individual (Goldstein 2024: 478). Listed among Holocaust survivors who returned to Zagreb in 1946 (Švob 2004: 223), Šovary survived the war in Zagreb due to his "mixed marriage and familial ties of his wife Božena née Stanzer. He was exempted from wearing the Jewish badge" (Goldstein n.d.). Post-war, he became a founding member and the first Vice-President of the Croatian Association of Literary Translators (DHKP n.d.).

Beyond *Taras Bulba*, Šovary translated numerous works by Gogol and other Russian and English authors. His translation of the novella was first published in 1950 by the state enterprise Zora within the collection *Ukrajinske pripovijetke* (*Ukrainian Tales*). During this period, the "Jewish question" was not a salient issue in Yugoslavia; while not eradicated, antisemitism was limited to isolated, legally prosecuted incidents as authorities fostered the restoration of Jewish dignity and freedoms (Goldstein 2022: 425–434). This paper accounts for the multifaceted nature of Šovary's identity, considering his shared identity with the novella's marginalized Other and his firsthand experience with antisemitic trauma. It simultaneously acknowledges his status as an established literary translator working within a climate of restored post-war freedoms.

The first edition of *Ukrajinske pripovijetke* included an extensive afterword by the translator – a feature absent from the final 1990 edition.<sup>5</sup> In the afterword, Šovary provides a comprehensive overview of Gogol's oeuvre, supplemented by biographical remarks. Regarding *Taras Bulba*, he writes: "Despite historical inaccuracies, some of which are tendentious, it is a magnificent depiction of the old Cossack spirit" (1950: 514). His 1964 afterword reiterates this praise, framing the novella as a faithful, vivid portrayal of the Ukrainian struggle for liberation and Cossack warriors "defending their land, faith, and customs against Christian and non-Christian enemies" and calls it "one of the most beautiful works of Russian literature" (203). Notably, Šovary never mentions the antisemitic undertones of *Taras Bulba* or Gogol's personal views. However, the ideological nuances of his

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

<sup>5</sup> The translation was subsequently included in the 2010 collection *Taras Buljba i druge pripovijetke* (*Taras Bulba and Other Tales*). Again, Šovary's afterword is omitted, replaced by a brief unsigned note that quotes only a few of his sentences.

afterword are significant. He begins by defining Gogol's ethnicity as Ukrainian, or Little Russian, explaining that in Tsarist Russia, only the Russian nationality was officially recognized; members of other nations were relegated to the status of *inorodtsy* (1950: 507).

Only two nations within it were not recognized as Russians: the Poles, because they refused to be, and the Jews, because they were not permitted to be. To this day, the anecdotal event following the 1905 Revolution is remembered, when the "Union of the Russian People" (popularly known as the "Black Hundreds") organized pogroms in southern Russia. The Greeks of one Crimean city became so terrified that they hastily submitted an address of loyal devotion to the "Supreme Throne", beginning with the words: *My, istinno-russkie greki goroda Jevpatorii...* (*ibid.*)

Without directly criticizing the work or its author, Šovary employs a subtle humor to ensure that antisemitism is not ignored. Here, we see a quiet resistance to the novella's depiction of Jews. While generally emphasizing Gogol's significance for Russian literature, the afterword concludes by addressing the social role of literature. Šovary asserts that Gogol's successors surpassed their master by illuminating social issues through a socialist lens and that Gogol "unconsciously served the cause of the Revolution" (*ibid.*: 524).

## Gogol's *жиды*

Gogol's portrayal of Jews in *Taras Bulba* is distinctly negative, as detailed in the later analysis. His personal letters over three decades corroborate this, frequently using the word *жид*<sup>6</sup> to denote moral corruption and usury. He employs the term as a synonym for greed, referencing "the thirst of a Jew [*жуда*] counting gold pieces" (2009a: 228), "Jewish [*жидовским*] manner" (2009b: 138), and "Jewishness [*жидовство*]" (*ibid.*: 280). He remarks that "money always comes to a Jew [*жиду*]: it knows its master ever since Judas' time" (2009c: 305). Even after his 1848 visit to Jerusalem, he warned his mother that a new village road would profit only morally suspect profiteers, including Jews (*жиды*) (2009d: 323). Gogol was familiar with the term *еврей*, but used it more rarely. It appears once negatively, regarding a "Naples' Rothschild" whose "Jewish [*Еврейская*] soul" sensed only "money, that is, an object more sacred than anything else in the world" (2009e: 168). Otherwise, his use of *еврей*/*еврейский* is limited to neutral references regarding language (2009d: 313) or religion (2009f: 62; 2009d: 303). Gogol's discourse demonstrates a clear command of both terms, yet his preference for

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<sup>6</sup> Following Šovary's strategy, as shown later, we translate the term as *Jew* or use the Russian Cyrillic *жид*.

жид reflects a specific alignment with the negative tropes of avarice and usury historically attributed to the Jewish people. To grasp the significance of this choice in both his correspondence and *Taras Bulba*, one must examine the broader sociocultural context that the Russian language both reflects and shapes.

## Russia and Its Jews

The word *жид* appears in all major Russian dictionaries, beginning with Dal (Dal 1863–1866), who codified it as ‘a stingy person, a miser, a covetous skinflint’.<sup>7</sup> His usage example – *Еврей, не видал ли ты жида? дразнят жидов* – demonstrates that by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the words co-existed with an evaluative distinction between them. 20<sup>th</sup> century dictionaries exhibit an ideological shift. Ushakov (1935–1940) lists two meanings: ‘1. In the mouths of antisemites – a Jew (contemptuous); 2. fig. In antisemitic circles – a miser (substandard, abusive)’. He notes that while the term originally lacked abusive nuances, it subsequently became “a common chauvinistic designation” with a “pogrom character” (*ibid.*). Ushakov’s “originally” is questionable, as Dal’s dictionary had already documented the derogatory shift 70 years earlier. Ozhegov represents the Soviet effort to distance the term from contemporary usage labelling it “obsolete” and “substandard”, while acknowledging it as synonymous with Jews – ‘То же, что еврей’ (Ozhegov and Shvedova 1949–1992). The same practice appears in Yevgenyeva (1957–1984), where one meaning is marked “colloquial and obsolete”, while another is presented as “coarse, substandard” ‘a contemptuous, abusive name for a Jew’. Yefremova (2000) categorizes the term as “substandard”, providing two distinct entries: the first as a name for a Jew ‘usually with a tint of contempt’ and the second as a ‘greedy person or skinflint’, explicitly noted as a “censuring or abusive word”. Today, the word’s status is legally defined; under Article 20.3.1 of the Russian Administrative Code, *жид* falls under the prohibition of inciting hatred or humiliating human dignity. This is evidenced by the 2019 conviction of Anton Blagin, whose usage of the word and Holocaust denial led to fines and the designation of his work as extremist (Blagin 2019).

Certain official legislative bans on the term *жид* predate both this and Gogol, originating in the Imperial Era. Following the partitions of Poland (1772–1795), the Russian Empire acquired the world’s largest Jewish population (Budnitskiy and Miller 2006: 303). Previously, since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Jews were largely barred from Russia for religious (Klier 1999: *Religioznaya traditsiya*; Poliakov 2003: 68–70) and economic reasons. The second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a series of

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<sup>7</sup> The searched dictionary entry is the unmarked form in the text unless otherwise noted.

restrictive anti-Jewish policies driven by a desire to protect the Russian population from perceived economic competition (Yegorov 2012a) – a stance pursued even by Catherine II prior to the 1772 partition.<sup>8</sup> While the first partition prompted a theoretical attempt at civic equality for all new subjects, this policy eventually succumbed to pressure from local Russian merchants who feared formidable economic rivals (Yegorov 2012c: 159; see also Budnitskiy and Miller 2006: 305–306). By 1791, the tension culminated in the legal formalization of the Pale of Settlement. Language reflected this ideology. According to Klier, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, *жид* was “becoming slightly unsavory”, a process completed by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1982: 3). However, it was in 1787, when the Jewish community leaders of Shklov successfully petitioned Catherine II to replace the derogatory *жиды* with *евреи* in all official parlance,<sup>9</sup> establishing the latter as the standard for Imperial legislation<sup>10</sup> (Fishman 1995: 80). By the publication of *Taras Bulba*, *жид* was no longer a linguistic necessity, but a deliberate – and offensive – choice.

Gogol’s *portrayal* of Jews in *Taras Bulba* dispels any remaining ambiguity regarding his word choice. Set in the 15<sup>th</sup>-century,<sup>11</sup> Zaporozhian Sich and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the heroic Cossack narrative relies on controversial depictions of various ethnicities, yet the portrayal of Jews is narratively dominant and consistently the most negative.<sup>12</sup> As Rosenshiel notes, “the Jew is integral to the content, style, and artistic vision” (2008: 3) of the work. While *Taras Bulba* is mythopoetic rather than documentary, its timeless image of the courageous, unyielding Russian hero is constructed specifically through the degradation of the Other. Jews bear the brunt of this contrast, depicted as dishonorable, greedy, and pathetically comical. Through the character of Yankel, Gogol established a literary archetype that endured in Russian classics for a century (Poliakov 2003: 75; Rosenshiel 2008: 2). Though his antisemitism reflected long-standing legal and cultural norms, Gogol’s work critically fixed the Jew within a hostile system.

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<sup>8</sup> See the 1762 Manifesto permitting foreigners to settle in Russia, “except for Jews [*жидов*]” (qtd. in Yegorov 2012c).

<sup>9</sup> Fishman notes a cultural divide: Westernized Jews saw this shift as vital for emancipation and integration, while traditionalists, lacking assimilationist ambitions, remained indifferent to Gentile terminology (1995: 80–81).

<sup>10</sup> This was even legally reinforced in 1880 when a Justice of the Peace ruled *жид* to be “abusive and offensive” in a defamation suit (qtd. in Klier 1982: 14).

<sup>11</sup> Gogol sets the story in the “rough 15<sup>th</sup> century” (2021: 243), though the events he references occurred primarily in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Denisov 2010).

<sup>12</sup> While the Catholic Poles represent the primary ideological opposition to the Orthodox Cossack, they lack the individualized characterization forced upon Yankel.

## The Name

The frequency and distribution of ethnonyms in the novella reveal the systematic nature of Gogol's characterization. In total, the lemma *жид* and its derivatives appear 120 times: *жид* (95), *жидовский* (11), *жидовка* (9), *жидёнок* (2), *жидова* (1), *жидок* (1), and *жидовтсво* (1). Conversely, *еврей* and *еврейка* appear only once each. Notably, *еврей* is used only when Yankel refers to a Jew-leaseholder (*еврей-арендатор*), and *еврейка* appears in a narrator's condescending remark regarding her "rather pretty little face" (*довольно смазливенькое личико еврейки*) (Gogol 2021: 293, 320). Moreover, while Jews address one another by name, the narrator and Cossacks favor *жид*; Taras, even after learning Yankel's name, uses it once before reverting to *жид*. In Šovary's translation, there are 120 occurrences, rendered as: *Židov* (97), *Židovka* (10), *Židovče* (2), *židovski* (8), *Čifut* (1), *čifutarija* (1), and *čiftuski* (1)<sup>13</sup>. The high-frequency correspondence in Šovary's translation confirms that he does not avoid the term. The relevance lies in its treatment. Namely, while *жид* was already offensive in Gogol's era and is frowned upon in contemporary Russian, the phonetically similar *Židov* remains normative in Croatian. According to the dictionary database *Hrvatski jezični portal*,<sup>14</sup> the term carries three meanings: '1. a. rel. a follower of the Jewish faith b. ethn. a member of the Jewish people; 2. hist. bibl. an inhabitant of the ancient Jewish state; 3. fig. pejor. a. a calculating person b. a miser.' Unlike the Russian term, *Židov* constitutes the linguistic standard, even as its derogatory figurative meanings coexist with its literal ethnoreligious definitions. Like its Russian counterpart, however, it has a complex history.

As Slavko Goldstein explained, *Židov* became the natural Croatian designation since Jews migrated here from Western regions using the Hebrew *Jēhudi* as a source<sup>15</sup> (1988). The term always held a pejorative connotation, stemming from the traditional view of Jews as "Christ-killers". Despite historical weight, by 1906, the journal *Židovska smotra* appeared, followed in 1917 by *Židov*, reflecting a Zionist stance on carrying the name with pride (Goldstein 2004: 5–6). Although Ustasha and Nazi propaganda weaponized the term during WWII, Croatian Jews sub-

<sup>13</sup> Šovary omits the term in two instances. First, during the massacre of the Sich Jews, where the depiction of Jewish legs (*жидовские ноги*) dangling in the air ridicules the victims (Gogol 2021: 270; Gogolj 1990: 275). Second, in a description of Yankel's Jewish skullcap (*жидовского яломка*) (Gogol 2021: 319; Gogolj 1990: 340). While the latter is textually minor, omitting the former softens Gogol's simultaneous depiction and ridicule of the massacre – an element that, in our view, should have been retained.

<sup>14</sup> All Croatian word meanings are cited from this database; for economy of expression, the reference will not be repeated.

<sup>15</sup> Ivo Goldstein notes *Židov* originates from the Latin *Judaeus*, likely entering Croatian via French (2004: 5).

sequently reclaimed it. Goldstein (1988) argued that *Židov* is a “perfectly normal” expression, viewing it as an act of pride, defiance, and solidarity with the Croatian language.<sup>16</sup> Its continued use presents a triumph of community agency over historical trauma. In contrast, the term *Čifut* remains codified solely as a pejorative.<sup>17</sup> Derived from the Turkish *Çifit* or *Çifut* (from Persian *Džühud*), the term took on a negative weight in Ottoman territories and remains a slur (Goldstein 1988).

By utilizing *Židov*, Šovary allows the text’s pejorative weight to emerge from the narrative context – the Cossacks’ actions and the narrator’s voice – rather than from a term perceived as outside the standard literary register. This strategy relies on the polysemy of the Croatian word; the reader is trusted to recognize that the pejorative meaning is activated by the context, even as the term remains normative. The fact that Šovary employs *Čifut*/*čifutarija*/*čiftuski* only three times suggests these are treated as extreme markers, reserved for instances where vitriol exceeds the customary harshness of the epic past or to convey a degree of contempt that the now-normative *Židov* could not sufficiently signal to a mid-20th-century reader. The first instance of this choice follows the arrival of Cossacks to the Sich bearing news of alleged Polish atrocities, specifically claiming that Jews hold Orthodox churches in lease. Šovary consistently translates *аренда/арендатор* ‘lease/leaseholder’ as *zakup/zakupnik*.

– Теперь у жидов они [церкви] на аренде. Если жиду вперед не заплатишь, то и обедни нельзя править. (Gogol 2021: 268)

– Sada ih [crkve] Židovi imaju u zakupu. Ako Židovu ne platiš unaprijed, ni službu ne možeš odslužiti. (Gogolj 1990: 272)

The Cossacks’ call to massacre the Jewish population – who lived and traded in the Sich outskirts – marks the novella’s first act of exclusive ethnic brutality. Notably, Gogol places a collective noun *жидову*, in the Cossacks’ mouths as they call to hang the residents and drown them in the river.

– Перевешать всю жидову! (...) Перетопить их всех, поганцев, в Днепре! (...) и толпа ринулась на предместье с желанием перерезать всех жидов. (Gogol 2021: 269)

<sup>16</sup> The 1970 exchange between Rendić and Slavko Goldstein underscores the ideological stakes of this terminology. Rendić (1970) argued that *Židov* was a vital affirmation of identity and the only designation normatively compatible with Croatian tradition. She maintained *Jevrej* was external impositions, identifying *Žudija* and *Čifut* as the only Croatian antisemitic designations (*ibid.*: 406). Goldstein adopted *Židov* but challenged claims of “eastern impositions”, justifying *Jevrej* as a “less tainted” term associated with wartime solidarity (1970: 287–288; cf. Rendić 1970: 713). Similarly, Ivo Goldstein described the pre-war shift toward *Jevrej* as an attempt to mitigate the derogatory use of *Židov*, rather than non-Croatian alignment (2004: 7).

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the noun *čifta* – ‘1. a. a petty tradesman, a peddler; b. a usurer, a moneylender, a loan shark; 2. fig. a philistine’ – is marked pejorative, with its etymology linked to *Čifut*.

– Povješajmo svu čifutariju! (...) Utopimo sve te pogane u Dnjepru! (..) i gomila pojuri u predgrađe u želji da pokolje sve Židove. (Gogolj 1990: 274)

Collective nouns reify component elements into a unitary entity (Langacker 2008: 106, 528), imposing “a construal of homogeneity” (*ibid.*: 141). The same mechanism underlies social categorization, which makes the environment more predictable and bolsters group identity (Tajfel 1969). This process is characterized by an asymmetrical perception of uniformity between one’s own category and others; namely, an ingroup tends to perceive an outgroup as homogenous (Judd and Park 1988; Tajfel 1982; cf. Lorenzi-Cioldi 1998). In severe conditions, this denial of individuality results in depersonalization and dehumanization (Tajfel 1982: 21; Deska 2018). In this context, *жидовы* functions as a linguistic precursor to physical violence, stripping subjects of individual agency and reducing them to a faceless aggregate bearing collective guilt for perceived heresies. Linguistic collectivization facilitates the transition to physical violence; the Cossacks are not killing individuals but destroying a mass. Šovary’s choice of *čifutariju* underscores this radical dehumanization and the ensuing brutality.

The second instance – the plural *Čifuti* – occurs shortly thereafter in the same scene. When Yankel pleads for mercy by claiming the Jews of the outskirts are like birth brothers to the Zaporozhians (Gogol 2021: 279), he inadvertently triggers a crisis of identity defense. To the Cossack mob, this claim of kinship is a defilement of status; their identity as courageous, self-sacrificing warriors depends on a rigid binary opposition to the cowardly and profit-driven Jewish stereotype. This perceived smearing of boundaries triggers a second call for liquidation by drowning.

– Как? чтобы запорожцы были с вами братья? – произнес один из толпы. – Не дождетесь, проклятые жида! В Днепр их, панове! Всех потопить, поганцев! (Gogol 2021: 270)

– Šta? Zaporošci da su vam braća? – javi se netko iz gomile. – To nećete dočekati, prokleti Čifuti! U Dnjepr s njima, panovi, utopimo svu tu pogan! (Gogolj 1990: 275)

Thus, both times Šovary employs the *čifutarija*/*Čifuti* lexemes, they are specifically localized within contexts of imminent murder and visceral hatred – an attitude further accentuated by the pre-attribution *проклятые* ‘damned’.

The third and final instance of the derogatory word – here the adjective *čifut-sko* – appears in a strikingly similar context of threatened identity. During the siege of Dubno, Taras asks Yankel if he has seen any of “ours” (*наших*) among the prisoners (Gogol 2021: 293). Yankel responds by adopting the same possessive pronoun: *Наших там много* ‘there are many of ours there’ (*ibid.*), proceeding to list specific Jewish names. This act of naming, though intended as comical, is a significant interruption of the text’s massification, highlighting the individual agency of characters typically stripped of their names.

Yankel's attempt to blur categorical boundaries by placing himself and Taras within the same We triggers a furious reaction. Taras labels the Jews *собаки* 'dogs' – an act of animalistic dehumanization (Haslam 2006) – and rejects Yankel's individualized list. By using the word *племя* 'tribe', Taras deindividualizes the subjects into a primitive, homogeneous mass. Šovary intensifies this animalization by translating the Russian *nponadu* 'may they perish' with the more visceral Croatian *nek crknu* 'may they drop dead', as *crknuti* refers specifically to the death of animals.

– Пропади они, собаки! – вскрикнул, рассердившись, Тарас. – Что ты мне тычешь свое жидовское племя! Я тебя спрашиваю про наших запорожцев. (Gogol 2021: 293)

– Nek crknu, pseta! – ljutito uzvikne Taras. – Šta mi turaš pod nos to tvoje čifutsko pleme! Ja te pitam za naše Zaporošce. (Gogolj 1990: 302)

Notably, Šovary does not merely transcribe the Russian *жид*. In Croatian, *Žid* is considered obsolete but lacks the inherent pejorative force it carries in Russian. Furthermore, while *Čifut* situates the translation within the historical system of Balkan antisemitism, it is used sparingly. Šovary predominantly uses the reclaimed term *Židov*, forcing the reader to confront the text's antisemitism through a standard word. By utilizing the standard ethnonym, Šovary embeds the prejudice within the novella's social fabric, preventing the reader from dismissing the bigotry as a mere linguistic relic.

## Greedy, Disloyal, Filthy Heretics

The negative portrayal of Jews in the novella can be broadly separated into four categories: greed, disloyalty, filth, and heresy. While the categories often blend within a single passage or lexical unit to create a singular, derogatory Other, we will attempt to examine them individually alongside their translations.

Interestingly, heresy is the least dominant category. Even the Zaporozhian pogrom – seemingly triggered by perceived offenses against Orthodox churches – is inextricably linked to economic leasing activities. There is only one instance where traditional antisemitism regarding the deicide is explicitly invoked. Here, Šovary remains extremely close to the source:

– Врешь, чертов Иуда! (...) Ты и Христа распял, проклятый богом человек! Я тебя убью, сатана! (Gogol 2021: 294)

– Lažeš, vražji Judo! (...) Ti si i Krista raspeo, od boga prokleti čovječe! Ubit ću te, sotonu! (Gogolj 1990: 305)

Overall, profit appears as the true Jewish god in the novella; consequently, greed is the most dominant category. The first mention of *жид* in the source text occurs during the introduction of the ethnic heterogeneity of the Sich outskirts. While no

inhabitant is portrayed gracefully, it is the Jew who is immediately associated with alcohol:

Жид, выставив вперед свою голову, цедил из бочки горелку. (Gogol 2021: 256)  
Židov [je] ispružio glavu i točio rakiju iz burenceta. (Gogolj 1990: 258).

This priming introduces a stereotype reinforced throughout the text: the Jewish alcohol manufacturer whose creditor practices were blamed for peasant poverty.<sup>18</sup> Numerous examples contribute to this image of the greedy Jew, ranging from the liquor trade to leasing practices and situational opportunism. The image of the greedy Jew is maintained through Šovary's precise translation. As established, he translates *арендаторов* using the historically grounded *zakupnicima*:

здесь были те, (...) у которых, по милости арендаторов-жидов, карманы можно было выворотить без всякого опасения, что-нибудь выронить (Gogol 2021: 260)  
tu [je] bilo i takvih (...) kojima ste, zahvaljujući zakupnicima Židovima, mogli izvrnuti džepove bez bojazni da će što ispasti iz njih (Gogolj 1990: 262)

Where the source constructs greed as agentive (*побуждаемые*), he underlines this force that constantly tempts Jews (*mamila*):

Только побуждаемые сильною корыстию жида (...) осмеливались жить и торговать в предместье (Gogol 2021: 262)  
Samo Židovi (...) koje je mamila ogromna dobit, usuđivali su se da žive u predgrađu i da se tamo bave trgovinom (Gogolj 1990: 263)

He accurately mirrors Yankel's superlative claim intended to paint him as a dishonest opportunist:

по дороге буду доставлять всякий провиант по такой дешевой цене, по какой еще ни один жид не продавал (Gogol 2021: 272)  
pa ću im putem dobavljati svakojaki provijant uz tako jeftinu cijenu uz kakvu još nijedan Židov nije prodavao (Gogolj 1990: 277)

Šovary's translation goes beyond mere accuracy; it recognizes and rewrites Gogol's linguistic richness, showing the translator's vast encyclopedia. For

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<sup>18</sup> This attitude is documented in several legal contexts, potentially motivating the 1727 Imperial Decree on Jewish expulsion (Solzhenitsyn 2001: 26; cf. Yegorov 2012a: 172). It appears in the 1797 Minsk governor's memorandum on famine (Fishman 1995: 83–84) and was solidified in the 1804 Regulation prohibiting Jews from rural residence and the liquor trade (Yegorov 2012c). While Jewish involvement in the trade was factual, it should be contextualized: Notkin's 1797 memorandum argues that rural expulsions, double taxation, and trade bans stripped thousands of their livelihoods, forcing them into these "socially harmful" trades (Fishman 1995: 84–85).

*корыстолюбивых торгашей* (Gogol 2021: 262), he chooses the layered and colorful *gramzljivih kramara* (Gogolj 1990: 263). As *торгаш* is a '1. Petty trader. Usually contemptuous. Trader, merchant in general. 2. Figurative. Usually contemptuous. An unprincipled person who trades their conscience, convictions, talent, etc.' (Yevgenyeva 1957–1984), so is *kramar* '1. a. A trader who sells trinkets at a fair. b. One who sells used goods; a second-hand dealer. 2. Pejorative. One who is capable of thinking only of their own petty interests; a petty bourgeois, a philistine, a *čifta*'. Similarly, he captures the irony in the adjective *бойкий* in *бойкой жидовской натуре* (Gogol 2021: 272) as *prometljivoj židovskoj naravi* (Gogolj 1990: 278). While *бойкий* 'resourceful' is not inherently negative (Yevgenyeva 1957–1984), the Croatian *prometuran* 'one who is resourceful in finding practical benefits and profit' (under *promućuran*) foregrounds the type of resourcefulness alluded to in the text.

Šovary strategically employs target-culture concepts to recreate the novella's historic rural atmosphere.<sup>19</sup> He translates *позадолжались в шинки жидам* (Gogol 2021: 266) as *pozadužili Židovima u krčmama* (Gogolj 1990: 270). While the Russian *шинок* is a pre-revolutionary (usually) Ukrainian drinking establishment (Yevgenyeva 1957–1984), the Croatian *krčma* – an establishment for pouring wine and *rakija* – though not culturally exclusive, as evidenced by the Russian word *корчма*, makes the setting recognizable for the Balkan reader. Following this principle, *шинкарь* becomes *krčmar* and *сивуха* 'poorly purified grain vodka' (*ibid.*) becomes *rakija*:

если кто-нибудь, шинкарь, жид, продаст козаку хоть один кухоль сивухи (Gogol 2021: 292)

ako koji Židov krčmar proda kozaku ma samo jedan vrčić rakije (Gogolj 1990: 301)

The following passage illustrates Šovary's successful recreation of Gogol's anti-semitic imagery through structural alignment and lexical adaptation:

Этот жид был известный Янкель. Он уже очутился тут арендатором и корчмарем; прибрал понемногу всех окружных панов и шляхтичей в свои руки, высосал понемногу почти все деньги и сильно означил свое жидовское присутствие в той стране. На расстоянии трех миль во все стороны не оставалось ни одной избы в порядке: все валилось и дряхлело, все пораспивалось, и осталась бедность да лохмотья; как после пожара или чумы, выветрился весь край. И если бы десять лет еще пожил там Янкель, то он, вероятно, выветрил бы и все воеводство. (Gogol 2021: 318)

Taj je Židov bio poznati nam Jankel. On se tu već udomaćio kao zakupnik i krčmar; pomalo je sve panove i plemiće u okolici prigrabio u svoje ruke, pomalo im izma-

<sup>19</sup> Šovary does not use domestication as a dominant strategy – as evidenced by his 37 explanatory footnotes following retained foreign elements.

mio sve novce i uopće jako učvrstio svoj židovski položaj u tome kraju. Na tri milje uokolo ni jedna kuća više nije bila čitava; sve su se pretvorile u razvaline i podrtine, seljaci su sve propijali, te im je ostajala samo siromaština i dronjci; cijeli je kraj bio kao uništen od požara ili od kuge. I da je Jankel još deset godina ostao ondje, vjerojatno bi uništio i cijelo vojvodstvo. (Gogolj 1990: 337–338)

Šovary preserves Gogol's accumulative syntax – the layering of decay and destitution – vividly conveying the perceived destructive Jewish influence. The altered word order does not compromise the syntactic rhythm, effectively capturing Gogol's cadence. One might object only that he misses an opportunity to make the predatory image more poignant by translating the metaphorical *высосал* as *isisao* 'sucked out' rather than *izmamio* 'wheeled out'. Nonetheless, the translation meticulously preserves the lexical density of stereotypical characterization.

Šovary systematically translates the culturally specific *червонный* and *червонец* 'the general name for foreign gold coins in pre-Petrine Russia' (Yevgenyeva 1957–1984), as *dukat*, a term historically widespread in Europe, including Croatia. An example is found in a passage filled with figurative language drawing a vivid picture of the extents of Jewish disloyalty and greed. He opts for figurative expressions more natural to Croatian (*бросились – zaigra; обвивает душу – rastače glavu*), achieving a stylistic richness that makes the antisemitic trope feel immediate:

Так и бросились жиду прежде всего в глаза две тысячи червонных, которые были обещаны за его голову; но он постыдился своей корысти и силился подавить в себе вечную мысль о золоте, которая, как червь, обвивает душу жида. (Gogol 2021: 318)

Odmah Židovu zaigra pred očima nagrada od dvije tisuće dukata, obećana za njegovu glavu; ali on se zastidi svoje pohlepe i trsio se da u sebi zatomi vječitu misao na zlato, koja poput crva Židovu rastače glavu. (Gogolj 1990: 338)

Interestingly, there are only a few expressions culturally specific to the Jewish community, further suggesting that Gogol's portrayal strips them of their authentic identity to create a distorted one. These include *нейцуку* (Gogol 2021: 319), the diminutive of *нейсы*, translated as the non-diminutive *pejesi* (Gogolj 1990: 340), and Yankel's exclamation *Ой, вей мур!* (Gogol 2021: 323), meaning 'oh, woe is me'. Šovary translates this Yiddish-inspired phrase as *oj weh mir*, followed by a footnote *Jao meni!* (Gogolj 1990: 344). While semantically adequate, he curiously opts for a standard German orthography rather than a transliterated *oj vej mir*. This choice distances it from Gogol's version of the Yiddish *oy vey iz mir* (Benor, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.).<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> One can only speculate on this choice. It is possible Yiddish was unfamiliar to Šovary, or that he was adhering to the Croatian norm of writing foreign words in their original script. Additionally, he may have been influenced by a previous line in the novella stating that the Jews began speaking *но-немецки* 'in German' (Gogol 2021: 321).

Overall, nothing is omitted or neutralized in translation regarding Jewish greed. This consistency extends even to passages where Gogol has Yankel admit to his own people's perceived avarice:

Что это за корыстный народ! И между нами таких нет (Gogol 2021: 323)

kakav je to gramzljiv svijet! Ni među nama nema takvih (Gogolj 1990: 344)

The mechanics of debt collection are rendered with equal truthfulness:

но взмолился пану, сказал, что подожду долгу, сколько пан хочет, и пообещал еще дать займы, как только поможет мне собрать долги с других рыцарей (Gogol 2021: 292–293)

ali nekako sam namolio pana, rekao sam mu da ću ga pričekati za dug, koliko god pan hoće, čak sam mu obećao da ću mu još dati u zajam ako mi pomogne utjerati dugove od drugih vitezova (Gogolj 1990: 302)

The narrative voice and the Cossacks' speech remain filled with the same judgment, while the Jews' own speech – used by Gogol to comically exemplify an obsession with profit – continues to be dominated by gold, trading, and debt collection in Šovary's translation.

The last example points to the second major category of antisemitism in *Taras Bulba* – disloyalty and untrustworthiness. Inextricably linked to this is the belief that Jews possess secret knowledge; while this occasionally reads as perplexed admiration, it primarily reinforces the narrative that they cannot be trusted. A stark instance is Yankel's reaction to Andriy's betrayal during the siege of Dubno. Taras is surprised that Yankel managed to enter the fortified city, a feat Šovary's translation accurately recreates as a moment of bewilderment.

Тарас посмотрел на жида и подивился тому, что он уже успел побывать в городе. (Gogol 2021: 292)

Taras pogleda na Židova i začudi se kako je on to već stigao da ode u grad. (Gogolj 1990: 302)

As Taras reels from his son's betrayal, Yankel offers a pragmatic stance, focused on Andriy's new golden attire:

– Потому что лучше, потому и надел... (Gogol 2021: 293)

– Zato što je ljepša, zato ju je i obukao. (Gogolj 1990: 303)

Here, *лучше* 'better' is translated as *ljepša* 'prettier'. While *bolja* would be semantically closer, it would also be more optimal in expressing Yankel's broader attitude toward the shifted allegiance – an outlook shaped by, but not reducible to, mere aesthetics. Unable to comprehend Taras's view that homeland and faith cannot be sold, Yankel insists on a comically literal interpretation:

– Я же не говорю этого, чтобы он продавал что: я сказал только, то он перешел к ним. (Gogol 2021: 293)

– Pa ja ne kažem da je što prodao, samo kažem da je prešao k njima. (Gogolj 1990: 303)

In Croatian, the modal particle *pa* reinforces Yankel's comic frustration as he attempts to de-escalate Taras's rage through neutral reporting. This hedging syntax (*ne kažem...samo kažem*) successfully preserves Yankel's survivalist discourse. This same logic underscores Yankel's reaction to the idea of killing Andriy for his betrayal:

– За что же убить? Он перешел по доброй воле. Чем человек виноват? Там ему лучше, туда и перешел. (Gogol 2021: 294)

– Pa zašto da ga ubijem? Od svoje je volje prešao. Šta je čovjek kriv: tamo mu je bolje, pa je prešao k njima. (Gogolj 1990: 304)

Šovary again employs *pa* to capture the source's *же*, maintaining the colloquial bewilderment. He translates the conventional Russian *по доброй воле* 'by one's own wish, without compulsion' (Fyodorov 2008) with the conventional Croatian *od svoje volje*. This preserves the idiomatic authenticity of the dialogue, as the more formal *dobrovoljno* (which retains the *good will* component) was rightfully dismissed.

The novella also asserts the Jews' seemingly unnatural ability to scheme:

Жиды, однако же, воспользовались вылазкою и пронюхали всё (Gogol 2021: 305)

No Židovi se iskoristiše ispadom i pronjušiše sve (Gogolj 1990: 321)

By choosing *pronjušiše* 'sniffed out', Šovary perfectly captures the zoomorphic nuance, maintaining the dehumanizing subtext of the original. The verb *iskoristiše* 'exploited' also accurately transfers their portrayal as opportunists who operate on the margins of the military conflict. In both cases the brevity of aorist helps the rhythm and underscores the swiftness of maneuvering.

The following translation reveals the intersection between stylistic nuance and the preservation of coarse ethnic stereotypes:

– Вы всё на свете можете сделать, выкопаете хоть из дна морского; и пословица давно уже говорит, что жид самого себя украдет, когда только захочет украсть. (Gogol 2021: 320)

– Vi ste kadri učiniti sve na svijetu, iskopat ćete makar i sa dna morskoga; pa već odavno poslovice veli da Židov samoga sebe može ukrasti, ako samo hoće. (Gogolj 1990: 341)

By choosing the regional *kadri* over the neutral *možete* and including the particle *pa*, Šovary maintains the colloquial texture of the original. Furthermore, the retention of the inverted *dna morskoga* preserves the archaic, elevated tone of the oral epic, ensuring that antisemitism remains embedded in a framework of artistically stylized oral narration.

Finally, Jews are constructed as literally filthy, a trait closely linked to perceived moral corruption. Šovary accurately translates the numerous descriptors of Jews and their environment as unclean: *нечистойою своею рукою* (Gogol 2021: 268) *svojom nečistom rukom* (Gogolj 1990: 273); *нечистый жид* (Gogol 2021: 268) *nečisti Židov* (Gogolj 1990: 273); *нечистому, запачканному домишке* (Gogol 2021: 317) *nečistu, prljavu kućicu* (Gogolj 1990: 337); *[к]уча всякого сору* (Gogol 2021: 317) *hrpa svakojakoga smeća* (Gogolj 1990: 337); *улицу, (...) Грязной и вместе Жидовской* (Gogol 2021: 320) *ulicu, (...) Prljava, a ujedno i Židovska* (Gogolj 1990: 340); *[к]уча жидакков, запачканных, оборванных, (...) валялась в грязи* (Gogol 2021: 320) *[h]rpa prljave, odrpane Židovčadi (...) valjala u blatu* (Gogolj 1990: 341); *грязный жидовский проспект* (Gogol 2021: 321) *prljavi židovski prospect* (Gogolj 1990: 342). Related to this is the animalization of Jews, specifically through the recurring image of a dog. While this insult is not exclusive to them, they are characterized as such 10 times, which accounts for a third of instances and presents a significant frequency within the dehumanizing narrative. This includes eight occurrences of the lemma *собака*, used six times by Taras and twice by Yankel to describe the treatment of Jews by others. Šovary captures the aggression of Taras's speech by varying the Croatian equivalents, employing *pas* (3), *pseto* (3), and *psina* (1). The pejorative derivatives, *pseto* and *psina*, appear when hatred reaches its peak: *Врешь, собака!* (Gogol 2021: 294) *Lažeš, psino!* (Gogolj 1990: 305). He omits the word only once:

Разве я не знаю, что жидов повесят, как собаку, коли он соврет перед паном?  
(Gogol 2021: 293)

Zar ja ne znam da bi pan Židova objesio da ga uhvati u laži? (Gogolj 1990: 303)

While we do not consider this omission concealing, the sentence contains unnecessary changes; it would read more optimally as: *Zar ja ne znam da bi Židova objesili, kao psa, da slaže pred panom*. Even Jewish children are described as little dogs: *две домашние собачки* (Gogol 2021: 323) *dva kućna psetanca* (Gogolj 1990: 344). A rare 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature word *рассобачий* (Gogol 2021: 268) is translated with the conventional pejorative adjective *pasji* (Gogolj 1990: 273). Unique to the Jewish characters is the phrase *свиное ухо* 'pig's ear', an insult alluding to their non-consumption of pork (Mikhelson 1896–1912). It is used twice and translated accordingly: *я прибую ему на самый лоб свиное ухо* (Gogol 2021: 292) *tomu ću (...) pribiti na čelo svinjsko uho* (Gogolj 1990: 301); *[в]решь, свиное ухо* (Gogol 2021: 293) *[l]ažeš, svinjsko uho* (Gogolj 1990: 303).

## Conclusion

Ultimately, Šovary's decision to translate the derogatory *жид* as the standard Croatian *Židov* is an assertion of linguistic autonomy. By honoring the Croatian Jewish community's reclamation of their own name, Šovary refuses to hide anti-semitism behind archaic slurs. Instead, he forces the modern reader to confront the text's prejudice through the language of their own identity. The analyzed segments reveal a translation finely attuned to the novella's complexities: no relevant meaning is obscured, the characteristics of simulated oral epics are preserved through a masterful blend of historical grandeur and humorous vernacular, and the Foreign is largely preserved. Even on a textual level, the translation succeeds by refusing to be subservient to the "original". When contextualized, it emerges as a subtle triumph of the marginalized over history. Šovary confronts history rather than erasing it, neither neutralizing nor embellishing the negative representation. Instead, he creates a space in which the image of the ridiculous usurer is transformed into that of an artist and the rewriter of a canonical text. This research suggests that the discourse on ethical translation should expand to include cases where the source text itself wreaks violence on the Other, who might find themselves in a complex position when given the opportunity to rewrite it. Šovary's approach constitutes an ethical strategy for the dignified rehabilitation of that Other. Finally, we consider succeeding in dispersing the invisibility of a translator as socioculturally significant as Roman Šovary.

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## SAŽETAK

### REKONTEKSTUALIZACIJA GOGOLJEVIH ŽIDOVA: PRIJEVOD ROMANA *TARAS BULJBA* ROMANA ŠOVARYJA

Znanost o prevođenju sve veću pozornost posvećuje ulozi prijevoda u oblikovanju identiteta i (pre)raspodjeli moći. Međutim, nedovoljno su istraženi slučajevi u kojima prevoditelj pripada zajednici koju izvorni tekst negativno stereotipizira i doprinosi njezinoj marginalizaciji. Takav primjer predstavlja hrvatski prijevod Gogoljeve novele *Taras Buljba* (translit. *Taras Bul'ba*) koji je načinio Roman Šovary, prevoditelj židovskog podrijetla koji je preživio Holokaust. Cilj je ovoga rada ispitati kako Šovary prevodi antisemitski diskurs izvornika i objasniti učinke njegove strategije kako bi se utvrdilo djeluje li prijevod kao mjesto otpora, odnosno omogućuje li odmazdu ili rehabilitaciju marginaliziranog Drugoga. Komparativna tekstualna analiza polazi od spoznaja unutar kulturološkog obrata o etici prevođenja i oblikovanju identiteta posredstvom prijevoda te se oslanja na povijesno i sociolingvistički relevantne podatke. Analizirani su prijevodi ruskog etnonima *žid* i njegovih izvedenica te prikaza Židova kao gramzivih, nelojalnih, prljavih heretika. Rezultati pokazuju da prijevod ne neutralizira antisemitizam izvornika. Šovary sustavno prevodi pogrdni ruski etnonim *žid* standardnim hrvatskim etnonimom *Židov*, dok pogrdni izraz *Čifut* koristi rijetko, u kontekstima ekstremne dehumanizacije i neposrednog nasilja, omogućujući time da pogrdnost proiziđe iz narativnog i društvenog konteksta. Šovary vjerno prevodi sve stereotipne prikaze istodobno vrlo uspješno prenoseći poetičku složenost Gogoljeva djela. Šovaryjev pristup stoga predstavlja etičku strategiju tihog otpora koja prijevod čini mjestom dostojanstvene rehabilitacije marginaliziranog Drugoga.

Ključne riječi: Roman Šovary, N. V. Gogolj (translit. Gogol'), *Taras Buljba* (translit. *Taras Bul'ba*), prijevod, antisemitizam, identitet