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BORIS VIAN'S OTHER VOICES – INTERLINGUAL AND INTERMEDIAL TRANSLATIONS OF *L'ÉCUME DES JOURS* AND ITS RECEPTION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Las otras voces de Boris Vian: traducciones interlingüísticas e intermediales de L'Écume des jours y su recepción en el Reino Unido

Vanessa MONTESI

Centro de Estudos Comparatistas, Universidade de Lisboa
vmontesi@campus.ul.pt; vanemontesi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: Boris Vian was a French writer, translator, lyricist, playwright, and critic. Drawing on the model proposed by Andringa (2006), I look at the reception of Vian in the English polysystem. After giving reasons for his late success in France, I turn to the English context and analyse how his work was received by critics writing in British newspapers from 1940 to 1990, comparing his reception to that of related authors. This leads me to investigate the number of intermedial translations of his most famous novel, *L'Écume des jours*. While in her analysis Andringa does not consider the role played by intermedial translations or adaptations, I argue that a study of an author's reception needs to go beyond the literary realm and pay attention to these other forms of dissemina-

tion, as they played a major role in the establishment of the novel in the English repertoire.

Keywords: Boris Vian; *L'Écume des jours*; sociology of translation; polysystem; reception studies; adaptation.

RESUMEN: Boris Vian fue un novelista, compositor, dramaturgo, traductor y crítico francés. A partir del modelo de Andringa (2006), estudio la recepción de Vian en el polisistema británico. Después de explicar los motivos de su éxito tardío en Francia, me dirijo al contexto inglés y analizo cómo los críticos hablaron de su trabajo en los periódicos británicos de 1940 a 1990, comparándolo con el de autores relacionados. Esto me lleva a una investigación sobre el número de traducciones intermediales de su novela más famosa, *L'Écume des jours*. Mientras en sus análisis Andringa no considera el papel desempeñado por las traducciones intermediales o adaptaciones, yo sostengo que el estudio de la recepción de un autor debe ir más allá de lo literario y abordar otras formas de diseminación, ya que desempeñaron un papel importante en el establecimiento de esta novela en el repertorio inglés.

Palabras clave: Boris Vian; *L'Écume des jours*; sociología de la traducción; polisistema; estudios de recepción; adaptación.

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In November 2018 Eliot Smith Dance Company premiered three new pieces at the Sage Gateshead Theatre in Newcastle. Among the three works there was an intermedial translation of a novel written by the French artist Boris Vian in 1947, *L'Écume des jours*. It was the first time that the novel was translated into a dance piece in Britain and I wondered how many people in the auditorium had previous knowledge of the novel. I myself had come across it by way of translation: first when I helped kickstart the dance performance I was now watching, then when I read the text in Gianni Turchetta's Italian translation and lastly when I watched Michael Gondry's film *Mood Indigo*. As I watched the performance, memories stemming from reading the book and watching the film were being reactivated, put in circulation and affected by this new actualization in dance form. I asked myself: how would other people receive and perceive the performance? Would they also rely on previous knowledge of the novel, the film, or any mediated form of the book? Do they know that this is an adaptation, or would they receive it as an original? And how would this in turn influence their reading of the book? How does the perception of a text change with time?

In «Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies», Edwin Gentzler (2016) posits translation studies along comparative studies and world literature and looks at how texts travel and how they affect and are affected by the layering of meanings and interpretations that goes with the travelling. In the chapter dealing with «Hamlet in China» he reaches the conclusion that adaptations proved more effective than interlingual translations in creating and influencing the image of the Shakespearean text in China. In similar fashion, Angela Kershaw (2019) maintains that literary history is informed by transcultural and prosthetic memory and therefore suggests focusing on how translation reorients texts for different publics and how these are received as a way to better understand the formation of travelling memory, defined by Astrid Erll (2011, 11) as «incessant wandering of carriers, media, content, forms and practices of memory, their continual travels and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders».

Following these recent insights, in this article I will be looking at the reception of Boris Vian in France and in the UK in order to understand which position he occupies now in the English literary polysystem and how he became (or not) part of the English repertoire. For this, I will be mainly relying on the methodology proposed by Els Andringa (2006) in her article «Penetrating the Dutch Polysystem: The Reception of Virginia Woolf 1920-2000». The framework developed by Andringa is based on reception theories and systems whose roots can be found in Russian Formalism (Viktor Shklovski and Yuri Tinianov), Czech Structuralism (Jan Mukarovsky and Felix Vodicka), but also in Michail Bachtin, Robert Jauss' *horizon of expectations*, and the theories developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Itamar Even-Zohar. Working on the notion of *repertoire* formulated by Even-Zohar, Andringa (2006, 525) defines it as «the mental equipment that enables its users to act and communicate in literary (sub)systems. A (sub)system is consequently determined by a group of agents who share a certain repertoire and make use of it in their institutional and non-institutional roles».

The repertoire thus intended is made up of three components and two characteristics. The three components are 1) the knowledge of a set of works functioning as frame of reference, 2) the strategies and conventions determining the production, communication and reception of a work, and 3) the array of interests regulating its «selection, judgement and classification» (Andringa 2006, 501). This means that a repertoire is formed through the interaction of individuals within a certain social group and that different repertoires may pertain to different groups and compete against each other. Indeed, the two characteristics that Andringa attributes to repertoires

are, on the one hand, those of being shared by a group of institutionalised and individual agents and determining the way its texts are dealt with, thus potentially contributing to the formation of identity and power within such groups; and, on the other hand, being temporary and subject to change.

Following this notion of repertoire, the study of an author's reception profile must deal with different elements and include a comparison with similar writers, belonging to the same time, genre, social group or gender as the one studied. At the same time, it must bring us back to their historical and social context, as the norms and values governing the production and reception of art are revealing of the fragmentation and stratification of society. In doing this, the role played by agents and mediators must not be forgotten, as they may belong to a specific subsystem and act according to their own interests. Indeed, Andrew Chesterman (2009) underlines the importance of studying the translators' and editors' *telos*, that is, why they work in the field and why they choose to insert a particular text into a particular subsystem at a particular time, and Kershaw (2019, 270) remarks that «reading translationally also involves understanding the various contexts in which different agents of translation activity work», since «the zone of critical engagement created by the relationship between translational agents and the environment is complex». The methodology used by Andringa consists in looking up the number of times an author is mentioned in newspapers and magazines and compare it to that of related authors, checking the dates and sources of publication over time, and the name and status of the reviewers. This is followed by an investigation into the number of translations into the target language over time and into the changing values governing an oeuvre's reception according to a model adapted from Renate von Heydebrandt and Simone Wingo (1996).

In applying this methodology to the reception of Boris Vian in the United Kingdom, and especially of his novel *L'Écume des jours*, I want to spotlight how intermedial translations played a fundamental role in helping the novel maintain its central position in the French polysystem and in projecting it abroad. The reason for choosing to talk about Vian is twofold: on the one hand, his activity as a writer and intellectual is extremely multifaceted and he can be defined as a cultural and intercultural mediator (Maylaerts *et al.* 2017), being responsible, among other things, for the popularization of science fiction, comics, the American hard-boiled noir and jazz music. This makes even more interesting to see how he in turn was presented to an international audience and how he even promoted himself through multilingual writing and self-translations. On the other end, this discussion enables me to touch upon some points of Andringa's article that I feel need further discussion and analysis.

2. BORIS VIAN, A LIFE GAMBLER

Boris Vian was born in 1920 in Paris from a wealthy family and died at the age of 39, having developed a heart problem when he was twelve. In his brief life, he produced an astonishing number of novels, poems, short-stories, theatre plays and songs. Having learnt English from his first wife and collaborator Michelle Leglise, he worked as a translator, wrote for jazz journals, worked daytime and joined several intellectual circles, among which the college Pataphysique and the Oulipo. Giangilberto Monti (2018, position 842-843) writes about him:

Non c'è artista del Novecento che sia riuscito a contaminare così tanti generi in una sola volta, come fece il principe di Saint Germain, e ad avere così tante pubblicazioni postume, anche perché critici ed editori faticavano a riconoscergli potenzialità commerciali, nonostante gli attestati di fiducia e le proverbiali pacche sulla spalla.

And indeed, traces of Vian are to be found in everything he touched: from the labels with description of the songs and authors on the LPs he produced to the *livre-disque*, his invention to popularise jazz music; from the genres of science fiction and noir that he introduced in France by translating American authors, organising gatherings and writing critiques in Sartre's acclaimed journal, to the «invention of Saint Tropez» (Monti 2018); from the jazz music played at the night club «Le Tabou» to the «all you can drink» formula introduced at The Riverside in 1953, as reported by an article published in Western Mail and South Wales News on 22 April 1953.

3. VIAN IN FRANCE

Given Vian's eclectic production, it is interesting to find reasons for what is described by Alistair Rolls, John West-Sooby and Jean Fornasiero (2014: 1) as «one of France's most surprising export failures». Indeed, the story of his career, both in France and internationally, is quite peculiar. During his lifetime, the works published under his name did not enjoy success in France, becoming famous only after his death and, given his anti-establishment attitude, after the social revolution of May 1968. It is during the 1960s and 1970s that he becomes a popular author in France, as the number of biographies written on him suggests. This may also point to a human, rather than purely literary interest, which would make sense given his extraliterary activity as organiser of conferences, songwriter and his much-criticised use of pseudonyms. Indeed, he became famous under

the pen-name of Vernon Sullivan, a fictitious black American writer of best-selling thrillers that raised the problem of racial discrimination, whom Vian pretended to be translating from American into French. In fact, it is only as a translator that Vian enjoyed success in his life, and the events concerning the reception and response to his first Sullivan book, *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* (1946), which he later self-translated into *I Spit on your Graves*, are revealing of the fragmentation of his contemporary society and of the «set of values governing the production, reception and communication of literature» (Andringa 2006, 526).

I Spit on your Graves can be considered a pastiche of the American hard-boiled thriller; as a matter of fact, Vian himself mentions James Cain and Henry Miller as sources of inspirations and proposes this «pseudo-translation» (Cattrysse 2014) as a way of bringing forward stylistic innovation in French writing. It recounts the story of a black but fair-skinned womanizer, who moves to a little town and decides to seduce and murder two sisters as an act of revenge for the death of his brother, killed by white people. The explicitly erotic language of the novel and the harshness of the scenes of violence are coupled with a fierce social critique, whose value is doubled by the reference to censorship in the preface at a time when Henri Miller was being censored in France and riots were spreading in Algeria following the Sétif and Guelma massacre (Aymali 2014). As Vian (2012, n.p.; Preface) writes:

Quant à son fond même, il faut y voir une manifestation du goût de la vengeance, chez une race encore, quoi qu'on en dise, brimée et terrorisée, une sorte de tentative d'exorcisme, vis-à-vis de l'emprise des Blancs «vrais», de la même façon que les hommes néolithiques peignaient des bisons frappés de flèches pour attirer leur proie dans les pièges, un mépris assez considérable de la vraisemblance et aussi des concessions au goût du public.

According to Ralph Schoolcraft (2010), there appeared few reviews of his book in 1946 and they were mostly split according to political views: on the one hand, the Left praised the anti-racist argument overlooking the sexual content of the novel; on the other hand, the Right strongly criticised the book and resorted to nationalist language, labelling any defence of *I Spit on Your Graves* «an anti-French endeavour» (André Roubaud in Noël Arnaud 1974, 47, translation into English by Schoolcraft). Therefore, it must have been a shock to find out that the author of this anti-French endeavour was a French himself, as the right-wing French activist Daniel Parker, head of the *Cartel d'action sociale et morale*, discovered a year later. Upon discovering that Sullivan was but a pseudonym, French critics from left and right took arms against Vian and accused him of being

a counterfeiter and of gaining success through deceit. More interestingly, as Schoolcraft (2010, 27) reminds, «with the change of authorial identity, the work is demoted from social novel to pulp fiction». However, harsh criticism did not stop people from buying the book; on the contrary, its sales jumped from several hundred in 1946 to 100,000, «helped» by the scandalous fact that his book was found next to a man who murdered his mistress before committing suicide, echoing the protagonist of the novel, a serial killer and womanizer. As noticed by Andringa in relation to the rising number of translations as linked to the success of Woolf's biography, a «human interest», or even a «gossip interest» may lie behind the rise of sales of *I Spit on Your Graves*, while Parker, with his inflamed critiques, might be considered as an «unwilling mediator», who unknowingly and unwillingly advertised Vian. At the same time, this event raises a handful of questions. Why was Vian so harshly condemned for using a pseudonym and why did the book lose its social value once discovered that the author was French? Why was it more successful as a translation from American English? Was the translation market gaining momentum at that time in France?

According to Gentzler (2016), turn-of-the-century France was immersed in a translating culture, as Paris was brimming with international visitors and Russian émigrés (Foshko 2008). At the same time this was an era of inventions and connections symbolised by the universal exhibition in 1900, the invention of the telephone, the radio, and finally of the cinematographer in 1895, which spurred dreams of a universal and transparent language (North 2005). Even the translation business grew, with more translations coming out either in magazines or in book format, so that by 1900 there were 60-70 published translations per year, making up 10% of the book market (Chevrel *et al.* 2012). After the war, it was the American presence that was mostly felt and Parisian life returned to be fizzy and animated, with the friction between the thoughtless enjoyment of the Parisian nights among intellectuals and the rawness of war being the result of years of occupation and imposed silence. This friction is painstakingly portrayed in Vian's subsequent novel *L'Écume des jours* (1947), which juxtaposes the post-war superficially festive and thoughtless atmosphere with a world where lives count next to nothing and death is always around the corner, hitting random people who happen to cross the protagonists' way and finally the protagonists themselves, a world where working conditions turn people into slaves and addiction and alienation lurk behind the shiny façade of abundance and carefree lifestyle.

Returning to inter- and post-war Paris translating culture, Celine Angus (2009) stresses that the German occupation and censorship resulted in an Anglo-Saxon craze during the 1940s and Jean-Marc Gouanvic (2005) talks

about a growing field of American literature in Paris in the interwar period, with many writers, such as Miller, Ernest Hemingway, and John Dos Passos emigrating to avoid censorship at home. Again, the book market seems to confirm this interest in translations, as series dedicated to foreign literature appear in the twentieth century and the pioneering *Bibliothèque des meilleurs noms étrangers* by Hachette was rapidly followed by *Prosa-teurs étrangers modernes* (1925) and *Du Monde entier* (1931) by Gallimard (Gouanvic 2005). Thus, interwar and post-war France could be described as a zone of hospitality, when this expression is understood through the lens of Judith Still's (2010) and Emily Apter's (2006) conceptualization as a «temporary sharing of space» (Still 2010, 14), a space of ambiguity and resistance as well as of welcome and in which people, institutions, material and cultural objects create a network of circulation and transformation of texts and meanings. If interwar France had seen the influence of Russian emigration, after the II World War France audiences craved North American culture and in particular the American hard-boiled thriller, as the creation of the collection *série noire* by the publisher Gallimard in 1945 suggests (Schoolcraft 2010, 22). From a sociological perspective, we may also see this interest in translations as marking the beginning of a rise of the English language to the hyper central position it occupies today in the market of translation (Sapiro 2007).

While this may explain Vian's decision to resort to a pseudo-translation, as Patrick Cattrysse (2014) seems to believe, the reviewers' shift of focus from the social to the sexual content of the novel may suggest another story. This shift could in fact result from an unwillingness to recognise the implications of a novel denouncing racial violence and openly siding with black people and their claim to social justice against the French colonial enterprise. Indeed, once the origin of the novel is dislocated from far-away USA to France, the Other depicted in the novel may also shift from African Americans to the colonised people in Algeria, a country where, as mentioned above, riots had begun to appear the year before the novel's publication. This also helps us understand why Vian decided to publish it under the guise of a translation, as he may have anticipated the difficulties in publishing such text under his own name. Using a pseudo-translation might have been as a form of political militancy, since according to Kershaw (2019, 92) «bringing a text into a particular language at a particular time is an ideological practice». This point gains even more validity if one considers Vian's output in its entirety and especially his plays, which dealt with sensitive political and social issues and relentlessly returned to the subject of war and oppression. This is hinted at in *The Empire Builders*, a play which sees the decay of a middle-class family living in a house

and forced to move from floor to floor up to the garret in an atmosphere of increasing claustrophobia, until only one member of the family is left. Eventually, he jumps off the building. This play is metaphorically linked to the demise of colonial empires and was written at the time of Algeria's war of independence and political crisis in France. Vian's militancy is even more evident in *The Generals' Tea Party*, which lays bare the hypocrisy and shallowness of war-makers as well as the economic reasons behind declaring war. Even his songs, the most famous of which is called *Le Déserteur*, function as a harsh critique of war. Given the recurrence of these themes in his oeuvre, it should not be surprising that he would allude to the racial oppression perpetrated by the French government, even though indirectly, in his writing. At the same time, the shifting reception and the unwillingness of reviewers to talk about the issues he raises finds a counterpart in the reception of his plays in the UK, as it will be shown in the following section. Therefore, this example shows us that a long shot of the literary subsystem –advocated for by polysystem theory– is necessary but not sufficient to explain the functioning of a text in a particular situation; rather, to have a complete picture, we must zoom in into the translational zone and look at the agents and institutions of production and circulation of meaning as well as at their telos and their socio-historical situation.

4. RECEPTION OF VIAN IN THE UK: FRAME OF REFERENCE, VALUES AND INTERESTS

The year after publishing *I Spit on Your Graves*, 1937, Vian publishes *L'Écume des jours* with Gallimard, this time under his name. If interwar French literature had been dominated by the catholic and regional novel (Kay *et al.* 2003), the post-war years can be clearly mapped and divided between the existentialists and the nouveau roman (Kershaw 2019). The latter sprung from Surrealism and Dada and tried to overcome the aesthetic impasse reached by existentialism, experimenting with new forms and committing itself to showing rather than telling (Coward 2004). The term nouveau roman was coined in 1957 and was attached to Sarraute's *L'Ère du soupçon* and Robbe-Grillet's *Pour un nouveau roman*, while most of the authors considered as representatives of the nouveau roman published with Les Éditions de Minuit, a French publishing house linked to the French resistance.

Both David Coward (2004) and Sarah Kay *et al.* (2003) posit Vian within this literary movement and as a clear inheritor of surrealism and dada, from which he derived the atmosphere of wakeful dream that pervades his novels and that is described as «literature that looks over its shoulder and

it is prepared to dismantle itself at any moment if the real world promises reach forward» (Kay *et al.* 2003, 265). However, the nouveau roman will gain ground only in the late 1950s, and by the time Nathalie Sarraute wins the Prix International de Littérature, Vian would be already dead. Thus, during his life, he «occupied a haunting no-man land between satire and sentiment, tough-mindedness and whimsicality, and with his ever alert linguistic imagination that allowed him to move back and forth emotional dispositions often thought as mutually exclusive» (Coward 2004, 282). This may explain why he did not enjoy success in France during his life but was resumed and became one of the most popular authors during the 1960s and 1970s.

As per the UK, if we look at the reception of Vian on the other side of the English Channel (or La Manche), we will find ourselves as puzzled as the editors of *If I Say If* (Rolls *et al.* 2014), who notice how the reception pattern of Vian in the UK follows a completely different path than in France, even in comparison with other French contemporary authors who shared much with him like Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir. If after his death Vian enjoyed growing popularity in France, he attracted little attention among the English readership, and this despite his activity as a multilingual writer, cultural mediator and self-translator (he published an English version of *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* in 1948). This is all the more striking if we consider that post-war Britain was exceptionally open to French literature and culture: on the one hand, it lacked a strong literary movement and can be described as a weak literature in polysystem theory's terms; on the other, French culture was highly regarded and featured in many dedicated journals such as *La France Libre*, *Association des Français de Grande-Bretagne* and the highly influential *Horizon*, which published great amounts of translated literature (Kershaw 2019).

Talking about the UK, Malcolm Bradbury (in Kershaw 2019, 131) defined the 1940s as an «obscure decade making a vacancy in recent cultural history». This was the direct result of paper shortages and the regime of authority maintained even after the end of the war, which materially impeded the flourishing of literature. At the same time, French people were trying to restore their image after being defeated at war and to make up for years of clandestine literature and censorship. It does not come as a surprise then, that French acclaimed authors would gain more and more popularity in Great Britain, where their reception relied on three main factors: leading opinions formers such as Cyril Connolly, the editor of *Horizon*; the belief in international cultural exchange as a lever for post-war reconstruction; the prosthetic memorial function associated to war literature as a means of gaining access to the continental experience of war (Kershaw 2019).

These interests can be seen at work in the reception of the main existentialist writers, as exemplified by the following chart. The chart shows a comparison between the number of times Vian is mentioned in British newspapers over time, compared to Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Camus and Raymond Queneau, people to whom he was closely associated at the time, and Georges Perec, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute to whom his style was subsequently compared by critics. The data are retrieved from the British Newspapers Archive, an online platform hosting around 29,000,000 newspaper pages dating from 1700 to date. This ongoing project of the British Library was started in 2011 and its aim is to scan and make available online the 40 million newspaper pages contained in the British Library over a period of 10 years. This means that the data I am working on is only partially reliable as there might be many more pages waiting to be scanned, but still I believe the difference in proportion to be quite significant.

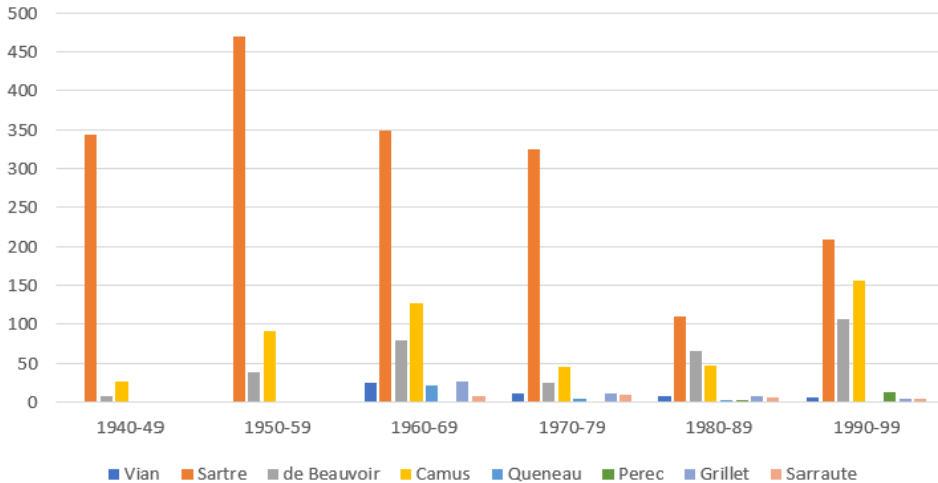


Figure 1: Number of mentions in British Newspapers Archive.

As we can see, the difference between Sartre, de Beauvoir and Camus as compared to Vian is marked and consistent over time. The bars representing Queneau and Perec are similarly short, but all the mentions refer to their activity as writers and to their books in translation, whereas only one article directly mentions Vian's novel, reporting the translation of *L'Écume des jours* into English in a non-appreciative way. Same goes for Robbe-Grillet and Sarraute, who belong to the next generation and enter the literary world later, having the first mentions after Vian's death. This chart also allows us to see fluctuations in popularity and general trends. For example, the line

representing Simone de Beauvoir soars between 1950 and 1969, reaching its peak in 1969. Starting from the 1970s the numbers drop, but in the 1980s de Beauvoir enjoys almost the same popularity as Sartre, whose fame was undisputed (though declining) until the previous decade. We should not forget that this was the time of the Women Liberation Movement, which led to such advances as the introduction of the contraceptive pill (1961), the abortion act (1967), the election of the first female secretary of state (1968) and the sex discrimination act (1975), besides organising gatherings and protests such as the national WLM Conference in Oxford (1970) and the Reclaim the Night March (1977). Accordingly, the articles on Simone de Beauvoir focus more and more on feminism and class struggle, whereas earlier they centred around her books and essays and the relationship with Sartre and the existentialists. Similarly, the sudden rise of Camus in the end of the 1950's and in the 1960's runs parallel to his reception of the Nobel Award in 1957, while the ascent in the 1990's may be associated to the rise of postcolonial studies, with Elleke Boehmer and Alex Tickle (2015, 1) describing the 1990s as an «increasing postcolonial decade». Not only: writers linked to existentialism were highly showcased and celebrated by the influential magazine *Horizon*, which functioned as a «display window for Sartre and Camus and the French writers» (Connolly in Kershaw 2019, 146) and where Vian is never mentioned.

Going back to Vian, what do the articles say about him? What was he mentioned for? And by whom were they written? The articles dating back to 1949 and 1953 reveal a pure «human interest», as he is associated to «his existentialist pals» (*The Tatler*, 27 April 1949, 18-19) and to the «all you can drink» club. A notable interest is shown during the 1960s by his theatre plays, *The Empire Builders* and *The Generals' Tea Party*, mentioned by *The Stage*, *The Birmingham Daily Post*, *Illustrated London News*, *The Tatler*, *The Telegraph* and *The Harrow Observer*. Following von Heydebrandt's and Wingo's methodology adopted by Andringa, we can notice that the articles focus on all four factors. As for their form, they are described as avant-garde symbolists, and «of firm thought, sensitive feeling and intricate writing» (*The Stage*, 17 November 1966, 7). They also focus on their content, *The Empire Builders* being an allusion to empires oppressing the masses and *The Generals' Tea Party* being a satire on government's reasons for making war. Regarding their effect, we find reviewers mentioning «passages of power» (*Illustrated London News*, 11 August 1962, 29) and describing them as «roving, frightening, gripping» (*The Stage*, 2 August 1962, 8) or wondering whether they are «fine and important or clever rubbish?» (*The Stage*, 9 August 1962, 6), or «allegory? Fantasy? Nose-thumb-at-audience nonsense?» (*Illustrated London News*, 10 August 1963, 33). Relational values also feature in the following comparisons between the two plays: «as opposed to

Empire Builders, which I find clinging to memory» (*Illustrated London News*, 19 November 1966, 29); «handling of elements is potent and skilled as in *Empire Builders*, though narrower in range» (*The Stage*, 17 November 1966, 7) or with other writers and playwrights. Particularly relevant in creating an image of the plays and publicising them were two reviewers, John Trewin (*Illustrated London News*, *The Stage*, *Birmingham Daily Post*) and Raymond Marriot (*The Stage*). A closer look at the values guiding the reviewers' reception shows the diversity of opinion and an interesting pattern, resonating with the reception of *I Spit on Your Graves* in France. Indeed, *The Empire Builders*, with his representation of the decay of a colonial empire by way of synecdoche (the decay of a middle-class family and the presence of an ill-treated zombie-like figure, the Schmurz), generated a variety of readings. These ranged from social and political readings, associating the play with the «gradual doom of those colonial empires that were created by force» as well as «a study of human death and loneliness» with the Schmurz symbolising either the oppressed masses, or the battered body in conditions of extreme labour, or conscience and the shadow of death (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 August 1962, 8). Marriot, writing for *The Stage*, also highlights the connection with Algeria and colonisation and compares the scope of Vian's playwriting to that of William Shakespeare and Luigi Pirandello and to John Osborne for the style (4 August 1962, 6). Others completely overlook the political allusions and describe the play as being about a «middle-class family persecuted by unknown forces» displaying bad humour and unaccomplished symbolism (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 February 1967, 5), or as linked to nuclear threats, Vian's approaching death and «France's troubles» (*Middlesex County Times*, 18 August 1962, 4). Most of the mentions are due to the fact that Trewin, one of the most influential critics of the time, had included the play in his list of the 25 plays of the year, thus consecrating it as a respected artwork. His dislike for the second play to be staged in the UK, *The Generals' Tea Party*, may be among the reasons for its failure. The play is about generals giving a tea party to start a war in order to solve economic problems and deciding what country, among China, USA and Russia, will be whose enemy. It is punctuated by allusions to the grabbing of land in Africa and cheerfully ends with the generals playing Russian Roulette while hiding from the same war they set in motion. Despite the play being extremely daring and powerful, it was generally received with perplexity and coldness. Trewin, so enthusiast about *The Empire Builders*, labels it as «chaotic absurdity» and something to be forgotten (*Illustrated London News*, 19 November 1966, 29), while one reviewer of *The Stage* considers it absurd that a general would start a war for economic reasons and defines it as «utter idiocy» (18 August 1966, 14). Only Marriot, critic at *The Stage*, does not consider it as

a pratfall and instead describes it as satirical comedy that explores political and social reasons for making war, an «absurdity that Vian explores with almost frenzied zeal» in his exposition of «a mass of bourgeoisie hypocrisy, pretention, selfishness and irresponsibility that amount to being a positive menace to the country» and concluding that «oozing through everything is the rottenness of the bourgeoisie state» (17 November 1966, 7). What I want to suggest is that the reception of his plays greatly depends, as for his Sullivan's novels in France, on the possibility to avoid, displace or limit their political implications to one country. Indeed, while *The Empire Builders* was either exclusively attached to France (*those colonial empires created by force, France's troubles...*) or seen as abstract representations of death and solitude, *The Generals Tea Party* was unapologetically critical of the way in which bourgeoisie states were kept in existence and simultaneously too general to be limited to a critique of France. If somehow British critics were able to avoid confronting the implications of *The Empire Builders* for their own country by focusing of France, *The Generals' Tea Party* made the task too difficult and this may be the reasons for the public's resistance to the play.

The history of the plays' reception also appears to confirm this point. While *The Generals' Tea Party* seems to fade away with the years, *Empire Builders* maintains relative fame in the 1970s, where 6 out of 10 references are linked to this play. Again, Trewin praises it for being a «supremely non-avant-garde, anti-symbolist play, allowing everyone to form his own opinion with no help from the author but plenty of clues leading to false trails» (*Birmingham Daily Post*, 21 August 1971, 2), while *The Harrow Observer* sees it as an attack on material possession and life outside society (9 June 1972, 7). The other references point to another play and to an event in Cardiff, where a red-light theatre organises a French dinner followed by songs and an adaptation of Vian's works, who is mentioned as «an enfant terrible of the 50's», demonstrating little knowledge of him or his works. Two mentions written by Elizabeth Harvey for the *Birmingham Daily Post Book Page* refer to Vian as a novelist in comparison to other writers, showing that he made up the journalist's repertoire of surrealist literature and was appreciated. Writing about Aragon's *Paris Peasants* she writes «is not a surrealist novel in the way that Boris Vian's novels, for instance, are surrealist» (27 February 1971, 8) and about Queneau's *The Bark Tree*, «impossible to translate as the marvellous and ambiguous novels of Boris Vian whom Queneau quite naturally admires» (4 July 1970, 8). It is interesting to notice that despite being now associated to the nouveau roman, at the time Vian was considered a Surrealist and linked to writers of the former generation.

The 1980s also see mentions of the play *Empire Builders*, with *The Stage* describing Vian as the «French writer who became something of a

cult in Europe as a result of the radical protests» (6 November 1980, 28). A French circle in the Republic of Ireland screened the 1968 film adaptation of *L'Écume des jours* (misspelled as *L'Écume des fours*) with English subtitles, indicating the possible presence of a subsystem of French speaking admirers (*Sligo Champion*, 22 April 1983, 11), while his songs are translated in 1988, as reported by the *Irish Independent*. In the 1990s his name is associated to a musical by Alain Guki, who «aims to bring the work of the post-war gallic lyricist, novelist and poet Boris Vian to a wider audience» (*The Stage*, 19 October 1995, 12) and to a film dealing with his death, which happened –quite dramatically– while he was watching an adaptation of his novel *I Spit on Your Graves*, whose painful process of adaptation is related by Monti (2018). During all this time, the only reference to his novels are indirectly provided by Harvey and by an article published in 1967 by the *Birmingham Daily Post* and written by the literary historian R. C. Churchill. This article deals with the translation of *L'Écume des jours* into English, carried out by Stanley Chapman, himself a member of the Pataphysique and the Oulipo. The reviewer shows no appreciation, as shown by the following lines: «greatest novel, as Queneau with appropriate absurdity has called Vian's undergraduate charade. It is good to see that the existentialists are getting it to the back by their disciples» (*The Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 December 1967, 8). Thus, his name in the UK is mostly linked to his plays, his life and to intermedial translations of his work.

At the same time, while popular success in France is not matched by the same popularity within the academia, according to Alistair Rolls *et al.* (2014: 3), «it is in the Anglo-Saxon system –and especially in the universities of North America– where some of the great names of Vian studies have worked». This mixed reception points to the existence of different subsystems and interests: highbrow and lowbrow, literary and human, plus the subsystem of the French social revolutionaries of May 68. Another suggestion for his little popularity in England could come from Rolls *et al.* (2014: 1-2), who state:

British crime-fiction readers will know Georges Simenon but not have heard of Boris Vian; generations of American Feminists will know Simone de Beauvoir but not this man she used to meet at parties and in the cafés of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and of whom she was quite fond; Sci-Fi fans throughout the Anglo-Saxon world are familiar with Jules Verne but not with France's translator of A.E. von Vogt, and soul-searching teenagers around the world work through their angst or at times discover it in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, but will never know the man with whom he shared so much.

This sentence, which is supposed to display the authors' shock for Vian's failure in the Anglo-Saxon world, might in fact point to a reason for that: while all the other writers are mostly linked to a genre or philosophical current, Vian's oeuvre is too eclectic to be labelled and confined to an exportable category. Did Vian's eclecticism impinge on his recognition abroad? Another interesting point raised by them is the fact that, while in the UK Vian's novels never became famous, they were successfully exported to other countries, such as Japan, where a manga and a film were adapted from his novel *L'Écume des Jours*. This points to the possibility of widening the range of analysis and checking strategies of communications and values and interests at stake in more than one country, something that Andringa does not consider. Another thing that misses from Andringa's analysis, and which she acknowledges, is the relevance of intertextual and, more importantly, of intermedial translations and their impact on the translation history and evaluation of Woolf, something that is rightfully spotted by Woolf's translator instead, who pushed for a new translation in light of the successful play «Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?». Hence, in the following section I will focus on interlingual and intermedial translations of Vian's most famous novel, *L'Écume des jours*, and on the agents involved.

5. TRANSLATION HISTORY: STRATEGIES AND INTERESTS

If we take a brief look at the translation history of *L'Écume des Jours*, we will find three subsequent translations into English (two of which were produced in the States) and a sustained number of intermedial translations, mostly produced in France.

YEAR	INTERLINGUAL TRANSLATION	INTERMEDIAL TRANSLATION
1967	<i>Froth on the Daydream</i> (trans. Stanley Chapman, UK)	
1968	<i>Mood Indigo</i> (trans. John Sturrock, USA)	film (France)
1979		rock music (France)
1981		opera (France, Germany, Russia)
1994		theatre, Philippe Faure (France)
1999		music (France)

YEAR	INTERLINGUAL TRANSLATION	INTERMEDIAL TRANSLATION
2001		<i>Cbloe</i> , film (Japan)
2003	<i>Foam of the Daze</i> (trans. Brian Harper, USA)	manga (Japan)
2005		graphic novel (France)
2009		theatre, Béatrice de la Boulaye, Judith Davies (France)
2010		theatre, company Charles et Stone (France)
2012		graphic novel (France)
2013		<i>Mood Indigo</i> , film (France)
2014	<i>Froth on the daydream</i> re-issued as <i>Mood Indigo</i> (UK, USA)	
2015		music (France)
2016		illustrations (Czech Republic) solo art exhibition by Yuko Mohri, (USA, Jane Lombard Gallery)
2018		dance performance (UK)

Table 1: Interlingual and Intermedial Translations

The first translation, which appears twenty years after the publication of the book in France, is carried out by Henry Chapman for the small publishing house Rapp & Carrol, closed by now. The translation is rapidly followed by a film adaptation in France in 1968, which appears together with the American translation published by Groove Press, a publishing house founded in 1947 and specialised in alternative literature, especially French avant-garde literature and theatre plays. The adaptation into a film, besides being linked to the May 68 revolution and the peak in book sales in France (150 000 copies are sold in 1968, while from 1970 the rate is of 110,000 annual sales) may also attest the possible consecration of Vian through translation. In 1979 the book is turned into a rock album by the progressive Rock band Memoriance, attesting to its steady popularity in France, while in 1981 Russian composer Edison Denisov decides to adapt the book into opera. The opera is divided into three acts and features text taken from the novel, Vian's songs, and allusions to Duke Ellington, jazz and the French

chanson. The libretto was published by Le Chant do Monde in Paris and the opera premiered in 1986 at the *Opéra Comique* in Paris and was subsequently staged in Perm (Russia) and Stuttgart (Germany) in 2012. As will happen with many of the agents of dissemination of Vian's work, Denisov explains that the opera had not been commissioned and that the idea came to him after accidentally reading the book. Another mention to his work appears in the album *L'Écume des jours* by Nicolas Barrot, in 1999, and in a play staged in 1994. The popularity enjoyed by Vian in Japan is shown by the book's adaptation into a film in 2001 (the film-maker Gô Rijû recontextualises the story in contemporary Japan) and by a manga published in 2003. Simultaneously, a third translation into American English is carried out by Brian Harper, who changes the title into *Foam of the Daze*. The story of this third translation is quite peculiar. Indeed, it was commissioned and published by TamTam Book, a small publishing house (twelve titles) specialised in twentieth-century international literature and specifically in the works of Boris Vian. As the owner explains in a post on his blog (2014), he decided to create the publishing house after discovering a book by Vian while in Japan, as he grew fond of the French writer and wanted his oeuvre to reach a wider audience. In 2005, a graphic novel under the book's title comes out in France, released by a small publishing house co-founded by the author of the graphic novel, Benoit Prateseille and in 2012 another graphic novel is published by the section *Mirage* of Edition Delcourt, an important publishing house specialised in comics, manga and graphic novels. The authors are David Morvan and Marion Mousse. During the same year, a theatre play is presented at the Festival Avignone by the company Charles et Stones. The famous film *Mood Indigo* by Michael Gondry, the acclaimed director of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, is released a year later, leading to the re-issuing of the 1967 translation, whose title is now changed into *Mood Indigo* so as to anchor it to the widely known film. This strategy is reflected in the paratext; indeed, the cover of this version features an image taken from Gondry's film. It is interesting to notice that the same strategy was used by the first translator into American English, John Sturrock, who used the title of the probably better-known song by Duke Ellington. In 2016, after watching Gondry's film, the Prague-based artist Tatiana Karpova made some illustrations based on Vian's novel, which were exhibited at Lostr Illustration Festival in Prague in 2016. In a personal email exchange, she explained to me that she was inspired by the novel's richness in metaphors and that she came to know the novel through the film. A solo exhibition named *Foam of the Daze* (the title of the 2003 translation published by TamTam Books) is held in New York at Jane Lombard Gallery in the same year. Inspired by the absurd world of Vian, the Japanese

artist Yuko Mohri realised site-specific kinetic installations that turn found objects into circuits of movement and sound in order to investigate the way human experience is characterised by apparently random and imperceptible connections. As for the dance performance by Eliot Smith Dance Company, premiered in Newcastle in November 2018, it was the French choreographer Mathieu Geffré, commissioned to choreograph a piece for the company, who brought forth the idea of adapting *L'Écume des jours*, previously unknown by the company director and by the dancers. These last examples clearly show the importance of intermedial translations and agents of dissemination in carrying the text across national boundaries.

Returning to Gondry's film, the convergence of translation and adaptations and the strategies relying on recycling the titles of songs and adaptations strongly suggests a link between the production of translations and adaptations. Striking is also the fact that translations and retranslations appear right before or after the adaptation of the work. We can observe how the first film based on *L'écume des jours* appears the year after its translation into English, suggesting its consecration through translation and probably provoking its second translation into American English. Afterwards, the order is reversed, and we can notice that the second translation into American English follows the release of the film *Chloe* in Japan (where the publisher Tosh Berman lived during some time) and similarly, the first translation by Stanley Chapman is reissued after the release of Gondry's film, its title now changed into *Mood Indigo*. Therefore, this example shows the interconnection between translations, adaptations and intertextual references in the production, communication and reception of a cultural product and points to the limits of analysing one without the others. A necessary step further, to be taken in a successive article, would be to analyse and compare the adaptations as well as the paratextual material, as these might give us insights into how they address a certain subsystem or highlight a specific interest but also into how they project the novel towards new subsystems, adapting it to different audiences and formats, in so doing expanding the numbers of subsystems where the said artwork figures.

6. CONCLUSION

In this article, I looked at how the reception of Vian's work in the UK could be studied through the model offered by Andringa (2006), based on his national and international career and his complex and eclectic activity as author, translator and cultural mediator. This in turn led me to notice some

limits of Andringa's analysis and issues that need to be further explored. Among these, the role played by adaptations and intertextual references in people's perception and reception of a cultural product, the possibility to do a comparative analysis of the reception profile of an author in different countries and to check it against reception in the home country, the need to consider the structure of the field of international cultural exchanges and the centrality of a language in the translation market as possible reasons of success and failure, the influence of «unwilling mediators» and bad publicity and finally the ease with which an author can be associated to particular currents and as such exported. Finally, the fascinating case of the shifting reception of the novel *J'irai cracher sur vos tombes* is a powerful reminder that one must look beyond the literary system when assessing the production and circulation of artworks, as the socio-political context and the agents of artistic dissemination may exert an undeniable influence. A closer look at the different strategies adopted in each of the translations could reveal other interesting aspects: for example, one could investigate the way paratexts have been used over time to promote certain aspects and values, or which aspects of the novel were foregrounded in the Japanese manga and film versions of *L'Écume des jours*. Also worth of research is how the absence of words from the dance piece affected the rendition, and what were the differences in the staging of the Opera in France, Russia and Germany. Due to the nature and length of this paper, these questions have not been addressed here; however, they seem worth investigating and could be the topic of further publications.

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