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## **Reception and Translations of Western Modernist Literature in Latvia in the Brezhnev Era**

### **Rietumu modernisma literatūras recepcija un tulkojumi Latvijā Brežņeva laikā**

#### **Keywords:**

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#### **Atslēgvārdi:**

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## Summary

This study was motivated by the aspiration to understand the entry process of Western modernist literature and its results during the period of Stagnation in Soviet Latvia. The article aims to disclose what works of Western modernism were known and translated and to identify the official ways of their reception. Since this familiarization process was influenced by the specificity of the Soviet colonization model, this study uses the approach of postcolonialism and cultural studies and a collection of data that reveals the appearance of the first modernist translations in this period. The main focus is on the situation in Latvia. However, it is viewed in the context of the literature translated into Russian, with a brief outline of the situation in the other Baltic republics which, together with Latvia, from the positions of the center of the USSR were treated as the so-called Soviet West. In order to reveal how the public perception of modernism was formed, this study analyzes the contribution of Latvian Soviet literary scholars and the influence of the central literary periodicals of the USSR on their works. In conclusion, the landscape of translation and reception of Western modernism in Soviet Latvia during the Stagnation shows the hybrid nature of culture and the parallel existence of colonial and decolonial discourses. It confirms that the focus on Western modernism, which intensified in the USSR during the period of political Thaw and Stagnation, paradoxically returned Western modernism to the literary space of Soviet Latvia and changed its cultural orientation from the East to the West.

## Kopsavilkums

Šo pētījumu rosināja vēlme izprast, kāds ir Rietumu modernisma literatūras ienākšanas process un tā rezultāti Padomju Latvijā stagnācijas periodā. Raksta mērķis: noskaidrot, kādi Rietumu modernisma darbi bija zināmi un tulkoti, un apzināt to oficiālos recepcijas ceļus. Tā kā šo iepazīšanas procesu ietekmēja padomju kolonizācijas modeļa specifika, pētījumā izmantota postkoloniālisma un kultūras studiju pieeja, kā arī veidots datu apkopojums, kas atklāj pirmo modernisma tulkojumu parādīšanos šajā periodā. Galvenā uzmanība pievērsta situācijai Latvijā, taču tā tiek aplūkota krievu valodā tulkotās literatūras kontekstā, nedaudz ieskicējot situāciju arī pārējās Baltijas republikās, kas kopā ar Latviju no PSRS centra pozīcijām tika traktētas kā t. s. padomju Rietumi. Lai atklātu izpratnes veidošanos par modernismu, pētīts latviešu padomju literatūrzinātnieku ieguldījums un viņu ietekmēšanās no PSRS centrālajiem literārajiem periodiskajiem izdevumiem. Kopumā Rietumu modernisma tulkošanas un recepcijas ainava Padomju Latvijā stagnācijas laikā parāda kultūras hibrīdo raksturu un koloniālā un dekoloniālā diskursa paralēlo esamību. Tā apliecina, ka uzmanības pievērsums Rietumu modernismam, kas PSRS pastiprinājās politiskā atkušņa un stagnācijas laikā, paradoksālā kārtā atgriezta Rietumu modernismu Padomju Latvijas literārajā telpā un mainīja kultūras orientāciju no Austrumiem uz Rietumiem.

## Introduction

This research was initiated by the desire to understand how the change of cultural orientation from East to West took place in Soviet Latvia during the Stagnation period, and how translations or only information about Western modernist literature opened the worldview of the people of Soviet Latvia. The article aims to find out what works of Western modernist literature were known and translated, and to investigate the official reception routes of Western literature.

The term *modernism* here is used in the traditional sense: Western literature that contradicts the conventional narrative, referring to the period approximately from 1890 to 1941 (Tew, Murray 2009). In the modernist paradigm, it is possible to separate early modernism (for example, the decadence movement, Marcel Proust, Knut Hamsun<sup>1</sup>), the so-called high modernism that marks the most radical and experimental expression in the first two decades of the 20th century (for example, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot, as well as the several sub-trends of modernism such as expressionism, dadaism, surrealism, etc.), and the so-called late modernism. It is a mode of modernism where the radical opposition to the traditional type of narrative is reduced (Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, etc.) (see, for example, Lewis 2007; Tew, Murray 2009).

Research of translations potentially helps to analyze the complex relationship between Soviet and Western modernity in the literary landscape of the Soviet Latvia. Information about Western modernist literature, its availability in translations, and its reception are the indicators that show the desire of the Soviet cultural space to distance itself from the process of Western cultural development and the simultaneous attraction to this culture. This process is characterized by the peculiar and paradoxical modernization efforts of Soviet culture.

In addition to the postcolonial and cultural approaches which shape the methodological basis, this study uses a data collection method to capture the first years of translation and to compare the translation landscapes in the heart of the USSR (Russia, especially Moscow and Leningrad) and in Soviet Latvia during Stagnation. The focus is mainly on the situation in Latvia, but facts and insights that characterize the comparative view of the reception of Western literature, especially modernist literature, have also been sought. Particular attention has been paid to the

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1 Knut Hamsun is a modern Norwegian novelist; his contribution to the development of the European modernist novel was uniquely significant. His novel *Sult* (1890) was translated into English already in 1899 (*The Hunger*, translator George Egerton).

developments in Russian culture, but the background of other Baltic republics has also been highlighted. The broader Baltic context of modernist literature reception is beyond the scope of this article.

The article also pays attention to the research of modernist works by Latvian literary scholars during Stagnation. To reveal the formation of an understanding of Western modernism in Soviet Latvia, the contribution of Latvian literary scholars to the interpretation of modernist literature has also been studied. Literary periodicals in Latvia and Russia have been used as the primary sources in this article.

The tradition of translation and the understanding of modernism literature practiced in the center of the Soviet state (Russia) during the years of Stagnation naturally determined the rules for translation and the understanding of modernism in Soviet Latvia. However, the article hypothesizes that the Soviet regime, which almost completely closed the window to the West at the beginning of the occupation, opened that window during later periods of thaw and Stagnation.

## **Using postcolonial criticism in translation analysis**

Cultural

policy, including literary publishing and translation policy, is just one of the many ways how a totalitarian power can control and change the minds and identities of people. In Soviet Latvia, like in the whole Soviet Union, the literary publishing and translation policies were applied to strengthen the ideology and power of the state, especially during the so-called High Stalinism (till the end of the Second World War in 1945) and Late Stalinism (from 1945 till Stalin's death in 1953).

The Soviet nation's collective identity manifested itself for the first time after 1945 when the end of the war transformed into the triumph of victory, and the Soviet nation started to recognize itself collectively. According to the investigations of Evgeny Dobrenko, a professor of Russian Studies, during Late Stalinism a myth was created about the war and Soviet greatness, about an all-conquering leader and a supreme state, about the Russian national exceptionalism and messianism (Dobrenko 2020). In the years of Late Stalinism, modernized conservatism and patriarchalism, anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism, as well as isolationism and xenophobia developed. As the Lithuanian publicist and writer Tomas Venclova has described the situation of the Lithuanian nation since the period of Stalinism, "the Sovietization and Russification process was carried out in brutal, obvious forms. An attempt was made in a brief time to totally change the cultural orientation of the nation" (Venclova 1979). The same can be said about the situation in Soviet Latvia and Soviet Estonia because cultural orientation changed throughout the Baltics. If before the Second

World War the cultural orientation of the Baltic States was multicultural and European, after the war it was oriented towards the East and Russia. In the first decades after the occupation, there was an almost complete shift of attention to Russian literature in the field of translation. Andrejs Veisbergs, in his research of translations into Latvian during 16th–20th centuries, concludes that extreme isolation from Western culture was practiced throughout the Baltics during the beginning of the re-occupation (Veisbergs 2022: 176). Until the Thaw, the translations of foreign publications were practically only the works of Western classics; 95% of all translations were from Russian (Veisbergs 2022: 176). Since the end of the war, an intensive acculturation process was carried out based on immigration from other Soviet republics, especially Russia. The acculturation process was determined not only by immigration but also by political decisions and propaganda.

“The term acculturation refers to the changes that may occur when individuals from different cultures come into contact, with possible changes in both immigrants and members of the receiving society” (Esses 2018). Psychological research suggests that acculturation is always bidimensional, even in an situation of occupation, despite power dominance “changes potentially taking place along two dimensions – one representing the maintenance or loss of the original culture and the other representing the adoption or rejection of the new culture” (Esses 2018). If we view the Soviet occupation as a kind of colonization model, it is helpful to use a postcolonial approach that can clearly show the changes in identity and worldview in the host society. David Chioni Moore was one of the first who suggested breaking the tradition of continuing the already superannuated centrality of the Western or Anglo-Franco coloniality. He turned to a postcolonial designation for another zone: “[T]he term “post-colonial” and everything that goes with it [...] might reasonably be applied to the formerly Russo- and Soviet-controlled region” (Moore 2001:114). The collective monograph *Baltic Postcolonialism*, edited by Violeta Kelertas, was the first comprehensive study of Baltic postcolonialism (Kelertas 2006). It was followed by investigations by Baltic scholars: Latvian literary researcher Benedikts Kalnačs’s monographs *Baltijas postkoloniālā drāma* (Baltic Postcolonial Drama) (Kalnačs 2011) and *20th Century Baltic Drama: Postcolonial Narratives, Decolonial Options* (Kalnačs 2016) and Estonian researcher Epp Annus’s monograph *Soviet Postcolonial Studies: A View from the Western Borderlands* (Annus 2019). Kalnačs focuses only on the Baltic states; Annus in her book deals with postcolonial studies of Eastern and East Central Europe areas. By employing the conceptual apparatus of postcolonial studies, Annus uses the notion of Soviet occupation, demarcating it chronologically: the Soviet presence in the Baltics commenced as a foreign occupation and evolved into a colonial rule: “Postwar Soviet colonialism was thus a product of the era of late colonialism, which differed significantly from

the classical era of colonialism, when the dominant postcolonial imaginaries were shaped around the model of the then-flourishing British Empire [...]. Soviet colonialism was a colonialism in camouflage: the Soviet regime never publicly articulated its strategic aims as explicitly colonial" (Annus 2019: 14).

Annus analyzes the simultaneous discourse of Soviet colonialism and decolonization and concludes that here can be seen "how colonial and decolonial discourses can unfold side by side, as in the late 1950s and in the 1960s, when decolonial processes became dominant in several East Central European states and emerged forcefully also in the Baltics [...]. Here, colonial subject positions are produced by a set of implicit and explicit rules, systems and practices that define the sphere of the possible (to be a writer in the Soviet era, one must follow such and such rules)" (Annus 2019: 7). To characterize the fusion of colonial and decolonial discourses, which is visible in all areas of Soviet life, postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity can be used. It helps us characterize new transcultural forms in occupied/colonized territories from the cross-cultural exchange viewpoint. Bhabha, in the essay collection *The Location of Culture*, speaks about the *Third Space of enunciation* (Bhabha 1994: 37) that may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture not on the basis of the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures but of the inscription and articulation of a culture's hybridity (Bhabha 1994: 38). Bhabha's research attempts to address the ambivalent space of colonial discourse with a hybrid space that gives the colonized the potential to find legitimacy outside the colonial condition. Annus reminds us that "colonial power always insinuates hybridity" (Annus 2019: 127) and "hybridization and merging of national and Soviet modernities took place over some decades" in the so-called Western Borderland (Annus 2019: 128).

The paradoxical influence of Soviet colonial ideology and the development of cultural hybridity was apparent after the end of high totalitarianism during the reign of Nikita Khrushchev, also known as the period of political Thaw or liberalization of the communist regime (1953–1964), and the reign of Leonid Brezhnev, also known as the period of Stagnation (1964–1982). Both periods saw a more liberal attitude towards all forms of culture, and a relative openness to Western culture; however, even then the ruling elite of the Soviet Union tried, with varying success, to further assert their dominance.

From the beginning of the political Thaw, literary publishing and translation policy also became more liberal, but the supervision of publications and translations remained tight. Political and cultural freedom was relative, and people had to adapt to an illusion of freedom that did not turn out to be real freedom. This period can be characterized as the previously mentioned mixture of Soviet colonialism and decolonization. Referring to Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Annus

admits that unlike the classical regime of colonization, the oppressed in the later stages of Soviet colonization were not pushed into complete silence. The voices of subalterns in the Soviet world were never fully silenced: "These were all voices that were supposed to be inaudible and yet were nevertheless heard sometimes, somewhere, under certain conditions, and thus participated in [...] small acts which in the end contributed to the breakup of the Soviet Union and real social change in its former Western borderlands" (Annus 2019: 17–18).

During the periods of Thaw and Stagnation, literature became this hybrid third space of conversation in Soviet colonization. Free-thinking expressions alternated with the fight against free-thinking. Society, especially the intelligentsia, had mastered the official form of expression and used it to achieve goals contrary to Soviet ideology. The principles of double morality were visible in all areas of life: "Intellectuals learned to work within the framework of Socialist Realism in art, music, and literature, and scholars utilized teachings from the Marxist–Leninist canon to legitimize their fields of inquiry" (Risch 2015:64).

As the cultural orientation towards the West had a strong tradition in the period of independence of Latvia and other Baltic states, the lost Western culture was not forgotten in Soviet times. It must be considered that in the Soviet republics, not only a discursive mixture of Soviet coloniality and modernity but also of local and national discourses and influences from the West coexisted (Annus 2019: 14). The image of Western culture continued to be a suggestive and essential part of the minds of the Soviet people. For the society behind the Iron Curtain, there existed two worlds: the real, closed Soviet space and the idealized, imaginary Western world. The influence of the partly banned Western culture and literature was also an element of the cultural hybridity of Soviet Latvia and other republics. As Sergei I. Zhuk points out, "the obsession with Western cultural products became the most important feature of cultural consumption in the closed socialist society of the post-Stalin era" (Zhuk 2009: 9).

Due to their historical experience and territorial location, the three Baltic republics were categorized as the Soviet West, "a space where new ideas of Sovietness developed, shaped by compromises between local inhabitants and state and Party institutions" (Risch 2015: 70). In her study, Annus also uses the concept of the West to denote the region, calling the area under consideration the Western borderland.

As the inhabitants of the Soviet West created a more Western sense of being Soviet through pre-Soviet publications and connections with the Western neighbors and their fellow nationals abroad, they were subject to larger control. Of course, that was why the interest in everything Western only intensified. Vitaly Pidgaetsky, a student and later a professor of History at the University of Dnipropetrovsk during the time of Brezhnev, gave an interview to the historian Sergei I. Zhuk in 1996.

He also confirmed the inclusion of Western Ukraine in the concept of the Soviet West and explained the consequences of stricter bans: “That is why we worshiped any cultural product that came from the magical West. For us, the West was a kind of symbolic mirror. Looking into this mirror, we tried to invent our own identity and understand what we were living for. To some extent, we constructed ourselves looking into this magic mirror of the forbidden and censored capitalist West. Sounds of Western popular music or images from Western films and stories from Western adventure novels intertwined with our Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish cultural forms and produced a strange mental mixture in our heads, which was cemented by our dominant Soviet cultural stereotypes” (Zhuk 2009: 2). The presence of Western and Russian culture and literature in the Soviet West caused the acculturation and hybridization processes of identity.

## **Western literature in Latvian and Russian translations**

The liberalization of Khrushchev’s time and the mood of freedom created a real “book hunger”, or “word hunger”. The cultivation of reading was especially encouraged by the authorities of Soviet power: “In the communist regimes of the Eastern Bloc, literature as a field was expected to adopt the official aesthetic values promoted by the Party. Furthermore, the Party promoted high-brow literature among the masses (see the *World Literature Series* in the Soviet Union, for example), convinced of its beneficial impact as it expressed the moral values [...]” (Rundle 2022: 5). An intensive wave of publishing of original books, periodicals, and translated literature occurred throughout the USSR, especially in its center – Russia. Foreign literature was published with the highest average print run – even in Soviet publishing, it was necessary to manage profitably, and the revenues from foreign belles-lettres were necessary to cover the losses from political publications, textbooks, etc. (Möldre 2010).

The phenomenon of the increasing amount of translated literature in the Thaw period has received much attention from researchers of Soviet Studies. An in-depth analysis of the history of translated literature in the USSR is provided in the book *Made Under Pressure: Literary Translation in the Soviet Union, 1960–1991* by Natalia Kamovnikova. It examines such issues as practices of translation policy in the context of the political and social situation; the history of censorship and publishing control in Russia; the workings of *Glavlit*, the leading Soviet censorship institution, and the role of the Union of Soviet Writers (Kamovnikova 2019). Another comprehensive source is a collective monograph *Translation Under Communism*, which examines the history of translation under European communism and deals with issues of censorship,



translation and ideology, as well as public policy. This monograph includes Nataliia Rudnytska's paper which analyzes the formation of and changes to the Soviet canon of world literature from the Revolution of 1917 to the collapse of the USSR in 1991 (Rundle 2022).

Rudnytska highlights the significant increase in translated literature since the political Thaw. She clarifies the attempt of Soviet ideology to internationalize the Soviet canon of world literature through state-supported translations of foreign literature (Rudnytska 2022: 39–73). Latvian researcher Veisbergs also emphasizes the remarkable quantitative growth of literature as a whole and translated literature since the Thaw and the return to translations from different languages, not only from Russian (Veisbergs 2022: 201–202).

Compared to the period of totalitarianism, translations from the languages of the Western world were returning to the literary landscape. Veisbergs concludes that the proportions of source languages changed quite rapidly in Latvia in the period of Thaw: the percentage of Russian translations dropped from 90% to 70% (Veisbergs 2022: 202). However, as can be seen, translations of Russian literature remained dominant. Kamovnikova, in her article devoted to translations of national literatures in the Soviet Union, marks the subordinate position of the national languages and of translations into them in comparison with Russian on the grounds of statistical data and officially published lists of recommended works in the national literature. The total number of translations into Russian exceeded the total number of translations made into all other languages of the Soviet Union, thus demonstrating its status and prestige.

Despite the dominance of Russian literature in the post-totalitarian period, the decolonization trends continued to develop in the literature landscape because the benefits of the Thaw period had long-lasting effects that continued during the Stagnation. Also, researchers call the Brezhnev Era the same as the Thaw period: a “book boom” (Zhuk 2009: 14). The lack of alternative entertainment sources and social or material status symbols encouraged the literary interests of the society. Reading books and periodicals in libraries, creating private book collections, and subscribing to periodicals had become a sign of prestige and intelligence.

Compared with the Thaw period, attitudes towards America and the West became cooler during the Stagnation, and translators and publishers had to adapt to the Iron Curtain and Cold War policies. The Communist Party still considered translation a symbol of internationalism and friendship between all Soviet republics and socialist block partners, but editors and translators took the chance to publish artistically diverse and challenging works. They used different strategies to present the texts in such a way that they would not be banned by censorship. Rudnytska, in the article *Translation and the Formation of the Soviet Canon of World Literature*, analyzes

the simultaneous existence of canon and decanonization, colonial and decolonial discourse. In her opinion, thanks to the alternative vision, translators sometimes managed to make use of the relaxation of ideological control and censorship and to promote the translation and reception of Western modernist authors who were far removed from the Soviet ideological model. This is how Franz Kafka, J. D. Salinger, Hermann Hesse, Albert Camus, and William Faulkner got published in Russia. Rudnytska pointed out that, of course, it strongly influenced the new generations of all Soviet writers, artists, and intellectuals (Rudnytska 2022: 39–73).

Analysis of the literature of Soviet Latvia also proves that during the Thaw and Stagnation, a distinct coexistence of colonial and decolonial discourse, as well as cultural hybridization processes can be observed. The Baltic republics, especially Estonia, productively used the policies of liberalism to their advantage. Estonia had more liberal cultural policies than the rest of the USSR. "It led other republics when it came to translating and producing musicals and plays from abroad. In 1965, Estonian theaters began staging the American musical *West Side Story*, presumably the first American musical staged in the USSR" (Risch 2015: 76). In Estonia, the plays by Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett were performed for the first time in the USSR. Estonians were also ahead of other republics in terms of translating modernist prose. "Modern Western writers appeared in translation first in Estonia, then in Lithuania, and generally ahead of other republics. Thus, Camus's works were published in Estonia in 1963 and 1966, while Lithuanians published a translation of Camus's *The Stranger* in 1968" (Risch 2015: 76). It was published in Russia the same year; in Latvia, *The Stranger* was published (translated by Milda Grīnfelde) only in 1989.

Unfortunately, the relative freedom was used to a much lesser extent in Latvia than in Estonia. The lag in the pace of translation of Western literature in comparison with the neighboring country was due to caution in all areas of Latvian life, determined mainly by the ruling circles. From 1959 to 1966, the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Latvian SSR was Arvīds Pelše; his successor was Augusts Voss, who held the position until 1984. Both pursued a policy of obedience to Moscow; therefore cultural expression, including publishing and translation policy, was cautious. However, even in Latvia during the Stagnation an intensive arrival of translated literature and the acquaintance with modernist literature could be observed.

During Brezhnev's regime, in the Baltic republics like in the whole USSR, there were some illegal ways of obtaining foreign literature with the help of dissidents, *samizdat* publications, and the smuggling of literature which progressed under the influence of the double standards culture. The purpose of this article is to look at the official entry routes for translated literature. There were two primary sources in the Baltic republics from which it was officially possible to learn something about Western

literature, including early modernist, high-modernist, late-modernist, and even post-modernist literature. The first source was translations into Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian; the second source, the presence of the Russian literary space in the Baltics, was of particular importance.

It was already mentioned that in the first three decades after the Soviet occupation, a paradoxical trend in translation and evaluation of Western modernist literature existed. In 1940, the Soviet power forcibly separated the Baltic states from Western culture and turned them eastwards, but since the late 1950s and the 1960s, the center of the Soviet world became the gateway to the West for the Baltic states. Venclova characterizes this tendency as “the desire by the rulers to demonstrate a fake liberalism,” but he admits that “the doors to world literature opened somewhat wider in Moscow” (Venclova 1979). So Russian literary periodicals became one of the main channels of information about developments in the free world. The legendary magazine *Noviy mir*, published in Russia since January 1925, was the source of particularly free-spirited publications during the periods of Thaw and Stagnation. Translations were also published in *Noviy mir*, but the most influential periodical was *Inostrannaya literatura*, published since 1955. This periodical was dedicated especially to translations of foreign literature and played a significant role in the change of cultural orientation. The previous Soviet Russian magazine dedicated to translated literature was *Internatsionalnaya literatura* (1933–1943). As Veisbergs indicates, “‘internationalism’ was the mantra in politics while the reality was greater isolation from the rest of the world than the relatively liberal approach of German or Italian fascism” (Veisbergs 2018: 78). Brian Baer, a researcher of Soviet Literature, has noted that “[t]he choice of *inostrannaya* for the title of the journal *Foreign Literature* marked a shift in emphasis from the solidarity implied by internationality to the concept of cultural difference, which is more evident in Russian than in English, as the Russian word formed from the roots *inoi*, meaning ‘other,’ and *strana*, ‘country’” (Baer 2016: 59). This means that the publishers’ goal has been to highlight this *otherness*, difference from the Soviet literature.

*Inostrannaya Literatura* or *Inostranka*, as it was called in everyday life, quickly became one of the biggest promoters of the art of translation in the Soviet tradition. According to Birgit Menzel, researcher of the history of *Inostrannaya literatura*, the magazine had 250,000 to 300,000 subscriptions in 1960 and up to 590,000 in 1970 (Menzel 2011: 154). Of course, most of the translated authors were ideologically acceptable writers from the socialist bloc, but there were many surprising publications of modernist and contemporary literature.

In Latvia, the magazine *Inostrannaya literatura* was in great demand; it could be found in libraries and received via subscription. Because the magazine was so popular, library readers sometimes even had to wait in line for six months to be able to read it.

Information that the number of orders was limited was repeatedly published in Latvian periodicals ([Anon] (2003). The fantastic popularity suggests that the magazine had a substantial influence on the Soviet intelligentsia's worldview.

From the beginning of the Thaw period, Latvian literary periodicals *Karogs* and *Literatūra un Māksla* contain many references to *Inostrannaya literatura* publications, mostly dedicated to foreign literature. The following examples show that Latvian magazines themselves were much more careful about ideological violations. Although the policy of literary translation was somewhat facilitated, and the Western classics and some works by contemporary foreign writers were translated if they complied with the principles of progressivity, there were almost no Latvian translations of all those examples of Western modernism and postmodernism literature that could be read in Russian. The years of publication of the most important high modernist prose texts and some important prose texts of late modernism properly show the consequences of different translation policies in Soviet Latvia and in the center of the USSR. The basis of comparison is, firstly, the translations into the Russian language published in *Inostrannaya literatura* (in some cases in other periodicals; their titles are not mentioned) and book editions; secondly, the translations into Latvian (see Table 1)<sup>2</sup>.

The path of learning about the most outstanding representatives of high modernism prose (Proust, Joyce, Kafka, and others) was gradual and fragmentary in the Soviet Russian literary space, but these coryphaei of modernism were not entirely unknown. Some episodes from Joyce's *Ulysses* were translated and published in Russian already in 1935–1936 in the journal *Internatsionalnaya literatura*, but the entire translation appeared only during *perestroika*, in 1989 (Menzel 2011: 155; Clark 2011: 133). Latvian writer Dzintars Sodums translated the novel entirely while living in exile. Fragments of *Ulysses* in Latvian appeared in the journal *Jaunā Gaita* in 1959, and the first publication of the entire book in Latvian came out in 1960 in Sweden. In Soviet Latvia, fragments of *Ulysses* were published in 1968 in the article by Dzidra Kalniņa *Par romānu un antiromānu* (On Novel and Anti-Novel; the beginning of Episode 1 and fragments of Episode 2). However, the novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was published in Russian in 1933 (Clark 2011: 133) and also in the *Inostrannaya Literatura* in 1976. The Latvian translation of the novel was published only in the 21st century.

Proust's series of novels *In Search of Lost Time* was also translated into Russian in the 1930s, but since 1973 all seven parts have been translated. During Stagnation,

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2 Names of the translators into Russian are not mentioned in this comparison. Since translators were often "invisible" during the Soviet era (their names were not published), a separate study should be devoted to this issue. Also, the productions of Western modernist drama in Latvia and the translations created for these productions is a separate research topic. This topic has not been addressed in this study.

Table 1.

Comparison of published translations into Russian and Latvian in the period of Stagnation

Author and title of the novel	Publication of original	Translation into Russian	The first translation into Latvian
James Joyce <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>	1916	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1976, No. 10; 1976, No. 11; 1976, No. 12	2013
Marcel Proust <i>In Search of Lost Time</i>	1913–1927	Since 1973 (1976, 1980, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1999)	Since 1996
Franz Kafka <i>The Metamorphosis</i> a.o.	1915	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1964	2001
Franz Kafka <i>The Trial</i> a.o.	1925	The book: 1965	1999
Franz Kafka <i>Diaries, Letter to father</i>	1919	The book: 1968	2005
William Faulkner <i>The Sound and the Fury</i>	1929	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1973, No. 1–2; the book: 1985	–
F. Scott Fitzgerald <i>The Great Gatsby</i>	1925	The book: 1965	1971
Ernest Hemingway <i>A Farewell to Arms</i>	1929	1936	1958
Ernest Hemingway <i>(selected works)</i>		<i>Complete Works</i> (I, II) 1966 <i>Selected Works</i> (I–IV) 1968, 1982	Since 1964 <i>Complete Works</i> (I–V) 1971
Albert Camus <i>The Stranger</i>	1942	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1968, No. 9	1989
Albert Camus <i>Plaque</i>	1947	Selection: 1969	1969; 1989
J. D. Salinger <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	1951	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1960, No. 11; the book: 1965	1969
Kurt Vonnegut <i>Cat's Cradle</i>	1963	–	1973
Kurt Vonnegut <i>Breakfast of Champions</i>	1973	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1975, No. 1–2	1987
Kurt Vonnegut <i>Slaughterhouse-Five</i>	1969	Selection: 1978	1987
Gabriel García Márquez <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	1967	<i>Inostrannaya literatura</i> : 1970, No. 6–7; the book: 1971	1981

there were no Latvian translations of Proust's work. Skaidrīte Jaunarāja started translating this series of novels in the 1990s, but it is still not finished. Very intensive acquaintance with Kafka's works in the USSR began at the end of Khrushchev's reign; many works were published in the mid-1960s, mainly due to the awakening movement in Czechoslovakia and the approaching Prague Spring. The reason for Kafka's popularity could be that at that time Czechoslovakians themselves searched for their multicultural roots and began to consider the Austro-Hungarian writer as belonging to their culture. In 1963, Czech translations of Kafka's works were published (Nekula 2016, 13). Already in *Inostrannaya literatura's* first issue of 1964, translations of Kafka's stories were published and information about the author was included. Kafka's works were not available in Latvian during the period of Stagnation; the Latvian translations of his works were done at the turn of the millenniums (translators – Amanda Aizpuriete, Silvija Brice, Līga Kalniņa). There were some earlier publications in the Awakening time literary magazine *Avots*.

Faulkner's modernist novel *The Sound and the Fury* in the Soviet Union was published for the first time in 1973, after what was reportedly a considerable behind-the-scenes argument. One of the recently cited arguments against printing this novel in *Inostrannaya literatura* was "that it is devoted to contemporary literature whereas Faulkner's work is already 44 years old. But its techniques are much more modern than virtually anything to appear in the Soviet Union since *The Sound and The Fury* first appeared in America in 1929" (Smith 1973). The novels *The Hamlet*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*, *Soldier's Pay*, and a play based on *Requiem for a Nun* were translated in 1958. Other works by Faulkner were translated later. Unfortunately, *The Sound and The Fury* has not been translated into Latvian yet.

The writers of the Lost Generation were more recognizable than American modernist Faulkner because the mood of a lost generation was understandable to the Soviet people. The most frequently translated Western writer in the USSR was Hemingway. After the Spanish Civil war, Hemingway met with Soviet communist leaders and journalists. His anti-fascist fervor increased, and he became a more attractive figure to the communists. Although his works contain elements of modernism, in Soviet literary studies he was positioned as a realist. Hemingway was first published in Russia in the 1930s. "*The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1935, and in the first of four editions of *A Farewell to Arms* came out" (Brown 1953: 143). During the Stagnation, a selection of his works (1968; 1982) and *Complete Works* (1966) were published in Russian. Despite the eventual compliance, as Veisbergs reminds us, the translation of Hemingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in Moscow took 30 years since it was adjusted to the ideological point of view (Veisbergs 2022: 211). Hemingway's novels and stories have also been translated into the Latvian language

since 1958, when the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) was published by the Latvian State Publishing House (Badina 2021: 137). *Complete Works* in five volumes were published in Latvia between 1971 and 1974. In the Latvian translation of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Džesija Dzērve, many politically motivated omissions have been detected, following the pattern of the Russian translation (Rauda 1977).

This comparison shows that Western high-modernist literature of the 1910s and 1920s was little known or completely unknown in Latvia during Brezhnev's time, although Latvian readers could read it in Russian translations. The situation with the translations of contemporary literature of that time was much better. At the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, some works of late modernist and even postmodernist writers were translated into Latvian. For example, Camus's *The Plague* and Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* were translated into Latvian shortly after their publications in Russian in 1969. Existentialism was popular in the Soviet Union, probably due to the left-wing orientation of Jean-Paul Sartre and some other thinkers. This was one of the reasons why Camus's works were intensively translated during the Stagnation in Latvia as well. Maija Silmale translated the novel *The Plague* into Latvian the same year it was published in Russian.

The appearance of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is, to some extent, a phenomenon. But its cause can be explained by Veisbergs's conclusion: "Translations of foreign literature were required to serve as a distorting mirror on the Western world: rather than being a window to the West, translations were to portray the West according to the Kremlin's skewed image" (Veisbergs 2018: 79). Ironically, it can be concluded that Salinger's novel was translated because it could show the dark sides of capitalist society and how they affect young people. Although the Latvian translation of *Catcher in the Rye* by Anna Bauga was praised after its publication (Zālīte 1969), later it was criticized for one of the typical features of Soviet-era translations – avoidance of low colloquial style and expletives (see Šīle, Veckrācis 2021: 188–196; Veckrācis 2023).

American postmodern writer Kurt Vonnegut and his ironic novels became familiar to Russian readers in the early 1970s, but only one novel, *Cat's Cradle*, also translated by Bauga, appeared in Latvia during the Stagnation period. Vonnegut's other works have been translated into Latvian since the late 1980s.

The novel that fascinated the West in 1967, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Marquez, was able to surprise the Russian-speaking audience in the early 1970s. According to Katerina Clark, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was one of the publications that had a major impact on Soviet literature because it "influenced several writers, including Chingiz Aitmatov whose *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (1980) became a trendsetter of the early 1980s" (Clark 2011: 141). After its translation into Latvian in 1981 (10 years after the Russian translation) by translator Voldemārs

Meļinovskis, Marquez's influences on Latvian literature are also noticeable. The search for roots, family history, and magic realism are evident in the prose by Alberts Bels and Zigmunds Skujiņš (see Oga 2023).

A special event in the Brezhnev Era was the publication of modernist poetry books. The publication of Western poetry during the Stagnation also took place in Lithuania, where an anthology *XX a. Vakary poetai* (The Twentieth Century Western Poets, 1969) was published and helped to introduce such poets as T. S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas, Paul Valery, Guillaume Apollinaire, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Paul Celan to Lithuanian readers. The selection of French poetry *Es tevi turpinu* (I Continue You, 1970), arranged by Silmale, introduced the Latvian reader to the development of French poetry during the last hundred years. Along with the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Arthur Rimbaud, and other outstanding authors, an extensive preface by Silmale was included in the book. Silmale was repressed after this publication.

Rarely the poetry of Western modernists was also published in Latvian literary periodicals. For example, in 1975, the magazine *Liesma* published a poem *East Coker* from Eliot's *Four Quartets*, translated by Igors Jakaitis, the newspaper *Literatūra un Māksla* published two other poems in Vizma Belševica's translation. Later, the three poems were included in the collection of American poetry *Visiem, visiem jums Amerikas vārdā* (Toward you All, in America's Name), along with some other modernists' (e. e. Cummings, Allen Ginsberg) works. The collection has an introduction by Tamāra Zālīte providing information on the trends in American 20th-century poetry and characterizing each poet's work practically without bowing down to Soviet ideology. The poetry of the high-modernist poet Ezra Pound was not allowed to be included in this anthology, but the translator and poet Uldis Bērziņš managed to include the translation in the selection *Dzejas diena* (Poetry Day, 1981) (Veisbergs 2022: 212).

The translation and publication of Hamsun's works during the Stagnation period are particularly noteworthy, as he was one of the most translated and beloved authors in the independent Latvia. In the period of Latvia's first independence, Hamsun's collected writings were published in 15 volumes (1936). After a long time, in 1976, another Hamsun's selection was finally published in two volumes (translator Elija Kliene) which duplicated the Moscow edition (Veisbergs 2022: 212).

During the years of Stagnation, many other excellent examples of Western modernist and postmodernist prose have been translated into Latvian, such as the German writer Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game* (1976), Thomas Mann's novel *Magic Mountain* (1976), and several American works, for example, F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* (1971) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1975). This list of translated literature proves that in the years of Stagnation there was no stagnation in literary translation. There was a slow but gradual process of becoming adept in



Western modernism and postmodernism, and the role of the Soviet center in this process is undeniable. The period of Stagnation in Soviet Latvia, as in the whole Soviet world, opened gates to a flood of literary translations of Western authors who had previously been banned. It contributed to the creation of alternative modernity in opposition to Socialist Realism. The translations became the intermediate space, or Third Space of enunciation, for “new voices, new cultural models and new visions of the world”, bridging the gap between the East and the West (see Rundle 2022: 11).

## **Reception of modernist literature in Latvia. The contribution of Latvian literary scholars to the interpretation of modernist literature**

Latvian literary periodicals reveal a wider perspective on Western modernism in Soviet Latvia. As the so-called Socialist Realism dominated the literary scene and was considered the only proper form of literature, modernism was not at the center of interest during the Soviet period, but the attitude towards this influential literary phenomenon was not unambiguous.

A large part of analytical publications on modernism in Latvian periodicals were translations of articles and books published in Russian or reactions to Russian publications. Nevertheless, there were also original publications written by Latvian authors, the most important being those written by the literary scholars and translators Tamāra Zālīte (1918–1990) and Dzidra Kalniņa (1927–1984).

In the translated publications, the attitude towards modernism is mostly negative – it is considered the opposite of realism, of critical realism, or even of proletarian literature. In such publications, modernists are called decadents and formalists with pronounced negative connotations; modernism is associated with imperialism, the crisis of bourgeoisie culture, and pathology; the development of literature in the 20th century is viewed as a battle between realism and modernism, metaphors of war and fighting are the most popular characterizations in the descriptions of contemporary literature ([Anon] 1966a; Karabanova 1964; [Anon] 1963, Surovcevs 1967; [Anon] 1967). The evaluations of modernist works are very politicized, and the language describing them mostly conforms to the general rhetoric of the Soviet political discourse. As modernism itself is not the central issue, literary scholars’ opinions are expressed mostly in articles on (Socialist) realism.

The Latvian audience of that the time gets informed that modernist representation of a human is based on the human’s loneliness in the world, and that this approach is “dangerous firstly to art in general and specifically to the art of novel”; that the structure of the modernist human consciousness is “to be rejected on principle,”

and that modernist aesthetics is “corrupting” (Surovcevs 1967). The same writing techniques are negatively evaluated in the case of modernism but positively – in the realism paradigm: “[Sean] O’Casey’s inner monologue is something completely opposite to Joyce’s inner monologue” ([Anon] 1963).

Nevertheless, sometimes the published information is of a broader scope, neutral and analytical, and even includes a positive evaluation of modernism or its aspects. One of the most substantial sources about modernism for Latvian readers is the book in Russian *Zarubezhnyj roman segodnja* (Foreign Novel Today) by literature researcher Tamara Motyleva (1966). A part of her book was published as a series in Latvian translation in *Literatūra un Māksla* (including the chapters dedicated to modernists). These fragments provide analytical information on Proust, Kafka, Joyce, and other writers and their role in the development of the novel as a genre – although the superiority of realism is also mentioned. Motyleva has also given lectures at the State University of Latvia and the Latvian Writer’s Union. The magazine *Karogs* published a review of Motyleva’s book by Kalniņa, *Ārzemju romāns šodien* (Foreign Novel Today) (Kalniņa 1967). Kalniņa emphasizes Motyleva’s impressive knowledge and international experience but also reveals contradictions, discrepancies, and shortcomings in the book, including those regarding modernism, as well as the groundlessness of some statements in the broader context of the development of Western literature.

Sometimes the Latvian press publishes translated articles from Russian periodicals other than *Inostrannaja literatura* or *Voprosi literaturi*, which tend to be more ideologically biased and, consequently, contain extremely critical views on modernist aesthetics, poetics, and subject matter. The titles speak for themselves: for example, *Politics and Art of the Reactionary Bourgeoisie* (Penkins 1962a; Penkins 1962b) from the Russian newspaper *Kommunist*. Latvian periodicals regularly publish retellings of articles by foreign (often Russian) authors and reports on discussions in foreign periodicals or conferences. The characteristic of these genres is anonymity – their authors are not mentioned. Some of the retellings and reports are dedicated to the discussions of modernism, and usually reflect the same politicized views and binary oppositions (progressive realism vs. primitive, vulgar, decadent modernism) ([Anon] 1965; [Anon] 1966b). Rarely do Latvian authors follow this ideological approach to modernism, for example, Mira Jansone in her voluminous article *On English and American Modernist Poetry* describes modernist poetry as self-serving, reactionary, and lacking ideas (Jansone 1960). There are instances where it is impossible to tell whether the article is an original publication or a translation (for example, Zasurskis 1969).

As mentioned before, few Western modernist and early postmodernist works were published in Latvia during the Brezhnev Era. The reactions in the Latvian cultural periodicals to these translations were very different. For example, information about

the publication of *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald can be found only in the lists of published books; there are no reviews by critics or literary scholars. Only in honor of Fitzgerald's 80th anniversary was a short anonymous article published, highlighting those aspects in Fitzgerald's works that comply with the ideological position of the USSR: Fitzgerald "outlines the tragic side-scenes of American lifestyle [...] emphasizes the idea that the post-war generation has no perspective in America," etc. ([Anon] 1976). The reception of the Latvian translation of *Catcher in the Rye* by Salinger was different. Although only one review by Zālīte analyzing the novel and its translation was published (Zālīte 1969), the popularity of Salinger's book in Latvia at that time can be observed in interviews with various personalities, the information about the book in regional periodicals, the high appreciation of Holden's monologue performed by Varis Vētra in Daile Theatre group's graduation performance, a recommendation for future teachers to read the book, and the use of the phrase "*uz kraujas rudzu laukā*" (as the title of the book was translated) even without mentioning Salinger or literature.

While during the Brezhnev Era, philosophical and aesthetic principles of modernism were mostly regarded negatively, some authors advocated for a deeper, non-polarized understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, philosopher Pēteris Zeile argued that while in Latvian aesthetic thought the word *modernism* has been used mostly as an expletive and complete rejection has dominated, such an approach is wrong because of the complicated nature and differences in modernist works. He called for analysis via a scientific approach (Zeile 1967).

Two Latvian literary scholars, Zālīte and Kalniņa, have contributed the most to bringing Western modernist literature to the Latvian audience. Zālīte has published several articles on modernism and modernist works. For example, she introduced Latvian readers to Eliot (Zālīte 1974). In her publications, Zālīte analyzes 20th-century Western literature, and its main features and the importance of modernism. She introduces Latvians to *Ulysses* (Zālīte 1972a, Zālīte 1983a), Kafka (Zālīte 1983b), Proust (Zālīte 1968), and other modernist and early postmodernist writers. Kalniņa's publications were mainly devoted to German modernist and postmodernist writings, and Kalniņa was the one who published the first fragments of *Ulysses* in Soviet Latvia in 1968 (Kalniņa 1968a, Kalniņa 1968b). Zālīte and Kalniņa also published overviews of Western literature, usually concentrating on one literary phenomenon (Kalniņa 1968c, Zālīte 1970) or genre (Kalniņa 1965, Kalniņa 1966, Zālīte 1960, Zālīte 1972b) and including analysis of early and contemporary modernist and postmodernist works. Zālīte's early publications (Zālīte 1960, Zālīte 1962) show much higher political engagement and, consequently, a more negative attitude towards modernism than her later works. The telling title of Kalniņa's publication, *Attālumi tuvīnās*

(Distances Are Getting Closer), exposes her attempts to acquaint Latvian readers with Western literary processes. Although both Zālīte and Kalniņa pay their dues to the demands of the Soviet regime by mentioning Lenin and Marxist criticism and by delivering some clichéd lines and phrases (otherwise the publication would not be possible), their approach is relatively objective and analytical, revealing comprehensive knowledge of Western 20th-century literature.

## Conclusions

In the research of modernist literature translated into Latvian during the period of Stagnation, the opinions of postcolonial criticism about the specifics of Soviet colonization are potentially significant. The notion of the hybrid nature of Soviet colonial culture helps to understand the controversial literary processes where, on the one hand, a critical attitude towards Western modernism was evident, and on the other hand, there were investigations of several aspects of modernism and sporadic translation of literary works. The complexity of the literary landscape reveals that we cannot draw a clear line between the colonial and decolonial course in Soviet culture.

Studying the translation landscape shows that for the Latvian audience, the main sources of knowledge about modernist literature during the Stagnation were the translations into Russian, especially publications in the periodical *Inostrannaya literatura*. Besides, during the years of Stagnation the number of significant translations of modernist works into Russian increased. This progress is much less significant in Latvia, where the volume of translated literature at that time lags far behind Russia. Due to the centralized cultural policy implemented in the Soviet Union, different attitudes towards the center and the periphery were also manifested in the field of translated literature. As Latvia and the other Baltic republics and the West of Ukraine maintained and strengthened their pre-war Western orientation and contacts with the West, the control over their culture, including translated literature, was greater during the Thaw and Stagnation.

High modernist literature was rarely translated in Latvian during the period; there were more translations of contemporary Western late modernist and post-modernist literature. However, there were a few particularly important publications during the Stagnation: some examples of Western modernist poetry and prose publications. Translations from Russian periodicals and original articles by Latvian literary scholars provided analysis and characterization of modernist literature. Most original articles on modernism were published in the late 1960s, early 1970s, and the 1980s (mainly by two Latvian authors, Tamāra Zālīte and Dzidra Kalniņa).

For the most part, Latvian literary periodicals introduced their readers to modernist and early postmodernist writers and analysis of their works. Attitudes towards modernist texts ranged from negative to neutral to even positive, but the reception of modernist books in the press and amongst the readers varied greatly. Most likely, during the Stagnation the real reception of Western literature and culture occurred in the informal talks among the Soviet intelligentsia.

It can be concluded that translations of Western literature illustrate how the Soviet power balanced between colonialism and decolonization. Translated literature (like other cultural developments) in the Stagnation period in Soviet Latvia reflected the hybrid nature of its culture and literature. The basis of hybridity was the influence of Soviet ideology and Russian culture; the past national, historical, and cultural experiences, and Western charm.

The situation surrounding translations of Western modernist works reveals that the Soviet cultural center was an essential battery of Western orientation during the period of Stagnation in Latvian literature, as it was throughout the whole Western borderland. The processes of translation and reception of modernist literature in Russia initiated the return of the Western world to Latvian literature. It proves the hybrid nature not only of the colonized Soviet West or Western borderland territory, but of the entire Soviet culture.

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