

BRIDGE BUILDING OR ARMCHAIR TRAVELING? THE RECEPTION OF THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF MANUEL RIVAS AND DOMINGO VILLAR

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Abstract

The reader of translations has gained increasing attention in Translation Studies in recent years, with more focused studies looking into the reception of translated works either through textual analysis of reviews (Zhao 2009, Bielsa 2013, D'Egidio 2015, Saldanha 2018) or the analysis of interviews and focus groups with real readers (Arnold 2016). The reception of works by anglophone readers, in particular, has raised interest among scholars who wish to understand the expectations and patterns of literary consumption by a hegemonic, central culture.

This article explores how Galician writers Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar's work is perceived and re-constructed by an anglophone readership through an analysis of professional (press) reviews and semi-professional (blog) reviews based on the homogenization-heterogenization-exoticism continuum posited by Saldanha (2018).

Keywords

Reception, readers, cultural representation, translated fiction

Resumo

Nos últimos anos, os estudos de Tradución veñen vendo un aumento no interese sobre o lectorado de traducións, presente en estudos centrados na recepción de obras traducidas ben sexa a través dunha análise textual de recensións (Zhao 2009, Bielsa 2013, D'Egidio 2015, Saldanha 2018) ou de estudos realizados a través de entrevistas e grupos de lectura con lectores reais (Arnold 2016). En concreto, a recepción de obra traducida no mundo anglófono vén xerando un interese particular entre académicos que buscan comprender as expectativas e os patróns de consumo literario no contexto dunha cultura central e hexemónica.

Este artigo explora a recepción das obras de Manuel Rivas e Domingo Villar no mundo anglófono e estuda como as recensións tanto profesionais (en

prensa) como semiprofesionais (blogs) re-constrúen a cultura galega segundo a noción de continuo homoxenización-heteroxenización-exotismo formulada por Saldanha (2018).

Palabras clave

Recepción, lectores, representación cultural, narrativa traducida

Introduction

Originated in the work of Hans-Robert Jauss in the 1960s, reception theory is concerned with the ways in which readers respond to texts depending on their ‘horizon of expectation’ (Jauss 1982), which is constructed and evolves based on the readers’ background and experiences. Unlike hypothesized, abstract notions of the reader which were more predominant in previous scholarship, reception theory gives agency to audiences and establishes a relation of co-creation of meaning between authors and their readership, thus opening up new areas of research concerned with how we read and the factors that may affect the ways in which we do it.

In Translation Studies, which has traditionally given greater attention to how translators translate and the strategies they use, studies based on reception and reader response are still scarce. Although the notion of the reader has been present in Translation Studies for a long time¹, discussions about audiences have tended to be prescriptive: as Arnold (2016) discusses, since the translation of literature is considered a way for readers to expand their horizons, scholars have assumed that readers should read translations to familiarize themselves with other cultures (Venuti 2004, Berman 2009, Connor 2014, Boase Beier 2015) and that there are better ways to read translations in order to become aware of the Other (Venuti 1995). This, however, provides little information about how real readers are engaging with translated works, and with the cultures these works are coming from. In recent years, the focus on readers in Translation Studies has increased, mostly through the analysis of book reviews (see, for example, Zhao 2009, Bielsa 2013, D’Egidio 2015, Saldanha 2018) or through the study of focus groups of real readers (Arnold 2016). The anglophone reader, in particular, has drawn great interest: on the one hand, the sheer size of the English-speaking market, along with the use of English as the lingua franca of the publishing world—which means that translations into English have a much higher chance of reaching third markets—has increased the focus of translations into English, in many cases funded through supports in the source cultures (see Mansell 2017 and Vimr

1 The idea of the reader has been a paramount aspect of the construction of translation theories for a very long time. The reader has been present in approaches to translation as diverse as Friedrich Schleiermacher (1813/2012), who defined translation strategies depending on how much the reader was moved towards the author and functional and skopos theories (Reiss and Vermeer 1984/2013) which prioritise a focus on the final goals of the translation. In theories focused on cultural translation and the representation of identities, Venuti’s (1998) ideas about domestication and foreignization also depend on an implied reader who will ultimately interpret and receive the text.

2019). On the other hand, the infamous and often-quoted figure of 3%² of translations from other languages into English has contributed to a generalised, oversimplified perception of the English-speaking readership as ‘parochial’ (Arnold 2016), resistant to difference and anglocentric, which has prompted scholarly studies aiming to put this in context.

Despite this renewed interest in the reader of translations, very little has been done on the reception of fiction from stateless, minoritized cultures. Besides Arnold’s extensive study on the reception and perception of Catalan prose by English-speaking readers, the focus so far for minoritized cultures, particularly those residing within the Spanish State, has been on translation flows, institutional support and distribution (for the Galician case, see, for example Castro and Linares 2019, Fernández Rodríguez 2010, Fernández Rodríguez et al. 2011, Luna Alonso 2005, Luna Alonso et al. 2005, 2011, 2012). Noia (2006) introduces reception theory in the context of Galician Translation Studies, but more analytical work remains to be done in the area.

This article will explore the main trends in translation and reception of Galician novels in the anglophone context in the period 2000-2018 and delve into the reception of two of Galicia’s most translated authors, Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar. Within the general framework of reception studies, and following Saldanha’s (2018) classification of the presentation and reception of translated literature, this article will analyse professional (press) reviews and blog reviews in order to ascertain how Galician culture is perceived and re-presented through an anglophone lens. Going beyond Venuti’s (1995) foreignization/domestication dichotomy, Saldanha argues that press reviews frame works of literature according to different objectives depending on their culture of origin, their author and their genre, mobilizing different aspects of the culture of origin in order to ‘create an image of “national” literature’ (Saldanha 2018: 1) that appeals to the target readership. In this way, press reviews function as a form of marketing device, influencing expectations around literatures along a continuum ‘from homogenization, through heterogenization, to exoticism’ (ibid: 12). In this conceptualization, homogenization refers to the presentation of books more focused on universal themes and topics familiar to the target readership, where their condition of translated works of literature is not considered a relevant fact; heterogenization, however, is more focused on the use of translated literature as a bridge into another culture, while exoticism leverages ideas about the unknown and mysterious to commoditize the culture that the translated work of fiction represents, in order to make it attractive to ‘an essentially tourist, rather than literary, “gaze”’ (Urry 2002, in Saldanha 2018: 7).

For the purposes of this article, we have considered not only those termed ‘professional’ press reviews, but also those included in amateur media such as specialized literature and translation blogs. Although their reach is arguably narrower than that of reviews published in mainstream newspapers, we argue here that blog reviews are increasingly important in

2 This figure has, in recent years, been discussed and put into context in several reports by Literature Across Frontiers (see Büchler and Trentacosti 2015).

the promotion and re-presentation of literature in translation; paradigms in communication have been steadily changing in the 21st century, and amateur online discussions are becoming increasingly prevalent for the promotion and visibilization of products, as well as for the construction of communities around particular topics; in many ways, blogs and other online networks have become ‘spaces both for consumers who wish to express themselves and consumers/producers who sell their influence in that community’ (Zanette et al. 2013:38). In that sense, blogs specialised on literature —and, particularly, literature in translation—, create and work within specific communities which they influence. In the context of a minoritized literature such as Galician, where limited distribution resources mean that press reviews are difficult to achieve, the role of more informal outlets are essential aspects to be considered when trying to understand the reception and re-presentation of literary works for the target audience. In the following sections, we will discuss which works of narrative receive professional and blog reviews and what this means for the reception and re-presentation of Galician literature and culture. Furthermore, once the general landscape is laid down, a qualitative focus on the reviews of the two best-known Galician authors in the anglophone world, Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar, will aim to answer how Galician literature is re-constructed in relation to Saldanha’s continuum, exploring differences among genres and authorship and analysing the impact of Spanish culture in the understanding of Galician literature and culture in the anglophone imagination.

Galicia in translation: Domingo Villar and Manuel Rivas as representatives of Galician narrative in the anglophone world

The translation of literary material has traditionally been considered a way for readers and cultures to access new materials and views not available in their own cultures, making way for, among others, Toury’s affirmation that translations are ‘facts of the target culture’, which aim to fill a gap in the target culture’s system. In this conceptualization of translation, a publisher, literary agent or translator in the target culture (the United Kingdom, for example), identifies a book of potential interest in the source culture (Galicia), acquires rights and starts the translation, editing and distribution process that will bring the book to its final readership. However, the invisibility inherent to a minoritized culture such as Galician makes this seemingly straightforward process much more difficult, since foreign publishers tend to, on the one hand, be less aware of recent, potentially interesting publications and, on the other, generally do not have access to a full understanding of narrative written in the language.

This, along with an increasingly generalised understanding of the importance of translation for the visibility of cultures beyond their borders, has created different flows and patterns of translation from minoritized or lesser-translated literatures. Rather than target publishers taking the initiative, the translation process tends to start in the source culture, be it with a directly produced translation (a ‘source-commissioned’ or ‘manuscript’ translation in Mansell’s (2020) terminology), focused on gaining the initial attention of foreign publishers, or with specific grants destined to fund translations

proposed by either translators or publishers (what Vimr (2020) calls ‘source-driven translation’). This takes an even more complex dimension in the case of translations into English, since this hegemonic language does not only constitute a market on its own (the largest market, in fact), but is also a point of access of other markets, as English is the *de facto* language of communication in the industry (Mansell 2020) and thus editors in other languages tend to have a better command of English than of the minoritized language in question (see Castro and Linares (forthcoming) for a comparative analysis of translations from Basque, Catalan and Galician into English).

Furthermore, the anglophone landscape provides minoritized cultures not only with access to a much broader audience, but also with the legitimacy that comes with being translated into the dominant language of global communication, a language that is in fact related to processes of (perceived) modernisation and of access to transnational and transcultural levels of dialogue. Strikingly, this plays a role even in scholarship, as illustrated by Casanova’s introduction to the English translation of her acclaimed book *World Republic of Letters*:

I am pleased that this book, aimed at inaugurating an international literary criticism, should itself be internationalized through translation into English [...] and debated at a truly transnational level. (Casanova, in Allen 2007: 23, my emphasis)

This source of legitimacy, international status and participation in global society has meant an increased interest in the translation of literary works into English, despite the anglophone market being known for its impermeability and difficulty to access. In the Galician context, this means that an increasing percentage of the funds is dedicated to translations into English, not only in what concerns competitive grants for book translations, but also through a series of other initiatives, including the publication of two anthologies of Galician Literature (2010, 2012), the publication of a collection of canonical Galician works in English translation entitled *Galician Classics* in collaboration with small publisher Small Stations Press, and the creation of a website in English, *Portico of Galician Literature*, with information about works and authors, along with translations of excerpts, with the objective of attracting and informing publishers about texts translated and available for translation. This increased interest in focusing on English as a target language for translations has resulted in an increment in the amount of translations into English funded in the second decade of the 21st century, as well as an increase in the number of novels translated for the anglophone market: in the period 2000-2018, 23 Galician novels were translated into English, 16 of which were published after 2010, as shown in Table 1.

Title (GAL)	Author	Title (EN)	Translator	Publisher	Year
<i>Xa vai o grifón no vento</i>	Alfredo Conde	<i>The Griffon</i>	Roy Boland	Bystander Press	2000
<i>O lapis do carpinteiro</i>	Manuel Rivas	<i>The Carpenter's Pencil</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Harvill Press	2001
<i>En salvaxe compañía</i>	Manuel Rivas	<i>In the Wilderness</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Harvill Press	2003
<i>Vento ferido</i>	Carlos Casares	<i>Wounded Wind</i>	Rosa Rutherford	Planet Books	2004
<i>Romasanta</i>	Alfredo Conde	<i>Romasanta: Uncertain memoirs of the Galician wolfman</i>	Roy Boland	Antipodas Monographs	2006
<i>Arredor de si</i>	Ramón Otero Pedrayo	<i>Circling</i>	Kathleen March	Amaranta Press	2007
<i>Ollos de auga</i>	Domingo Villar	<i>Water-blue eyes</i>	Martin Schifino	Arcadia Books	2007
<i>Os libros arden mal</i>	Manuel Rivas	<i>Books Burn Badly</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Harvill Press	2010
<i>A praia dos afogados</i>	Domingo Villar	<i>Death on a Galician Shore</i>	Sonia Soto	Abacus	2011
<i>A esmorga</i>	Eduardo Blanco-Amor	<i>On a Bender</i>	Craig Patterson	Planet Books	2012
<i>Todo é silencio</i>	Manuel Rivas	<i>All is Silence</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Harvill Press	2013
<i>A sombra cazadora</i>	Suso de Toro	<i>The Hunting Shadow</i>	Antonio de Toro	Galebooks	2013
<i>Criminal</i>	Xurxo Borrazás	<i>Vicious</i>	Carys Evans-Corrales	Small Stations Press	2015
<i>Polaroid</i>	Suso de Toro	<i>Polaroid</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Small Stations Press	2015
<i>Un nicho para Marilyn</i>	Miguel Anxo Fernández Fernández	<i>A niche for Marilyn</i>	Kathleen March	Small Stations Press	2016
<i>Os comedores de patacas</i>	Manuel Rivas	<i>The Potato Eaters</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Small Stations Press	2016
<i>Tic-Tac</i>	Suso de Toro	<i>Tick-Tock</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Small Stations Press	2016

<i>As voces baixas</i>	Manuel Rivas	<i>The Low Voices</i>	Jonathan Dunne	Penguin	2016
<i>Ilustrísima</i>	Carlos Casares	<i>His Excellency</i>	Jacob Rogers	Small Stations Press	2017
<i>Así nacen as baleas</i>	Anxos Sumai	<i>That's how Whales are Born</i>	Carys Evans-Corales	Small Stations Press	2017
<i>Herba moura</i>	Teresa Moure	<i>Black Nightshade</i>	Philip Krummrich	Small Stations Press	2018
<i>Papaventos</i>	Xavier Queipo	<i>Kite</i>	Kirsty Hooper	Small Stations Press	2018
<i>Lume de cobiza</i>	Miguel Anxo Fernández Fernández	<i>Greedy Flames</i>	Kathleen March	Small Stations Press	2018

Table 1. Galician novels translated into English (2000-2018)

Four aspects stand out in the translation of Galician novels into English in the 21st century. Firstly, the lack of women authors published in the period is striking; only two women writers are translated in the period, both by Small Stations Press, and only in the later years of the selected period. That's how Whales are Born, by Anxos Sumai, which appears in English in 2017, translated by Carys Evans-Corrales; and Black Nightshade, by Teresa Moure, which is translated by Philip Krummrich in 2018. Secondly, and one of the most visible/salient characteristics of the corpus is the clear domination of Manuel Rivas as an author. Rivas is the author of 6 out of the 24 novels³ translated into English between 2000-2018, that is:

- The Carpenter's Pencil – 2001 – Harvill Press
- In the Wilderness – 2003 – Harvill Press
- Books Burn Badly – 2010 – Harvill Secker
- All is Silence – 2013 - Harvill Secker
- The Low Voices - 2016 - Penguin
- The Potato Eaters - 2016 - Small Stations Press

3 Besides the novels referred to in the article, Rivas has had two collections of short stories published in English (*Vermeer's Milkmaid*, 2001, Harvill Secker and *One Million Cows*, 2015, Small Stations Press), as well as a short booklet with three stories from *Vermeer's Milkmaid* entitled *Butterfly's Tongue*, published to accompany the release of the homonymous film in 2000. Three collections of Rivas's poetry have also been published by Shearsman (The Disappearance of Snow, 2012, and *The Mouth of the Earth*, 2019, in translation by Lorna Shaughness, and Small Stations Press (From *Unknown to Unknown*, 2017, in translation by Jonathan Dunne).

Furthermore, and, illustrating the third idiosyncratic aspect of the publication of Galician literature in English, he is the only author in the corpus who has been published by a large publishing house (under the imprints Harvill Press/Harvill Secker/Vintage/Penguin⁴), which puts him at an advantage against the other authors in terms of distribution and ease of access to his books in the anglophone market. The rest of the publications are either the result of projects associated to the academic sector —such as Roy Boland’s translations of Alfredo Conde’s novels or the translation of classic and canonical authors by academics, as is the case of *On a Bender*, by Eduardo Blanco-Amor (tr. Craig Patterson) or *Circling*, by Ramón Otero Pedrayo (tr. Kathleen March)—. In many cases, these translators act not only as translators but also as cultural agents and promoters of the culture, be it through the Galician centres and university departments or through international literary networks and connections. Castro highlights their often-precarious status, as they carry out their translation and promotion work ‘sen garante ningún de acabar no prelo e decote mesmo sen compensacións económicas’ (2006: 353), or are carried out by small, independent presses, namely Galician-focused Small Stations Press. This brings me to the fourth specific characteristic of the translation of Galician literature for the anglophone world: Small Stations Press has, in fact, been the main publisher of Galician literature in both the English and Bulgarian markets, particularly in the 2010-2018 period, publishing between four and five volumes of Galician narrative per year in English, acquiring a significant growth of its work and influence in the landscape. Its irruption on the scene has thus meant a considerable increase in the Galician works published in English, although the risks of depending on one small publisher for the whole of the exports of Galician narrative to the English-speaking world are substantial. In fact, the lack of attention given to Galician narrative by other foreign publishers is a source of concern for the researchers of the Bitraga group at the University of Vigo (Luna et al. 2011) who suggest that translations into English, generally related to academic projects or promoted by Galician institutions, are at risk of not reaching target audiences. Jonathan Dunne himself has discussed issues with the public funding available, arguing for an increase in funds allocated per project to support not only the translator fees, but also the publisher’s investment in promotion and distribution (Dunne 2020).

To counter this, it is important to acknowledge a new trend related to best-selling or quick turnaround literature with the translations of Domingo Villar’s crime fiction, published in 2007 and 2011 by Arcadia Press (*Water-blue eyes*) and Abacus (*Death on a Galician shore*). This, however, shows the intricacies of the Galician landscape and its intimate connections with the

4 Manuel Rivas’ novels are published in English by Harvill Press, which became part of the Random House conglomerate in 2002 (later Penguin Random House) and was renamed Harvill Secker after its merger with Secker and Warburg in 2005. Both Harvill Press/Harvill Secker and Vintage are imprints of Penguin Random House, so they are, for the purposes of this article, considered as a large commercial enterprise, as opposed to smaller, independent publishing houses such as Small Stations Press.

Spanish language and context, as the translations of Villar’s books are carried out from Spanish rather than from Galician, and undertaken by translators who have little contact with the Galician literary landscape (Martin Schiffino and Sonia Soto). Furthermore, unlike the translations published in academic contexts or by Small Stations Press, which are carried out by translators who engage directly with the Galician context in different ways (be it through their academic work, their place of residence or their specialisation in the translation of Galician literature), Villar’s versions in English are commissioned by a literary agent, and the author himself seems to have very little engagement with the process, as he claims in an interview published in Galicia 21 in 2009 (Cid 2009).

This brief overview of the Galician landscape reveals that the number of translations into English has increased, particularly in recent years, but still showcases a fragile scenario driven by individual agents rather than by a professionalization of the sector or an increased interest in Galician literature by foreign publishers, on the one hand, and shadowed by the Spanish language, on the other. Moreover, this means that reception of Galician novels is still scarce due to the lack of resources for marketing and distribution: among the novels translated in the period 2000-2018, very few have reviews either in press or blogs (see Table 2 for a summary of the reviews received by Galician novels in English).

Title (EN)	Press Reviews	Blogs
The Griffon	0	0
The Carpenter’s Pencil	4	4
In the Wilderness	3	1
Wounded Wind	0	0
Romasanta: Uncertain memoirs of the Galician wolfman	0	0
Circling	0	0
Water-blue eyes	0	10
Books Burn Badly	7	1
Death on a Galician Shore	9	10
On a Bender	1	3
All is Silence	4	6
The Hunting Shadow	0	0
Vicious	1	1
Polaroid	0	0
A niche for Marilyn	0	2
The Potato Eaters	0	2
Tick-Tock	0	2

The Low Voices	4	3
His Excellency	0	2
That's how Whales are Born	0	2
Black Nightshade	0	2
Kite	0	2
Greedy Flames	0	2
Home is like a different time	0	2

Table 2. Reviews of translated Galician novels in the anglophone context

Although reviews are arguably not the only factor to take into account when exploring the reception of a work, the lack of online and press engagement with Galician narrative is a good indicator that, in many cases, books are not reaching their intended readers. This is clearly shown in Table 2, in which it becomes clear that a great majority of the translations published get very few, if any, reviews in press or blogs. In this context, the writers Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar, the only two literary figures who consistently receive attention from anglophone critics and readers, become the two main representatives of Galician literature for the average English-speaking reader, thus making it even more important to understand the ways in which Galician culture is being re-interpreted and re-constructed in the engagement with their translated works.

Data compilation and methodology

In order to further understand the reception of these two authors in the anglophone world, this study has focused on the analysis of two types of reviews⁵: those termed ‘professional’, or those published in the press and those considered ‘semi-professional’, that is, those appearing in blogs dedicated to literature or literature in translation.

The texts for the professional reviews were obtained from the Nexis database through a search for the name of the authors. This was supplemented with a Boolean search on Google for the name of the author, and the book, which also yielded reviews appearing in blogs and more informal means of communication. Although it is impossible to claim full coverage of reviews by this method, especially as blog reviews can be added much later than the publication of the works, the amount of data gathered guarantees a representative corpus of reviews of the works of Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar in the period 2000-2018. Table 3 presents a detailed overview of the reviews received by each of these authors works in the different outlets, whereas

5 Although they exist, book reviews published in academic journals have not been included in the scope of this article, as the focus here is on the commercial avenues of distribution and reception, and we have considered that readers outside the academic world do not generally engage with academic publications.

Table 4 summarises the findings by author and type of review (Professional and semi-professional).

Title (EN)	Author	Press Reviews	Blogs
<i>The Carpenter's Pencil</i>	Manuel Rivas	4	4
<i>In the Wilderness</i>	Manuel Rivas	3	1
<i>Water-blue eyes</i>	Domingo Villar	0	10
<i>Books Burn Badly</i>	Manuel Rivas	7	1
<i>Death on a Galician Shore</i>	Domingo Villar	9	10
<i>All is Silence</i>	Manuel Rivas	4	6
<i>The Potato Eaters</i>	Manuel Rivas	0	2
<i>The Low Voices</i>	Manuel Rivas	5	3

Table 3. Reviews of Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar

	Professional (Press reviews)	Semi-professional (Blogs)
Manuel Rivas	23	17
Domingo Villar	9	20

Table 4. Summary of reviews identified for Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar

Once the reviews were collected, three fields common to most reviews were identified, following D'Egidio (2015) and Arnold's (2016) classifications. Firstly, the field 'translation/translator', which included references to the novel as a translation, including the mentions of the source language and names of the translators. Any evaluative comments on the quality of the translation were also noted as these indicate that readers were reading with an awareness of the fact that the novel belonged to a culture other than their own. Secondly, the field 'author', in which references to the author and their status in the source culture or characteristics were identified and comments on the author's style were highlighted. Finally, the area of 'culture', or references to the Galician context of the novel were identified to ascertain the degree to which this other culture was recognised as Galician. For example, references to the author, the geographical or historical context or the culture accompanied by the word Galician or related. The use of specifically Galician references was also compared to references to Spanish in the reviews to gauge the level of awareness of a difference between Galician and Spanish cultures. These themes enable the analysis to identify patterns of homogenization (for example, a focus on the author's status and style and on the universality of themes or no mention of the book as a translation), heterogenization (clear references to the book being a translation, as well as references to specificities of Galician culture) and exoticism (stereotyped references to the culture).

The continuum of homogenization-heterogenization-exoticism: Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar

In her analysis of the mediascape of Brazilian literature in the anglophone press, Saldanha (2016) mentions two distinct types of books represented on the homogenization side on the continuum, that is, not highlighting their culture of origin in the reviews: on the one side, Paulo Coelho's best-selling books, focused on "universal" themes and with an international audience in mind, are not presented as particularly Brazilian; on the other, the experimental nature of the works of writers such as Clarice Lispector, which is considered to be attractive to only a small elite of readers and rather compared to other authors in the established literary canon. This aspect of the continuum is not found in the reception and re-presentation of Galician literature and, in particular, in that of Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar as the two most reviewed authors within it. In some way or another, the origin of the books is always referenced to in the reviews, as the following sections will discuss.

Authorial style and the (in)visibility of the translator: Mentions of the author and the translator in Rivas and Villar's reviews

As mentioned above, mentions of the author and their status can shed light on the ways in which a work is being perceived and re-presented by the target readership. In Rivas's case, mentions to his authorial style are present in all the professional and semi-professional (blog) reviews identified and analysed. Many of them highlight Rivas's talent as a writer and the particularly poetic aspects of his language (see Table 5 for examples), as well as his 'unusual' style and the challenging and convoluted nature of his prose (see Table 6). In many ways, Rivas is presented as a writer of 'literature with a capital L' (The Toronto Star 2013) and a 'true modern classic' (Winston's Dad 2010), which will appeal to 'readers of earnest literature' (The Toronto Star 2013), thus positioning him within the international canon of high literature (Casanova 2007), where he can be compared to other successful classic and contemporary authors who act as a framing device and a reference for the reader. It is important to note that, although several of the references are related to writers from the Spanish-speaking world, contemporary classics from other literary traditions are also evoked in several reviews (see Table 7 for examples).

‘[T]his lyrical though frequently impenetrable import’ (Publisher’s Weekly 2001)
 ‘Rivas’s language has **the sheen of poetry**’ (Merritt 2001)
 ‘[W]ith the forty five chapters almost short stories in their own right – or perhaps, with **their vivid imagery and evocative language, poems.**’ (Yee 2004)
 ‘The result is a poignant, **lyrical meditation**’ (Publisher’s Weekly 2005)
 ‘Rivas’s **hauntingly poetic** use of language’ (Ribeiro de Menezes 2010)
 ‘An epic and resoundingly lyrical refutation of totalitarianism and cruelty’ (Publisher’s Weekly 2011)
 [H]is style is at once **poetic** and precise (Kerrigan 2013)
 ‘Rivas [...] combines a **lyric gift**, full of rich imagery (Eaude 2013)
 ‘He paints his homeland **through a poet’s eyes**, he is a poet as well as a novel writer’ (Winston’s Dad 2013)
 ‘Even at his most precise and clinical Rivas retains **his poet’s eye** (Battersby 2014)
 ‘This poetic and moving novel’ (Brooks 2015)
 ‘Rivas has an **appealingly lyrical** style’ (France 2016)

Table 5. Examples of reviews of Manuel Rivas focusing on his poetic style

‘Rivas’s highly charged language is sometimes excessive and the **narrative convoluted**’ (Publishers Weekly 2001)
 ‘In the Wilderness is a **work of strange appearance** and accomplished waywardness’ (Sansom 2003)
 ‘At first, the structure of In the Wilderness **is a little disorienting**’ (Yee 2004)
 ‘**Unusually written** and at times brilliant this is an interesting read’ (1streading’s blog 2013)
 ‘All is Silence is an interesting story written in a **very unusual style**’ (The Bookbag 2013)
 ‘[T]he above passage remains colourfully compelling, not to mention **idiosyncratically independent**’ (Marx 2013)
 ‘All is Silence is **not an easy read**’ (1streading’s blog 2013)
 ‘[A]ll too frequently he gives us **less than he sees**. [...] [D]emands so much of the reader’s own imagination that we rarely enjoy the immersive experience of fiction (Basilières 2013)’
 ‘The narrative structure [...] moves backwards and forwards through time and from one viewpoint to another. This further **disorients the reader**’ (Brooks 2015)

Table 6. Examples of reviews of Manuel Rivas focusing on his unusual, difficult to read narrative

'It is so well done, and within pages this novel emerges as both strikingly similar to Javier Cercas' recent *Outlaws* and stylistically superior' (Ribeiro de Menezes 2010)
'All is Silence surpasses this year's Impac winner, Juan Gabriel Vásquez's *The Sound of Things Falling*' (Battersby 2014)
It is time for reviewers and sundry pundits to quit the flattering comparisons with Lorca, Joyce and Garcia Marquez. Manuel Rivas reads like no-one else on the planet' (The Newsroom 2013)

Table 7. Examples of reviews of Manuel Rivas comparing him to other authors

Rivas's re-presentation as an author embedded in an international canon of contemporary classics links in with the increasing mentions of his previous works in translation as he becomes consecrated as an author in the anglophone world: examples such as 'I have already reviewed two of his previous books on this site: the most widely translated work in the history of Galician literature, *The Carpenter's Pencil* (1998) and the simply, brilliant, *Books Burn Badly* (Marx 2013), 'As in *The Carpenter's Pencil*' (Sansom 2003), 'Rivas's best-known work is probably *The Carpenter's Pencil*' (Basilières 2013) or 'Two of his novels, *The Carpenter's Pencil* (1998) and *Books Burn Badly* (2006), are vital components in the literature of the Spanish Civil War (Battersby 2014) showcase the representation of Manuel Rivas as a consecrated author that has acquired a literary capital and his own space in the 'world system of translation' (Heilbron 1999). Status and consecration are, thus, essential forces at play in the representation and reception of Rivas in the anglophone world.

Nonetheless, it is rare for Rivas not to be presented as a translated author, and comments on the translations abound, ranging from mentions of the translation's quality, always positive, to statements in defence of translation itself (see Table 8).

Positive reviews of the translation/translator

'[S]eamlessly translated (by Jonathan Dunne) (Merritt 2001)

'[B]eautifully translated by Jonathan Dunne (Winston's Dad 2010)

'[F]ull marks to Jonathan Dunne for doing such a great job of translating from the Galician' (The Bookbag 2011)

'Originally written in Galician, it surely has to be said that Jonathan Dunne's translation is truly exceptional' (Marx 2013)

'Rivas, ably translated here by Jonathan Dunne' (Eaude 2013)

Luckily, in the translator Jonathan Dunne he seems to have found a soulmate who shares his vision and comic timing' (Battersby 2014)

'[H]is meditative tone is brilliantly conveyed by Jonathan Dunne' (Battersby 2016)

'Rivas has an appealing lyrical style, an offbeat humour and a translator well attuned to both.' (France 2016)

Negative reviews of the translation/translator

'[T]his despite an uneven translation' (Kirkus Reviews 2001)

'Part of this might be down to something being lost in the translation from Galician to English, but I also think it's the result of the author attempting to be innovative. (The Bookbag 2013)

'Perhaps familiarity with Galician culture remedies this, or perhaps the effect is different in the original. In English, it's mostly puzzling (Basilières 2013)

Table 8. Examples of mentions of the translation and the translator in Manuel Rivas's reviews

Examples such as the above bring complexity to Venuti's idea of the translator's invisibility and the 'illusion of transparency' (1995). In Rivas's case, the presence of the translator, be it through positive or negative reviews, suggests a conscious reading of the book as a translation and understanding of the nuances of the process and an indication that no homogenization is at play in the presentation of Rivas's works to the anglophone readership. Furthermore, the process of translation is discussed and, as this example illustrates, the reference of the Galician culture and language remains visible in many of the reviews:

Jonathan Dunne has translated all Rivas's other books into English and he works straight from Galician, with no intermediate Castilian phase, as would once have been usual for translations from Spain's minority language. (Times Literary Supplement 2016)

In comparison, Domingo Villar as an author is much less present in the reviews than Rivas; the plot takes centre stage, and the focus of reviewers is more on the readability of the text and the construction of the characters, rather than on authorial idiosyncrasy: Villar's works are indeed not presented as high works of literature that readers must work towards, and thus words like 'pleasurable' 'enjoyable' read, or 'beautifully readable' (Reactions to Reading 2010) abound in the descriptions of the novels, which also appreciate Villar's 'concise and expressive' style (Kitchin 2010) (more examples available in Table 9). The characters are 'interesting if somewhat familiar' (Petrona 2010), yet 'excellent' (AustCrime Fiction 2012) and 'richly drawn and highly believable' (Reactions to Reading 2011); particularly, they thrill because they

‘lead an apparently mundane life, and yet conceal secrets and anxieties, fears and hopes, love and hatred’ (Thriller Books Journal 2014). Readability and the ability to draw believable characters who the reader can identify with seem thus to be the most relevant aspects of these novels’ reception. Interestingly, although there is barely any comparison of Villar to authors in other traditions, as in Rivas’s reviews, the characters themselves do indeed find counterparts in crime novels written by others (see Table 10), thus embedding the novels (rather than the author) in a genre, crime fiction, in which works in translation have experienced radical success (see, for example, Nilsson et al. 2017 for an in-depth consideration of crime fiction as world literature).

You simply can’t beat this book for plot, character, atmosphere, a sense of place and poetry, and sheer readability. (Petrona 2010)

‘But the light tone of the prose, the interesting if somewhat familiar central characters, the evocative imagery, and the effective immersion in Galician culture, gastronomy, and even city planning combine to make this a very worthwhile crime fiction read. (Harper 2009)

‘There is much to admire in Villar’s writing style, which is concise and expressive, and *Water-blue Eyes* is a pleasurable read. (Kitchin 2010)

‘What there is, however, is a nicely twisty and plausible plot, peopled by some excellent characters that I’d be happy to spend a lot more time with in the future’ (AustCrime Fiction 2012)

‘Although the mystery is fairly simply told, it’s everything else that makes this such an enjoyable read. (AustCrime Fiction 2012)

Table 9. Mentions of readability and enjoyability in Domingo Villar’s reviews

‘[H]is appreciation of food is almost on a par with Salvo Montalbano’s (Petrona 2010)

‘Villar’s team of detectives, Inspector Leo Caldas and his assistant, Rafael Estévez, bears some resemblance to that of Barcelona’s Alicia Bartlett-Gimenez (gender notwithstanding). (Petrona 2010)

‘Leo Caldas like Andrea Camilleri’s Salvo Montalbano, is a man who enjoys fresh seafood, and wine’ (Price 2010)

‘Villar pays homage to some of the great crime writers as the saxophonist with the blue eyes has on his night table *The Terracotta Dog* by Andrea Camilleri, and bookshelves packed with novels by Montalban, Ellroy, Chandler, and Hammet; all this detail adds to the successful chemistry created in the book. (Price 2010)

‘Caldas is partial to good food and wine, and the book is peppered with descriptions of trips to local restaurants, reminiscent of Inspector Montalbano in the Camilleri books’ (Eurocrime 2012)

Table 10. Mentions of other crime fiction characters and authors in Domingo Villar’s reviews

Despite the translated crime fiction boom, discussion around the book as a translation and mentions of the translator are less prevalent than in Rivas’s reviews; as a matter of fact, only 9 out of the 29 reviews analysed

directly engage with the matter, although it is important to clarify that all the reviews engage with the book as originated in Spain/Galicia, as will be discussed in the following section. There is no doubt, thus, that Villar's novels are coming from a different geographical space—and that this is an important part of their appeal, in fact—yet the process of translation or the existence of a translator are not generally reflected upon. When there is reflection, there tends to be a judgment on the translation, particularly I matters related to fluency—'I cannot judge the quality of the translation as such but the results read very fluidly' (Gunn 2010)—and authenticity, as illustrated in these opposing comments about translation approaches:

Martin Schifino, who also translates Carlos Fuentes, does a great job in this novel, so well portraying the different mores and cultures of the Spanish regions and the many humorous aspects of mutual misunderstandings' (Petrona 2010)

'On the translation side of things, there are parts that annoy me, in particular the complete lack of any Spanish phrases in the dialogue' (Classic Mystery 2011)

Besides already showcasing a clear association with Villar's books as written in Spanish --which is, in fact, the language from which they are translated—and as pertaining to the Spanish landscape and literary tradition, as will be discussed more in-depth in the following section, these two examples highlight an interesting approach to the role of the translator: here, the focus is not so much on traditional ideas of faithfulness or loyalty to the text, but rather on creating a target text that still provides the reader with the impression that they are getting closer to the culture they are reading from. There is no 'illusion of transparency' (Venuti 1995) here either, but rather an illusion of authenticity that is expected as part of the reading experience.

Comparing reviews for Rivas's and Villar's novels highlights radically different approaches to reading a work of literature, but also highlights some commonalities. Despite differences in the genre and status of their novels, both authors are reviewed in comparison to other, more familiar writers (as part of an international canon, in the case of Rivas, and as part of a crime fiction community, in the case of Villar's characters). In some ways, this brings their work closer to the readers, who can frame their writing and understand them through previous readings and associations. However, there is no homogenization in either of the cases: although specific reflection about the translation is lacking in Villar's reviews, invisibilizing the process and the person behind the version in English, the book is at no point presented as originally written in English, instead highlighting the role of translators as providers of Spanish authenticity. In Rivas's case, on the other hand, references to the translator and the translation appear frequently, and often signal back to the language and culture of origin being Galician rather than Spanish. The portrayal of the original geographical space in which the books are set, as well as their culture of origin and the relationship between Galician and Spanish

elements is in fact a particularly relevant aspect of their reception, and will be discussed in the following section.

The description of space and the portrayal of culture: Translated literature as bridge-building or tourist gaze?

As mentioned in the previous section, all the reviews analysed for both Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar explore the setting of the novels and their context of origin to a certain extent; even those in which the translation process is not highlighted focus on the foreignness of the text. However, due to the close contact between Galician and Spanish culture and the situation of minoritization of the former, approaches to the representation of the culture of origin are varied.

In the case of Manuel Rivas, and although there are a few examples of assimilation with Spanish culture, reviews generally present him very specifically as a Galician author, and the fact that the original language of the novels is Galician tends to be highlighted – ‘His passport may be Spanish, but Manuel Rivas is from Galicia, that Land of the Gaels in the far north-west of Spain’ (Kerrigan 2013) (see more examples in Table 11). This, again, is mirrored in blog reviews, indicating that the profile of the author and its reception by the anglophone readership highlight his ‘Galicianness’ as opposed to his Spanish nationality. As a matter of fact, in certain cases, the blog writers themselves explore this ambiguity between the classification of Galician writers, suggesting that there is a process of developing a new, more complex, understanding of the relationship between the Galician and Spanish languages and cultures after reading Rivas’s novels:

‘Well I put this book down as Spanish fiction although Manuel Rivas, he is a Galician writer he is from that part of Spain and writes in Galician not Spanish and this book is a direct translation from his original. (Winston’s Dad 2013)

His works are also presented as clearly Galician, illustrated by mentions of place —The novel focuses on life in a small coastal village in Galicia’ (Istreading’s Blog 2013, more examples on Table 11), although there are examples of assimilation with Spanish culture, mostly in amateur blog reviews— ‘The story of friends growing up in a small Spanish community’ (The Bookbag 2013). Contrary to claims of homogenization in translation, it seems that, for Rivas, the place of origin and language of his novels are a selling point rather than an impediment. Rivas’s novels are thus very clearly located in professional and semi-professional reviews, and this importance of place, along with the historical contexts that many of them refer to, are some of readers’ most highlighted areas.

Mentions of Galicia (examples)

'In the village of Aran, in Galicia, a young girl (Rosa)... (Kirkus Reviews 2005)
The skein of stories woven around them begins in 1881, unwinding a thread that spans more than a century and concentrates on Galicia' (The Newsroom 2010)
'The novel focuses on life in a small coastal village in Galicia where smuggling is commonplace' (1streading's blog 2013)
'Galicia, in Spain, is both one of the most remote of Western Europe's regions, and cosmopolitan, with its economic emigrants sending news across the oceans.' (Eaude 2013)
Perhaps familiarity with Galician culture remedies this, or perhaps the effect is different in the original. (Basilières 2013)
'Rivas injects telling asides about the Galician character and never allows the reader to forget the territory in which his yarn unfolds' (Battersby 2014)

Mentions of Rivas as a Galician author or an author writing in Galician (examples)

'Books Burn Badly is a novelistic tour-de-force by Galician writer, Manuel Rivas.' (Ribeiro de Menezes 2010)
'Silence lies at the heart of the latest novel from Galician journalist Rivas (The Carpenter's Pencil)' (Publisher's Weekly 2011)
'[F]ull marks to Jonathan Dunne for doing such a great job of translating from the Galician.¡ (The Bookbag 2011)
'Like many before him, the Galician poet and novelist Manuel Rivas has previously sought inspiration in the events of the Spanish Civil War' (Stelfox 2011)
'The astonishingly gifted Galician author, Manuel Rivas' (Marx 2013)
'His passport may be Spanish, but Manuel Rivas is from Galicia, that Land of the Gaels in the far north-west of Spain. (The Guardian 2013)
'Rivas, who writes in Galician, has been a tireless promoter of his homeland' (The Guardian 2013)
'[J]ust happens to be written by a Galician genius' (Battersby 2014)

Table 11. Examples of specific mentions to Galicia or the Galician origin of Rivas in reviews

Nevertheless, the most interesting thing about Rivas's reviews is not so much this recognition of difference and identification of the author with an autonomous Galician culture, but rather the fact that reviewers, both professional and not, often connect Galicia to other, more familiar territories for themselves or their readers; in particular, Ireland and Wales, as well as connections to a more general Celtic culture:

For, like Ireland, Galicia is as much diaspora as nation. (Kerrigan 2013, my emphasis).

In many ways *All Is Silence* is a great Irish novel: it is so easy to imagine the action being transferred to the west of Ireland. (. . .) The youngsters are aware they have a native culture that has been relegated to the margins. (. . .) If this is the great Irish novel that just happens to have been written by a Galician genius, it is also the

finest movie the Coen Brothers have yet to make. (Battersby 2013, my emphasis).

[H]as created a portrait of Spain and above all, an insider's look at a very particular culture: his own as a citizen of the northwest Spain, an area very like the west of Ireland (Battersby 2016, my emphasis) An English-speaking reader may think he detects a tinge of the Celtic twilight: a quality of mists, gyres and whorls (Sansom 2003, my emphasis).

I heard it described as a bit like Ireland to England but from what I've read actually the north-east of the UK is a better idea for me (Winston's Dad 2013, my emphasis).

This, along with the many explanatory notes about the Galician language, the location of Galicia and its status within Spain, along with historical clarifications, suggests that reviewers, both professional and amateur, are not presenting these stories as universal, homogenized works of literature but do indeed need to connect them to more familiar references. This goes in line with Chan's (2010/2014) affirmation that the assimilation of textual information is much slower for readers of the translation, and thus they might highlight aspects of the texts that relate, in their 'foreignness' to more familiar territories or histories, in order to create a clearer picture of the culture that is being portrayed. This nuanced representation of differences and similarities among cultures is, perhaps, the closest example of the use of translation as 'bridge-building' between cultures, and of readers exploring their familiar surroundings in order to inform and define their 'horizons of expectations' (Jauss 1982).

In Domingo Villar's case, and perhaps interestingly for quick turnaround literature, there is no sense of homogenization in the reviews either, but rather a sharp focus on cultural context, albeit representing a very different picture to that portrayed in Rivas's reviews: an unproblematic, holiday and tourist-like landscape, full of clichés and stereotypes, displaying a hedonistic, beautiful but superficial perception of Galicia focused on its landscapes, wine and food, as well as its representation as a culture steeped in the past, 'imbued in the traditions' (Clarke 2010) and almost outside of the present time (see Table 12 for examples). As Saldanha discusses in her analysis of the reception of Brazilian literature, 'this strategy of temporal distantiation, in anthropology and elsewhere, facilitates the marginalization of other cultures as belonging outside our time' (2013: 10). Indeed, ideas around gastronomy, landscapes and tourist attractions are very present in the reviews, highlighting the sensory aspects of the reading experience, even going as far as recommending to 'read which [sic] drinking a Rioja with some jamón ibérico if you can find it (or serrano if you can)' (Goodreads 2017).

‘[T]he effective immersion in Galician culture, gastronomy, and even city planning combine to make this a very worthwhile crime fiction read’ (Harper 2009)

‘The novel is set in the town of Vigo in the Galicia region of Spain, which sounds extremely beautiful. [...] Inevitably, progress and commercialism are eating into the distinguished, long history of the region’ (Clarke 2010)

‘One of the many joys of this book is the mismatched partnership of Caldas, imbued in the traditions, proud history, and rambling, leisured manner of the region’ (Clarke 2010)

‘The plot has a nice twist at the end, but it is the evocative atmosphere, Galician location, humour, characters and culinary details that make this novel, and detective Leo Caldas, a fine addition to the variety of European crime fiction (Price 2010)

‘There seemed to me to be a lack of atmosphere [...] Apart from the descriptions of the goose barnacles though – that just made me hungry’ (Classic Mystery 2011)

‘Rather, he provides a measured account of this beautiful region of Spain and its inhabitants as Caldas travels about digging into the past, so we become absorbed in the ways of life there’ (Clarke 2011)

‘The slightly one-dimensional approach to the mystery means that the solution, when it arrives, seems less relevant than our sorrow in leaving behind the evocative descriptions and evident affection the author has for traditional Galicia and its inhabitants’ (Clarke 2011)

‘I found Estevez to be an annoying character but he serves the useful purpose of highlighting the peculiarities of the Galician customs, as they are often as strange to him as they are to us. (Peckham 2012)

Table 12. Examples of stereotypical aspects of Galician culture highlighted in Domingo Villar’s reviews

These examples clearly showcase that readers, in general, seem to be aware of the different origin of the works, contrary to the hypothesis – criticised by Arnold (2016: 237) –, of the anglophone reader as an “ethnocentric, parochial reader, indifferent to anything beyond the realms of the familiar”. However, this happens fundamentally not because the translation fact is erased or the culture assimilated or domesticated, but rather because these books are read and received as ‘guidebooks’:

If the local tourist bureau in Galicia hasn’t paid Villar something for his work then they should because my overwhelming desire upon finishing the book was to investigate how much it would cost me to fly there and stay a while. (Reactions to Reading 2011, my emphasis)

‘The descriptions of Galicia and the subtle interplay between the characters take the reader right into the action. You can almost smell the plates of seafood, the salty sea breeze and feel the rain in your face blowing in off the Atlantic. (Crime Scraps 2011, my emphasis)

This suggests not only a clear process of exoticization of the works—even consciously, as readers use books as a form of ‘armchair travelling’

(Saldanha 2018)—, but also a focus on the engagement with Villar’s literature at a much more emotional level. Readers, when engaging with a text, experience a three-fold process: the emotional response to the text, the response to their context (their influences and horizon of expectations) and their intellectual appreciation of the text (Chan 2010/2014). The reviews of Villar’s books show that readers tend to engage with and enjoy the emotional and sensory elements of the work much more than its literary value, as in the case of Rivas, and that they participate in the culture of origin as tourist travelling to a new setting. In this way, the fictional world constructed by Villar serves as a portrait of a ‘real’ world that, ultimately, exists only in the minds of the anglophone readers.

Conclusion

This article set out to study the perceptions and attitudes towards Manuel Rivas and Domingo Villar in the anglophone world. These two authors were selected on the basis that they are the most reviewed authors among the target readership, indicating that they are reaching a wider audience than other translations of Galician narrative. Indeed, the very process of translation of Galician literature, highly dependent on institutional funds for translation and with very little funding allocated to the distribution of the books, suggests that the priority for the publication of Galician fiction in other languages might not be focused on the target readership. Out of the 24 novels translated from Galician into English in the period 2000-2018, only the two authors analysed in this study have received enough reviews to suggest that a significant readership has been reached.

As was argued in the previous sections, the two authors contribute to Galician literature in very different ways: Rivas works on high-brow works of literature engaging with a number of historical periods and cultural aspects specific of Galicia, while Villar produces quick turnaround crime fiction. Both have a very strong sense of place, however, although their representation of Galicia and Galician culture differs. It is only expected that anglophone readers will receive these works differently and engage with them in specific ways.

When a thorough textual analysis is done of the reviews, an interesting observation comes to the fore: although both authors are placed at different points in the homogenization-heterogenization-exoticism continuum, none of their works is fully homogenized into the anglophone cultures they are reaching. Rather, they are always presented as translations and their culture of origin is highlighted, albeit in two very different ways. In the case of Rivas, a trend arises of readers who use translated Galician literature as a bridge to access the culture (whether Galician or Spanish), and learn about it. These readers, in many cases, make use of familiar territories and comparisons (such as Ireland, Wales or the Celtic world) to inform their horizon of expectations. These reviews present a more nuanced understanding of the specificities of Rivas’s work and Galician culture, and value the literary quality and status of the author. Although Rivas has gained status in the Spanish literary landscape and is sometimes presented as a Spanish writer, most reviews still focus on his Galicianness and his commitment to the culture.

The case of Villar presents a different picture: that of readers who use foreign fiction (particularly crime fiction) as ‘travel guide’ or ‘armchair traveling’ (Saldanha 2018). In this case, reviews focus on a much more emotional approach to the novels and highlight more stereotypical aspects of the culture, focusing on the sensory aspects provided by gastronomy or the descriptions of landscapes, thus presenting a much more exoticized version of the culture and the territory, provided as a tool to escape and as a much more superficial approach to a new culture, which ultimately perpetuates notions of Galicia as a traditional region steeped in the past.

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