

# The Trials of the Intertextual:

The Translation and Reception of  
Tatyana Tolstaya's *Kys* in Sweden and the United States

*M.A. Malin Podlevskikh Carlström*  
*Department of Languages and Literatures*

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## Abstract

- Title:** The Trials of the Intertextual: The Translation and Reception of Tatyana Tolstaya's *Kys'* in Sweden and the United States
- Author:** Malin Podlevskikh Carlström
- Language:** English
- Keywords:** Russian literature, translation studies, Lawrence Venuti, intertextuality, translation reception, thematic analysis, Tatyana Tolstaya, *Kys'*, *Därv*, *The Slynx*

This dissertation analyses the translation and reception of Tatyana Tolstaya's novel *Kys'* (2000). The analysis includes, as well as the Russian source text, the Swedish translation *Därv* (2003), translated by Staffan Skott and Maria Nikolajeva, and the English translation *The Slynx* (2003), translated by Jamey Gambrell.

A basic premise for the investigation is that intertextuality takes particular expression in the Russian literary tradition, which is why it is vital to discuss possible strategies for translating intertextual references and also how the choice of strategies may affect the reception of a target text.

The first part of the dissertation focuses on intertextuality and possible ways to classify and translate intertextual references. The analysis reveals that the Swedish translators have replaced many quotations from Russian poetry with Swedish or canonical poetry, while the American translator has translated the Russian quotations into English. To summarize, while the Swedish translators seem to have interpreted intertextuality *as such* as being important and recontextualized some of the references, the American translator instead seems to have interpreted the references to Russian culture and the actual referent texts as being important.

The second part analyses the reception of the two target texts by means of a comparative analysis of twelve Swedish and sixteen American reviews in non-scholarly and non-professional publications. The analysis reveals that the reception differed between the two target cultures. While the English target text was primarily read as a novel about Russia, the Swedish critics were also able to relate the novel to universal topics such as art and human nature. Finally, the analysis revealed that an underlying theme among the Swedish reviews is "Can art/literature save us?" while an underlying theme among the American reviews is instead "Can Russia be saved?"

To conclude, the Swedish translators managed to achieve an interpretation of the source text that was not only more intelligible for the target text readers but also more interesting and relevant from their perspective. Thus, intertextual literature may benefit from a translation strategy that takes the function of intertextuality into consideration and that also—when necessary—recontextualizes intertextual references.