Sarah Parenzo

Reception of A. B. Yehoshua's Work Translated into Italian:

Literary Work in Translation as an Inter-Cultural Transitional Space with Therapeutic Potential

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Supervisors: Dr. Hilla Karas and Prof. Rachel Weissbrod

# Abstract

This study deals with the way in which author A. B. Yehoshua's works have been received in Italy since the 1990s. We examine Yehoshua's outstanding success in Italy from the vantage point of the principles of bibliotherapy (a therapeutic modality based on Wolfgang Iser's theory of reader-response criticism and on Winnicottian psychoanalysis) and cultural translation (with a special focus on the writings of Homi Bhabha and Judith Butler), employing the concept of "third space." We propose viewing Yehoshua as a writer whose work places him in the position of therapist for the Italian reader, and the Italian reader as a patient who, via the reading process, may undergo a transformative inner process. This process can help the reader overcome his/her negative attitude toward the other, and especially toward the Israeli-Jewish other, and to deal with unresolved moral conflicts and conflicts of identity. We test our hypothesis via an analysis of Yehoshua's *A Late Divorce* (1996 [1982]), *A Journey to the End of the Millennium* (1998 [1997]), and *The Liberated Bride* (2002 [2001]), in Italian translation, with an emphasis on the ethical principles embedded in these works, on attitudes toward the other, and on boundary crossing.

The study is divided into five chapters. **Chapter 1** presents the study's theoretical groundwork, reviewing reader reception and response theories that help in identifying likely impacts of the text on potential readers in the target culture. The chapter also discusses psychoanalytic theories, in particular that of Donald Winnicott, as well as bibliotherapeutic principles that allow one to identify immanent therapeutic qualities in literary texts. Also discussed are principles of cultural translation, concentrating especially on the work of Bhabha and Butler, who view translation as a communicative act between different cultural groups, and an intermediate space of negotiation with the other over identity and morality.

**Chapter 2** examines the historical, political, cultural, and literary background against which Hebrew literature's reception in Italy, from the late 1980s on, may be understood. The chapter addresses the impact of historical events such as the outbreak of the First Intifada (1987-1993), the Oslo Accords (1993), and the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the Italian racial laws (1988), on Italian-Israeli relations generally, and on Italian attitudes toward Jews specifically.

**Chapter 3** looks at the process through which A. B. Yehoshua and his works have been received in Italian culture. Our examination includes interviews with publishers, with attention to their main economic and political considerations; we review distribution data, awards, and critical responses to Yehoshua's books. There is also an interview with Yehoshua himself; the author explains his reception from his own perspective, and discusses the possibility of viewing his works as aesthetic artifacts with therapeutic potential for Italian readers.

**Chapter 4** offers an analysis of *A Late Divorce*, *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*, and *The Liberated Bride* in Italian translation, based on the principles of cultural translation and bibliotherapy. In this chapter we look at whether Yehoshua's oeuvre in Italian translation can serve as an intercultural "third space" with therapeutic potential for Italian readers, and promote dialogue processes in the encounter with the other. For this purpose, the first three sections of the chapter explore the rehabilitation possibilities embedded in these narratives, and offer an interpretation of their potential ability to rehabilitate the images of excluded and repressed others who appear in them. This interpretation is founded on the theory of cultural translation offered by Bhabha and Butler, and on the work of post-structuralist philosophers who addressed the ethical negotiation that takes place in the encounter with the other. Thus, the chapter presents the thought of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts who base themselves on phenomenological-existentialist theory, and who provide tools for rehabilitating the image of the socially excluded. The chapter's fourth section also assesses the therapeutic potential of Yehoshua's work for the Italian reader, asking whether it is capable of changing that reader's ethical position regarding his/her "Jewish other." Accordingly, the section discusses several psychoanalytical mechanisms involved in the reading process offered by bibliotherapists, such as transference and identification, which have the power to spark transformation in the reader's soul. These mechanisms are employed in an analysis of Yehoshua's novels as a potentially intermediate therapeutic and intercultural space for the Italian reader.

In order to assess the actual impact of Yehoshua's work on readers, **Chapter 5** applies the principles of cultural translation to the actual responses of Italian readers, and to the assessments published over the years by literary critics. We also compare the responses of potential readers to those of actual readers, with attention to their similarities and differences. This comparison illuminates the possibility of seeing a "therapeutic process" specifically in Yehoshua's reception in Italy – a process that unfolds with the aid of the translated work of literature as an intermediate intercultural space. It also sheds light on the creation of literature in translation generally as an intermediate intercultural space with therapeutic qualities for the reader.