

Franz Kafka and Stefan Zweig in the Context of Azerbaijani Literary Studies: Research Traditions, Translation Practices, and Cross-Cultural Intersections

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Abstract

The exploration of *Franz Kafka* and *Stefan Zweig* within the framework of Azerbaijani literary scholarship represents a relatively recent and developing dimension of modern Azerbaijani philology. The systematic study of the literary heritage of these prominent twentieth-century Austrian writers—particularly their philosophical and aesthetic resonances within Azerbaijani cultural and literary discourse—may symbolically be described as a *newborn branch* of national literary research. To date, there has been no comprehensive monograph devoted to topics such as “*Modern Austrian Prose and Azerbaijan*” or “*Austrian Literature of the Twentieth Century and the East*.” Even within the republic’s academic press, articles of a purely scientific character concerning this field remain exceedingly rare.

While journalistic materials have occasionally addressed the broader sphere of cultural exchange—particularly in music, theater, and official diplomatic contexts—such works have typically appeared following formal *Days of Azerbaijan in Austria* or high-level bilateral meetings. These accounts, though valuable for documenting cultural diplomacy, seldom contribute to the deeper comparative or analytical study of literature itself. Nevertheless, they form a useful historical backdrop, demonstrating the longstanding mutual interest and goodwill between the two nations’ intellectual communities.

Keywords:

Franz Kafka; Stefan Zweig; Austrian literature; Azerbaijani philology; comparative literature; literary translation; intercultural dialogue; existentialism; avant-garde; Azerbaijan-Austria cultural relations; East-West literary exchange; modernism in literature

Research Innovation and Scholarly Relevance

The scholarly innovation of this dissertation lies primarily in its attempt to synthesize and contextualize disparate Azerbaijani academic works on Austrian authors—unifying previously scattered studies into a cohesive analytical framework. By integrating and reinterpreting the critical insights of Azerbaijani scholars such as **Assoc. Prof. Vakil Hajiyev**, **PhD Svetlana Jabrayilova**, and **PhD Naida Mammadkhanova**, this study contributes to mapping the contours of Azerbaijani-Austrian and, to some extent, Azerbaijani-German-language literary relations.

Although the contributions of younger Azerbaijani philologists to this field remain preliminary, their efforts represent foundational steps toward establishing a sustainable tradition of comparative inquiry. Their research underscores an important fact: literary dialogue between Azerbaijani and Central European writers—especially those within the Austro-German cultural space—has the potential to open new frontiers for mutual understanding, aesthetic enrichment, and interdisciplinary scholarship.

A central conclusion of this research is that many twentieth-century Austrian writers, including Kafka, Zweig, Rilke, and Musil, did not merely reflect abstract philosophical ideas. Instead, they sought to depict human existence under conditions of crisis, alienation, and moral disintegration—developing literary methods to express survival and self-reconstruction amid existential turmoil. Although these authors' philosophies often appear deeply subjective, even bordering on abstraction, their narratives nevertheless establish a recurring archetype of *nostalgic behavior* and moral introspection.

Through comparative-typological and partially linguistic analysis, this dissertation demonstrates that the creative systems of these authors correspond with intellectual movements such as **existentialism** and the **avant-garde**. These frameworks privilege the *essence of human behavior* over prescriptive theory, transforming literary creation into a form of moral and psychological exploration. Notably, no prior comprehensive Azerbaijani study has undertaken such a comparative synthesis—underscoring the originality and necessity of this work.

The Urgency of the Problem

Despite the efforts of international organizations to promote global cultural understanding, humanity continues to confront profound divisions in worldview, motivation, and collective memory. The persistence of ideological, ethnic, and religious tensions suggests that each nation's conception of truth, justice, and moral destiny remains largely rooted in its own historical pain and cultural logic. In such a fragmented global environment, literary and cultural interaction acquires a new ethical dimension—becoming not merely aesthetic, but civilizational.

The expansion of globalization and the intensification of ideological confrontation have underscored the importance of constructive intercultural dialogue. In this regard, **literary conferences, translation projects, and academic forums**—both in Azerbaijan and across Europe—serve as critical platforms for enhancing mutual understanding. They promote social cohesion, foster equality, and encourage dialogue between diverse civilizations. Such initiatives often revisit classical moral values, interpreting them through the lens of contemporary pluralism and respect, thus mitigating antagonistic competition and reducing ideological polarization.

Within this global framework, the cultural relations between **Azerbaijan and Austria** deserve special attention. The Azerbaijani-Austrian literary exchange, including the broader **Azerbaijani-Germanic** connections of the Austro-Hungarian era, remains an underexplored yet promising field. Themes such as *oriental motifs in Austrian prose, the reflection of Eastern philosophy in Central European literature, and the reception of Austrian modernism in Azerbaijani criticism* reveal deep cross-cultural resonances. The

systematic study of these intersections can significantly contribute to both Azerbaijani and European philology.

Theoretical and Methodological Outlook

From a theoretical standpoint, this dissertation positions Azerbaijani literary studies within a comparative framework that emphasizes *intercultural reciprocity* rather than unilateral influence. The chosen methodology combines historical-literary analysis, hermeneutic interpretation, and linguistic comparison to trace parallels in narrative structure, philosophical orientation, and symbolic representation.

It is evident that the comprehensive study of Azerbaijani–Austrian literary relations throughout the twentieth century opens an expansive panorama for understanding the broader dialectic between East and West. Such research not only enriches the national literary canon but also invites European scholars—literary critics, linguists, historians, and philosophers—to reconsider the position of Azerbaijani literature within the continuum of world literature.

The exchange of expertise between Azerbaijani and international scholars strengthens constructive tendencies in cultural and academic cooperation. It is also crucial to recognize that the Azerbaijani nation, in shaping its material and spiritual culture, has historically demonstrated openness to learning from and engaging with other civilizations. This intellectual hospitality has allowed Azerbaijani writers and scholars to integrate external influences creatively while preserving national authenticity.

He realized that his tragedy was not personal, but rather a reflection of the tragedy of the modern human being, who had lost his connection to faith, morality, and social harmony. Kafka's alienation, according to Azerbaijani literary critics, is not an individual but a universal symbol of twentieth-century civilization's crisis. In this regard, Mahir Garayev emphasizes that *"Kafka's inner anxiety embodies the moral confusion of an entire generation that witnessed the collapse of traditional values under the weight of bureaucratic modernity"* (1.12).

In the same period, Azerbaijani scholars began to note the striking parallelism between Kafka's metaphysical despair and the Eastern mystical understanding of human helplessness before destiny. Professor R. Rovshan, in his 1997 essay on modern European humanism, argues that *"Kafka's 'absurd world' is not entirely foreign to the Sufi experience of estrangement (ghurbat); in both cases, the human being is lost in a labyrinth of divine silence"* (2.7). This comparison opened a new dimension in Azerbaijani Kafka studies, enabling local researchers to read his works through an Eastern philosophical lens rather than only a Western existentialist one.

At the same time, the study of **Stefan Zweig's** creative heritage in Azerbaijan followed a somewhat different path. Zweig's artistic world, characterized by psychological depth and humanistic optimism, resonated strongly with Azerbaijani readers in the post-Soviet decades. His novels *"The Royal Game"* (*Schachnovelle*), *"Letter from an Unknown Woman"*, and *"Amok"* were translated into Azerbaijani in the early 2000s, largely through the efforts of the *Azerbaijan Translation Centre under the Cabinet of Ministers*. Literary critic **S. Jabrayilov**, who analyzed Zweig's narrative technique, wrote that *"Zweig's*

psychological prose is a continuation of the Viennese tradition of moral introspection, in which the emotional conflict of an individual becomes the mirror of an entire epoch” (3.4).

A notable contribution in this regard is the article by **N. Mammadkhanova** titled “*Humanistic Universality in the Works of Stefan Zweig*” (published in *Azerbaijan Philology Studies*, 2010). She remarks that Zweig’s moral ideals—his rejection of fanaticism, empathy for the weak, and belief in intellectual tolerance—found a special echo in Azerbaijani cultural thought, which historically values moderation (*i’tidal*) and ethical harmony (4.2). Thus, Zweig’s intellectual pacifism and Kafka’s metaphysical rebellion form two contrasting yet complementary aspects of the Austrian modernist consciousness that fascinated Azerbaijani scholars.

From the early 2000s onward, Azerbaijani philologists began to integrate both Kafka and Zweig into comparative research with native authors. For example, **Professor S. Aliyev** conducted a study comparing *Kafka’s* “The Castle” with **J. Mammadguluzadeh’s** “The Post Box,” emphasizing the shared motif of *bureaucratic absurdity and moral alienation* (5.9). Similarly, **Dr. T. Rasulov** in his paper “*Existential Parallels between European and Azerbaijani Modernism*” (Baku State University Bulletin, 2015) highlighted the convergence of *Kafka’s* depiction of fear and helplessness with **Huseyn Javid’s** metaphysical dramaturgy.

It is worth noting that this new direction in Azerbaijani literary scholarship was facilitated by interdisciplinary methods, combining philological analysis with psychoanalytic and sociocultural approaches. Comparative interpretation of Eastern and Western motifs, particularly in the writings of Austrian authors, enriched Azerbaijani academic discourse and encouraged translation projects that aimed not merely at linguistic equivalence but at cultural contextualization.

By the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Azerbaijani translation corpus of Austrian literature had expanded significantly. Collections of *Franz Kafka’s Diaries* (translated by **R. Mammadli**, 2012) and *Selected Works of Stefan Zweig* (translated by **F. Javadov**, 2014) became available to the general public. These publications renewed local interest in Austrian modernism and prompted literary seminars at **Baku State University**, **Khazar University**, and **Azerbaijan University of Languages** focusing on “*The Reception of Central European Literature in Azerbaijan.*”

Scholars also began to explore the stylistic and ideological dimensions of translation. **Dr. S. Isgandarli** (2018) analyzed *Kafka’s Transformation* through a linguistic-semiotic lens, noting that “*the translator must preserve Kafka’s syntactic tension and metaphoric opacity to retain the existential vibration of the text*” (6.5). In turn, **Dr. L. Nasraddinova** argued that Zweig’s translators often sought to “*Azerbaijanize*” his narrative rhythm and emotional tone, making his texts more accessible to local readers without compromising their European character (7.8).

These efforts collectively illustrate that the study of Austrian literature in Azerbaijan is not merely a matter of translation or influence but a genuine dialogue of cultural sensibilities. Kafka’s introspection and Zweig’s humanism, when refracted through the Azerbaijani intellectual tradition, generate new interpretive spaces where East and West converge.

From a methodological standpoint, it is essential to emphasize that such comparative research must rely on **textual precision and contextual fidelity**. As the author of this study notes, *“Active and deliberate research into the methods by which contemporary Austrian literature absorbs Eastern motives cannot attain significance without rigorous textual comparison and confrontation.”* This principle underpins the current research, which seeks not to impose analogies artificially but to uncover naturally occurring intersections in the symbolic systems of both cultures.

Ultimately, Austrian literature retained its **originality and authenticity** throughout the twentieth century precisely because of its openness to foreign inspiration, including Eastern motifs. These influences—whether philosophical, religious, or aesthetic—did not dilute Austrian identity but rather enriched it with additional layers of meaning. Azerbaijani literary scholarship, by tracing these interconnections, contributes not only to the understanding of Austrian modernism but also to the broader narrative of world literature, where cultures engage in a continuous and dynamic exchange of ideas.

Translation Accuracy and Semantic Distortion in Azerbaijani and Russian Renderings of Stefan Zweig’s Works

It is evident that inaccurate lexemes and overly complex syntactic constructions used by both Russian and Azerbaijani translators have caused serious distortions in the transmission of **Stefan Zweig’s** original meanings. In the episode under consideration, Zweig describes the *inner moral death of a man confronted with his own lie*. **Montaigne** expressed a profound insight relevant to this idea: *“Once you turn your tongue in the direction of a lie, you will never be able to turn it back again.”* The moral and psychological consequences of this lie are examined by Zweig in a gradual and multi-layered manner—an aspect insufficiently conveyed by both Azerbaijani and Russian translators.

A striking observation is that in the original German text of the short story **“Angst”**, Zweig never repeats the title word itself. Instead, he employs a series of adjectives and stative verbs to depict *Frau Irene’s* psychological disintegration. The author’s concern is not the *momentary feeling* of fear but rather the gradual descent into despair. This subtle shift of focus—the transition from fear to moral collapse—is frequently lost in translation.

Zweig’s repetition of *“Jahre- und jahrelang”* serves to indicate the long duration of blackmail. In Azerbaijani and Russian this corresponds to the enumerative intonation of phrases such as *“from year to year”* or *“throughout many years”*, yet translators have rarely captured its rhythmic insistence.

Another point of contention is the rendering of Frau Irene’s insult toward the blackmailer as *“a vile creature.”* From both ideological and stylistic perspectives, this is an inaccuracy. Zweig’s aristocratic heroine would not use such vulgar zoological epithets as *“Natter”* or *“Otter”* (“viper,” “adder”), nor the crude *“Scheusal.”* More precise equivalents conveying moral repulsion without coarseness would be *“Abscheulich”* (a repulsive person) or *“Widerwillen”* (a woman evoking aversion). The translators’ choice thus introduces unnecessary harshness alien to Zweig’s subtle moral tone.

Moreover, in attempting to convey the author's climactic portrayal of *fear*, both Russian and Azerbaijani translators rely on phrases that fail to express its metaphysical depth. In the original, expressions like "*Grablich*," "*Schauerhaft*," or "*Alptraum*" (horrifying, dreadful, nightmarish) would more faithfully correspond to the sense of an "unescapable nightmare."

Similarly, the translation of Zweig's concept of "*borderline cases*" (*Grenzfälle*) in the story "*Die Gouvernante*" ("*Tutor Woman*") presents challenges. In the original, the children are not individualized; Zweig distinguishes them as "*the seniors*" and "*the juniors*," emphasizing generational perception rather than personal psychology. The Russian critic **A. Rusakova** notes:

"The author is not interested in the individual approach of each child to a given fact; he seeks to depict the collective feeling of horror that children experience when they first stand before the abyss separating innocence from corruption. Despite love, beauty, and justice, they encounter hatred, deceit, and cruelty for the first time. Children perceive everything tragically; they feel fear for the future." (4.11)

Unfortunately, both Russian and Azerbaijani translations distort this moral and philosophical nuance. The final passages have been rendered in a way that suggests *children's hatred toward their parents*, an ideological misreading likely influenced by Soviet-era social interpretations. As Rusakova herself clarifies,

"Such social explanations arose due to historical circumstances, but Zweig's intention is clearly directed toward an abstract, universal plane of human morality." (4.11)

This misrepresentation cannot be dismissed as a mere lexical or stylistic lapse—it is a **conceptual and ideological error**. Zweig's intent was to dramatize moral awakening, not generational rebellion. Hence, translators must approach his prose with heightened sensitivity to connotative precision, syntactic subtlety, and philosophical context.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that Azerbaijani translators, when working with the stylistically refined and psychologically nuanced prose of Zweig and Kafka, face a demanding intellectual task. Achieving fidelity requires not only linguistic skill but also an understanding of cultural semantics, narrative rhythm, and psychological symbolism.

The identification and interpretation of the artistic impulses connecting writers of different epochs and nations constitute a central challenge for modern literary studies. Although authors such as Franz Kafka and Stefan Zweig wrote independently of Azerbaijani contexts, their universal humanism and psychological insight resonate profoundly within the spiritual landscape of Azerbaijani literature. The patterns of thought and emotional experience linking these traditions testify to the *shared moral and existential concerns* that transcend linguistic and geographic boundaries.

In the coming decades, Azerbaijani philology faces the demanding yet inspiring task of comprehensively studying these intercultural dynamics—mapping the evolution, laws, and stages of mutual enrichment between Azerbaijani and Western European literatures. Among these, Austrian literature, with its deep humanistic and psychological orientation, remains one of the most significant interlocutors. The continued engagement with this

tradition promises not only academic innovation but also the strengthening of cultural bridges between nations.

Conclusion

The **scientific and theoretical significance** of this research lies in its expansion of our understanding of the creative heritage of prominent Austrian and Azerbaijani writers and its contribution to comparative literary scholarship. By identifying thematic parallels and aesthetic convergences, the study enhances mutual literary and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Austria.

From a methodological perspective, accurate interpretation of a literary text presupposes the transmission of its conceptual core into an accessible communicative plane. The varying interpretations of the German-language originals analyzed here highlight the importance of *semantic fidelity* and *cultural awareness* in translation.

The Azerbaijani presentation of Austrian prose and poetry must preserve the original's **semantic, phonetic, and rhythmic** dimensions. In poetry and prose alike, the translator's stylistic decisions—lexical selection, syntactic structuring, and rhythmical modulation—are of critical theoretical importance for the ongoing development of Azerbaijani translation studies.

Therefore, the continued refinement of translation practices, alongside philological research, represents a vital step toward strengthening intercultural dialogue and ensuring the faithful reception of European modernist literature within the Azerbaijani scholarly and literary community.

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Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to the **ethical principles of academic research and publication**, including the responsible use of sources, proper citation, and respect for intellectual property. All literary works, translations, and interpretations used in this research are duly

referenced. The study involves **no human or animal subjects**, and therefore does not require formal ethical approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares **no conflict of interest** related to the publication of this paper. The research, analysis, and conclusions presented are based solely on independent academic work and reflect the author's own interpretations and perspectives.

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