

BOOK COVER AS A SEMIOTIC TRANSLATION: THE CASE OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY MAYRIG BY HENRI VERNEUIL

Mkrtich S. Mkrtchyan

Institute of Language after H. Acharyan,
National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan, Armenia;
Brusov State University, Yerevan, Armenia
mkrtich.mkrtchyan@bryusov.am

Beyond their conventional role, book covers function as sophisticated agents of cultural communication and semiotic translation. While extant research often analyzes the linguistic aspects of translation, the interplay of verbal and non-verbal elements on book covers, particularly in the context of autobiographical narratives and cross-cultural adaptation, remains neglected. This study examines the book cover as a site of semiotic translation in Henri Verneuil's autobiography, *Mayrig*, in its French, Armenian, and American editions. The interplay between its verbal and nonverbal elements is explored through a comparative lens, informed by Gérard Genette's insightful paratextual theory. Particular attention is paid to how the very fabric of the cover subtly reveals patterns and variations that vividly illustrate the cultural and temporal adaptations of the narrative's core themes. Drawing on Roland Barthes' concept of photography as an "umbilical cord", the analysis examines how photographic elements enhance the autobiographical pact. Thus, the study evaluates the connections that emerge from combining various media, such as family photos, movie stills, and narrative quotes. This article concludes that *Mayrig*'s covers actively serve as dynamic sites of semiotic translation that employ various semiotic strategies to successfully convey the main themes of the work to a diverse audience.

Keywords: book cover, semiotic translation, autobiography, semiotics of photography, *Mayrig*, Henri Verneuil

ОБЛОЖКА КНИГИ КАК ФОРМА СЕМИОТИЧЕСКОГО ПЕРЕВОДА: НА ПРИМЕРЕ АВТОБИОГРАФИИ «МАЙРИК» АНРИ ВЕРНЕЯ

М. С. Мкртчян

Институт языка имени Р. Ачаряна Национальной академии наук
Республики Армения, Ереван, Армения
Государственный университет имени В. Я. Брюсова, Ереван, Армения
mkrtich.mkrtchyan@bryusov.am

Цель статьи – используя сравнительный семиотический анализ, выявить стратегии передачи смысла автобиографического текста на обложку

книги посредством семиотического перевода. Материалом исследования являются обложки автобиографии Анри Верней «Майрик» в её французском, армянском и американском изданиях. Эти обложки функционируют как сложные знаковые системы, объединяющие вербальные и невербальные элементы. Методологическую основу исследования составляют семиотический и сравнительный анализ, дополненные теорией паратекста Жерара Женетта. Семиотический перевод осмысливается как процесс мультимодального смыслообразования, при котором ключевые темы текста передаются через взаимодействие вербальных и невербальных кодов, ориентированных на конкретную аудиторию. Особое внимание уделяется метафоре Ролана Барта о фотографии как «пуповине», связывающей автора и читателя и создающей метонимическую связь между обложкой и содержанием книги. Это свойство фотографии активизируется через интертекстуальные и интермедийные связи, тем самым усиливая автобиографический пакт Филиппа Лежёна. В ходе анализа выявлены культурные коды, репрезентируемые в визуальном оформлении обложек, отражающих специфику национальных изданий. Сравнительный подход позволяет установить, что французские версии акцентируют личные воспоминания, тогда как армянские – коллективную память, что проявляется, например, в использовании картины Аршила Горки «Художник и его мать» как автобиографического визуального элемента. Появление кадров из экранизации на позднейших обложках иллюстрирует феномен интермедийности.

Таким образом, обложки автобиографии «Майрик» предстают как динамичные платформы семиотического перевода, в которых реализуются разнообразные стратегии для эффективной передачи ключевых тем произведения.

Ключевые слова: обложка книги, семиотический перевод, автобиография, семиотика фотографии, Майрик, Анри Верней

DOI 10.23951/2312-7899-2025-4-122-141

Introduction

Book covers transcend their primary function as protective shells to become complex sites of semiotic translation that engage with dynamic multimedia narratives and profound cultural shifts. While the linguistic dimensions of translation have received extensive scholarly attention, the multimodal interplay of verbal and nonverbal elements on book covers – and their profound role in cross-cultural semiotic translation – represents a significant yet critically underexplored area of research. This gap is particularly pronounced within the burgeoning field of paratextual studies, especially concerning autobiographical

narratives, where the cover must negotiate the deeply personal with broader cultural contexts. Although previous studies have recognised book covers as semiotic constructs [Sonzogni 2011; Mossop 2017; Torop 2019; Jiang 2021], there is still a notable lack of in-depth comparative analysis. This gap is especially pertinent given that books, in the marketplace, function primarily as commodities, a role their covers are strategically designed to support [Liu, Zhang 2025]. Through the deliberate orchestration of imagery and text, covers perform a semiotic translation of the book's content, thereby serving both marketing and interpretive functions. This article responds to this research gap by analyzing the French, Armenian, and American editions of Henri Verneuil's autobiography, *Mayrig*, using a semiotic translation framework. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how book covers operate as active agents in cultural memory formation and in the complex dynamics of multimodal communication.

Methodology

This article employs a qualitative, comparative case study approach to analyze the intersemiotic translation of Henri Verneuil's autobiography *Mayrig* across its French, Armenian, and American editions. The analytical framework combines three key theoretical fields:

- **Paratextuality:** Gérard Genette's concepts of peritext and epitext are used to analyze the verbal and non-verbal elements surrounding the main text.

- **Photography and autobiography:** Roland Barthes' concept of photography as "umbilical cord" and Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" are used to explore the role of photographic images in establishing authenticity and conveying familial themes.

- **Intersemiotic translation and intermediality:** Roman Jakobson's and Gideon Toury's models of translation provide a basis for understanding the transfer of meaning across sign systems. This is further developed using Irina Rajewsky's concept of intermediality to analyze the combination of media (text, photography, painting, film stills) on the covers.

The analysis identifies diachronic and cultural differences to reveal how marketing, cultural memory, and audience shape the paratextual presentation of the book.

Theoretical framework: Semiotics and translation

Semiotics is a burgeoning interdisciplinary field that provides researchers with tools to analyze meaning-making across various modes

of communication. As Juri Lotman [1990, 5] aptly noted, “everything which the semiotic researcher turns his/her attention to becomes semiotized in his hands”. Similarly, Robert E. Innis [1985, vii] asserts that “semiotics deals with meanings and messages in all their forms and in all their contexts”. According to Evangelos Kourdis [2022, 139], semiotics serves as a cultural theory of communication and an interdisciplinary field analysing cultural encoding and decoding in verbal and non-verbal systems. This interdisciplinary aspect makes semiotics particularly valuable for a vast array of disciplines seeking to explain various complex phenomena, transcending the limits of any single discipline.

In his seminal article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, pioneer structural linguist Roman Jakobson [1959] argued that word meaning is fundamentally semiotic, grasped through its translation into other signs, whether within or across verbal and nonverbal systems [Jakobson 1959, 126–127]. He identified three types of translation: **intralingual** (rewording within a language), **interlingual** (between languages), and **intersemiotic** (transmutation from verbal to nonverbal signs). Not only did Jakobson’s semiotic approach broaden the scope of translation studies, but it also facilitated an understanding of translation that transcended purely linguistic applications.

However, this groundbreaking contribution was not without its critics. Gideon Toury [1986], in particular, argued that Jakobson’s typology remained linguistically biased, thereby neglecting the wider semiotic dimensions of translation. Toury highlighted that translation often involves crossing multiple semiotic borders (e.g., oral to written, religious to secular). Consequently, he proposed a binary typology: **intrasemiotic** (translation within or between languages, encompassing intralingual and interlingual) and **intersemiotic** (translation between language and non-language) [Toury 1986, 1113]. Toury’s revised model is more applicable and acknowledges that language itself is a sign system, aligning with Ferdinand de Saussure’s [2011, 16] structuralist view, making intrasemiotic translation inherently cover both within-language and between-language translation cases.

The study of such translational processes falls within semiotics of translation or translation semiotics, an interdisciplinary field that explores translation as a semiotic activity. Dinda Gorlee’s [1994, 226–227] concept of **semiotranslation** owes its inspiration to the semiotic theory of Charles S. Peirce, American philosopher and co-founder of modern semiotics, who famously claimed that interpretation precedes translation and meaning is “the translation of a sign into another sign system of signs” [Peirce 1931–1935, vol. 4, 127]. This Peircean insight also

influenced Jakobson's work. Namely, building upon Peirce's concept of invariance, Jakobson argued that any analysis of a sign, particularly within translation, must consider both its stable core and its potential for variation: "on no level is it possible to deal with a sign without considering both an invariant and a transformational variation" [Jakobson 1985, 252]. Therefore, in line with the semiotic understanding of signs encompassing invariant and variant features, translation inherently involves additions, substitutions, and deletions. Crucially, however, the underlying invariance is what preserves the recognisability of the source text.

Ultimately, translation studies have increasingly recognized the valuable insights offered by semiotics. Rather than relying solely on linguistic models, scholars now conceive of translation as a broader, interdisciplinary process of meaning-making. The semiotics of translation is a diverse topic of research that derives from and incorporates various academic traditions [Sütiste 2024, 182]. This reflects a more comprehensive understanding of translation as a semiotic process, involving the interpretation and negotiation of signs across cultural, linguistic, and multimodal contexts.

The embrace of a semiotic perspective opens up exciting new avenues for research, allowing scholars to look into previously overlooked aspects of translation, such as the role of visual elements, cultural codes, pedagogy, and the interpretative processes that are ubiquitous in today's complex communicative landscapes.

Building on these fundamental semiotic and translation theories, we can now examine how these principles manifest themselves in the translation of meaning on book covers.

Semiotics of translating book covers

In general, texts are interdependent entities, and to comprehend one, it is necessary to consider other texts. This relationship is called *intertextuality*, a term coined by Julia Kristeva [1980] aimed to show that the meaning of a specific text is always shaped by other texts. This focus on relations as the primary units of analysis is key to understanding how texts function, especially in translation, where meaning is created through interaction of multiple semiotic layers, such as linguistic, oral, and visual, all of which must be considered to achieve an adequate translation of the verbal component [Valdeón 2024, 4], and it is this relational perspective that "constitutes the foundation of meaning-making in translation" [Cantó-Milà et al., 2025, 5]. Within this relational par-

adigm, Gérard Genette [1997a] offers a strong framework for classification, proposing the term “transtextuality” as a broader concept than intertextuality, with five subtypes: intertextuality, paratextuality (the surrounding elements of a text such as titles, headings, illustrations, blurbs, dust jackets, etc.), architextuality (genre), metatextuality (critical commentary), and hypotextuality (underlying/transformed text).

Given our focus on the book cover, a crucial element of Genette’s paratext, understanding how readers engage with a book requires looking beyond the text itself, leading us to delve deeper into this concept. Therefore, to fully analyze a book, one must consider these surrounding paratextual elements that Genette outlines. Moreover, to make the paratext more explicit, Genette [197b, 5] divided it into peritext and epitext, where peritext is “included in the book-as-object”. Thus, peritexts are supplementary details included within the physical book itself or directly bound to it, such as on the covers, but not in its actual content. On the other hand, epitext can exist freely and independently of the book; examples of epitext include book reviews, stickers, awards, literary criticisms, interviews with the author, and many others. Genette [197b, 5] posits that peritext and epitext share “the spatial field of the paratext”, and it can be presented with this formula: “paratext = peritext + epitext”. Among the crucial elements comprising the peritext, and thus directly bound to the book-as-object, are book covers and dust jackets. These give information about the author and the publisher, and sometimes about the translator. Additionally, they also present further information about the content, which gives a more complete understanding of the work and its intended audience. Moreover, Brian Mossop [2017] argues that book covers are marketing tools, capitalizing on the fact that buyers judge books by their covers, and as freestanding art pieces, book covers frequently evoke notions in potential buyers’ minds that are separate from the source or target text. Furthermore, Mossop notes that in some cases, book covers can also “contradict the text and also display inconsistencies between different wordings on a single cover and between wordings and imagery” [Mossop 2017, 2].

From a semiotic standpoint, these verbal and non-verbal elements act as signs that convey meaning about the book, and their translation requires careful consideration of potential variations in interpretation. Moreover, paratexts can actively reframe a book’s core narrative to serve a specific agenda [Tan 2024]. This perspective is effectively illustrated by Alexis Weedon [2007, 117], who argues that “[b]ook covers can be seen as a doorway through which we glimpse the text. [...] It is the threshold between the public commercial arena where the book is for sale and the more intimate world of the text where the author speaks to us alone”.

The interplay between a book cover and its content exemplifies a part-whole relationship. Weedon [2007, 117] elucidates this by stating that covers operate through a process of partial concealment and partial disclosure. This notion of partial representation finds a parallel in translation theory. Namely, building on Lawrence Venuti's [2017] notion of translation's inherent incompleteness, Maria Tymoczko [1999, 55] argues that the translator's necessary interpretive choices and selection of aspects inevitably lead to a partial representation, defining translation as metonymic: "it is a form of representation in which parts or aspects of the source text come to stand for the whole".

These peritextual elements, including book covers and dust jackets, act as crucial information carriers and the interface between the potential reader and the book's content. Moreover, from an intersemiotic standpoint, these verbal (e.g., title, author's name) and non-verbal (e.g., imagery, design) elements act as signs that translate key aspects of the book into a different semiotic mode. Therefore, armed with the tools of semiotic analysis and Genette's insights into paratexts, the subsequent examination will delve into the specific intersemiotic translations evident in the French, Armenian, and American editions of *Mayrig*.

Book covers of the autobiography *Mayrig* across times and cultures

Henri Verneuil, a successful French director of his time [Hayward 2025] of Armenian origin, recounts his journey in his autobiography *Mayrig*, "mother" in Western Armenian. Here he details his arrival in Marseilles, integration into French society, and the loss of his mother and loved ones, alongside his traumatic experiences as a non-French individual and his family's escape from the Armenian Genocide. It is a story of one family, three mothers, as Verneuil would call his mother and his two aunts. Published in 1985, the book was a success and led Verneuil to write and direct a film adaptation at the suggestion of his friend, the Armenian-French writer Henri Troyat¹.

The study of the autobiography book covers remains relatively unexplored territory. This becomes particularly interesting when considering the inherent limitations of autobiographical narratives during the analysis of the book cover and/or dust jacket. As Genette [1997b, 23] points out, printed covers – those made of paper or board – are a relatively recent development, emerging around the early nineteenth century. The increasing focus on covers can likely be attributed to economic factors, aiming to boost sales. The industrialization and expand-

¹ <https://en.168.am/2016/09/06/10564.html>, accessed 29 April 2025.

ing consumer culture of the time likely drove this shift in book cover production, catering to desires for ownership and gift-giving. Furthermore, with the rise of the film industry and the adaptation of books into cinema (intersemiotic translation), cinematic illustrations began appearing on book covers as a strategy to attract a wider audience, especially those familiar with the film but not the book. This created a mutually beneficial relationship where the film and the book could promote each other in the market.

Building upon Genette's concept of the peritext, the following analysis examines the early French editions of *Mayrig* (Fig. 1) to illustrate how verbal and nonverbal signs on the cover function as an initial intersemiotic translation of the autobiography's core themes. The first editions of *Mayrig* [Verneuil 1985; Verneuil 1987] (Fig. 1a and Fig. 1b) feature a cover with a family photograph showing Henri Verneuil with his mother, Araxi, holding him as a baby, set against a yellowish background with the author's name in white on a green band and the title in black font (Fig. 1b). This prominent family photograph serves as a key nonverbal sign, immediately establishing the central relationship of the autobiography: the bond between the author and his mother. This visual element initiates an intersemiotic translation of the personal and familial nature of the narrative. Notably, the photograph at the bottom of the title is positioned askew. This slight irregularity in the visual peritext could be interpreted as a subtle semiotic cue, perhaps hinting at the subjective nature of autobiography. From a semiotic perspective, this photograph functions as an indexical sign (in Peirce's terminology), directly pointing to a real moment in the author's past and establishing a sense of authenticity that is crucial to the autobiography. Moreover, the connotations associated with the black-and-white family photograph, such as nostalgia, intimacy, and the passage of time, contribute to the reader's initial understanding of the tone and themes of the autobiography, even before engaging with the verbal text. The yellowish background, while potentially a marketing choice, also conveys connotations of warmth and perhaps a connection to the Mediterranean setting of the early narrative.

This use of a foreign word as the title is a purposeful act of foreignisation, a verbal sign that, in conjunction with the author's recognized name, initiates a process of intersemiotic translation by indicating the autobiography's cultural origins to a French-speaking audience. On the back cover, readers learn that Verneuil will miss his "Mayrig", the Armenian word for mother. This section also explains that the book was written in response to numerous requests from European viewers curious about his childhood, a topic he had often mentioned. The second

edition adopts a white background and a slightly brighter family picture. The author's name is now in blue, but the back cover retains the same information as the first edition. This shift from warmer colors to tranquil tones could be attributed to evolving fashion trends or a deliberate marketing strategy.



Fig. 1. French editions of *Mayrig*: (a) [Verneuil 1985]; (b) [Verneuil 1987]

The title, *Mayrig*, a Western Armenian word, targets a French readership already familiar with the name Henri Verneuil and his Armenian

heritage. This choice represents a foreignisation method, retaining the unfamiliar *Mayrig* while leveraging the known name of Henri Verneuil. This extratextual information is essential for understanding the autobiographies of famous individuals. Building upon this understanding of extratextual influence, Gasparyan Gayane [2024] specifically argues that the information surrounding a text shapes its comprehension, especially for works with national specificity. This perspective directly supports Genette's concept of paratext, highlighting how elements like the author's background and cultural context, alongside titles and other framing devices, significantly impact a reader's interpretation. Thus, rather than alienating the prospective reader, the choice of the foreign word emphasizes the origins of the author, Henri Verneuil, potentially increasing the book's appeal.

The cover photography of *Mayrig* strongly suggests a link between the author and his mother. Nevertheless, according to Philippe Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" [1996], typical indicators of autobiography are the author, narrator, and protagonist sharing a name or a clear "Autobiography" subtitle. Without these, the work is usually an autobiographical novel. Furthermore, as Weedon [2007] notes, a book cover acts as a threshold, shaping the reader's initial glimpse of the text. In the context of autobiography, this threshold plays a crucial role in establishing a kind of implicit "pact" with the reader. While Lejeune focuses on explicit textual markers such as the coincidence of the author's name with the narrator's, the cover itself, through its nonverbal language and the prominence of certain verbal elements, can also contribute to this initial framing. For example, the presence of a personal photograph on the cover can visually signal the autobiographical nature of the work, even before the reader examines the title page or any explicit general statements.

Mayrig presents an interesting case: while its Armenian title, meaning "mother", lacks a direct autobiographical cue, its narrative focus on Verneuil's childhood, family, and the autobiographical son-mother relationship ultimately leads to its classification as an autobiography based on its content.

The intimate nature of this connection finds resonance in Roland Barthes' influential *Camera Lucida* [1981], where he famously employs the metaphor of an "umbilical cord" to describe the link between a photograph and its subject. As he explains, "A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" [Barthes 1981, 81]. Beyond a mere distant recollection, photography becomes a medium for sharing our narratives. This view

is supported by Marianne Hirsch [2012, 6], who, drawing on Barthes' "umbilical cord" analogy, argues that photography is deeply embedded in family life and reinforces familial ideology. Therefore, the choice of the photography on the cover is to reinforce the familial bond, the origins of Henri Verneuil.

Continuing with the Armenian editions (Fig. 2), the use of distinct intersemiotic translation strategies reflects various cultural and temporal contexts. The Soviet edition of *Mayrig* [Vernoy 1989] (Fig. 2a) is designed with a plain brown background and yellow writing, with little emphasis on bright colors. In contrast, the modern edition of *Mayrig* [Vernoy 2015] (Fig. 2b) has a dark red backdrop and yellow-orange text. Furthermore, the modern cover conveys a deeper meaning by partially depicting a woman's face. However, this is not just any face but the mother of the Armenian American artist Arshile Gorky (1904–1948), depicted in his poignant self-portrait, *The Artist and His Mother*. This incorporation of Gorky's painting adds a significant layer of intertextuality, as one Armenian artist's autobiographical work visually promotes another's. From an intersemiotic standpoint, the use of this image translates the concept of "mother" beyond the personal to a shared cultural experience of loss and remembrance. This autobiographical painting was based on a picture taken before the Armenian Genocide, and it reflects Gorky's grief over the loss of his mother and his motherland.

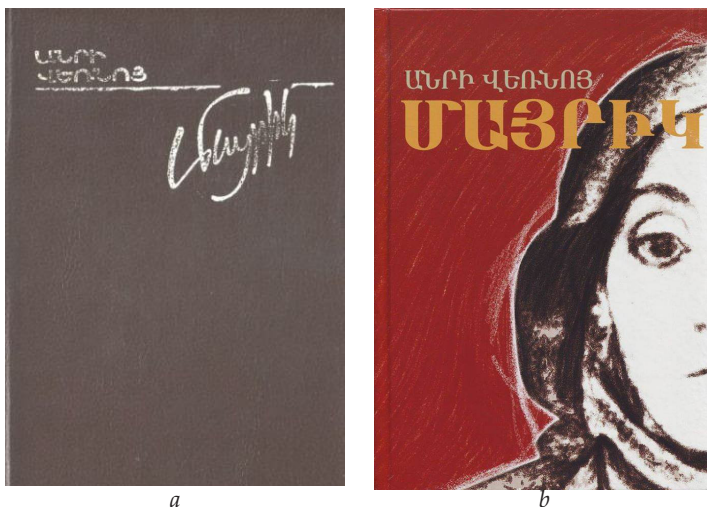


Fig. 2. Armenian editions of *Mayrig*: (a) published during the Soviet period [Vernoy 1989]; (b) a modern edition [Vernoy 2015]

The decision to feature Gorky's mother on the cover of another prominent Armenian's autobiographical work was most likely planned

to appeal to the reader's emotions. This is more than a picture; it is an interweaving of stories and media –intertextuality that evolves into intermediality. As Irina O. Rajewsky [2005, 52] eloquently puts it about intermediality, this crossing of media borders is a “communicative-semiotic concept, based on the combination of at least two medial forms of articulation”.

Here, the intermediality of the “mother” goes beyond a simple familial connection. For Armenians, “mother” often embodies the motherland itself, symbolizing (lost) childhood and a cherished homeland. Two people, two media, two types of narrative, yet a single story of mother-to-son connection, which translates this bond into a broader concept of motherland that transcends time and space. Both live far from their homeland, and the memories of their mother in the form of a picture or painting transform that umbilical cord into a wider notion of love, grievance, and the search for identity: French Armenian, American Armenian.

This “collage of media” becomes increasingly evident when we consider how book covers and jackets adopt movie imagery after a “semiotic translation”, i.e., book-to-cinema media transfer. However, the use of Gorky's deeply personal and historically resonant painting on *Mayrig* operates on a more profound level and expands our understanding of the autobiographical narrative through a visual language that is already imbued with emotional and cultural value.

Following the intersemiotic translation of the book into film, later editions of *Mayrig* further illustrate the interplay between media and their paratextual elements (Fig. 3). Namely, subsequent editions include excerpts accompanied by quotes, transforming these books into intermedial texts – a woven, interconnected, intricate collage. For instance, the French book cover from 1991b resembles the 1987 edition, while the dust jacket showcases a rounded image from the film *Mayrig* [Verneuil 1991b], featuring celebrated actors Omar Sharif and Claudia Cardinale and other actors with their belongings at the film's beginning in Marseille. This inclusion of a film still, featuring the recognizable figures of Omar Sharif and Claudia Cardinale in a key scene, exemplifies intermediality, as it involves the “combination of at least two medial forms of articulation” [Rajewsky 2005, 52] – the visual language of cinema integrated into the print medium of the book. This intermedial element likely aims to leverage the film's popularity to attract a wider readership. Similarly, the back cover of the 2021 Armenian edition features a still from the film *Mayrig*, specifically the beloved pakhlava-making scene. This deliberate incorporation of a cinematic moment into the book's paratext demonstrates intermediality. By presenting a visual fragment

from the film, the book engages with the reader's potential familiarity with the movie, creating a dialogue between the two media and potentially evoking emotional resonance associated with that specific scene. This strategy is carefully planned from a marketing perspective to attract new readers. Thus, the release of the movie or the intersemiotic translation of the book into cinema brings changes to the book market, too.

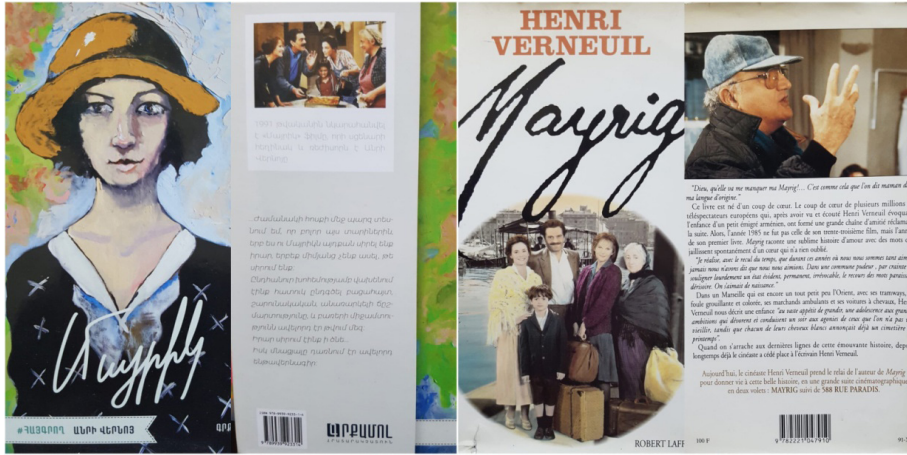


Fig. 3. French edition ([Verneuil 1991a], right) vs. Armenian edition ([Vernoy 2021], left)

The book cover, title, illustration, and description are essential elements for understanding an autobiography from the perspective of book consumption. Additionally, Vincent Jouve [2020, 13–14] suggests including the following elements in Genette's list: the table of contents, the notes, the chapter titles, the subheadings, the name of the publisher, the title of the collection, the prefaces, and the afterwords.

Finally, examining the American edition of *Mayrig* [2005] reveals yet another layer of intersemiotic translation, tailored for a specific diasporic audience. The American edition's cover (Fig. 4) employs a “family album” framing around the photograph of young Henri in his mother's arms. The “family album” framing around the photograph acts as a metonymic sign, where a part (the album format) stands in for the whole concept of personal history, memory, and familial archives. This visual cue strongly signals the autobiographical nature of the book. This nonverbal element acts as an intersemiotic translation of the autobiography's deep engagement with memory and the past, visually suggesting a cherished recollection brought forth from a personal archive. The photograph itself, depicting the foundational bond between mother and

son, mirrors the central theme of the narrative of *Mayrig*, translating this core relationship into a visual representation of tenderness and early connection – the umbilical cord. The publishing house of the English translation is St. Vartan Press, and the copyright owner is the Diocese of the Armenian Church. The translator from French into English is Elise Antreassian Bayizian. The involvement of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) strongly suggests this publication is in the interest of the collective Armenian community, at least in the USA. This can be interpreted as an attempt to raise awareness about the life stories of the Armenian Genocide survivors on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, keeping the bond stronger within the Armenian diaspora by sharing the microhistory, or personal narratives, of the Armenian Genocide survivors' difficult lives as migrants in France with American Armenians.

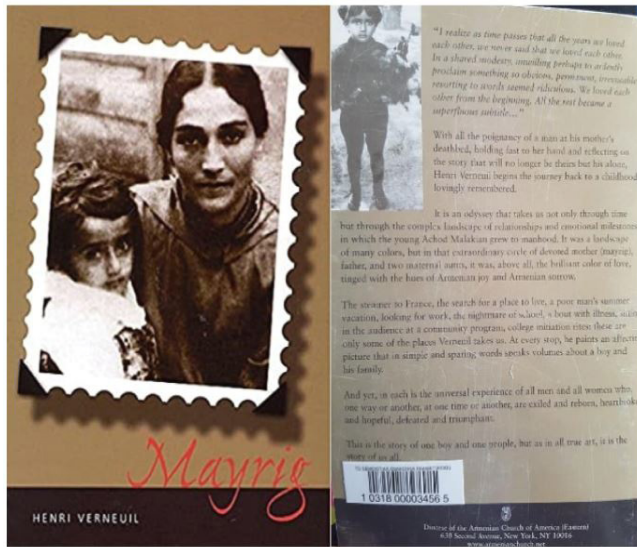


Fig. 4. American edition [Verneuil 2005], translator Elise Antreassian

Verbal descriptions on book covers often offer a brief overview of the content through one or more quotations from the book. This serves to attract the intended reader by introducing a key aspect of the work in a metonymic manner – one quotation representing the whole. For example, all the book covers in this analysis share the same poignant quotation from the book in their respective languages:

I realize as time passes that all the years we loved each other, we never said that we loved each other. In a shared modesty, unwilling perhaps to ardently proclaim something so obvious, permanent, irrevocable, resorting to words

seemed ridiculous. We loved each other from the beginning. All the rest became a superfluous subtitle ... [Verneuil 2005] (italics are original)

The retention of the Armenian title, *Mayrig*, for an English-speaking audience, coupled with this evocative image, potentially serves to maintain a connection to the author's cultural heritage while simultaneously presenting a universally relatable image of maternal love. Furthermore, the poignant quote visually resonates with the intimate and enduring connection depicted in the photograph, where the unspoken bond between mother and child is palpable. As already mentioned, this quote itself serves as a metonymy (Tymoczko's conception of translation), representing the whole text, and can be understood as an intrasemiotic translation (in Toury's terms) or an intralingual translation (in Jakobson's terms), summarising the narrative's emotional core. Moreover, as seen in the case analysis of *Mayrig*, the book cover can be a focal point of intermedial translation (in Rajewsky's terms) when a film still snippet appears on the book cover or dust jacket.

Additionally, the book cover can also incorporate an epitext, i.e., extratextual information about the author or the topic that the book is about. Hence, at the back of the English translation, the description of the book ends by stating that in each portrayal of the bond between the son and his mother, there is "the universal experience of all men and all women who, one way or another, are exiled and reborn, heartbroken and hopeful, defeated and triumphant". The description ends with the phrase that this story is the story "of one boy and one people, but as in all true art, it is the story of us all" [Verneuil 2005].

Conclusion

The analysis of book covers of French [Verneuil 1985; Verneuil 1987; Verneuil 1991a; Verneuil 1991b], Armenian [Vernoy 1989; Vernoy 2015; Vernoy 2021], and American [Verneuil 2005] editions of Henri Verneuil's autobiography, *Mayrig*, reveals that book covers are culturally dynamic sites of intersemiotic translation that evolve with cultural trends. Employing Genette's paratextual framework and semiotic translation theories, this study demonstrates how the interplay of verbal and non-verbal cues on these covers shapes the reader's initial encounter with Verneuil's autobiography.

Reflecting this cultural context, early French covers prioritize the mother-son relationship and introduce the author's background, utilizing family photography – a motif echoed in later editions across cultures. In contrast, Armenian editions evolve to incorporate collective

cultural memory and intertextual references (such as Arshile Gorky's autobiographical artwork). Furthermore, the recent French and Armenian book covers establish an intermedial connection to the film. The American cover, on the other hand, frames the personal narrative within a "family album" motif, emphasizing memory and universal emotions for the diaspora and a broader audience.

For autobiographical books, the cover often engages with the implicit claim of authenticity, where visual cues such as photography convey the personal nature of the narrative. Moreover, the photography on an autobiographical book cover is more than just a marketing strategy; it serves as an umbilical cord connecting the content with the reader and the author, acting as a metonymy that translates all paratextual elements both inside and outside the book.

REFERENCES

- Barthes 1981 – Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera lucida: Reflections on photography*. Hill and Wang.
- Cantó-Milà et al. 2025 – Cantó-Milà, N., Roig-Sanz, D., Ashrafi, N., & Meylaerts, R. (2025). Relational approaches and translation studies: An interdisciplinary dialogue. *The Translator*, 31(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2025.2457878>
- Gasparyan 2024 – Gasparyan, G. (2024). Extratextual information as an integral part of literary communication. *Terra Linguistica*, 4(58), 34–51. <https://doi.org/10.18721/JHSS.15403> (In Russian).
- Genette 1997a – Genette, G. (1997a). *Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree*. U of Nebraska Press.
- Genette 1997b – Genette, G. (1997b). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gorlée 1994 – Gorlée, D. L. (1994). *Semiotics and the problem of translation: With special reference to the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce*. Amsterdam: Brill.
- Hayward 2025 – Hayward, S. (2025). Henri Verneuil (1920–2002) – cinéaste de première classe. *French Screen Studies*, 25(1–2), 82–99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/026438941.2024.2321708>
- Hirsch 2012 – Hirsch, M. (2012). *Family frames: photography, narrative, and postmemory*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Innis 1985 – Innis, R. E. (1985). *Semiotics. An introductory anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jakobson 1959 – Jakobson, R. (1959). On linguistic aspects of translation. In R. Brower (Ed.), *On Translation* (pp. 232–239). Harvard University Press.
- Jakobson 1985 – Jakobson, R. (1985). Communication and society. In S. Rudy (Ed.), *Selected writings VII: Contributions to comparative mythology. Studies in linguistics and philology, 1972–1982* (pp. 98–100). Mouton.

- Jiang 2021 – Jiang, M. (2021). Book cover as intersemiotic translation: Between image, text, and culture. *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, 8(3), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23306343.2021.1971421>
- Jouve 2020 – Jouve, V. (2020). *Poétique du roman*. Armand Colin.
- Kourdis 2022 – Kourdis, E. (2022). Semiotics. In F. Zanettin & C. Rundle (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of translation and methodology* (pp. 139–154). Routledge.
- Kristeva 1980 – Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press.
- Lejeune 1996 – Lejeune, P. (1996). *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil.
- Liu, Zhang 2025 – Liu, B., Zhang, J. (2025). Books' physiognomic appeal and the overseas dissemination of Chinese *dianji* (classics): A focus on the *Library of Chinese Classics*. *Int. Commun. Chin. Cult*, 12, 37–59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40636-024-00316-9>
- Lotman 1990 – Lotman, Y. (1990). *Universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. Indiana University Press.
- Mossop 2017 – Mossop, B. (2017). Judging a translation by its cover. *The Translator*, 24(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2017.1287545>
- Peirce 1931–1935 – Peirce, C. S. (1931–1935). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. (C. Hartshorne & P. Weiss, Eds.). The Belknap Press.
- Rajewsky 2005 – Rajewsky, I. O. (2005). Intermediality, intertextuality, and remediation: A literary perspective on intermediality. *Intermédialités / Intermediality*, 6, 43–64. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1005505ar>
- Saussure 2011 – Saussure, F. de. (2011). *Course in general linguistics*. Columbia University Press.
- Sütiste 2024 – Sütiste, E. (2024). Semiotics of translation. In A. Lange, D. Monticelli, Ch. Rundle (Eds.). *The Routledge handbook of the history of translation studies* (pp. 181–196). Routledge.
- Sonzogni 2011 – Sonzogni, M. (2011). *Re-covered rose: A case study in book cover design as intersemiotic translation*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Tan 2024 – Tan, X. (2024). Paratextual mediation and (re)framed narratives: A case study of Ganxiao Liuji. *Social Semiotics*, 35(4), 581–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2024.2375068>
- Torop 2019 – Torop, P. (2019). Book as/in culture. In K. Kroó (Ed.), *The book phenomenon in cultural space* [A könyvvelenség a kulturális térben] (pp. 18–32). Eötvös Loránd University; University of Tartu.
- Toury 1986 – Toury, G. (1986). Translation. In T. Sebeok (Ed.), *Encyclopedic dictionary of semiotics* (pp. 1107–1124). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Tymoczko 1999 – Tymoczko, M. (1999). *Translation in a postcolonial context: Early Irish literature in English translation*. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Valdeón 2024 – Valdeón, R. A. (2024). The translation of multimodal texts: Challenges and theoretical approaches. *Perspectives*, 32(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2024.2290928>
- Venuti 2017 – Venuti, L. (2017). *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. Routledge.

- Verneuil 1985 – Verneuil, H. (1985). *Mayrig*. Robert Laffont.
Verneuil 1987 – Verneuil, H. (1987). *Mayrig*. Le Livre de Poche.
Verneuil 1991a – Verneuil, H. (1991a). *Mayrig*. Robert Laffont.
Verneuil 1991b – Verneuil, H. (1991b). *Mayrig*. AMLF.
Verneuil 2005 – Verneuil, H. (2005). *Mayrig* (E. Antreassian, Trans.). St Vartan Press.
Vernoy 1989 – Vernoy, A. (1989). *Mother* [Mayrik] (S. Avagyan, Trans.). Xorhrdayin grogh (In Armenian).
Vernoy 2015 – Vernoy, A. (2015). *Mother* [Mayrik] (S. Avagyan, Trans.). AREDIT (In Armenian).
Vernoy 2021 – Vernoy, A. (2021). *Mother* [Mayrik] (S. Avagyan, Trans.). Grqamol (In Armenian).
Weedon 2007 – Weedon, A. (2007). In real life: book covers in the Internet bookstore. In N. Moody & N. Matthews (Eds.), *Judging a book by its cover* (pp. 117–128). Routledge.

БИБЛИОГРАФИЯ

- Barthes R. Camera lucida: Reflections on photography. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
Cantó-Milà N., Roig-Sanz D., Ashrafi N., Meylaerts R. Relational approaches and translation studies: an interdisciplinary dialogue // The Translator. 2025. Vol. 31, № 1. P. 1–16. doi: 10.1080/13556509.2025.2457878
Гаспарян Г.Р. Внетекстовая информация как важный компонент художественной коммуникации // Terra Linguistica. 2024. Т. 58, № 4. С. 34–51. doi: 10.18721/JHSS.15403
Genette G. Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997a.
Genette G. Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997b.
Gorlée D. L. Semiotics and the problem of translation: with special reference to the semiotics of Charles S. Peirce. Amsterdam–Atlanta, GA: Brill, 1994.
Hayward S. Henri Verneuil (1920–2002) – cinéaste de première classe // French Screen Studies. 2025. Vol. 25, № 1–2. P. 82–99. doi: 10.1080/26438941.2024.2321708
Hirsch M. Family frames: photography, narrative, and postmemory. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.
Innis R. E. Semiotics. An introductory anthology. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
Jakobson R. On linguistic aspects of translation // On Translation / R. Brower (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959. P. 232–239.
Jakobson R. Communication and society // Selected Writings VII: Contributions to comparative mythology. Studies in linguistics and philology, 1972–1982 / S. Rudy (ed.). Berlin: Mouton, 1985. P. 98–100.

- Jiang M. Book cover as intersemiotic translation: Between image, text and culture // *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*. 2021. Vol. 8, № 3. P. 219–235. doi: 10.1080/23306343.2021.1971421
- Jouve V. *Poétique du roman*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2020.
- Kourdis E. Semiotics // *The Routledge handbook of translation and methodology* / F. Zanettin, C. Rundle (eds.). London; New York: Routledge, 2022. P. 139–154.
- Kristeva J. *Desire in language: a semiotic approach to literature and art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Lejeune P. *Le pacte autobiographique*. Seuil, 1996.
- Liu B., Zhang J. Books' physiognomic appeal and the overseas dissemination of Chinese *dianji* (classics): a focus on the *Library of Chinese Classics* // *Int. Commun. Chin. Cult.* 2025. Vol. 12. P. 37–59. doi: 10.1007/s40636-024-00316-9
- Lotman Y. *Universe of the mind: a semiotic theory of culture*. London; New York: Tauris, 1990.
- Mossop B. Judging a translation by its cover // *The Translator*. 2017. Vol. 24, № 1. P. 1–16. doi: 10.1080/13556509.2017.1287545
- Peirce Ch. S. *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* / C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss (eds.). Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1931–1935.
- Rajewsky I. O. Intermediality, intertextuality, and remediation: A literary perspective on intermediality // *Intermedialités / Intermediality*. 2005. Vol. 6. P. 43–64. doi: 10.7202/1005505ar
- Saussure F. de. *Course in general linguistics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Sütiste E. Semiotics of translation // *The Routledge handbook of the history of translation Studies* / A. Lange, D. Monticelli, Ch. Rundle (eds.). London; New York: Routledge, 2024. P. 181–196.
- Sonzogni M. *Re-covered rose: a case study in book cover design as intersemiotic translation*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.
- Tan X. Paratextual mediation and (re)framed narratives: A case study of Ganxiao Liuji // *Social Semiotics*. 2024. Vol. 35, № 4. P. 581–598. doi: 10.1080/10350330.2024.2375068
- Torop P. Book as / in culture // *The Book phenomenon in cultural space [A könyvjeleenség a kulturális térben]* / K. Kroó (ed.). Budapest; Tartu: Eötvös Loránd University, University of Tartu, 2019. P. 18–32.
- Toury G. *Translation* // *Encyclopedic dictionary of semiotics* / T. Sebeok (ed.). Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1986. P. 1107–1124.
- Tymoczko M. *Translation in a postcolonial context: Early Irish literature in English translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1999.
- Valdeón R. A. The translation of multimodal texts: Challenges and theoretical approaches // *Perspectives*. 2024. Vol. 32, № 1. P. 1–13. doi: 10.1080/0907676X.2024.2290928
- Venuti L. *The translator's invisibility: a history of translation*. London; New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Verneuil H. *Mayrig*. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1985.

- Verneuil H. Mayrig. Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1987.
- Verneuil H. Mayrig. Paris: Robert Laffont, 1991a.
- Verneuil H. Mayrig. AMLF, 1991b.
- Verneuil H. Mayrig / E. Antreassian (trl.). New York: St Vartan Press, 2005.
- Vernoy A. Mother [Mayrik] / S. Avagyan (trl.). Yerevan: Xorhrdayin grogh, 1989.
(In Armenian).
- Vernoy A. Mother [Mayrik] / S. Avagyan (trl.). Yerevan: AREDIT, 2015.
(In Armenian).
- Vernoy A. Mother [Mayrik] / S. Avagyan (trl.). Yerevan: Grqamol, 2021.
(In Armenian).
- Weedon A. In real life: book covers in the Internet bookstore // Judging a Book by its Cover / N. Moody, N. Matthews (eds.). London; New York: Routledge, 2007. P. 117–128.

Материал поступил в редакцию 11.06.2025