BENJAMINS · TRANSLATION · LIBRARY

# Transfiction

## *Research into the realities of translation fiction*

*edited by*
Klaus Kaindl
Karlheinz Spitzl

Transfiction

# *Benjamins Translation Library (BTL)*

The Benjamins Translation Library (BTL) aims to stimulate research and training in Translation & Interpreting Studies – taken very broadly to encompass the many different forms and manifestations of translational phenomena, among them cultural translation, localization, adaptation, literary translation, specialized translation, audiovisual translation, audio-description, transcreation, transediting, conference interpreting, and interpreting in community settings in the spoken and signed modalities.

For an overview of all books published in this series, please see
*http://benjamins.com/catalog/btl*

## *EST Subseries*

The European Society for Translation Studies (EST) Subseries is a publication channel within the Library to optimize EST's function as a forum for the translation and interpreting research community. It promotes new trends in research, gives more visibility to young scholars' work, publicizes new research methods, makes available documents from EST, and reissues classical works in translation studies which do not exist in English or which are now out of print.


**General Editor**

Yves Gambier
University of Turku

**Associate Editor**

Franz Pöchhacker
University of Vienna

**Honorary Editor**

Gideon Toury
Tel Aviv University

**Advisory Board**

Rosemary Arrojo
Binghamton University

Michael Cronin
Dublin City University

Dirk Delabastita
FUNDP (University of Namur)

Daniel Gile
Université Paris 3 - Sorbonne Nouvelle

Amparo Hurtado Albir
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Zuzana Jettmarová
Charles University of Prague

Alet Kruger
UNISA, South Africa

John Milton
University of São Paulo

Anthony Pym
Universitat Rovira i Virgili

Rosa Rabadán
University of León

Sherry Simon
Concordia University

Şehnaz Tahir Gürçaglar
Bogaziçi University

Maria Tymoczko
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Lawrence Venuti
Temple University

Michaela Wolf
University of Graz


**Volume 110**

Transfiction. Research into the realities of translation fiction
Edited by Klaus Kaindl and Karlheinz Spitzl

# Transfiction

## Research into the realities of translation fiction

*Edited by*

Klaus Kaindl

Karlheinz Spitzl

University of Vienna

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Amsterdam / Philadelphia

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences – Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

**CIP data is available from the Library of Congress.**

Benjamins Translation Library, ISSN 0929-7316 ; v. 110
ISBN 978 90 272 5850 2 (Hb ; alk. paper)
ISBN 978 90 272 7073 3 (Eb)

© 2014 – John Benjamins B.V.
No part of this book may be reproduced in any form, by print, photoprint, microfilm, or any other means, without written permission from the publisher.

John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands
John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

*all characters appearing in this work are fictitious.
any resemblance to real persons, living or dead,
is purely coincidental.*

# Table of contents

Going fictional! Translators and interpreters in literature and film:
An introduction 1
*Klaus Kaindl*

A Hitchhiker's Guide to … : What to expect and where to start from 27
*Karlheinz Spitzl*

**Episode I. Entering theoretical territories**

The power of fiction as theory: Some exemplary lessons
on translation from Borges's stories 37
*Rosemary Arrojo*

Language, essence, and silence: Fictional translators
in Peter Kosminsky's *The Promise* 51
*Salam Al-Mahadin*

Walter Benjamin revisited: A literary reading
in Todd Hasak-Lowy's short story "The Task of This Translator" 69
*Fotini Apostolou*

Of dragons and translators: Foreignness as a principle of life.
Yoko Tawada's "St. George and the Translator" 87
*Klaus Kaindl*

Taking care of the stars: Interpreted interaction
in Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *L'étrange Destin De Wangrin* 103
*Karlheinz Spitzl*

Reaching a dead-end – and then?
Jacques Gélat's *Le Traducteur* and *Le Traducteur amoureux* 113
*Nitsa Ben-Ari*

**Episode II. Travelling through sociocultural space**

From *La dolce vita* to *La vita agra*: The image of the Italian literary translator as an illusory, rebellious and precarious intellectual **127**
*Giovanni Nadiani*

From a faltering bystander to a spiritual leader: Re-thinking the role of translators in Russia **141**
*Natalia Olshanskaya*

Interpreting *Daniel Stein:* Or what happens when fictional translators get translated **157**
*Brian James Baer*

Fictional translators in Québec novels **177**
*Patricia Godbout*

Pseudotranslations in 18th century France **189**
*Sigrid Kupsch-Losereit*

**Episode III. Experiencing agency and action**

On the (in)fidelity of (fictional) interpreters **205**
*Ingrid Kurz*

Interpreting conflict: Memories of an interpreter **221**
*Marija Todorova*

Truth in translation: Interpreters' subjectivity in the truth and reconciliation hearings in South Africa **233**
*Alice Leal*

Witnessing, remembering, translating: Translation and translator figures in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* and Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* **247**
*Sabine Strümper-Krobb*

Translating the past, negotiating the self: Discursive resistance in Elisabeth Reichart's *Komm über den See* **261**
*Renate Resch*

The apocalyptical interpreter and the end of Europe: Alain Fleischer's *Prolongations* **271**
*Dörte Andres*

## Episode IV. Carrying function into effect

Willa Muir: The "factional" translator:
How Muir self-fictionalized her translations of Kafka's work **287**
*Michelle Woods*

Translation as a source of humor:
Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is illuminated / Alles ist erleuchtet* **299**
*Waltraud Kolb*

Neither is a translator, unless they're transauthers:
Confusion and (re-)gendering in feminist fiction/translation **315**
*Daniela Beuren*

Magical mediation: The role of translation and interpreting
in the narrative world of *Harry Potter* **329**
*Alice Casarini*

Future imperfect: Translation and translators
in science-fiction novels and films **345**
*Monika Wozniak*

Fiction as a catalyst: Some afterthoughts **363**
*Karlheinz Spitzl*

**Name index** **369**

**Subject index** **371**

# Going fictional! Translators and interpreters in literature and film

## An introduction

Klaus Kaindl
University of Vienna

### Translation on the move

Translation is movement. Translation is motion. This association is already established in the Latin word "transferre", to carry across. We can find it in descriptions of translation and interpreting as early as in ancient Rome (cf. Lieber & Winter 2011: 1910). We can also, for example, see it in Friedrich Schleiermacher's distinction between translation that leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him, or vice versa, moves the writer toward the reader (cf. 1813/2000: 49), as well as in Michael Cronin's metaphor of translation as a dual journey, "in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another" (2006: 45). And, it is also visible in José Saramago's definition of literary writing as a translation process, in which "we transfer what we see or feel into a conventional code of symbols" (1997: 85). The fact that the concept of translation can be applied to such very different phenomena – such as languages, feelings, human beings – is surely rooted in its "chameleonlike" changeability (D'hulst 2010: 54), through which it seems to elude all attempts of pinning it down (transfixion). A clear definition of what we might mean with movement in regard to translation and interpreting is just as elusive. Depending on the theoretical approach, it can, e.g., be viewed as neutral transfer, as manipulative/manipulated transformation, or as Steiner's sexualised "appropriative penetration" (Steiner 1975: 298).

This vague and open definition is one reason why translation became a travelling concept in such diverse disciplines as linguistics, literary studies, semiotics, philosophy, history, medicine, architecture etc., and finally became a buzzword of cultural studies. In the latter field, it is used as "cultural translation" (cf. Bhabha 1994: 319–337) to describe transfer and interaction situations found particularly in postcolonial contexts, but also in globalised contexts in general. Since then, the metaphor of translation has been expanded to encompass a whole plethora of transfer processes between cultural contexts, ranging from values and ideologies to cognitive styles and everyday actions.[1] In this process, the concept of translation experienced another significant shift of meaning: Instead of an instrument that stabilizes meaning, with the translation process as a linear movement between two fixed meanings, the source and target text, translation can now be regarded as "a mutable mobile which operates within a topology of fluidity" (Cronin 2006: 28). As a result, change, transformation, fragmentation, dislocation and cracks have become key coordinates for understanding the motion created by translation.

The transposition from the textual to the social sphere turned translation into a key concept for describing social processes, particularly those of today's globalisation: "'[T]ranslation' has become a kind of master metaphor epitomizing our present *condition humaine* in a globalized and centreless context, evoking the human search for a sense of self and belonging in a puzzling world full of change and difference" (Delabastita 2009: 111). This affinity between globalisation and translation goes far beyond the pragmatic view that translation and interpreting services are at the core of globalisation as such.[2] Parallels can be drawn between translation and interpreting and the opposing forces of homogenisation and diversification. According to Pieterse (2009: 86f) the latter determine the dynamics of globalisation and can create uniformity or diversity, unification or fragmentation, integration or marginalisation, acculturation or transculturation, and translation and interpreting, where similarly contradictory forces are at work.

Globalisation has led to major upheavals in the organisation and structure of societies, which Baumann (2000) subsumed under the heading of "liquid modernity" – the dissolution of social and territorial networks that previously provided people with a rather fixed frame of reference for their life decisions. Their disappearance has brought about unprecedented dynamics of change in our societies. Intensified migration as one of the major characteristics of globalisation is, therefore, directly linked to translation in a multitude of ways, as, e.g., Malena (2003: 9) states:

---

**1.** For the development and the metamorphoses of cultural translation in different disciplines, see Wolf (2008).

**2.** For a comprehensive view of the consequences of globalisation for translation, see Cronin (2003).

> Migrants are translated beings in countless ways. They move themselves from their familiar source environment and move towards a target culture […]; they most likely will have to learn or perfect their skills in another language in order to function in their new environment; their individual and collective identities will experience a series of transformations.

Fluid social structures make it impossible for individuals to have a fixed, stable position within society. A consequence of this development is Tomlinson's (2003: 273) deterritorialisation, the loss of the natural connection between a fixed social or geographical location and cultural or social life. Instead, "non-places" such as airports, shopping malls, virtual spaces and electronic communication media have increasingly become the scenes of action, or, as Rapport & Dawson describe it, "movement has become fundamental to modern identity, and an experience of non-place (beyond 'territory' and 'society') an essential component of everyday existence" (1998: 6). In the process of globalisation, the identity of the individual no longer seems tied to a set location, so that it no longer has essentialist ideas of home and culture a fixed point at its centre. Translators and interpreters as individuals who are constantly in motion or create motion due to their constant movement between languages and cultures seem to symbolise the deterritorialisation of humankind perfectly: On the one hand, their bi-, poly-, multi-, pluri-, or translingualism and -culturality create a situation that Susan Bassnett (2002: 10) describes as "in-betweenness", which can be seen as mental deterritorialisation, and on the other, workplaces such as the interpreting booth or the virtual space of videoconference interpreting are typical social and geographic non-places.

The use of translation as a means of describing a world in flux, however, goes beyond globalisation. To Moraru (2011), translation is an important means of overcoming globalisation and establishing a "cosmodern world" in which difference becomes the pivotal point of comprehension and the basis of human relationships. He considers translation prototypically cosmodern: "Since relationality is the keystone of the cosmodern and translation is a relational form, translation scenes and, with them, an entire translational way of seeing the world take up a central position in the cultural projections of cosmodernism." Moraru then analyses the "cosmodern shift in the history of translation" (2011: 158) on the example of two literary texts, Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* and Nicole Mones' *Lost in Translation* (cf. 2011: 175–202).

The fact that translation and interpreting have become a "mundane fact of life" (Robinson 1997: 27) has led to an increased emergence of translation as a theme and translators and interpreters as protagonists in literature and film: "Because of the vagueness and instability of his location between poles that are no longer stable in themselves, the translator has become an icon of the fluidity and multiplicity

of modern culture. And with that, the translator has become an ever more prominent figure in fiction." (Strümper-Krobb 2011: 25) One reason for this increased interest is certainly rooted in the fact that literature and film are never detached from society, but rather react to its developments, changes and upheavals with their own methods and devices. Another reason for this interest, however, can be seen in the shared affinity to the concept of movement, which Michel Butor calls a central theme of fiction (and, one might add, of film). This is why he – not quite seriously – suggested a separate research field within literary studies, called "itérologie" (1972: 7), which would study the different themes of geographical movement of characters. From this perspective it seems natural for authors and directors to use the expressive, symbolic, and representative potential of translation and interpreting to address themes of movement, such as migration, flight, displacement, wandering, restlessness, or uprooting in literature and film.

Initially, as Sherry Simon (1999: 58f) notes, the interest of writers in translation as a theme appeared to be limited to postcolonial literature and "various modes of 'border writing'".[3] Today, however, we can speak of a veritable boom of translation and interpreting as literary themes and of translators and interpreters as characters that is no longer limited to certain literary or cinematographic genres. We encounter fictional translators and interpreters in poetry, prose, and drama. The topic of translation and interpreting can be found in all genres – in historical novels and science fiction films, in romance and thrillers, in gay literature and westerns, in post-modern literature and experimental film, in short stories and silent movies, in novellas and TV shows, poems and musicals, etc. Going beyond the fictional, we might also include (auto)biographies and memoirs of translators and interpreters or documentaries about translation and interpreting.

On its journey through different contexts and uses, translation now has become a central motif and topic of the narrative arts, of literature and film. This development is doubtlessly rooted in the mobility of the concept, its changeability and its many layers of meaning.

Thus, this present volume focusses on transfiction, i.e. the introduction and (increased) use of translation-related phenomena in fiction. It investigates what this development means for translation studies, what theoretical and methodological issues it raises, and how we might respond to them.

3. Pagano (2000: 39) puts it similarly, speaking of "a strong predominance of writers associated with postmodern/postcolonial spaces" with regard to fictional translators.

## The translatorial eye of fiction

The use of translation as a topic and motif and of translators and interpreters as characters in literature and film goes far back. However, the phenomenon remained largely unnoticed by both literary studies and translation studies for a long time, and there have been hardly any studies on its historical dimensions and development. The *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs* (Seigneuret 1988) has no entry for translation. Only in the entry on language does the author mention a few works – such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) or some science-fiction novels such as Jack Vance's *The Languages of Pao* (1958) – in which impediments in communication occur due to the use of different languages (cf. Krueger 1988: 706f). The only explicit mention of translation is in the context of interpreters' memoirs (cf. 1988: 709f). The same goes for literary descriptions of the professions of translation and interpreting. In the 1952 bibliographical dictionary of working life and professions in German prose, which analyses novels and short stories from the past 200 years, the entry for interpreter mentions only the autobiographical novel *Halt Wacht im Dunkel* (1947) by Hiltgunt Zassenhaus, in which the author describes her wartime experiences as an interpreter (cf. Schmitt 1952: 142).[4]

For a long time, translators and interpreters as fictional beings remained largely unnoticed by translation studies as well. Geoffrey Kingscott, for example, spoke of a "comparative paucity [...] of translator and interpreter characters in fiction" (1989: 7) as recently as 1989, and Renate von Bardeleben was of the opinion that translators as characters had aroused the interest of authors only recently and that "writers appear to have suddenly discovered a new being that can be endowed with sufficient significance to express modern existence" (1997: 324). The surge in the number of literary and cinematographic works that address translation or interpreting or use translators or interpreters as characters may be a relatively recent phenomenon, but the topic itself has a long tradition in literature and film. Although there are as yet not many in-depth historical studies on this topic, the wealth of literary works in which translation or interpreting is a theme or topic shall be outlined here.

References to interpreters and interpreting can be found in German-language epic poetry as early as the 12th century. In her doctoral dissertation, Gertrud Wiech (1951) analyses how bridging the gap between different languages and the language skills of the characters were described at the time. She concludes that linguistic differences and overcoming them through interpreting has always been linked to certain social connotations and symbolism: It could, in religious terms,

4. The revised edition of the dictionary (cf. Plesske 1997: 159f), which, however, only includes literature since 1945, lists 21 novels, short stories, and autobiographies.

signify an outcast, it could be a sign of cultural or geographical distance, or of social distance to knighthood and nobility (cf. 1951: 98).

While Wiech found that in German-language literature explicit references to interpreters as characters in the 12th century were relatively rare, Martinell Gifre & Cruz Pinol & Ribas Moliné (2000) present very different findings in their study on multilingualism in literary works.[5] They dedicate a long chapter to interpreters and translators and their depiction in different genres (cf. 2000: 31–109). In addition to historical reports, particularly those written during the conquest of the Americas, their collection compasses numerous literary works such as epics, poems, and chronicles in Spanish, Catalan, Provençal, Portuguese, French, Italian, and German. While the examples are cited without context, this work can nevertheless serve as a valuable source for future detailed historical studies. Remarkably many different terms are used in various literary works from the 12th century on: In addition to being called interpreters or translators, these characters are also referred to as tongues, guides, messengers, as "latinier" or "druguemant",[6] as in the 12th century poem Cligès by Chrétien de Troyes (cf. Martinell Gifre & Cruz Pinol & Ribas Moliné (2000: 82):

> Et fet par un suen druguemant,
> Qui greu savoit et alemant,
> As dues empereors savoir
> Qu'ainsi vialt la bataille avoir.
> Li messagiers dit son message
> En l'un et en l'autre langage
> Si que bien l'entandirent tuit.

There is as much diversity in the characterisation of interpreters as in those names. There are lazy and drunk interpreters, faithful servants, traitors, and spies (cf. 2000: 87–95). Many works reference real interpreters, such as La Malinche, Hernán Cortés' interpreter, who has been the subject of historical reports since she was first described in Díaz del Castillo's eyewitness report *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1632/2011). As Valdeón (2013) notes, translation studies have largely neglected to examine the way she was portrayed from a historical and scientific point of view, which ultimately resulted in a fictionalisation of La

5. Multilingualism in works of literature has a long tradition, which has been widely examined since Forster's (1970) pioneering studies (for a good overview of research see Knauth 2007). Discussing literary multilingualism would go beyond the scope of this introduction, whose focus is on the fictional portrayal of translators and interpreters. For interconnections of multilingualism and translation in fiction cf. Delabastita & Grutman (2005a). For multilingual situations in film cf. O'Sullivan (2011).

6. This name comes from the Arabic, where interpreters are called "targûmân" (cf. Vermeer 1992: 58f).

Malinche even in scientific writing.[7] In addition to authentic historical interpreters, such as La Malinche or Jerónimo de Aguilar, a number of fictional characters emerged at the time, such as the dubious interpreter in the 16th century chronicle *Jornada de Omagua y Dorado* by Pedrarias de Almesto (cf. Martinell Gifre & Cruz Pinol & Ribas Moliné 2000: 93).

With Miguel Cervantes' *Don Quixote* (1605), which is widely considered the first modern novel, fictitious translation as literary device also becomes a fixture of literature.[8] Earlier literary works had also claimed to be translations, but there the fictitious translation usually served to establish a narrative framework by referring to a supposedly real source that served as a starting point and topos of the narrative with the objective of claiming authenticity, i.e., that the story is true (cf. Wehrli 1984: 100). In *Don Quixote*, the fictitious and nameless translator and his fictitious translation serve to highlight this problematic relationship of fiction and truth. As Hagedorn shows in his diachronic study of fictitious translation, which spans a 400-year period that begins with Miguel Cervantes' Don Quixote,[9] fictitious translation has assumed increasingly multilayered functions over the centuries, ranging from intertextual references, irony and humour to philosophical questions about literature (cf. 2006: 210). The different ways in which fictitious translation can appear developed a similar diversity: It can appear in the preface or afterword, in footnotes, but also as part of the actual narrative.

William Shakespeare also used translation as a dramatic device in his plays. While there is a considerable body of research on the translation of Shakespeare's plays, the multitude of fictionalisations of translation processes in his work have hardly been examined. One of the few exceptions is Delabastita, who provides numerous examples that show that "Shakespeare was definitely aware of the dramatic mileage there was to be got out of translation" (2004: 31). The cross-language situations in his plays have a wide range of functions, from demonstrating cultural differences to creating a comical effect.

---

**7.** To this day, La Malinche serves as a screen onto which different ideas of women's roles and mediator roles are projected, e.g. in the Mexican play *Malintzin* by Sotelo Inclán (1957), Fuentes' collection of short stories *El naranjo* (1995) or the historical novel *Malinche* by Laura Esquivel (2007).

**8.** In contrast to pseudotranslations as defined by Toury (1995), fictitious translation is not about relinquishing responsibility as an author by claiming a text to be a translation, it is about playing with the boundaries of the real and the fictional text-worlds.

**9.** In his bibliography, Hagedorn lists a large number of works from the 17th to 19th centuries. In addition to *Don Quixote*, he analyses the following works from this period in detail: Cervantes' *Persiles y Sigismunda* (1617), Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721), *The Castle of Otranto* by Walpole (1764), *Der goldne Spiegel* by Wieland (1772) and Potocki's *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (1847).

In the 20th century, translation truly became the focus of the narrative. One of the earliest key figures in this process was Jorge Luis Borges. In his stories "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (1941), "La muerte y la brújala" (1944) and "La busca de Averroes" (1949), he addresses the relationship between the original and the translation, the connection between writing and translating, and the relationship between author and translator.[10] Since then, authors with varying levels of experience with translation have chosen this topic for their narratives. This includes authors who have never translated, authors who also translate or interpret, and translators and interpreters turned authors who write about their experiences in autobiographies or novels.

The history of the cinema may be considerably shorter than that of literature, but interpreting and translation were discovered as topics by directors early on and can be found in all genres: "translation issues are not the recondite concerns of niche film makers, but lie at the heart of some of the most widely seen films on the planet". (Cronin 2009: xiii) The earliest examples are from silent films, such as the 1916 film *The Dragoman* by the British director Edward Sloman or the early screen adaptation of Arthur Conan Doyle's short story in *The Greek Interpreter* by George Ridgewell from 1922. One of the first sound films with an interpreter as the main character is the Egyptian comedy *Shalom el Torgoman* by Togo Mizrahi (1934/35). As Cronin (2009) shows in *Translation goes to the Movies*, translators and interpreters can be found in many different genres – western, comedy, drama, thriller, and science fiction. It is interesting to note that these films are frequently based on literary works. For example, Arthur Conan Doyle's story *The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter* (1892–1893) was not only the basis for the silent film mentioned above, but also for the 1985 TV film *The Greek Interpreter* by Alan Grint. Barbara Wilson's novel *Gaudí Afternoon* (1991) was adapted into a film of the same name 10 years later by Susan Seidelman; Jonathan Safran Foer's success novel *Everything is Illuminated* was made into a movie directed by Liev Schreiber only a few years later (2005), and Alan Pauls' *El pasado* (2003) was adapted for the screen by Hector Babénco in 2007, to name but a few examples.

Both in literature and in film, translation and interpreting themes are often intertwined with questions of identity. Across the centuries, the loss of old and the search for new frames of reference appears to be a central factor. Where in the 17th century, the narrative centred around the fact that people were beginning to see themselves as individuals who had to find their place in an increasingly secular world (cf. Hagedorn 2006: 19), literature and film today treat the question of identity with regard to translation and interpreting at many different levels: In times

**10.** Thiem considers Borges' works one of the main causes for the boom of fiction that deals with translation issues (cf. 1995: 210).

of massive social changes and breaks, such as migration, war, economic, religious, or political upheaval; against a backdrop of difficult ethical and moral situations caused by the differences between two parties and their conflicting expectations of the interpreter or translator; in the context of emotional and mental stress caused by the translator's or interpreter's in-betweenness between languages and cultures and the resulting feeling of being uprooted and the inability to call any place their home; and finally also with a view to spiritual and creative conflicts that centre around the question what kind of relationship the author and the translator have: Whether the translator only follows what others say or write, or whether they are themselves creative and independent. The reason why it is translators and interpreters who are used in literature to embody existential conflicts and contradictions may also be rooted in the ambivalent characteristics ascribed to them and their work in the course of history: They are invisible and ubiquitous, subordinate and powerful, faithful and dubious, oppressed and uncontrollable, and they can enable or prevent communication – in other words, they are changeable, oscillating beings that are hard to grasp because they are constantly in motion and have so many layers to them.

It is striking that translators and interpreters are most often used to exemplify the problematic or even negative aspects of such conflicts, particularly in contemporary literary and cinematic works, turning them into symptoms of a problem that affects the entire society. Klein (1996) concludes that the literary motif of translation is linked to destruction and death, while Kaindl (2008) notes that translation and interpreting in fiction are frequently connected with illness. Cutter (2005), on the other hand, finds that English-language novels and autobiographies of contemporary ethnic writers often use the trope of translation to transcode ethnicity in a positive way, and Andres (2009: 19) states that female interpreters at least are portrayed more positively in films than in many literary works. These conflicting findings show, above all, that writers and directors use both the humorous and the dramatic, and most of all the socio-political potential of the translation process and the figure of the translator or interpreter.

The strong presence of translators and interpreters in novels and films has doubtlessly contributed to a new visibility of translators and interpreters and their work, as Strümper-Krobb (2009) and Ben-Ari (2010) point out.[11] It may however

---

**11.** This becomes evident in the wealth of book and film titles that explicitly refer to translators, interpreters or their work or product. To name just a few: *The Translator* by Pat Goodheart (1979), *Lost in Translation* by Eva Hoffman (1990), *Translations* by Brian Friel (1991), El *traductor* by Salvador Benesdra (1998), *La traducción* by Pablo de Santis (1998), The *Translator* by John Crowley (2003), *Les nègres du traducteur* by Claude Bleton (2004), *Translator's Kiss* by Doug Murphy (2004), *The Translator* by Leila Aboulela (2006), *Le Traducteur* by Jacques

be doubted whether this is sufficient justification for establishing a separate genre such as, e.g., the *Künstlerroman* – as Hagedorn (2006: 17f) suggests. While the *Künstlerroman* mainly deals with the insecurity of the artist or author relating to their status, role, and function as a creator, or focuses on the author's development, the translator or interpreter is, in most instances, used as a symbol for developments that concern society as a whole. A character who is a translator or interpreter as well as translation processes can be employed to examine the big questions and opposing poles of communication, such as understanding and misunderstanding, creation and negotiation of meaning, the self and the other, and encounters between languages and cultures, allowing them to be reinterpreted as fundamental issues of our existence. The topic of translation and interpreting is placed into a fictional space with a performative act, as it were, transporting it into a new and larger context that goes beyond the concrete working and living situation of the interpreter or translator.

## The fictional eye of translation studies

### Directions of research

In the field of translation studies, the in-depth examination of the image of translators and interpreters in films and literature did not begin until the 1990s. With the exception of Wiech's (1951) early study, there were hardly any works of the kind in literary studies either, with the notable exception of the science fiction genre (e.g. Plank 1959, Krueger 1968, Meyers 1980). These studies, where the topic, theme, or motive was not just translation but language in general, focus mainly on machine translation. Many authors appear to consider it best suited for futuristic settings, likely due to the important role technology plays in this genre.[12] The studies focus

Gélat (2006), *Le Traducteur perd le Nord* by Jean Paul Fosset (2008), *Vom Schweigen meines Übersetzers* by Hans-Ulrich Möhring, *Vengeance du traducteur* by Brice Matthieussent (2009), *Le labyrinthe du traducteur* by Olivier Balazuc (2010), *Le Traducteur amoureux* by Jacques Gélat, *Girl in Translation* by Jean Kwok (2010); *Interpreters* by Ronald Harwood (1985), *The Greek Interpreter* by Max Davidson (1990), *El Intérprete* by Néstor Ponce (1998), *The Interpreter* by Suzanne Glass (2000), *The Interpreter* by Suki Kim (2003). Some examples of film titles are: *Lost in Translation* by Sofia Coppola (2003), *The Interpreter* by Sydney Pollack (2005), *La Traductrice* by Elena Hazanov (2006), *Tradurre* by Pier Paolo Giarolo (2008), *The Task of the Translator* by Lynne Sachs (2010) and *Traduire* by Nurith Aviv (2011).

**12.** A more comprehensive study of translation scenarios in science fiction novels and films was undertaken much later, in the field of translation studies, e.g. Mossop (1996) and Cronin (2009: 115–133).

particularly on the plausible portrayal of such translations, as plausibility is an important feature of this genre, as Meyers notes: “science-fiction writers have a special duty not to violate our understanding of the world; their success is to be primarily judged on whether or not their work maintains an internal plausibility” (1980: 124). The translational plausibility as measured against the state of the art of machine translation and the so-called “magic decoder” is seen as a “touchstone for the validity of the strong form of the plausibility theory” (1980: 126) – although Meyers notes that the majority of novels do not meet this plausibility criterion.

In the field of translation studies, George Steiner, Rosemary Arrojo, Elizabeth Welt Trahan, and Ingrid Kurz are among the pioneers of examining fictional translators and interpreters and their work. Their studies dealt with various issues that would become separate avenues of research in the 1990s. In *After Babel*, Steiner examines Borges’ short story *Pierre Menard* (cf. 1975: 70–73) and considers it “the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation. What studies of translation there are, [...], could, in Borges’s style, be termed a commentary on his commentary.” (1975: 70) Arrojo (1986: 11–22) goes even further, incorporating Borges’ short story into her deconstructivist analysis of the relationship between the original and the translation or the author and the translator. Both demonstrate the theoretical explicative potential large literary works can have for translation theory. In her essay on the Arabic translator in *Don Quixote*, Welt Trahan (1984) opens up another perspective for translation studies: One that is closer to literary studies, examining the narrative and, consequently, metaphorical function of translators in literature. Ingrid Kurz (1987) employs a third approach. She uses Doris Lessing’s novel *The Summer Before the Dark* as a starting point for comparing the description of interpreters in fiction with reality. Her interest is on whether the portrayal of the profession is realistic or unrealistic. In a way, she transfers the criterion of plausibility used in the study of science fiction novels to fiction in general.

These pioneering works bore fruit in the 1990s, when Vieira (1995: 50) announced a “fictional turn dos Estudos da Tradução”. The objective of this turn was to integrate reflections on translation theory found in works of fiction, e.g. those of Borges, Cortázar or Guimarães Rosa, into translation studies. Pagano (2002: 81) identifies a twofold movement in this turn: One approaches the topic from the perspective of translation theory, where fiction serves as a source for theorising about translation, while the other approaches it from a literary point of view, where translation is used as a metaphor in order to reflect on social processes, such as migration, and states of being, such as in-betweenness. Pagano, who considers herself a representative of the first group, writes that “fiction represents a genre that informs translation thinking from a comprehensive perspective, sensitive to relationships and movements difficult to capture through more orthodox

analyses that do not consider fictional texts." (2002:97) In her analysis of the translation theme in the works of Julio Cortázar, she focuses on the description of the translation process, which Cortázar related to semiotic and psychological aspects at a time when translation theory was still in its infancy. Arrojo, who also follows that direction of the fictional turn, studies the complex relationships between the original and the translation. In a series of contributions on the works of Borges (1993), Calvino (1995), Edgar Allan Poe (2003), Moacyr Scliar (2004), and Claude Bleton (2006), she uncovers the psychoanalytic, deconstructivist, philosophical, and feminist building blocks of a translation theory present in these works.

Gentzler (2008) expands this approach, developing the fictional turn further. He examines the translational dimension in works of fiction not only as a source for translation theories, he draws a connection between the theme of translation in literature and the formation of national identities in Latin America: "Translation in South America is much more than a linguistic operation; rather, it has become one of the means by which an entire continent has come to define itself." (2008:108) Building on this assumption, he analyses translational themes in works of fiction with a view to their role in the construction of cultures and demonstrate how e.g. Borges' literary view of translation can be seen as a rebellion against the colonial powers of Europe (cf. 2008:115).[13] Valdeón (2011), for example, develops this approach further, but in contrast to Gentzler, does not see the role of translation in the construction of cultures as a purely positive factor. Under the heading "fictionalizing twist", he examines how the fictionalisation of a character, such as the interpreter Doña Marina, can lead to the negative portrayal of not only interpreting, but of a whole nation.

Lavieri (2007, 2010) also expands Vieira's original theoretical profile of the fictional turn by analysing fiction not only as a source of translation theory, but also as a factor that may influence the way in which translation is practised in a society. In contrast to Wakabayashi (2011:100), who draws a clear distinction between reality and fiction, Lavieri assumes that these two domains can never be clearly separated from each other, as we do not experience reality in an immediate way and our approach is instead always indirect, via symbols, language, or texts. As a result, works of fiction can also become a possible source for the creation of translational knowledge. Lavieri describes his approach as comparative translation anthropology that broadens the horizon of translation studies considerably by combining the different viewpoints of cultural history, social logic, philosophy, aesthetics, and poetology. He postulates an "imaginaire du traduire" (2010:125) that should be considered the equal of scientific-theoretical models. For Lavieri,

13. Similar arguments can be found in Waisman (2005), who sees Borges' works also as a commentary on the relationship between Europe and Latin America.

this fictional poetry of translation and interpreting opens up a new dimension for translation research that goes beyond theory building, which is similar to Gentzler's approach. While Gentzler looks at the relationship between construction of national identities and fictional description, Lavieri mainly addresses the interplay of fictional and real translation practice. He analyses, amongst other things, Borges' stories about translation to see how they influenced the real translation practice in Argentina.

Cronin (2009), Arrojo (2010) and Kaindl (2013), finally, connect another area of translation studies, translation didactics, with the analysis of fictional depictions of translators and interpreters. Arrojo, for example, considers literary texts a good introduction to the discussion of theoretical questions with translation and interpreting students (cf. 2010: 56), and Cronin considers translators in films "a rich intertextual resource" (2009: xi) that can be used as a basis for discussions with students about issues such as fidelity vs. infidelity, (un)translatability, invisibility, foreignising vs. assimilating translation, etc. Kaindl (2013) identifies three levels of didactic potential in translation fiction: Movies and literature can help convey scientific theories, they can provide insights into everyday or subjective theories, and finally they can also illustrate concrete theories of (practical) action.

In addition to these different ways of using fiction and film as a source of theories, there are a number of researchers who study the narrative and metaphorical functions of translation and could be considered representatives of the second direction of the fictional turn. Some publications are rooted fully in the domain of literary studies – particularly comparative literary studies – such as Bardeleben (1997), who sees translators and interpreters in fiction as a metaphor for postmodern life or the diachronic thematological study by Hagedorn (2006) cited above, in which he studies works of fiction that are presented as fictitious translations by the authors and examines the different narrative functions this fiction of translation fulfils. Wilhelm's (2010) monograph is another representative of this group, analysing the aesthetic potential of the stereotype of the traitor using the literary criticism method of close reading.

In addition to the purely literary studies there is also a number of works that substantiate the analyses with approaches from translation theory. This includes several contributions from the collection *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism* edited by Delabastita & Grutman (2005a). There are also many studies that deal with the visibility of translators and interpreters (e.g. Strümper-Krobb 2009 and 2011, Ben-Ari 2010) and combine this with the analysis of the metaphorical dimension in which translators and interpreters become representatives of various social or personal situations, such as migration, uprootedness, war, exile, etc. Cronin (2009) and Apostolou (2009) analyse the visibility of interpreters in films. They not only substantiate the visibility with translation theory but also

all analyse it in terms of cinematic techniques such as camera angles. Another combination of literary and translation studies can be found in Andres' study (2008) of the constructions of identity of fictional interpreters. With a comparative approach, she combines concepts from both imagology and interpreting studies to construct an analysis model with which she examines both the self image of fictional interpreters and how they are perceived by others.

The analyses in this second area are not limited to works of fiction or films that deal with translating and interpreting in the traditional sense: Over the last years, there has been a growing interest in narratives where social processes can be linked to the concept of cultural translation as defined by Bhabha. As Wilson, who studies the "translational identity" (2011: 235) of characters in translingual narratives, states, cultural translation cannot only be used to study real transcultural communication processes, but can also be applied to fiction (cf. 2011: 237). This perspective, which is rooted in cultural studies is, e.g., used by Lüsebrink (2009) in his analysis of Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, where he sees the exile of the narrator as a translation process. Steiner (2009) assumes a postcolonial perspective when he studies migration as a cultural translation experience in the works of Sudanese and Tanzanian authors.

A third direction of the fictional turn was initiated by Kurz (1987) and focuses on contrasting real and fictional translators and interpreters or translation and interpreting situations. The articles by Jean Delisle (2003, 2012) and the volumes edited by Kurz & Kaindl (2005) and Kaindl & Kurz (2008 and 2010) do not seek to examine a mimetic realism of fiction; rather, they address the question whether these fictional characterisations could be realistic even though they have not yet occurred in reality (cf. Kaindl & Kurz 2005: 11). The reason for this approach is that the interest of a given profession in books and films portraying that profession is usually not merely literary. Instead, such fiction is nearly always compared to reality while reading, or, as Luhmann says enables the reader to "locate oneself in the world as it is portrayed" (2000: 62). Fictional depictions also provide insights into the ideas, clichés and stereotypes of translating and interpreting that exist in a given society and can therefore be used as a source for the study of folk theories concerning translation and interpreting (cf. Kaindl & Kurz 2005: 10).

Historical studies that attempt to glean information about the historical reality of translation and interpreting from literary works in previous centuries (e.g. Bachleitner 1989) are also located between the conflicting forces of fiction and reality. There, fictional translators are viewed as historical figures and the works of fiction serve as sources for a kind of social history of the profession.

## Frames of reference for research

With the growing interest in the portrayal of fictional translators and interpreters in literature and films came an increasing desire to organise the multitude of works systematically and to discover methodical research paths. In view of the different approaches, the many possible research questions, and the research objectives, which differ depending on the discipline in which the research originates, and it does not appear expedient to define a single, unifying methodological approach. Instead, it might be more appropriate to offer a number of different components that can be combined flexibly to suit the researcher's purpose.

At the **extratextual level**, the elements of author, genre, era, and culture can be the research focus alone or combined in different ways depending on the research question and objective. For example, a *group of authors* or an individual *author* could become the object of research. An example of the first case is Anderson (2005), who examines how authors who are themselves translators write about translation and interpreting. Individual authors such as Julio Cortázar, Jorge Luis Borges or Francesca Duranti repeatedly make translation the topic of their works and, in the process, develop their own specific viewpoint on the phenomenon of translation and interpreting.

Frequently, such studies also focus on a given *genre*.[14] Wilson (2009: 186), e.g., writes that the genre of "self-conscious novels", of the kind that Francesca Duranti writes, leads to a certain view of (self-)translation. Cronin (2009) also structures his study of the portrayal of translators and interpreters in movies by genres, such as western, comedy, thriller, and science-fiction. Of course, a text is not defined solely by its genre, but genres create a textual and social framework that influences expectations, the way in which the subject matter is portrayed, and the genre's function. This allows them to function as framework of reference for the readers and viewers (cf. Livingstone 1994: 253f). In other words: Whether the topic of translation or interpreting appears in an autobiography, a mystery, a sitcom or an action thriller heavily influences the way in which the action or the character is portrayed and also how it is perceived by the recipient.

As genres are constantly changing, they can always be viewed in a *cultural context* and a *historical perspective*. Baer (2005) does so in his study on fictional translators in Russian detective stories. Hron (2009) shows how closely linked a genre and its culture are by contrasting the genre of migrant literature by culture. She

14. There are countless definitions of genre that are either based only on intratextual or on both intra- and extratextual criteria. I follow Fowler's definition, who argues that genres are created through an agreement between the producer and the recipient of the text and are therefore largely the result of extratextual factors (cf. 1989: 216).

finds that countries with strong national sentiments, such as France or Germany, have a different view of immigrants than countries that were created through immigration, such as Canada or the United States. In the former, "immigrants are never expected to 'fit in', it is presumed they will always remain 'different' from the 'pure-breed' citizens." In the latter, however, "the hardships of immigrants might be considered a natural and commonplace requirement of the immigrant experience" (Hron 2009: 46). As a result, the depiction of migration as translation differs between cultures. An example of this can be seen in the German novel *Alle Tage* by Terézia Mora (2004): Despite his perfect command of German, a translator who emigrated from Yugoslavia to Germany remains foreign and different until the very end, which is perceived as a problem by those around him and leads to conflicts. In contrast, Jean Kwok's US novel *Girl in Translation* (2010) does not portray foreignness as the end result. Instead, the protagonist finds her place in society despite initial difficulties and succeeds in translating her personality into the new cultural context. Other researchers, such as Wakabayashi (2005), examine the depiction of fictional translators in a given culture across all genres.

At the **intratextual level** there are several ways to structure research systematically. Ost (2010) attempts a categorisation by *topics* and distinguishes seven thematic areas that are addressed in literary works: the unity or diversity of languages, intralingual translation, the relationship between the original and the translation, transfer of meaning in translation, betrayal or fidelity, translation ethics, and translation as a metaphor. As Ost himself concedes, this is less of a systematic categorisation than an attempt to create a path through the "dense jungle" of translation fiction (cf. 2010: 22, my translation). It would appear more coherent to classify works by the power of the translator or interpreter, as in Delabastita & Grutman (2005b: 19–23). This power is determined by two variables: "the importance of the message that is to be communicated, and the distance between the cultures which enter into communication via the translator" (Delabastita & Grutman 2005b: 19). From this starting point, Delabastita & Grutman distinguish four areas of communication: communication between gods and humans, intergalactic communication (in science fiction), international communication, and translation as subjective experience. Another method of classification would be by different modes of translation or interpreting, as there are a number of novels where literary translation, technical translation, conference interpreting, or community interpreting for asylum seekers – to name but a few – feature as topic.

Another way of systematisation is suggested by Hagedorn (2006: 13) and Kaindl (2012: 80f), who distinguish four or five different *narrative functional categories*, respectively.[15] One functional category that is frequently found in

15. In the present text we use Kaindl's (2012) classification and terminology.

fiction is the characterisation of characters. Authors and directors give their characters certain traits that define them socially, emotionally and psychologically. As Kaindl & Kurz (2005: 10) note, there are certain recurring typologies that are used to characterise translators and interpreters, such as the traitor, the builder of bridges, the nitpicker, the traducer, the wordsmith, the helper, the homeless or the uprooted wanderer. If we follow Lévi-Strauss' (1985: 9) thesis that societies frequently ascribe certain traits to certain professions, such books and films can give us information about the corresponding society's ideas, clichés, and stereotypes of translators and interpreters.

Translating and interpreting can also have a symbolic function. In these cases, translation or interpreting functions as a starting point for social, historical, philosophical, or aesthetic questions of an age or a society, such as in *Le Désert mauve* by Nicole Brossard (1987), which addresses the relationship between language and reality, or in Ingeborg Bachmann's short story *Simultan* (1974), where an interpreter is the starting point for a discussion of communication issues, or Alejandro González Iñárritu's 2006 film *Babel*, where translation and interpreting are also associated with fundamental questions of communication against the backdrop of globalisation.

The third possible function is the metaphorical one. In works such as David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993), Jean Kwok's *Girl in Translation* (2010), or the experimental film *The Task of the Translator* by Lynne Sachs (2010), translation is not seen as a text-based activity but rather as a metaphor for cultural processes. As mentioned above, in this metaphorical manifestation the concept of fictional translation also becomes relevant for cultural studies.

The fourth category consists of works with a meta-narrative function. In these the topic of translating or interpreting is at the centre of the narrative. They deal with the process and problems of translation, such as Laura Bocci's *Di seconda mano* (2004), which is about literary translation, or Hans-Ulrich Möhring's *Vom Schweigen meines* Übersetzers (2008). It is striking that such books are frequently written by practising translators or interpreters, who use them as a way to theorise about translation and interpreting with literary means.

The fifth category, finally, encompasses works with a meta-fictional function. These attempt to blur the boundaries between fiction and reality by using the device of fictitious translation, i.e. by presenting their work as the translation of another's work. Translation seems particularly suited to philosophising about narrative theory, as the translator in a dual role as reader and author symbolises the boundary between fiction and reality and proceeds to deconstruct it between the original and the translation. Examples of meta-fictional works are Jorge Luis Borges' "Pierre Menard, autor del Don Quijote" (1941), Sarah Dunant's novel *Transgressions* (1998), and Carlos Somoza's mystery novel *La caverna de las ideas*

(2000). Frequently, several of these functions are present in a narrative, so that many works lend themselves to various different research questions and analytical approaches.

In addition to the thematic communicative and the narrative functional components, D'hulst offers *narrative structural points of reference.* He uses the linguist Emile Bénveniste's differentiation between the act of uttering (énonciation) and the utterance (énoncé) as a starting point (cf. D'hulst 2010: 54f). Applied to the theme of translation and interpreting, this corresponds to a differentiation between works in which concrete acts of translation or interpreting take place (énonciation) and works that tell about translation or interpreting (énoncé). Another distinction would be whether the translation or interpretation in question is intra- or interlingual. The different aspects of narrative presentation, such as the narrator's position (do the narrator and the narrative belong to the same world or not) and narrator types (extradiegetic vs. intradiegetic), are only mentioned in passing in D'hulst's work. Narratological studies, such as those by Genette (1988) and Bal (1997), are very helpful for the analysis of narrative structural aspects both in literature and in film. So far, very few studies have employed narratological categories of character analysis, such as the classification of the portrayal of translators and interpreters as heroes, villains, or helpers, or the distinction between static and dynamic, between one-dimensional and multidimensional characters. The same goes for cinematographic categories, the analysis of the visual and the acoustic levels, which are both equally important in constituting fictional characters.

## Translation studies on the move

The profile of a discipline changes with each new theory, each new question or topic, and the outlines of its subject matter begin to shift. Translation studies is a highly dynamic and fluid discipline, as the many turns it has experienced during its existence have shown (cf. Snell-Hornby 2006). However, whether the current situation should be called a "fictional turn", as Vieira (1995) did, or if we should rather speak of "new directions" as suggested by the title of Gentzler's (2008) book is not, in my opinion, the key question. The significance of a new development should rather be measured by the impact it has on the discipline – both external and internal.

The pervasiveness with which translation and interpreting are used as a concept both to describe and explain real facts of society and as a fictional topic and motif to express central questions of life has moved them to the centre of society. It was this motion that made translation interesting for other disciplines as a theoretical concept – not least as a literary text analysis tool. In her study of the

portrayal of pain in immigrant literature, which is firmly rooted in literary studies, Hron employs Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation: "My work […] takes up Jakobson's notion of intersemiotic translation in reverse: It examines how the source language of pain may be interpreted into a verbal sign system of the target host country – in all, how immigrant writers might *translate* their pain into the written word." (2009: 40) For Hron, pain, socio-economic precariousness, and racial discrimination are languages that can be translated into words. The source texts, in this case, are the realities of the sociopolitical context and the experiences of the authors, which, in an intersemiotic translation process, are translated into words, a target text that takes the form of a novel or a short story.

While Hron analyses the topic of pain in literary texts as an intersemiotic translation, Ost (2010: 147) goes even further by proposing a "paradigm traductif". This translation paradigm is, in a way, a general matrix for interpreting literary texts. Derrida (1999) demonstrates on the example of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* how the concept of translation can be applied as a central interpretation category. He reads the play as a description of the task of the translator (cf. 1999: 31) and interprets the individual storylines as aspects of a translation theory. For example, he interprets the attempt of Portia to convince her father, the merchant Shylock, to depart from the literal (Jewish) interpretation of the contract and to accept the (Christian) interpretation as a confrontation between two translation principles, the literal on the one hand and the assimilating on the other. For Ost, such a translational reading paradigm is not only a tool for interpreting texts, it also indicates solutions to the conflict in the play (cf. 2010: 49).

The study of the way in which translation-related phenomena are addressed in fiction and film beyond the scientific and professional level of reflection also has an impact on the profile of translation and interpreting studies. The issue of realism in literature and film is secondary in this context. They can both simulate reality and, as Beaugrande & Dressler (1981: 191) say, create an alternative relationship to reality or, as Wakabayashi states, "operate purely at the level of art" (2011: 101). It is indisputable that literature and film are a part of our world; they are always embedded in aesthetic, social, political, cultural, and ideological contexts and refer to them with their own means. Therefore, literary and cinematographic works of fiction are always also statements about how translation-related phenomena were conceptualised in a given society, in a given culture, at a given time. As a result, the fictional view of translation and interpreting is an added opportunity for translation studies to delve deeper into the history of ideas and the relationships among translation, culture, and society.

When translation studies accepts fiction as a source of and authority on translation issues, it transposes the general post-modern understanding that the boundaries between fiction and reality are fluid to a very concrete level: The

boundaries between science and fiction are not impermeable or fixed. Both reference the world and both create and explain the world with their own means. If, in this volume, those boundaries are moving, it is in order to create room for new perspectives in translation studies, to open up new pathways, and to build a bridge so that it is not the differences, but the things fiction and science have in common, that move to the foreground.

## References

### Primary sources

Aboulela, L. 2006. *The Translator*. New York: Black Cat.
Almesto, P. de. 1581–1586/1986. *Jornada de Omagua y Dorado*. Madrid: Historia 16.
Aviv, N. 2011. *Traduire*. France: Les Films d'Ici.
Babénco, H. 2007. *El pasado*. Argentina: 20th Century Fox de Argentina.
Bachmann, I. 1974. *Simultan*. München: dtv.
Balazuc, O. 2010. *Le labyrinthe du traducteur*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres/Archimbaud.
Benesdra, S. 1998. *El traductor*. Lima: Ed. De la Flor.
Bleton, C. 2004. *Les nègres du traducteur*. Paris: Métailié.
Bocci, L. 2004. *Di seconda mano*. Milano: Rizzoli.
Borges, J.L. 1941/1989. "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote." In *Obras Completas 1923–1949*, 444–450. Barcelona: Emecé.
Borges, J.L. 1944/1989. "La muerte y la brújala." In *Obras Completas 1923–1949*, 499–507. Barcelona: Emecé.
Borges, J.L. 1949/1989. "La busca de Averroes." In *Obras Completas 1923–1949*, 564–569. Barcelona: Emecé.
Brossard, N. 1987. *Le Désert mauve*. Montréal: Hexagone.
Cervantes, M. de. 1605/1998. *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. Barcelona: Ed. Crítica, Instituto Cervantes.
Cervantes, M. de. 1617/1992. *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda. Historia septentrional*. Madrid: Castalia.
Coppola, S. 2003. *Lost in Translation*. USA: Focus Features.
Crowley, J. 2003. *The Translator*. New York: Harper Collins.
Davidson, M. 1990. *The Greek Interpreter*. UK: Hodder & Stoughton.
De Santis, P. 1998. *La traducción*. Barcelona: Planeta.
Doyle, A.C. 1892–1893. "The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter." *Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly.*
Dunant, S. 1998. *Transgressions*. New York: Regan Books.
Esquivel, Laura. 2007. *Malinche*. New York: Washington Square Press.
Foer, J.S. 2002. *Everything is illuminated*. London: Penguin Books.
Fosset, J.-P. 2008. *Le Traducteur perd le Nord*. Hem: le Riffle.
Friel, B. 1991. *Translations*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
Fuentes, C. 1995. *El naranjo*. Madrid: Alfaguara.

Gélat, J. 2006. *Le Traducteur*. Paris: José Corti.
Gélat, J. 2010. *Le Traducteur amoureux*. Paris: José Corti.
Giarolo, P.P. 2008. *Tradurre*. Italy: Officina Outroad.
Glass, S. 2000. *The Interpreter*. London: Arrow Books.
González Iñárritu, A. 2006. *Babel*. France/USA/Mexico: Paramount Pictures.
Goodheart, P. 1979. *The Translator*. New York: Holt and Company.
Grint, A. 1985. *The Greek Interpreter*. *Sherlock Holmes Season 2, Episode 2*. UK: Television Episode.
Hoffman, E. 1990. *Lost in Translation*. New York: Penguin.
Harwood, R. 1985. *Interpreters*. Oxford: Amber Lane Press.
Hazanov, E. 2006. *La traductrice*. Switzerland/Russia: Ventura Film.
Kim, S. 2003. *The Interpreter*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Kwok, J. 2010. *Girl in Translation*. New York: Penguin.
Lessing, D. 1973. *The Summer before the Dark*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
Malouf, D. 1993. *Remembering Babylon*. London: Chatto 6 Windus.
Matthieussent, B. 2009. *Vengeance du traducteur*. Paris: P.O.L.
Mizrahi, T. 1934/1935. *Shalom el Torgoman*. Egypt: Abdou Meharram.
Möhring, H.-U. 2008. *Vom Schweigen meines Übersetzers*. München: Fahrenheit.
Mones, N. 1998. *Lost in Translation*. New York: Delta.
Montesquieu, C.L. 1721/1984. *Lettres persanes*. Paris: Librairie Générale Française.
Mora, T. 2004. *Alle Tage*. München: Luchterhand.
Murphy, D. 2004. *Translator's Kiss*. Lincoln: iUniverse Inc.
Pauls, A. 2003. *El pasado*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
Pollack, S. 2005. *The Interpreter*. UK/USA: Universal Pictures.
Ponce, N. 1998. *El intérprete*. Buenos Aires: Beatriz Viterbo.
Potocki, J. 1847/1989. *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*. Paris: José Corti.
Ridgewell, G. 1922. *The Greek Interpreter*. UK: Stoll Picture Productions.
Sachs, L. 2010. *The Task of the Translator*. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-zbPYP0P14 (last accessed 18 December 2012).
Schreiber, L. 2005. *Everything Is Illuminated*. USA: Warner Independent Pictures.
Seidelman, S. 2001. *Gaudí Afternoon*. Spain: Antena 3 Televisión.
Sloman, E. 1916. *The Dragoman*. USA: Lubin Manufacturing Company.
Somoza, C. 2000. *La caverna de las ideas*. Madrid: Alfaguara.
Sotelo Inclán, J. 1957. *Malintzin (Medea americana)*. México City: Tiras de Colores.
Swift, J. 1726/1992. *Gulliver's Travels (Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships)*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions.
Vance, J. 1958. *The Languages of Pao*. New York: Avalon.
Walpole. H. 1764/1982. *The Castle of Otranto*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Wieland, C.M. 1772/1987. *Der goldne Spiegel oder die Könige von Scheschian. Eine wahre Geschichte aus dem Scheschianischen übersetzt*. Hildesheim: Weidmann.
Wilson, B. 1991. *Gaudí Afternoon*. London: Virago Press.
Zassenhaus, H. 1947. *Halt. Wacht im Dunkel*. Wedel: Alster-Verlag.

## Secondary sources

Anderson, J. 2005. “The double agent: aspects of literary translator affect as revealed in fictional work by translators.” In *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, D. Delabastita & R. Grutman (eds.), *Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*: 171–182.

Andres, D. 2008. *Dolmetscher als literarische Figuren: von Identitätsverlust, Dilettantismus und Verrat*. München: Weidenbauer.

Andres, D. 2009. “Dolmetscher in fiktionalen Werken – von Verirrung, Verwirrung und Verführung.” *Germanistisches Jahrbuch Russland – Das Wort*: 11–24.

Apostolou, F. 2009. “Mediation, manipulation, empowerment: Celebrating the complexity of the interpreter’s role.” *Interpreting* 11 (1): 1–19.

Arrojo, R. 1986. *Oficina de Tradução – A Teoría na Práctica*. São Paulo: Àtica.

Arrojo, R. 1993. *Tradução, Desconstrução e Psicanálise.* Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora Ltda.

Arrojo, R. 1995. “Translation and Postmodernism in Calvino’s ‘Se una notte d’inverno un viaggiatore’.” In *La traduzione: Saggi e documenti II*, E. Arcaini (ed.), 41–56. Roma: Istituo Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato.

Arrojo, R. 2003. “The Power of Originals and the Scandal of Translation – A Reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Oval Portrait’.” In *Apropos of Ideology: Translation Studies on Ideology – Ideologies in Translation Studies*, M. Calzada Pérez (ed.) 165–180. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Arrojo. R. 2004. “Tradução, (in)fidelidade e gênero num conto de Moacyr Scliar.” *Revista Brasileira de Lingüística Aplicada* 4 (1): 27–36.

Arrojo, R. 2006. “Translation and Impropriety: A Reading of Claude Bleton’s ‘Les nègres du traducteur’.” *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 1 (2): 91–109.

Arrojo, R. 2010. “Fictional Texts as Pedagogical Tools.” In *Literature in Translation. Teaching Issues and Reading Practices*, C. Maier & F. Massardier-Kenney (eds.), 53–68. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press.

Bachleitner, N. 1989. “‘Übersetzungsfabriken’. Das deutsche Übersetzungswesen in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts.” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 14 (1): 1–49.

Baer, B. J. 2005. “Translating the transition: the translator-detective in Post-Soviet fiction.” In *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, D. Delabastita & R. Grutman (eds.), *Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*: 243–254.

Bal, M. 1997. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Bardeleben, R. von. 1997. “The translator as mediator and metaphor. Joyce Carol Oates’ ‘Détente’, Eva Hoffman’s Lost in Translation and Ward Just’s The Translator.” In *Transfer. Übersetzen – Dolmetschen – Interkulturalität. 50 Jahre Fachbereich Angewandte Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz in Germersheim*, H. W. Drescher (ed.), 325–345. Frankfurt: Lang.

Bassnett, S. 2002. *Translation Studies, third edition*. London/New York: Routledge.

Baumann, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beaugrande, R. de & Dressler, U. W. 1981. *Einführung in die Textlinguistik*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.

Ben-Ari, N. 2010. “Representations of translators in popular culture.” *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5 (2): 220–242.

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge.

Butor, M. 1972. “Le voyage et l’écriture.” *Romantisme* 2 (4): 4–19.

Cronin, M. 2003. *Translation and Globalization*. London/New York: Routledge.
Cronin, M. 2006. *Translation and Identity*. London/New York: Routledge.
Cronin, M. 2009. *Translation goes to the Movies*. London/New York: Routledge.
Cutter, M.J. 2005. *Lost and Found in Translation: Contemporary Ethnic American Writing and the Politics of Language Diversity*. Chapel Hill N.C.: University of North Carolina Press.
Delabastita, D. 2004. "'If I know the letters and the language': translation as a dramatic device in Shakespeare's plays." In *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, T. Hoenselaars (ed.), 31–52. London: Arden.
Delabastita, D. 2009. "Fictional representations." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, M. Baker & G. Saldanha (eds.), 109–112. London: Routledge.
Delabastita, D. & Grutman, R. (eds.). 2005a. *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism. Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*.
Delabastita, D. & Grutmann, R. 2005b. "Introduction. Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation." In *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, D. Delabastita & R. Grutman (eds.), *Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*: 11–34.
Delisle, J. 2003. "Les traducteurs de papier: un portrait réaliste?" *Circuit* 81: 18–19.
Delisle, J. 2012. "Les traducteurs de papier – Traducteurs et interprètes dans la literature québecoise." *Traduire* 226: 7–20.
Derrida, J. 1999. "Qu'est-ce que une traduction 'relevante'?" In *Quinzièmes Assises de la Traduction littéraire* (Arles 1998), 21–48. Arles: Gallimard.
D'hulst, L. 2010. "La traduction mise en scène dans la prose francophone et hispanophone moderne: de la narrativisation à la métalepse." In *translatio in fabula. enjeux d'une rencontre entre fictions et traductions*, S. Klimis & I. Ost & S. Vanasten (eds.), 51–62. Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis.
Diaz del Castillo, B. 1632/2011. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*. Edición, estudio y notas de Guillermo Serés. Madrid: Real Academia Espãnola.
Forster, L. 1970. *The Poet's Tongue. Multilingualism in Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Fowler, A. 1989. "Genre." In *International Encyclopedia of Communications Vol 2*, E. Barnouw (ed.), 215–217. New York: Oxford University Press.
Genette, G. 1988. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. New York: Cornell University Press.
Gentzler, E. 2008. *Translation and Identity in the Americas. New Directions in Translation Theory*. London/New York: Routledge.
Hagedorn, H.C. 2006. *La traducción narrada: el recurso narrativo de la traducción ficticia*. Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universitad de Castilla-La Mancha.
Hron, M. 2009. *Translating Pain. Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Kaindl, K. 2008. "Zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit: TranslatorInnen im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft, Literatur und Realität." In *Translationskultur – ein innovatives und produktives Konzept*, L. Schippel (ed.), 307–333. Berlin: Frank & Timme.
Kaindl, K. 2012. "Representation of translators and interpreters." In *Handbook of Translation Studies Vol. 3*, Y. Gambier & L. van Doorslaer (eds.), 79–84. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Kaindl, K. 2013. "Das Potential des 'Fictional Turn' für die Translationsdidaktik." In *Aus Tradition in die Zukunft. Perspektiven der Translationswissenschaft. Festschrift für Christiane Nord*, F. Mayer & B. Nord (eds.), 143–155. Berlin: Frank & Timme.

Kaindl, K. & Kurz, I. 2005. "Einleitung." In *Wortklauber, Sinnverdreher, Brückenbauer? DolmetscherInnen und ÜbersetzerInnen als literarische Geschöpfe*, I. Kurz & K. Kaindl (eds.), 9–18. Wien: LIT Verlag.

Kaindl, K. & Kurz, I. (eds.). 2008. *Helden, Verräter, Gaukler? Das Rollenbild von TranslatorInnen im Spiegel der Literatur*. Münster etc.: LIT Verlag.

Kaindl, K. & Kurz, I. (eds.). 2010. *Machtlos, selbstlos, meinungslos? Interdisziplinäre Analysen von ÜbersetzerInnen und DolmetscherInnen in belletristischen Werken*. Münster etc: LIT Verlag.

Kingscott, G. 1989. "The literature of translation." *Traduire* 140: 5–17.

Klein, Judith. 1996. "Sinnzerstörung und Tod. Übersetzen als Thema und Metapher der modernen Literatur." In *Literarische Polyphonie. Übersetzung und Mehrsprachigkeit in der Literatur*, J. Strutz & P. V. Zima (eds.), 113–121. Tübingen: Narr.

Knauth, K. A. 2007. "Literary Multilingualism I: General Outlines and Western World." In *Comparative Literature: Sharing Knowledges for Preserving Cultural Diversity*, M. Seligmann-Silva et al. (eds.). Available at: http://www.eolss.net/ebooks/Sample%20 Chapters/C04/E6-87-07-05.pdf (last accessed 10 August 2013).

Krueger, J. R. 1968. "Language and techniques of communication as theme or tool in science-fiction". *Linguistics. An International Review* 39: 68–86.

Krueger, J. R. 1988. "Language". In *Dictionary of literary themes and motives*, J.-C. Seigneuret (ed.), 701–711. New York/Westport/London: ED. Greenwood Press.

Kurz, I. 1987. "Conference interpreting – myth and reality." In *Proceedings of the 28th Annual Conference of the American Translators Association, Albuquerque, New Mexico, October 8–11*, 1987, K. Kummer (ed.), 315–320. Medford, NJ: Learned Information.

Kurz, I. & Kaindl, K. (eds.). 2005. *Wortklauber, Sinnverdreher, Brückenbauer? DolmetscherInnen und ÜbersetzerInnen als literarische Geschöpfe*. Wien: LIT Verlag.

Lavieri, A. 2007. *Translatio in fabula. La letteratura come practica teorica del tradurre*. Rome: Editori Riuniti.

Lavieri, A. 2010. "'Homo translator'. Notes pour une anthropologie comparative de la traduction." In *translatio in fabula. enjeux d'une rencontre entre fictions et traductions*, S. Klimis & I. Ost & S. Vanasten (eds.), 117–127. Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1985. *La potière jalouse*. Paris: Plon.

Lieber, M. & Winter, D. 2011. "Übersetzung, italienische Sprache und italienische Sprachgeschichte." In *Übersetzung. Ein internationales Handbuch zur Übersetzungsforschung*. Teilband 3, H. Kittel et al. (eds.), 1907–1919. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Livingstone, S. M. 1994. "The rise and fall of audience research: an old story with a new ending." In *Defining Media Studies: Reflections on the Future of the Field*, M. R. Levy & M. Gurevitch (eds.), 247–254. New York: Oxford University Press.

Luhmann, N. 2000. *The Reality of the Mass Media.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Lüsebrink, H.-J. 2009. "'Lost in Translation': Übersetzung und Exilerfahrung bei Eva Hoffman (Polen/Kanada/USA) und Jacques Poulin (Québec, Kanada)." In *Kultur übersetzen. Zur Wissenschaft des Übersetzens im deutsch-französischen Dialog*, A. Gil & M. Schmeling (eds.), 97–106. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Malena, A. 2003. "Presentation." *Special Issue on Translation and (Im)migration TTR* 16 (2): 9–13.

Martinell Gifre, E. & Cruz Pinol, M. & Ribas Moliné, R. 2000. *Corpus de testimonios de convivencia lingüística (ss.XII–XVIII)*. Kassel: Ed. Reichenberger.

Meyers, W. E. 1980. *Aliens and Linguistics. Language Study and Science Fiction*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Moraru, C. 2011. *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
Mossop, B. 1996. "The Image of Translation in Science Fiction and Astronomy." *The Translator* 2 (1): 1–26.
O'Sullivan, C. 2011. *Translating Popular Film*. Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
Ost, F. 2010. "La traduction dans la fiction. Du pareil à l'autre." In *translatio in fabula. enjeux d'une rencontre entre fictions et traductions*, S. Klimis & I. Ost & S. Vanasten (eds.), 21–50. Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis.
Pagano, A. S. 2000. "Sources for Translation Theory: Fiction in Latin America." *ATA Chronicle* 29 (4): 38–44.
Pagano, A. S. 2002. "Translation as Testimony: On Official Histories and Subversive Pedagogies in Cortázar." In *Translation and Power*, M. Tymoczko & E. Gentzler (eds.), 80–98. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
Pieterse, J. N. 2009. *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
Plank, R. 1959. "Communications in Science Fiction." In *Our Language and our world*, S. I. Hayakawa (ed.), 272–278. New York: Harperer.
Plesske, H.-M. 1997. *Beruf und Arbeit in deutschsprachiger Prosa seit 1945. Ein bibliographisches Lexikon*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann.
Rapport, N. & Dawson, A. 1998. "The Topic and the Book". In *Migrants of Identity. Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*, N. Rapport & A. Dawson (eds.), 3–17. Oxford/New York: Berg.
Robinson. D. 1997. *Translation and Empire. Postcolonial Theories Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
Saramago, J. 1997. "To write is to translate." In *The Translator's Dialogue. Giovanni Pontiero*, P. Orero, Pilar & J. C. Sager (eds.), 85–86. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
Schleiermacher, F. 1813/2000. "On the Different Methods of Translating." In *The Translation Studies Reader*, L. Venuti (ed.), 43–63. London: Routledge.
Schmitt, F. A. 1952. *Beruf und Arbeit in deutscher Erzählung. Ein literarisches Lexikon*. Stuttgart: Hiersemann.
Seigneuret, J.-C. (ed.). 1988. *Dictionary of literary themes and motives*. New York/Westport/London: ED. Greenwood Press.
Simon, S. 1999. "Translating and interlingual creation in the contact zone. Border writing in Quebec." In *Postcolonial Translation. Theory and Practice*, S. Bassnett & H. Trivedi (eds.), 58–74. London/New York: Routledge.
Snell-Hornby, M. 2006. *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Steiner, G. 1975. *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford: OUP.
Steiner, T. 2009. *Translated people, translated texts*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
Strümper-Krobb, S. 2009. *Zwischen den Welten. Die Sichtbarkeit des Übersetzers in der Literatur*. Berlin: Weidler.
Strümper-Krobb, S. 2011. "Spaces of Translation." In *Crossing Borders. Space Beyond Disciplines*, K. James-Chakraborty & S. Strümper-Krobb (eds.), 17–31. Bern etc.: Peter Lang.
Thiem, J. 1995. "The Translator as Hero in Postmodern Fiction." *Translation and Literature* 4 (2): 207–218.
Tomlinson, J. 2003. "Globalization and Cultural Identity." In *The Global Transformations Reader. An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, D. Held & A. McGrew (eds.), 269–277. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Toury, G. 1995. *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Valdeón, R. A. 2011. "On fictional turns, fictionalizing twists and the invention of the Americas." *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 6 (2): 207–224.

Valdeón, R. A. 2013. "Doña Marina/La Malinche: A historiographical approach to the interpreter/traitor." *Target* 25 (2): 157–179.

Vermeer, H. J. 1992. *Skizzen zu einer Geschichte der Translation, Bd. 1: Anfänge – von Mesopotamien bis Griechenland; Rom und das frühe Christentum bis Hieronymus*. Heidelberg: IKO.

Vieira, E. R. P. 1995. "(In)visibilidades na tradução: Troca de olhares teóricos e ficcionais." *Com Textos* 6: 50–68.

Waisman, S. 2005. *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence of the Periphery*. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press.

Wakabayashi, J. 2005. "Representations of translators and translation in Japanese fiction." In *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, D. Delabastita & R. Grutman (eds.), *Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*: 155–169.

Wakabayashi, J. 2011. "Fictional representations of author-translator relationships." *Translation Studies* 4 (1): 87–102.

Wehrli, M. 1984. *Literatur im deutschen Mittelalter. Eine poetologische Einführung*. Stuttgart: Reclam.

Welt Trahan, E. 1984. "The Arabic Translator in Don Quixote: His Master's Voice and Victim." In *Translation Perspectives: Selected Papers, 1982–1983*, M. Gaddis Rose (ed.) 71–85. Binghampton, NY: SUNY.

Wiech, G. 1951. *Dolmetscherei in der weltlichen Epik des 12. Jahrhunderts*. Tübingen: Dissertation.

Wilhelm, C. 2010. *Traduttore traditore – Vermittler durch Verrat. Eine Analyse literarischer Translatorfiguren in Texten von Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino und Leonardo Sciascia*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier.

Wilson, R. 2009. "The Writer's Double: Translation, Writing, and Autobiography." *Romance Studies* 27 (3): 186–198.

Wilson, R. 2011. "Cultural mediation through translingual narrative." *Target* 23 (2): 235–250.

Wolf, M. 2008. "Translation – Transkulturation. Vermessung von Perspektiven transkultureller politischer Aktion." Available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/wolf/de (last accessed 18 December 2012).

# A Hitchhiker's Guide to …

## What to expect and where to start from

Karlheinz Spitzl
University of Vienna

Notre vie est un voyage.

### Getting on track

This volume is based on the *1st International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film,* which was held at the University of Vienna's Centre for Translation Studies, September 14–17th, 2011. It all started with rain … and, while we think back, some good memories come to mind: The chic soirée up in the hills at *Monaldi & Sorti's* (whose bestselling literary works only appear in translation; cf. 2008, 2009, 2011); Michèle Cooke's and Martin Stegu's flamboyant performance – reading translation fiction in lecture room #9; or, listening to those 19th-district church bells whose peal and chime, from one particular day onwards, neighbouring Beethoven was unable to hear …

The aim of this conference was to link literary and cinematic works of translation fiction to state-of-the-art translation theory and practice. As there are multiple ways of knowing, why not take fiction as one of them? Investigating translatorial action in the mirror of fiction (seen as another reality which we create) can stimulate the work of translation and interpreting practitioners, scholars, teachers and students by approaching related phenomena from beyond the cognitive barrier of 'fact', and, thus, challenge established concepts and paradigms. The following 22 chapters want to achieve exactly this.

### Pocket map

The volume in your hands offers no string of beads. It is rather a swirling collection of a multitude of approaches, perspectives and insights, which can – when put in motion *(lécture)* – turn into a vivid kaleidoscope. The arranged order of chapters

suits – *avant tout* – one purpose: To introduce you, in a concise and comprehensive manner, to the overall text; with its outline also providing direction and orientation. Moreover, it is our invitation to travel along with us through its four sequential episodes. You may join or leave wherever you wish, move in slow motion or scamper about, take shortcuts, break your own trail, or, start right at the end.

Episode 1 sets out with a selection of theories, concepts and methods: Entering theoretical territories. Episode 2 turns to sociocultural space: Contextualizing and situating works of translation fiction. Episode 3 zooms in on transfictional agency and action. And, finally, Episode 4 exemplifies how specific intended functions, such as authenticity, gender or humour are transfictionally expressed and carried into effect. Nevertheless, the aspects of agency, action and expression are there right from the beginning, and you will find various theoretical, conceptual and methodological approaches right through to the end – with the coordinates of chronos and topos as your constant companions.

We set off with **Rosemary Arrojo** and the power of fiction as theory. Arrojo illustrates that Jorge Luis Borges had already anticipated in his literary work most of the groundbreaking notions we usually associate with post-modern translation studies today. She shares with us Nietzsche's understanding of translation when referring to Borges's expressed irritation that a three-fourteen-afternoon dog, seen in profile, should be the same as a three-fifteen one, seen frontally. At the end she points to the importance of the translatorial will to power and the *audacity* to exercise it. In her article – based on Peter Kosminsky's TV series *The Promise* – **Salam Al-Mahadin** leads directly to the field where interpreters or translators have to take a responsible stand. Her conceptualization of translation goes immediately beyond the boundaries of language. She shows the power (and factual impossibility) of silence in a world preoccupied with words and at a loss for translation. Cautiously, Al-Mahadin interweaves phenomenological and psychoanalytical thoughts into a symbolic pattern which enables us to examine the creation of meaning in translated interaction. **Fotini Apostolou** reads Todd Hasak-Lowy's short story "The Task of This Translator" against the background of Walter Benjamin's famous 1923 essay. She examines translators as agents of survival who have to destroy in order to preserve. Apostolou links translation to history and explores its function as a form of resistance to uprootedness and facelessness in our globalized world. In his reflection of Yoko Tawada's "St. George and the Translator", **Klaus Kaindl** picks up where Benjamin took off but takes another path. In the company of Tawada he introduces the dragon as a new translatorial metaphor: Powerful but vulnerable, strong but endangered, hidden but redoubtable. He overthrows the established order by turning the saint into a murderer, with domestication as the only apparent route to escape. In this existential struggle Kaindl opens the discussion to the dimensions of body, sensation and pain.

**Karlheinz Spitzl** introduces us to *Wangrin* (by Amadou Hampâté Bâ), a hopelessly flamboyant interpreter hero. The context: Imperialistic conquest and violence (late 19th/early 20th century). *Wangrin* is well aware that meaning has no fixed entity and interpretive refraction shapes reality. Whose agenda anyway? He goes beyond dyadic concepts by freeing himself, first of all, from the distinction between truth and lie. By doing this, *Wangrin* seems to be quite in accordance with some of our current post-modern ways of thinking. Getting us back on track, i.e. on solid soil, **Nitsa Ben-Ari** presents a fourfold classification system of transfictional novels after which she analyzes Jacques Gélat's *Le Traducteur* and *Le Traducteur amoureux*. In the first novel, the translator's secret wish to become a writer ends in disillusion when he realizes that 'original' writing does not exist. In the sequel, our protagonist takes a step back and enters into a love affair with translation: Making meaning as a continual process of co-cognition. But, again, Gélat offers no escape with regard to originality: Translation as the same old story told over and again in tedious repetition. Has the fictional turn left us at a dead-end?

In this thoughtful mood, we pick up speed again and enter Episode 2: Travelling through sociocultural contexts. **Giovanni Nadiani** takes us to (the image of) the Italian literary translator as an illusory, rebellious and precarious intellectual: *La vita agra*. Nadiani tells us of the particular aura that formerly surrounded the figure of the literary translator as a word and world expert who could deal with anybody and anything. But since the 1960s, especially through the influence of the meta-translational works of Luciano Bianciardi, écrivain *and traducteur maudit,* this aura has turned into an anarchic and bohemian hue. This translational role paradigm still seems to pervade Italy's sociocultural reality today as a recent novel of Flavio Santi shows: *Aspetta primavera, Lucky* depicts the everyday life of a typical precarious sub-proletarian word stuntman who tries to escape the cultural industry's *diktat* of the pervading post-neoliberal and globalized era.

**Natalia Olshanskaya** and **Brian James Baer** add to the construction of a sociology of translation by closely examining transfictional role models, their purported function and its legitimation. Olshanskaya explores Georgiy Danelia's film *Autumn Marathon* and Ludmila Ulitskaya's best-selling novels *Sincerely yours, Shurik* and *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*. Both Danelia and Ulitskaya locate the typical translator's in-betweenness within the interplay between political authorities and society. Olshanskaya draws quite a heroic picture of Daniel Stein: The translator as somewhat of a hybrid saint; quite symbolic for the post-modern condition? Baer challenges this view, disrupts Stein's homage and sets a counterpoint to our Russian interlude. In a close reading, he unhinges Ulitskaya's highly acclaimed novel and demonstrates the functional shift which took place after the novel had been translated and recontextualized in an English-speaking environment. Baer sees Daniel Stein's fictional life-world not as liquid utopian space but rather rooted

in the limited sociopolitical context of current Russia. He argues that categorizing Daniel Stein – with his outspoken sentiment against queer love – as post-modern would be an outright misreading of the novel's ideological content.

Through a selection of québécois transfictional œuvres (from Harry Bernard to Nicole Brossard, and Pierre Baillargeon to Gail Scott, just to mention a few) **Patricia Godbout** reminds us that – even set in an everyday plurilingual environment – the ubiquitous profession of translation cannot be detached from the socioeconomic field in which it takes place. She characterizes a highly asymmetric (and hierarchical) context in which there is not much room for allophone voices between English and French speakers, with the latter ones in a seemingly permanent struggle for empowerment. Godbout exemplifies that in such a symbolic *espace de lutte* the capability to translate does not necessarily mean an asset. In the past, it has often been linked to the fear of losing one's identity on the part of the Québécois/es. Although we remain in a French mood, we will now turn back the hands of time and find ourselves with **Sigrid Kupsch-Losereit** in 18th-century France. Kupsch-Losereit researches the denomination of translation *(traduit de/par)* as a protective shield within the public discourse: Don't kill the messenger! She investigates the function and characteristics (with Barthes's "Reality Effect" revisited) of pseudotranslations by quoting from a wide variety of sources, such as Argens, Voltaire, Montesquieu, La Beaumelle, Grafigny or Crébillon: Quasi the translators' longing for authorship in reverse. Kupsch-Losereit provides us with a list of typical pseudotranslatorial indicators and discusses the phenomenon of translation-without-original in a matrix of censorship, responsibility and innovation.

Episode 3 draws us into highly dynamic settings with strong asymmetries of power; where choices have to be made (interpretive refraction), consequences lived with, and innocence is lost. It is here that issues of ethics and responsibility arise. In such interactional contexts, where unequivocality and impartiality rarely exist, translators and interpreters have to make meaning. In an anthology of transfictional examples taken from literature and film, **Ingrid Kurz** measures interpreting agency against the yardstick of fidelity. She shows that in the trans*frictional* heat of action interpreters do a lot more than render meaning: They negotiate, coordinate, assist, advocate, catalyze, moderate, modulate, mediate, broker, manipulate …, i.e., they intervene. Her examples show how transfictional interpreters deal with unstable points of departure and navigate zones of uncertainty. The more fragile the setting, the more room for manoeuvre and manipulation we seem to have.

**Marija Todorova** moves us to a warzone by introducing us to Tanja Janković's autofictional memoire *The Girl from Bondsteel*. The book's protagonist, Dijana, who is hired by the deployed military forces as an interpreter, finds herself in a liminal and (in multiple ways) contradictory position in which she feels herself exposed to full precariousness. Todorova observes that making meaning cannot

be delinked from the interpreter's own biography, her socio-cultural background and individual value system. **Alice Leal** leads us from violence to trauma. Her examination is based on Michael Lessac's and Hugh Masekela's dramatization of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Hearings. In *Truth in Translation* the interpreters are confronted with feelings and situations of extreme discomfort and disruption. While bearing witness to the telling of horrible events they are caught in the conflict between victim (survivor!) and perpetrator where it seems morally impossible not to take sides.

**Sabine Strümper-Krobb** further introduces us to translating the secret code of pain, loss and trauma; in her particular case: Remembered trauma and the art of witnessing the Holocaust. Through the works of Jonathan Safran Foer *(Everything is Illuminated)* and Anne Michaels *(Fugitive Pieces)* Strümper-Krobb describes translation as a key to memory and a remedy to the violence of voicelessness. **Renate Resch** explores Elisabeth Reichart's novel, *Komm* über *den See*, in quite a similar vein but with a shift in focus. The main protagonist, Ruth Berger, is a former interpreter who had to give up her job due to mouth ulcers and sickness. By means of discourse analysis Resch investigates how the various discursive layers of the general and personal past translate into Ruth Berger's individual identity. She looks at the intricate interplay of discourse, power structures and identity building which Reichart elaborates in her novel. Far from *Ruth Berger's* solitude, **Dörte Andres** leads us into the globalized void of the international conference scene, where individual interpreting agency ceases to exist. With Alain Fleischer's *Prolongations* we seem to have reached yet another dead-end. Fleischer portrays an international conference context in which the top leaders appear as empty toy soldiers and the interpreters as replaceable drivers of a conveyor of emptiness in an endless loop (*trance* fiction). There is no audience and the interpreters finally opt for animal sounds, thus renouncing language itself. Even Fleischer's main character, Tibor Schwarz, conference interpreter by profession, ends up between life and death after being stabbed but kept alive through eternal non-consummated sexual intercourse. As the idea of hell needs human minds, international conferences seem to need interpreters.

Episode 4 leads us down several 'functional' paths and explores how certain specific – i.e. authentic, humorous, gendered and futuristic – effects were transfictionally carried across. **Michelle Woods** presents to us the (so far unpublished) self-fictionalization (or -factionalization) of Willa Muir, the first English-language translator (together with her husband Edwin) of Kafka's novels and stories. Her novel's *(Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey)* main character is a rare example of a strong, authentic translator figure in modernist English-language literature. Muir develops her protagonist, Alison Muttoe, as a strongly articulated identity that can exist hand-in-hand with creativity; an artist as a translator.

Since humour negotiates difference, it can also be regarded as a mode of translation; at the same time, translation can function as a source of humour. **Waltraud Kolb** explores these reciprocal functions in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*. In a contrastive reflection on two different German translations, Kolb looks into the strategies by which the comical effects were achieved. Often, through incongruous translational interventions, the protagonist, Alexander Perchov, succeeds in establishing and maintaining some sort of truce in an emotionally laden transcultural environment.

With a focus on gender-related transfictional identity construction, **Daniela Beuren** leads us down a further path. She resists any kind of transfixion and practically shows, by means of literary examples (taken from Barbara Wilson and Carol Shields), how translatorial power can be creatively translated into lexis and grammar (which are both artefacts of our social life). In doing so, Beuren breaks established binary codes and creates room to manoeuvre. In contrast, **Alice Casarini** approaches gender from an entirely different angle. Although the interlinguistic rendition *of* the novels, movies and audio plays has been instrumental in the creation of J. K. Rowling's billion-dollar empire, Casarini pioneered into Harry Potter's world to research the role of translation *within*. Even though no professional translators feature among the main characters, many of the latter repeatedly engage in translational activities that originate fundamental plot twists. In this *Potterverse* translatorial action is gendered as a symbol of acquired power (male) as opposed to innate linguistic ability (female).

Ending Episode 4, our volume challenges the Final Frontier: Boarding a time machine with **Monika Wozniak**, we reach strange new worlds where no human has gone before. It's quite easy to imagine a myriad of translational (and supposedly starring) jobs on offer as you warp through the infinite polyphony of the galaxy. Wozniak points to the fact that in science-fiction literature and film professional translators or interpreters seem to be *personae non gratae*, even in situations which would logically require their presence. She analyses various strategies to navigate transgalactic communicative impasses by introducing, amongst other things, machines, magic tools and androids. Finally, and far from the future, Wozniak links the translators' image reflection in the science fiction mirror to their actual status of the mundane present.

Now, before we embark on our transfictional voyage, just one more thing: To those who have been with us through laughs, tears and tantrums, while editing this volume – our gratitude.

## References

Cooke, M. & Stegu, M. 2011. "Losers or Leaders? Readings from Translation Fiction on the Occasion of the 1st International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film. Friday, September 16th, 2013; University of Vienna – Centre For Translation Studies." Invitation Card: Unpublished.

Kaindl, K. & Spitzl, K. 2011. "Transfiction: 1st International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film." Conference Website. Available at http://transfiction.univie.ac.at/ (last accessed at 28 February 2013).

Monaldi & Sorti.[1] 2008. *Imprimatur.* Translated by P. Burnett. Edinburgh: Polygon – Birlinn Ltd.

Monaldi & Sorti. 2009. *Secretum.* Translated by P. Burnett. Edinburgh: Polygon – Birlinn Ltd.

Monaldi & Sorti. 2011. *Veritas.* Traduit par Dominique Vittoz. Paris: Plon.

Okto TV – UniWien Broadcast. 2011. "Transfiction: 1st International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film." (10/11/2011 – 20:33–20:37). Video file. Available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtvDcUIpH6M (last accessed at 28 February 2013).

Radio Orange – O94 Kultur Spezial Broadcast. 2011. "Transfiction: 1st International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film." (10/10/2011 – 13:00–14:00). Audio file. Available at http://o94.at/radio/sendung/o94kultur-spezial/1006173/ (last accessed at 28 February 2013).

1. The authors prefer to be referenced without indicating their first names.

EPISODE I

# Entering theoretical territories

# The power of fiction as theory

## Some exemplary lessons on translation from Borges's stories

Rosemary Arrojo
Binghamton University

The Latin American intellectual tradition is marked by a symptomatic recurrence of translation-related issues in scholarship and in fiction that can be interpreted as an eloquent sign of the continent's overall awareness of the fundamental importance of the translator's activity in its formation and history. In Latin America, as in most postcolonial contexts, translation, both as a metaphor and as the actual translingual practice that domesticates the foreign, plays a central role in the most fundamental, all-encompassing questions to be addressed on issues of nationality, ethics, and identity. It is also, quite probably, the most prevalent theme in the fiction written in the continent (cf. Gentzler 2008: 109), a conclusion that is undoubtedly supported by the growing number of Latin American writers that have been particularly creative in constructing plots that scrutinize the complex relationship between originals and their repetitions as well as the consequences associated with the role of translation in the transformation of the foreign into the national or the domestic. The main goal of this chapter is to examine the powerful role of fiction as theory, particularly as it finds a privileged illustration in Latin American literature and, more specifically, in the work of the Argentinean Jorge Luis Borges, in whose stories on translation we find a reflection on language, interpretation, and intercultural relations that anticipated in more than half a century most of the groundbreaking notions we usually associate with poststructuralist and postcolonial translation studies today.

### Oswald de Andrade and Borges: Between reverence and irreverence

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the conception of translation inspiring Latin American intellectuals has often been associated with the subversion of the usual hierarchies that have been taken for granted in matters of intercultural relations such as the one that places the "original" over the translation, the author

over the translator, the foreign over the domestic, or the dominant over the subaltern. A case in point is the metaphor of translation as cannibalism, proposed and theorized by some contemporary Brazilian translators who claim that their creative versions of Western writers are blatantly and unapologetically domesticating. "Tupi or not tupi, that is the question," proclaimed Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 "Manifesto Antropófago", 'Tupi' being the main ethnic indigenous group and language found by the Portuguese as they reached the Brazilian coast in 1500. In Andrade's provocative appropriation of Shakespeare's original line, which is arguably one of the best known in all of European and Western literature, we find a good-humored expression of the postcolonial predicament. As Andrade's line "inscribes a colonial perspective into the Shakespearean intertext and, for that matter, to the Western Canon", it rearticulates Hamlet's European dilemma, "informed by Christian scruples as to what may come after death", as one that has to do "with the plurality of the origin and, accordingly, of the cultural identity of Brazil, both European and Tupi, both civilized and native, both Christian and magic" (Vieira 1999: 97). Moreover, it transforms Hamlet's existential plight into the very question that challenges the postcolonial condition: How should the former colony translate and relate to the West and, at the same time, prevent that whatever is associated with the Tupi and what they represent does not get completely lost in the aftershock of colonization? Andrade's elaboration of an answer to this crucial question is the central thrust of his "Manifesto", in which his passionate insistence on the recognition of a plural Brazilian identity is also the defense of an approach to the foreign that entails the domestication of Europe into and within the Brazilian context. As he reverses the hierarchy that has always privileged the foreign European over the domestic, Andrade celebrates the wisdom of the Caraíba, the Brazilian natives who "had discovered happiness long before the Portuguese discovered Brazil" and should be the leaders of the ultimate revolution: "The Caraíba Revolution. Greater than the French Revolution. The unification of all the effective revolutions for the good of mankind."[1]

This attitude towards the foreign entails a form of cultural translation that finds its paradigm in cannibalism: "I am only interested in what is not mine. The law of men. The law of the cannibal." As it couches the logic of the hybrid "Tupi or not Tupi", cannibalism entails a combination of reverence and irreverence that inspires a daring sense of creativity and settles the conflict defining the encounter between the domestic and the foreign, at least from Andrade's Brazilian perspective. The task to develop these insights into a full blown reflection on translation has been taken on by his later disciples, the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, whose work as translators and theorists has been almost synonymous

1. All translations mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

with a Brazilian perspective on translation in the last few decades. Their overall conception could be briefly summarized in the following lines from Augusto de Campos's preface to a collection of translations of some of his favorite poets: "My way of loving them is translating them. Or devouring them, in accordance with Oswald de Andrade's Cannibalistic Law: I am only interested in what is not mine." (Campos 1978: 7) As a representation of the ambivalence of translation in the Brazilian context, shaped by a centuries-old history of asymmetrical relations between the domestic and the foreign, the metaphor of cannibalism situates translators between their love for the foreign and their decision to submit it to the interests of the domestic. As he introduces the poets he has chosen to translate for the collection mentioned above – Arnaut Daniel, John Donne, Tristan Corbière, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, among others – Augusto de Campos refers to them as being closer to him than most of his Brazilian contemporaries. They are, so to speak, his "invented friends", those he loves and devours, and who will be part of his poetic "family". Thus, translation as cannibalism is presented not simply as a politics of cultural exchange, but as a strategy that can actually reshape the national canon and reinvent the identities of those who are chosen to be translated.

The recognition of this subversive vocation for translation has also been associated with the writings of Jorge Luis Borges, one of the greatest Latin American writers of all time. In the short piece entitled "El escritor argentino y la tradición" – "The Argentine Writer and Tradition", in Esther Allen's version – originally written as a lecture in 1951, he proposes an approach to the relationship between Argentine literature and the Western tradition that shares some points with Andrade's vision in the "Manifesto". Just as Andrade reverses the hierarchy between Brazilians and Europeans, Borges sees the peripheral position occupied by his country in the world of intellectual achievement as one that involves an unsuspected advantage. Since Latin Americans in general, as he claims, are part of the European tradition but find themselves outside its limits, or, at most, in its remote periphery, their heritage is rightfully "the whole of Western culture", and this privileged position allows them to take on all the European themes "without superstition and with an irreverence that can have, and already has had, fortunate consequences" (Borges 1999a: 426). For Borges, his right to innovate and handle the foreign "without superstition" is, also, intimately related to his views on translation. An active translator throughout his life, he saw translation, both in its "proper" sense and in broader terms, as an activity that clearly produces meaning and is, therefore, inseparable from reading and writing, an activity that has been recognized as a fundamental, constructive force behind most of his fiction. As Sergio Waisman points out, "in Argentina's 20th century, there is arguably no other writer for whom translation is as integral a part of his or her literary production as it is for Borges" (2005: 11).

## Translating European philosophy into Latin American fiction

"Funes, el memorioso" – "Funes, His Memory", in Andrew Hurley's version – first published in 1944, can be read as a creative translation into fiction of some of Nietzsche's concepts or, more specifically, as a domestication of European philosophy in the context of a small Uruguayan town in the beginning of the 20th century (cf. also, Martin 2006, Kreimer 2000, and Bell 2007 for other readings on possible connections between Nietzsche's philosophy and Borges's "Funes"). Borges's protagonist is Ireneo Funes, the bastard son of a local ironing woman and an English doctor, who dies young and becomes famous on account of his prodigious memory miraculously acquired after an accident that left him completely paralyzed. Our source is Borges's third person narrator, whose text is supposed to be a testimonial on Funes addressed to the editors of the special volume to be published about the young man, defined both as "a precursor of the race of the supermen – 'a maverick and vernacular Zarathustra' – [and …] also [as] a street tough from Fray Bentos, with certain incorrigible limitations" (Borges 1998a: 131). Just as Nietzsche's protagonist in *Also sprach Zarathustra* – *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in Adrian del Caro's version – is a translation of Zoroaster, the Persian prophet from the sixth century B.C., Borges's character can be read as a domestication of sorts of Nietzsche's. A passionate nationalist, Funes is appropriately surrounded by a context that is clearly Uruguayan but that also seems to echo the Nietzschean prophet's: A purely human world devoid of metaphysics, in which nature is the closest equivalent to anything that could be remotely associated to the divine or the transcendental. As a prisoner of his modest room, Funes never left his cot, "his eyes fixed on the fig tree behind the house or on a spider web" or, still, on "a fragrant switch of Artemisia" (Borges 1998a: 132f).

Furthermore, Borges's characterization of Funes is based on two fundamental traits that are intrinsically connected: His prodigious memory and his inability to forget. As he recovered consciousness soon after falling off a horse, he was paralyzed and found the present to be 'so rich, so clear that it was almost unbearable, as were his oldest and even his most trivial memories.' What seemed to be an extraordinary gift was also a source of distress: Funes was then unable to rest or sleep and to adequately process his recollections and the ever changing reality, a condition that turned him into an obsessive spectator restricted to repeating – to and by himself – an endless, "pointless mental catalog of all the images of his memory" (Borges 1998a: 135). Appropriately, we may find a plausible explanation for Funes's predicament in the second essay of Nietzsche's *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, which I read in Carol Diethe's version, *On the Genealogy of Morality,* and which begins by defining the human animal as the one "with the prerogative to promise", a prerogative that indicates that to be human is to be aware of the passing of time,

to distinguish the present from the past and, therefore, to anticipate and make plans for the future. Moreover, this human ability to remember and to deal with time is directly dependent on its "opposing force, *forgetfulness*", which is the active capacity to suppress "consciousness for a while, [... in order] to make room for something new." As Nietzsche concludes, "there could be no happiness, cheerfulness, hope, pride, *immediacy*, without forgetfulness". In fact, the person "in whom this apparatus of suppression is damaged" can be compared "to a dyspeptic", i.e., someone who "cannot cope with anything" (Nietzsche 2007: 35).

It was precisely his inability to digest reality that brought him a disturbing awareness of the arbitrary nature of language, an awareness that prevented him from accepting illusions as truths. In this aspect, his characterization seems to echo Nietzsche's conclusion in an early essay, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im Außermoralischen Sinn" – "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense", in Daniel Breazeale's translation – according to which we "can only live with any repose, security, and consistency" provided that we manage to forget that "every concept arises from the equation of unequal things" (Nietzsche 1999: 83) and to deceive ourselves into believing that there are indeed stable objects to which we can refer as "*this* sun, *this* window, [or] *this* table" (Nietzsche 1999: 85). As for Funes, he found it painfully difficult to deal with the limitations of a language that blatantly equates what is obviously unequal and owes its foundation to arbitrariness and conventionality. For instance, it was difficult for him to see that "the generic symbol 'dog' took in all the dissimilar individuals of all shapes and sizes", as it irritated him that "the 'dog' of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog of three-fifteen, seen frontally" (Borges 1998a: 136). Borges's example of the "dog" seems to illustrate Nietzsche's basic argument about difference and the arbitrariness of language and could very well remind readers of the philosopher's example of the "leaf" in "On Truth and Lies". As Nietzsche's reasoning goes, in order to make language work, we have to come to terms with the fact that "no one leaf is ever totally the same as another", and, thus, accept that the concept "leaf" is formed "by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects" (Nietzsche 1999: 83).

Funes's irritation at a language that fails to be the faithful representation of an ever-changing reality does not simply mirror Nietzsche's reasoning as it seems to bring a new twist to Nietzsche's example. As Borges's text suggests, in order to trust and to be able to use language, we are not merely required to accept the illusion of stability brought about by the erasure of differences involving so many different "things" that we have accepted to call "dogs"; we must also learn to ignore our personal memories associated with any particular "dog". Consequently, in order for language to work, we need to ignore the diversity involved in the psychologically motivated elements associated with the ways in which we view and

process concepts. As Borges's narrator explains in a fragment that can be read almost as a supplement to Nietzsche's example of the "leaf" mentioned above, "[t]he truth was, Funes remembered not only every leaf of every tree in every patch of forest, *but every time he had perceived or imagined that leaf*" (Borges 1998a: 136, emphasis added).

In order to placate his frustration, Funes contemplated the creation of a language that could be less ambiguous or less arbitrary, a project which Borges's narrator compares to that of John Locke, the English philosopher who, in the 17th century, "postulated (and condemned) an impossible language in which each individual thing – every stone, every bird, every branch – would have its own name". Funes, however, soon discarded the idea because it was "too general, too ambiguous" (Borges 1998a: 136). Another project later discarded by Funes was the invention of a new numeral system for which he would use apparently unconnected words instead of numbers as we know them. As the narrator suggests, Funes's project was originally motivated by "his irritation that the thirty-three Uruguayan patriots should require two figures and three words rather than a single figure, a single word", and it was this "mad principle" that he then applied to the other numbers: "Instead of seven thousand thirteen (7013), he would say, for instance, 'Máximo Perez'; instead of seven thousand fourteen (7014), 'the railroad'; other numbers were 'Luis Melián Lafinur', 'Olimar', 'sulfur', 'clubs', 'the whale', 'gas', 'a stewpot', 'Napoleon', 'Agustín de Vedia'" (Borges 1998a: 135f). These projects seem to have brought Funes the fleeting illusion that by creating a new language and a new numeral system he would manage to elude arbitrariness. The thirty-three patriots that inspired his "mad principle" is a direct reference to the revolutionary group that was responsible for the foundation of Uruguay as a modern state in the 1820's, a reference that could also be related to Funes's inclusion of Napoleon, whose occupation of Spain at the beginning of the 19th century ultimately contributed to the independence of Uruguay. Similarly, all the other references could be associated to Funes's immediate surroundings such as the "railroad" or the "stewpot" and, also, "Olimar" – both the river and the village located in Uruguay's department of Treinta y Tres, named in honor of the thirty-tree patriots mentioned above. The other references not only give us a glimpse of Funes's strong nationalism and favorite heroes but also function as mirrors of himself as the author of failed projects: Máximo Perez (1825–1882), Luis Melián Lafinur (1850–1939), who was Borges's uncle, and Agustín de Vedia (1843–1910), all of whom participated in unsuccessful attempts against the institutionalized power in Uruguay in the second half of the 19th century.

While we read "Funes" as a translation of Nietzsche's philosophy we could also associate the Uruguayan's desire to shape conventions and his immediate reality to the philosopher's notion of the will to power, particularly as it is conceived as

one of Zarathustra's most important lessons to those interested in the path leading to the Overman. In one of his speeches, entitled "On a Thousand and One Goals", Zarathustra reaffirms Nietzsche's argument that the creation of language and truths has been necessary for "human survival and preservation", elaborating on how it is inextricably affective and, thus, connected with "esteeming", i.e., with placing a value into one's creations: What one people esteems "hangs over" them as "a tablet of the good", and this "tablet of their overcomings […] is the voice of their will to power", a voice which not only defines humans as such, but which also preserves their identity and marks their difference from one another (Nietzsche 2006: 42f). In another speech, "On Self-Overcoming", Zarathustra further argues that the very possibility of thinking involves the will to make all there is reflect the interests of the one who is doing the thinking, a claim that ultimately equates the will to power to the very will to live (cf. Nietzsche 2006: 89). To the extent that the will to power, as "the essence of life", is the drive behind the construction and the imposition of what is regarded as true and valuable, and since truths and values are ultimately made up of language, the will to power can also be another name for interpretation, an activity that necessarily involves violence as it inevitably reshapes what is being interpreted: "You do violence with your values and words of good and evil, you valuators; and this is your hidden love and the gleaming, trembling and flowing-over of your souls" (Nietzsche 2006: 90).

As Borges seems to appropriate Nietzsche's philosophy "without superstition", he expands and reframes it in another context at the same time that he creates a story that is a superb lesson on the mechanisms of language as the material with which our will to power constructs and establishes meaning by domesticating difference. His paralyzed, dyspeptic Funes, who dies prematurely of pulmonary congestion, shows us that without our active engagement with what comes from outside, there is no production, no movement or possibility of growth in any meaningful way. In addition, by creating a character that is both European and Latin American, both a hero and an anti-hero, as well as a text that is both – or between – fiction and philosophy, Borges irreverently undermines all these established hierarchies and in the process questions the basis of nationalism as well. Finally, as we read Borges's "Funes" alongside Oswald de Andrade and Augusto de Campos, we can dislocate the metaphor of cannibalism from the limits of Brazilian nationalism and argue that cannibalism, or at least, a Borgesian brand of cannibalism, is not a mere choice or strategy and is, in fact, the only law defining our attempts to handle and appropriate otherness.

## Borges's "Pierre Menard": Between fiction and theory

It is mostly on the basis of a conception of language as something that recreates rather than merely represents meaning that Borges (1999b) elaborates his views on translation "proper" as well. In his well-known essays from the 1930's, "Las *versiones homéricas*" – "The Homeric Versions", in Eliot Weinberger's translation – and "Los traductores de las 1001 noches" – "The Translators of *The One Thousand and One Nights*", in Esther Allen's version – he subverts the usual hierarchical opposition between the so-called "original" and its translations at the same time that he explores the complex issue of the translator's agency and the role it plays in the shaping of world literature. In the intriguing first paragraph of "The Translators of *The One Thousand and One Nights*", for example, he refers to several European translators of the *Nights* as a "hostile dynasty", which is ultimately constituted as a consequence of each translator's desire to supplant his predecessors. As Borges argues, one of the "secret aims" of Richard Burton's translation was "the annihilation of another gentleman", Edward Lane, "the Orientalist, author of a highly scrupulous version of *The One Thousand and One Nights* that had supplanted a version by Galland. Lane translated against Galland, Burton against Lane" (Borges 2004: 94).

While Borges's essays offer us a glimpse into some of the consequences of the intrinsically productive vocation of translation and, therefore, of the translator's authorial thrust, it is in one of his most dazzling stories that we will find a much richer, more subtle and thorough exploration of these intricate issues. First published in 1939, "Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*" – "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*", in Andrew Hurley's version – is the quintessential fictional piece about texts and textual relationships, which, according to George Steiner, is "the most acute, most concentrated commentary anyone has offered on the business of translation." Steiner's comment, by the way, was made in the context of a book that covers hundreds of texts and authors in its treatment of the fundamental issues that have occupied the vast area of "translation, language, and culture" articulated in almost two thousand years of documented scholarship in the West (1975: 70). As a story that pretends to be a review or an academic essay, "Pierre Menard" destabilizes, first of all, the very distinction between commentary and fiction and, as its plot develops, it practically questions every single cliché usually associated with the translator's activity. Overall, Menard can be read as a comical illustration of the perfect translator idealized by tradition: He devoted his life to the repetition of somebody else's text and died with the conviction that he had indeed managed to repeat the totality of a few fragments from *Don Quixote*. The remarkable product of his "invisible" project seems to be the ultimate translation as it allegedly repeats, in Menard's French context of the early 20th century, the exact same Spanish words of Cervantes's original. However, the cliché of the selfless,

invisible translator working in the shadow in order to safely transfer the integrity of the original to a different context is called into question as the narrator's reading breaks the illusion of sameness and shows that what is repeated can only be repeated in difference, thus anticipating the kind of reflection on translation and textual relations that has been developed in the wake of post-Nietzschean trends of contemporary thought.

As Menard gives up his plan to actually become Cervantes and move to 16th century Spain, deciding instead to face the challenge of writing *Don Quixote* while still being Menard and living in early 20th century France, we readers are provided with a wealth of material on the basis of which we can rethink the apparently reasonable ethical principles that prescribe the translator's invisibility and blind fidelity to the foreign original and its author. Just as Menard cannot leave behind his context and circumstances as he sets out to rewrite Cervantes's text, Borges's narrator as Menard's reader cannot help but contextualize the two verbally identical fragments he compares – one from Cervantes's *Quixote* and the other, from Menard's – in that which is undoubtedly one of the most baffling moments of 20th century fiction: "The contrast in styles is […] striking. The archaic style of Menard – who is, in addition, not a native speaker of the language in which he writes – is somewhat affected. Not so the style of his precursor, who employs the Spanish of his time with complete naturalness." (Borges 1998b: 94) As Borges's story humorously illustrates, translation is especially suitable for a reflection on the nature of meaning and how it comes to be produced and processed and, consequently, on how the domestic necessarily appropriates and transforms – cannibalizes – the foreign, reinventing itself in the process. As they are faced with the conundrums of translation and interpretation, Borges's readers also have to come to terms with the central issue behind Menard's apparent failure to truly repeat Cervantes's text: The disturbing conclusion that meaning does not seem to find a shelter in words that could protect it from change and difference, or even from spurious readings, and has to be recognized as the object and the outcome of a conflict involving competing possibilities.

## The exemplarity of Borges's fiction as theory

As it investigates lesser explored aspects directly associated with processes of meaning construction, Borges's fiction shows a unique capacity to translate philosophical questions into ingenious plots that serve as a superb illustration of Jacques Derrida's defense of literature as a privileged site for the kind of thinking usually associated with philosophy. As Derrida's position has been summarized,

> the thinking that takes place in philosophy […] cannot […] be confined to technical philosophy, or to the canonical history of philosophy, even if that is the place one starts; it is also to be sought and found in many other places, in law, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. Above all, the thinking that occurs in philosophy communicates in a very special way for Derrida himself with literature.
> (Caputo 1997: 57f)

To the extent that it is "an institution which tends to overflow the institution", offering us the "unlimited right of writing and reading, the right to defy laws of prohibition, to engender fictions against the prevailing sense of reality" (Caputo 1997: 58), literature can be potentially richer and more daring than other types of writing. As it brings us plots with multiple voices expressing multiple points of view, often in conflict, fiction can take readers beyond the limits of what we conventionally call theory or philosophy, allowing us to venture into usually unchartered areas such as the more personal relationships involving the various agents engaged in the construction of meaning that defines writing, reading, interpreting, and translating.

If we probe, for example, the relationships that are established between Borges's narrators and his protagonists in both "Funes" and "Pierre Menard", we could get at least a few glimpses into some behind-the-scenes aspects of the competitive nature of writing and interpreting that can be associated to the will to power, arguably one of the key themes explored in the stories. As readers of "Pierre Menard" try to understand the magnitude of his "invisible work", for example, they cannot ignore the fact that there are at least three different voices expressing views on texts and textual relations in the story: The narrator, Pierre Menard and, of course, Borges. Could these views be reconciled? What is Borges actually telling us behind his narrator and his protagonist? Also, as we try to find some meaningful explanation for Menard's "subterranean" desires and motivations and how they relate to his "visible" work, we can speculate on how such desires and motivations might be related to the narrator's and, ultimately, to Borges's as well. And as we ponder over some of Borges's more intriguing choices, we may try to answer questions such as the following: Why is Menard apparently celebrated for his "achievement" at the same time that he is portrayed as a somewhat pathetic, Quixotic figure obsessed with Cervantes's masterpiece, a text, by the way, which he does not consider to be "inevitable" or even "necessary"? Although I cannot elaborate on possible answers in the space of this chapter, it is certainly significant that, in the end, while Menard is definitely dead and barely remembered as the French symbolist who tried (and failed) to reproduce a few fragments from Cervantes's novel, Cervantes is still Cervantes, living on as one of the greatest authors of all time thanks, at least in part, to countless Menards – as "invisible" readers and translators – who have rewritten his text in many languages throughout the centuries.

Finally, as we try to reconcile all these different views, we might conclude, for example, that the defense of notions of translation and interpretation as activities that actually produce meaning, which is one of the central themes explored in "Pierre Menard", cannot simply erase deep-seated views involving authorship that are part and parcel of our tradition. Therefore, it would not be far-fetched to consider that, in the story, on some level, Borges could very well be suggesting that, even though we should recognize the impact of Menard's "visibility" in his translation project, it is still far more desirable to emulate an author like Cervantes than one of his many anonymous translators and readers (cf. Arrojo 2004, for a detailed elaboration of some of these issues).

If we follow a similar path in our reading of "Funes", we will also find a subtle competitiveness defining the relationship constructed between Funes and an authorial figure, which in this case is represented by the narrator in whose text the long dead Uruguayan lives on as a character. Furthermore, even though Funes is described as a "precursor of the race of the supermen", it is in fact the narrator who seems to be evolving towards Nietzsche's Zarathustra, who defines himself as "a prelude to better players" (Nietzsche 2006: 168). Consider, for example, Zarathustra's "On the Three Metamorphoses", the first speech in Part I, in which he elaborates on "how the spirit becomes a camel, and the camel a lion, and finally the lion a child", the child being the closest to the Overman (Nietzsche 2006: 16). In this light, Funes's transformation after his accident could be associated to the camel's metamorphoses into the lion, which "once loved 'thou shalt' as its most sacred", but now needs to find "delusion and despotism even in what is most sacred to it, in order to wrest freedom from its love by preying." As Zarathustra explains, this is how "the spirit becomes lion" and "wants to hunt down its freedom and be master in its own desert", even though it is still incapable "of creating new values" (Nietzsche 2006: 16f). As we know, after his accident, the paralyzed Funes became fully aware of – and deeply irritated by – the "delusion and despotism" he associated to the arbitrariness of language, and it was his inability to deal with its consequences and, most importantly, with his own will to power, that prevented him from changing his context and effectively creating and establishing new meanings and conventions. The narrator, on the other hand, could be related to the child, who is described in Zarathustra's speech as "being capable" of that which "even" the lion is not: "The child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a wheel rolling out of itself, a first movement, a sacred yes-saying." (Nietzsche 2006: 17) Unlike the lion, the child is able to ignore the negative burden of human history and is, thus, free to be creative and exercise its will to power, revealing the strength of the human on the path to the Overman. Appropriately, as a counterpoint to the dyspeptic Funes, Borges's narrator fully embraces the fact that the Uruguayan Zarathustra is, ultimately, a creation of both his memory and

his “absent-mindedness”. He accepts, for instance, that his testimony on Funes cannot be “impartial” (Borges 1998a: 131) and definitive as he knows that the past is “irrecoverable”, and it is this knowledge that, far from paralyzing him, enables him to write his story and turn Funes into a character.

As it requires that readers take a stand in the recreation of its plots, inviting us to exercise our will to power, fiction can be far more alluring and productive than formal philosophy or theory and gives us an invaluable opportunity to peek at what might be lurking behind some of the usual clichés about originals and translations, particularly in complex stories such as Borges's “Pierre Menard” and “Funes”. This does not mean, however, that we should (or even could) ignore theory or philosophy when we read fiction, and it would be naïve to try to alienate one from the other, a conclusion that is especially relevant for Borges's stories, which, as I have tried to show, can often be read as creative translations of major philosophical questions and dilemmas on issues of language and agency. Furthermore, there is a lot to be learned on such issues from a dialogue between Borges's fiction and his own essays. In fact, in a fragment from “The Translators of *The One Thousand and One Nights*”, for example, we can find a plausible explanation for the question raised above regarding Borges's subtle celebration of authorial power in both “Pierre Menard” and “Funes”. In his commentary on Dr. Mardrus's French version of the *Nights,* Borges concludes that to celebrate “Mardrus's fidelity is to leave out the soul of Mardrus, to ignore Mardrus entirely”; rather, “it is his infidelity, his happy and creative infidelity, that must matter to us” (Borges 2004: 45). As Borges destabilizes the long standing tradition that has relied on a limiting notion of fidelity as the yardstick for the evaluation of translations and translators, he is also celebrating the translator's will to power and his audacity to exercise it in his translations, a disposition that has often been associated with the practice of translation in Latin America, as shown above. It is precisely this kind of irreverence that Menard seems to lack as he needs to keep “subterranean” his project to take over Cervantes's text, a lack that might also explain why the French symbolist is represented as a Quixotic figure in the story. Menard, like the paralyzed Funes, cannot forget the burden of tradition and is, therefore, still incapable of consciously cannibalizing it and making it his own. Borges and his author figures, on the other hand, like Oswald de Andrade and Augusto de Campos, are masters at revering the past at the same time that they reinvent it “without superstition”.

## References

### Primary sources

Borges, J. L. 1998a. "Funes, His Memory." Transl. A. Hurley. In *Collected Fictions*, 131–137. New York: Penguin.

Borges, J. L. 1998b. "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." Transl. A. Hurley. In *Collected Fictions*, 88–95. New York: Penguin.

### Secondary sources

Andrade, O. de 1928. "Manifesto Antropófago." *Revista de Antropofagia* 1 (May).

Arrojo, R. 2004. "Translation, Transference, and the Attraction to Otherness – Borges, Menard, Whitman." *Diacritics* 34 (3–4): 31: 53.

Bell, M. 2007. "Nietzsche, Borges, García Marquez on the Art of Memory and Forgetting." *The Romanic Review* 98 (2/3): 123–134.

Borges, J. L. 1999a. "The Argentine Writer and Tradition." Transl. E. Allen. In *Selected Non-Fictions*, E. Weinberger (ed.), 420–426. New York: Penguin.

Borges, J. L. 1999b. "The Homeric Versions." Transl. E. Weinberger. In *Selected Non-Fictions*, E. Weinberger (ed.), 69–74. New York: Penguin.

Borges, J. L. 2004. "The Translators of *The One Thousand and One Nights*." Transl. E. Allen. In *The Translation Studies Reader*, L. Venuti (ed.), 94–108. New York/London: Routledge.

Campos, A. de 1978. *Verso Reverso Controverso*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

Caputo, J. D. (ed.). 1997. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell – A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Gentzler, E. 2008. *Translation and Identity in the Americas – New Directions in Translation Theory*. New York/London: Routledge.

Kreimer, R. 2000. "Nietzsche, autor de 'Funes, el memorioso." In *Jorge Luis Borges – Intervenciones sobre pensamiento y literatura*, W. Rowe, C. Canaparo & A. Louis (eds.), 189–197. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Paidos Iberica.

Martin, C. 2006. "Borges Forgets Nietzsche." *Philosophy and Literature* 30: 265–276.

Nietzsche, F. 1999. "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense." Transl. D. Breazeale. In *Philosophy and Truth – Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, D. Breazeale (ed.), 79–97. New York: Humanity Books.

Nietzsche, F. 2006. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra – A Book for All and None*. Transl. A. del Caro. A. del Caro & R. Pippin (eds.) Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nietzsche, F. 2007. *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Transl. C. Diethe. K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.). Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.

Steiner, G. 1975. *After Babel – Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford/London/New York: Oxford University Press.

Vieira, E. R. P. 1999. "Liberating Calibans: Readings of Antropofagia and Haroldo de Campos' Poetics of Transcreation." In *Post-Colonial Translation – Theory and Practice*, S. Bassnett & H. Trivedi (eds.), 95–113. New York/London: Routledge.

Waisman, S. 2005. *Borges and Translation – The Irreverence of the Periphery*. Lewisburg: Bucknell.

# Language, essence, and silence

## Fictional translators in Peter Kosminsky's *The Promise*

Salam Al-Mahadin
Al-Ahliyya Amman University

### Introduction

Peter Kosminsky's *The Promise*, a four-part series, was first broadcast on Channel 4 in the UK in February 2010 (cf. Kosminsky 2011a, b, c, d). An example of the voyage genre, it traces the young female protagonist's footsteps as she embarks on a journey of personal, historical and political discovery that takes her all over the Occupied Territories of Palestine, a journey guided by her own grandfather's diary of his military service in the region on the eve of the establishment of Israel in 1948. This chapter explores the role of translation and translators in the series by adopting a multi-disciplinary approach from the annals of Heideggerian philosophy (1962), Lacanian psychoanalysis (2005), discourse analysis, semiotics and applied linguistics. This highly eclectic approach is testimony to the complexity of the roles translators and translations play in this series which constantly shifts between Arabic, English and Hebrew.[1] The series' uniqueness lies in its dispensation with the process of translation as a simple and straight-forward rendering between two languages and the translators as second-class authors who merely serve to translate between the three language systems. Instead, it elevates translation to the level of a philosophical discovery where both the original and target texts seemingly have little to do with each other on the language plane yet are intimately very linked on a deeper level of Heideggerian philosophical 'understanding' which is a key concept in this chapter. Heidegger postulates understanding as the ability of beings to be in the world not through a specific process of cognition but rather through an existential and fundamental quality that belongs to that

1. For detailed literature review of fictional translators in film and literature refer to the introduction of this book.

*Dasein*/being's existence. In crude, simpler terms, it is the ability "to be" in the moment without being cognitively aware of how we are doing it. The hermeneutics of any given experience is not grounded in cognition only but in a know-how, an ability and a familiarity. Thus, to understand does not mean to be in possession of certain knowledge but rather to possess certain know-how and skills to the extent one does most things without thinking about them. For example, a skilled carpenter could put together a wardrobe while his mind is not focused on the task at hand but rather on other things. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2006) relies on a Heideggerian approach to 'understanding' to opine that hermeneutics is at once a process of understanding, application, and translation. What concerns us here is what Gadamer had to say about translation as an "extreme case" of understanding. He further argues that in translation "we are dealing with […] interpretation, and not simply reproduction" (Gadamer 2006: 387). Thus, "the agony of translation consists ultimately in the fact that the original words seem to be inseparable from the things they refer to, so that to make a text intelligible one often has to give an interpretive paraphrase of it rather than translate it." (2006: 403) My analysis of several examples from the series will focus on the "interpretative paraphrase" that Gadamer proposes and the manner in which foreign world-views seek to make sense of each other when they collide in a multi-lingual context. What is of valuable interest is the fact that the world of translation studies generally neglects how the realities of translation in daily life differ completely from the annals of academic studies. The examples that follow define a process of translation/understanding/ application/reproduction that transcends the meaning of words to attempt to create a context of mutual comprehension as it relates to very complex schemata of conflict and alienation, a meaningful vehicle for – perhaps – capturing an essence of events through reproduction rather than literal translation if the latter threatens the exchange with a break-down in communication.

## *The Promise:* An overview

Erin Mathews, an 18-year old British girl, decides to take a gap year and travel to Israel to accompany her Israeli-British friend Eliza who is about to embark on her military service there. In the meantime, Erin stumbles upon the diary of her seriously-ill grandfather, Len Mathews, as she and her mother are clearing out his house. Len was a soldier with the peace-keeping troops that served in Mandate Palestine between 1945–1948 (cf. The Guardian 2011). According to Peter Kosminsky, the series seeks to document the experience of 100,000 British veterans who served in Mandate Palestine up until 1948 (cf. The Guardian 2011).

The experiences Len undergoes have been collated from interviews with veterans and extensive research on the subject (cf. The Telegraph 2011). The main thrust of the series is focused on how these soldiers arrived with nothing but sympathy for Jewish plight but, having witnessed the lengths they went to in order to establish Israel, left in 1948 with their sympathies swayed to the Arab side. According to Kosminsky, that view was unanimously reflected in all the interviews they conducted with the surviving veterans.

The series traces the experiences of Len in Mandate Palestine after World War II after he strikes an unlikely friendship with a Palestinian Arab, Abu-Hassan (Mohammed), a tea vendor on the army base. As the situation continued to deteriorate with the Jewish underground efforts to get rid of both the Arabs and the British, the latter decided to withdraw their troops in 1948 leaving the Arabs to fend for themselves. On the eve of the establishment of Israel, Len accompanies Mohammed to the borders once it became clear their homes were no longer safe. In the chaos that ensued Mohammed's son Hassan goes missing and Len promises to find him and return him to his father before the boats leave. Len eventually finds Hassan (who had been given the keys to the family's house by his dad) but on their way to the boats, Hassan is killed by Jewish forces. His last request was that Len return the key to his father.

Erin's journey runs parallel to Len's. She, too, arrives armed with Eurocentric views about the conflict in the Occupied Territories. When she decides to find Mohammed or any member of his family to give them back the key to fulfil her grandfather's promise, she embarks on a journey that takes her across some of the hottest zones of the conflict, such as Hebron and Gaza. The deeper she finds herself embroiled in the everyday existence of Palestinians, the more sympathetic she becomes to their cause.

Len's love interest turns out to be an underground Irgun spy who dated him to extract information about British activities. Erin weaves her own love triangle with her interest in Eliza's brother (Paul) and a Palestinian (Omar Habash) but in the end she favours the latter, in a symbolic move that mirrored her shifting sympathies, despite Paul being a vociferous defender of Arab rights. In one significant scene in Hebron, Paul ends up shooting at Arabs when his Israeli soldier friends come under threat. He explained to Erin that he did that out of loyalty. The scene marked a turning point in the relationship with Erin's realisation that Paul's politics aside, deep inside his loyalties still lay with his fellow Israelis.[2]

**2.** For a detailed overview of the series, see (http://wapedia.mobi/en/The_Promise_(2011_TV_serial)).

The fantastic and sometimes unbelievable dramatic twists notwithstanding – Kosminsky has Erin and Omar crossing into Gaza via one of the infamous underground tunnels – Erin finally succeeds in returning the key to Mohammad's daughter, a very old woman on her deathbed in Gaza.

In an article in *The Guardian* (2011), Kosminsky remarks that

> Israel is isolated, loathed and feared in equal measure by its neighbours, finding little sympathy outside America for its uncompromising view of how to defend its borders and secure its future. How did Israel squander the compassion of the world within a lifetime? That's the question *The Promise* sets out to explore.

## Language, essence, and silence in *The Promise*

The series opens with a scene in hospital as Erin and her mother begrudgingly visit the ailing grandfather on his deathbed (cf. Kosminsky 2011a: 0'20–1'51). No signs of disavowal (*Verleugnung*)[3] as both mother and daughter openly express their distaste for the visit. Erin cringes in horror when she notices the urine bag filling up; a moment when fetishist disavowal is completely suspended.[4] An ideologically constitutive instant that will be juxtaposed with the final scene in the series when Erin returns from the trip and immediately heads to her grandfather's hospital bed to hold his hand and inform him that the promise has been fulfilled.

Our first encounter with epistemic violence occurs after the hospital scene when Erin and her mother could be seen cleaning out the grandfather's apartment (cf. Kosminsky 2011a: 2'58–4'56). The two women are throwing out his things giving the viewer the impression the old man had died. The act of getting rid of the grandfather's effects is intended as a plot technique to introduce one of the main devices in the series, the grandfather's diary, but also to reflect the absence of mourning for the old man's impending death. His things are a metonymy for his symbolic burial at the hands of the two women.

When Erin stumbles across the diary hidden behind a pile of books, the mother initially admonishes her for reading people's "private" thoughts and instructs her to "bin it". Erin hesitates and seems to be in the grips of insatiable

---

**3.** Disavowal, as opposed to negation, is a narcissistic expedient whereby the individual seeks to avoid acknowledging absences or shortcomings of key parental figures (cf. Gale Dictionary of Psychoanalysis 2012, see also Žižek (2008)).

**4.** In most human relationships, people choose to operate on the premise that although everyone has bodily functions like defecation and urination, people act as if their loved ones don't and they expect the same from the other. It is a suspension, by tacit mutual agreement, of the inherent aggression/distastefulness of the human being.

curiosity. The object before her eyes had transformed her grandfather from the empty shell of an old man to someone ‘with a past’. When a photograph falls out of the diary in the process of throwing it out, Erin picks it up and asks her mother “which one is him?” The mother points to one of the soldiers in the photo. Erin asks where it was taken. The mother replies: “Palestine. That’s what they used to call Israel.” It is not clear who is meant by “they” but at one fell swoop, the mother names and renames the place in the photo. The “they” clearly refers to those who have stopped using the term Palestine but the mother’s act of epistemic violence imposes upon the spatio-temporal (she mentions the year to Erin) of the photo a predominately Eurocentric linearity. Most Arabs still refer to Palestine by its old name. Many locations, cities and towns in Palestine/Israel are still known by their old names in Arabic and new names in Hebrew and several examples will occur during the series. (See the example about Ein Howd/Eid Houd below).

The mother’s act of naming then renaming the place/signified means it has been assigned two unstable signifiers. What we see in the photo is not the whole of Palestine/Israel but rather a very small part of it, possibly a clearing in front of the house where Len was staying with his colleagues. Yet in response to where pictures were taken, if they depict political entities other than the spectator’s own geographic boundaries, he/she answers by the act of naming that other foreign place. The element of the foreignness is very central to our gaze of photographs. Yet even that foreignness eludes fixity in Len’s photograph. What is that place that must be syntagmatically named and paradigmatically renamed? The double signifiers mark the beginning of Erin’s journey. With that linguistic ambivalence, the photo establishes its studium, a word Roland Barthes (1982: 27) used in the analysis of photographs and defined as the “very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential liking […] [It] is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right’.” He contrasts that with the notion of punctum; ”the element which rises from the scene, shoots out of like an arrow and pierces me” (Barthes 1982: 26). The punctum is that element of the photograph that reaches into the recesses of our being and bruises us as Barthes poignantly put it.

Erin’s journey is one from studium to punctum, from the raw moment of horror at the sight of the urine bag to the final scene where she rushes to the hospital bed to hold his hand in a final act of redemption, from a photograph with inconsequential referents (Erin did not know who her grandfather was as a person) to one that wounds and bruises Erin with the force of its truth (she locates the punctum after she embarks on a journey of discovery to get to know her grandfather), from a terrain/place that has to be named and renamed, suspended in a moment of unstable translation and signification, to one with a single name at the end of the series (cf. Kosminsky 2011d: 101’03–103’00).

The following four sections will outline several positionalities occupied by the fictional translator and translation in the series; the translator as author, the suspension of translation, the multiple subject positions of the fictional translator, and the (un)translatability of silence.

## The translator as author

Most of the first episode introduces Len's and Erin's idyllic world as the newly-arrived Len is coming to terms with the new place and Erin is enjoying her visit to Israel. Erin's reading of the diary is still dispassionate and apathetic. The turning point for both of them occurs at around the same time, towards the end of the first series (cf. Kosminsky 2011a: 66'07–70'32). Paul takes Erin on a trip to Nablus in the West Bank where she meets Omar at a meeting for Combatants for Peace. That was Erin's first encounter with the world of the Palestinian Arabs.

The first fictional translator makes an appearance here. He does consecutive translation for Paul and Omar's very short speeches about why they joined Combatants for Peace. He is clearly not a professional translator and his only claim to the task at hand is the fact he speaks both English and Arabic quite well. Nor is he a neutral observer; while interpreting for Paul and Omar, he interjects sighs, head shakes, pauses and meaningful smiles into his speech not used by the speakers of the original text. Those subtle non-verbal expressions catapult him from the periphery to the centre of the moment's textuality. The surplus/excess these cues add to the text commit an act of visual erasure of the two speakers, Paul and Omar, who seem to take a backseat to the expressive modality the translator represents. In fact, the translator is flanked by Omar and Paul singling him out as central to the field of vision.

Although the translator does not make any other appearance in the series, those few minutes in which he does are rich with signification about the role fictional translators can play on the screen. This particular translator – who remains nameless – is at the centre of the camera's gaze. The close-up shots of him while he is enunciating the translated text place the home viewer in a position similar to that of the member of audience who is oscillating between the speaker and the translator. With one sigh and a pause, the translator occupies the position of the author. He is not only reproducing a source language text in another language, he is also domesticating it; a domesticated text almost always presupposes an ideological apparatus at play as the translator's own agenda comes into play (cf. Venuti 1995). But in the case of the written text, the translator is hiding between the lines; we can only uncover his traces if we go back to the original text. On the screen, he is part of the "frenzy of the visible" (Comolli 1980). The camera names its object

and by centering its constitutive gaze on the translator (several close-ups shots of his non-verbal cues), it assigns the translator the double role of translator/author. More poignantly, the nature of screen production situates both the source and target texts and their producers within a cinematic frame, a privilege often denied to written texts where the source text is absent. It also allows us to query what happens when the translator is politically/emotionally invested in his task and what the limits of his involvement are. The non-verbal inflections and camera gaze codify the translator's "subject position"[5] as that of a player/member/translator/author within the discursive schemata of the scene. He possesses enough authority and power to inflect his utterances with additional cues or at least that's what the camera is instructing us to believe. What is interesting about this scene in particular is that, later in the series, we learn that Paul and Omar are trilingual; they speak English, Arabic and Hebrew quite fluently. They could have easily addressed the audience in any language of their choice yet Omar chose Arabic and Paul chose English. Their deadpan unemotive deliveries were in direct contrast to those of the translator and the author of this chapter found the fictional translator's renderings of both Omar and Paul's speeches much more superior to the source texts.

## Translation, interrupted

An equally interesting take on the process of translation (or lack thereof) is presented in the scene that follows the one in the previous section (cf. Kosminsky 2011a: 70'33–74'45). Erin, Paul and Omar are riding in the car when Erin asks Paul why Omar was going back with them to Israel. Paul responds "Ask him. He speaks English." Omar's demeanour betrays his annoyance with her but he retorts, almost sarcastically "My home is on the other side of the wall." Paul comments "Omar is an Israeli-Arab. He has the same rights as me and Eliza [...] in theory." When the three of them reach an Israeli checkpoint, passports are handed over to the Israeli soldier manning the crossing point. As they were driving away, a heated exchange could be overheard in the background; An Arab man is trying to cross from the West Bank into Israel with his family but the soldier allowed only his family to pass through. The whole exchange takes place in Arabic and Hebrew. The commentary here is based on my own translation of the exchange. The Arab man is telling the soldier in Arabic that he is crossing to attend his brother's wedding and that he has a permit to do so. When he failed to get across, he tells his wife (in Arabic) to

5. In Foucault's (1973) theory, an individual's subjectivity is constructed by discourse, thus he or she becomes the subject of multiple discourses where he occupies various subject positions that reflect shifting webs of power relations.

just go ahead and he will follow later. Omar gets out of the car and has a few words with the soldier in Hebrew. The soldier turns on Omar and orders him to take off his clothes, there and then and proceeds to inspect them. Paul interferes but is forced to leave the scene when the solder points his rifle at him. As Erin and Paul ride away, Paul comments: “Welcome to Israel, Erin. You have just been given a crash course into what it means to be a Palestinian in this fucking country.” When Erin interprets the scene as an attempt to stop terrorists from coming into Israel, Paul stops the car and instructs Erin to look at two villages divided by the Wall. He then proceeds to ask:

> Do you know what that is? It is a Palestinian village. Do you know what THAT is? That’s another Palestinian village. That one’s outside the checkpoint. That one’s inside the checkpoint. Which one does the terrorist come from? You tell me. The village outside the wall or the one that is already inside? It is not about stopping terrorists. The checkpoints are there for one reason, to make their lives impossible so that they will give up and move away, it is about control, humiliation and forcing them off their land. It has got nothing to do with terrorism. Nothing.
> (Kosminsky 2011a: 75’34–76’10)

The scene at the checkpoint is unique in that it deploys three linguistic systems (English, Arabic, Hebrew) without translating between them. The scene is clearly anchored in the English language, with the other two languages dispatched into the scene like musical exchanges or unsubtitled operatic arias. To appreciate the poignancy of this strategy, it is important first to situate Erin and Len and the camera gaze.

The camera gaze in *The Promise* is complex and layered but not an omniscient one. The camera affords access only to what Erin and Len, the two central characters in the series, can see and understand. This duality of image and voice, set in a realistic mode rather than a transcendental one, restricts the domain of access to meanings generated by the audio-visual. There are four types of gaze in the series (Len’s gaze, Erin’s gaze, the camera’s gaze and the viewer’s gaze). The camera very rarely chooses an angle which would not be accessible from Erin’s and Len’s vantage point. Erin, by virtue of her access to the diary, is privy to Len’s gaze. It can thus be argued that Erin’s gaze is the most central to the series since it has access to both her own experiences and Len’s. The gaze, however, is not constitutive of only the visual. It also determines the limits of linguistic interpretation and meaning to be found in enunciations; If either Erin or Len cannot understand a certain exchange in a foreign language, the viewer at home is deprived of translation.

But the camera gaze is very elusive and manipulative. It has been ordered and guided to see the world through Erin and Len’s gaze but its lens sometimes leaves their line of sight and doubles back on them in a moment of collusion

between the camera and the spectator. But while the image can be conspiratorially revealed thus, the limitations of language/sounds/ voices/silence are strictly Len's and Erin's. Meaning is intimately bound up with their monolingual limitations. There is no excess/surplus meaning from the voice that equals that of the gaze. This is why Erin's interpretation of the checkpoint scene, albeit one informed by her gaze and some traces of Len's was very distorted, hence the exchange she had with Paul. Erin brought her Eurocentric knowledge of the conflict to bear on the checkpoint scene, thus emerging with the interpretation that the Palestinian man was not allowed through because he might pose a security threat to Israel.

In leaving it untranslated, the checkpoint scene was elevated to the level of the Brechtian absurd where the details do not really matter. What matters is what we take away from the scene, what traces it leaves behind. The scene, in dispensing with language mirrors Schopenhauer's (1910: 333) statement about music: "This is why the effect of music is so much more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts, for they speak only of shadows, but it speaks of the thing itself." It is precisely because music is wordless that it speaks of the essence or the thing itself or what Schopenhauer refers to as the idea. The untranslated exchanges bypass and dispense with the exact meaning of the utterance in favour of depicting the essence of the conflict. Žižek (1996: 94) argues that music seizes "the subject in the real of his/her being, bypassing the detour of meaning: In music, we hear what we cannot see, the vibrating life force beneath the flow of Vorstellungen".[6]

All parties to the conflict are represented; the West Bank Palestinian (the family trying to cross), the Israeli soldier who represents the state, the Israeli Arab from 1948 lands (Omar), the Israeli left-winger (Paul) and the most oppressive apparatus in the lives of the Palestinians; the checkpoint. The terrain of the scene is laid out before our gaze and the characters enact the most fundamental scene in Palestinian life capturing the 'real'[7] scene (the one played out thousands of times in the lives of Palestinians conducting their lives around the constraints of 600 checkpoints in a small area of 6000 sq/km) which in turn, by absence of language, captures the Lacanian 'real' scene (the Lacanian real whose dynamics equal the Schopenhauerian Idea or Kantian thing-in-itself, or Platonic essence).[8] The Palestinian trying to cross a checkpoint, the Israeli soldier refusing him entry, the Arab Israeli who is lost between the two worlds and is neither a West Banker

**6.** *Vorstellungen* is a German word which means (ideational) representations.

**7.** Real is a reference to an underlying essence/thing-in-itself whose horror has been masked by its entrance into the language order (cf. Lacan 2005).

**8.** For the purposes of this argument, I use these notions interchangeably to denote the essence or haecceity of something.

nor a full Israeli citizen and the Jewish Israeli left-winger who tries to interfere only to be forced to "leave the scene". By taking away language from this Scene/ Dispositif,[9] the scene is reduced to its raw bare essence. It is an essence that can never be expressed in words, the same way the Lacanian "real" resists symbolisation because "the real" is too horrible, or as Žižek (2008) would argue it is outside language. Language differentiates the real into words, thus reducing its horror. The essence is lost in the details provided by signification and language. In watching the scene unravel, we came face to face with the undifferentiated real. In other words, we are not distracted by the contents of the exchanges and the trivia of the reasons of why the Palestinian is trying to cross or what the Israeli soldier said or the enunciations of Paul and Omar.

*No Way Through* is a 7-minute film that won the Ctrl.Alt.Shift Award. Written and directed by Alexandra Monro and Sheila Menon (2009), the film imagines an England with checkpoints similar to those in the West Bank. It tells the story of a young girl who crashes into a car while riding her bicycle and the driver's attempts to get her to a hospital as they struggle to get across checkpoints. In the end, they cannot and the police beat up the man at the checkpoint. The surrealism of imagining a London with checkpoints and soldiers with an English accent telling a British guy he cannot get the girl to the hospital without providing any reasons at all provide the horrific thrust of the movie. The horror of the real has been brought home. Its foreignness has been domesticated. It would not have been as powerful a movie had it been set in the West Bank. But by making the characters speak English and by shifting the terrain of the event to London, the viewer is shocked by the sheer horror of it all.

*The Promise* and *No Way Through* have employed two different logocentric techniques to convey the horror of the essence of the conflict. By masking language in *The Promise*, and by giving a foreign scene a local setting and a local tongue in *No Way Through*, the viewer is disentangled from the normative practice of everyday language and forced to confront the realities of the conflict and what is it essentially all about.

In dispensing with translation, the checkpoint scene problematised the role of translation and translators on the screen. This absence reflected the tacit presence of a fictional translator who remained silent and refused to reproduce the scene in English. An absence is always the presence of something that has remained mute and wordless. The sounds of foreign language are not meaningless but often acquire the power of music in drawing us closer to the essence/ the

**9.** Michel Foucault (1980: 194) defines *dispositif* as the ensemble of discursive and non-discursive elements (institutions, architectural forms, laws, etc.) that converge to create an apparatus that produces and regulates knowledge and power relations within a certain social order.

real of an exchange without the trivia of the symbolic. It is not a coincidence that the act of interpreting carries with it the double meaning of translation and the echoes of hermeneutics since in rendering the essence in words, we are by default allowing its entry into the world of limited linguistic formulation and language-determined truths.

Paul's commentary on the checkpoint scene inhabits that liminal space of non-translatability and hermeneutics. The natural human urge would have been to translate/interpret the scene for Erin's benefit but Paul chose to start by saying "Welcome to Israel, Erin. You have just been given a crash course into what it means to be a Palestinian in this fucking country." What role has Paul assigned himself here? Can it be said that he chose to forgo translation and jump straight into hermeneutics and understanding? But isn't translation a form of understanding and hermeneutics? Don't many translators enforce ideologies and certain forms of knowledge on the source text to produce a target text that corresponds to the translator's desired point of view and understanding? I am using the term understanding here in the Heideiggerian sense of understanding as "falling in" and "being in" rather than cognitive mental understanding. It is the state of "living in" a conversation without giving much thought to how one does it. This type of familiarity and transparency of a conversation means we don't pause to ponder whether we understood or not. We simply "do" a conversation the way we open a door or a sit on a chair, without much thought to the handle on the door or the shape of the chair.

If the aim of translation is understanding, Paul has chosen to dispense with the formality of translation which would not have guaranteed that Erin, to use a slang word, "would get it." Getting it is ostensibly about recognising the meaning of words but it is also about a certain type of knowledge being "disclosed to us" in the Heideggerian sense of disclosedness. It is not simply a process of uncovering but one of "being in" the conversation. Thus, Paul, in a move which altered the rules of communicative actions, was almost saying to Erin "It does not matter what they said, this is what I want you to grasp, what I want you to take away with you." Translating for Erin would not have guaranteed that she "grasps it" so Paul 'interpreted' the scene, forced upon it a disclosedness that only comes naturally with speaking Hebrew and Arabic and "being in" their zone of conflict. Paul's use of "crash course" is an apt metaphor for getting to the "heart of the matter" without much ado.

Paul and Erin head to a coffee shop where Erin reprimands him for being so hard on his parents after he tells her she is having "play catch up pretty fast in this insane country of ours" and that she does not know much about what is going on because she is living in the safe world of his parents. "Catch up" is another implicit reference to Erin being "thrown into" a quick grasping/understanding

of the situation. But Erin still resists having Paul's views foisted upon her and proceeds to tell him that his parents are some of the kindest people she had ever met. Paul concurs wistfully then tells her the story of how his father took him to see the border when he was ten:

> The Jewish side was green and fertile and the Arab side was brown and barren with a few goats, and then he said to me and this was this big lesson he wanted me to remember, he said 'look what they've done with the land in 2000 years and look what we achieved in 50.' And this is a good man, a liberal man. It took me years to question the assumptions behind the things he said to me that day. They are not as deserving as we are, they do nothing with the land. They are animals. They hate us. (Kosminsky 2011a: 78'06–79'03)

Paul's narrative is reminiscent of Brecht's (1999) *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* about a group of peasants fighting over a valley. One group has lived there all its life and owns the land and the other has great plans to develop the valley. In the end, the valley goes to the latter group by order of the arbiters sent to settle the dispute. The play is a play within a play and contains a story of a woman who keeps a child and loves him more than his own parents. What concerns us here is the manner in which Paul's parable contributes to Erin's total understanding of the checkpoint scene. By deconstructing his parents' logic (which represents a central thesis in Israeli Land appropriation logic), the checkpoint scene reaches full circle for Erin. The camera zooms in and her face, although she remains silent, registers the subtle hint of *verstehen* (understanding). Erin still had no idea what happened at the checkpoint yet – in terms of the petty specific details – yet she 'gets it' now and 'understands' the balance of power and the suffering that permeate the lives of Palestinians under occupation. That colossal feat of revealing the scene to her without translating it is testimony to the complex and often misunderstood relationship between interpreting and hermeneutics, in this case as it pertains to the function of multilingualism on the screen.

## The translator who is not

Erin's relationship with Omar takes a new turn when she embarks on a quest to find Abu-Hassan to return the key (cf. Kosminsky 2011b: 66'05–77'48). She initially contacts him to take her to Ayn Hawd (Ein Hod) where Abu-Hassan used to live with his family. Erin explains that she needs someone who can drive her there and also act as a translator since she does not speak Arabic. Upon arrival, she finds out that the village is a haven for Israeli artists and that no Arabs have lived there since the 1948 war. The Israeli woman in the information shop smiles mockingly

and tells Erin that she might find the Palestinians in a refugee camp in Jordan. Another Israeli girl suggested they look up the mountains where some villagers have built houses in their orchards there after being kicked out of their homes.

Omar acts as Erin's translator although huge chunks of conversation are left untranslated with Omar providing Erin with the gist of the dialogue. In the end, they locate an old Palestinian man who used to live in the village. Abdul-Basir says he cannot remember whether Mohammad (Abu Hassan) used to live in the village or not. Erin wonders if taking him there might jog his memory. Omar smiles wistfully and indulgently. And Erin says "We could just drive through. What's wrong with that? I don't see why it is such a big deal." Omar continues to smile at her and in the next scene the old man is sitting in the back seat as they drive through the village.

| | |
|---|---|
| Abdul-Baisr: | (reminiscing in Arabic) Here was my grandfather's house. My mother was born there. There was a big grapevine behind the house. My school is in the adjacent street. While coming back from school I used to visit my aunt and her children. |
| Erin: | What is he saying? |
| Omar: | He is talking about the people he knew when he lived here. |
| Abdul Basir: | (in Arabic) All of this is new here. God bless those good old days. |
| Omar: | He is sad. |
| Abdul Basir: | (in Arabic) Here is the house. Stop! Stop! That's my house!! |
| Omar: | (In Arabic) This was your house? |
| Abdul Basir: | (in Arabic) Yes. |
| Erin: | What's that? |
| Omar: | (in English) It is where he used to live. |

(Kosminsky 2011b: 73'13–74'10)

The camera pans out and his house has been turned into an outdoor gallery of artistic works. Abdul Basir smiles and looks on longingly. Erin: "How long has it been since he has been here?" Omar replies: "You really don't get it, do you? He has never been back here. He isn't welcome."

Omar occupies several positionalities in the series. He is the proverbial Palestinian who spent six years fighting with al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. His brother spent 3 years in an Israeli jail while his father died fighting the Israelis. He is also Erin's love interest but he rejects her gently as several junctures, the implication being that he is not interested in short holiday romances. Omar also acts as a springboard for revealing deep-seated Israeli prejudices as evidenced by the horror of Eliza's family when Erin invites Omar to have dinner with them (cf. Kosminsky 2011c: 22'37–29'30). Most importantly, he is Erin's link with the Arab side of the conflict in his capacity as a translator.

Similar to the translator at the Combatants for Peace meeting, Omar is not a translator by training. His only claim to the skill is knowledge of Arabic, English and Hebrew. His character is testimony to the complexity of multiple 'subject positions' that translators may occupy on the screen. Omar cannot be reduced to his role as an translator, although that is exactly what he does on many occasions throughout the series. To essentialise him as such would be to neglect the centrality of his role in fusing the cultural horizons that separated Erin from the Palestinian context. Gadamer (2006: 389) argues that "the translator's task of re-creation differs only in degree, not in kind, from the general hermeneutical task that any text presents." This view is beautifully reflected in the schemata Omar deploys in transferring meaning between languages; he often neglects to translate some parts, summarises others or as evident in the exchange above when he talked about Abdul Basir being sad, he teases out the emotion underlying an utterance without translating the utterance itself. These unorthodox translation techniques reflect a transgressive positionality that can only come from elevating the translator to the subject position of the cultural demystifier. Traversing the cultural divides shifts Omar's task from the realm of functionality to that of aesthetics. The part of the scene where the old man is reminiscing about his lost home was very touching in Arabic but rendering it verbatim in English would have sacrificed the underlying performative force of the utterance. "All of this is new here. God bless those good old days," was rendered as "he is sad" by Omar. Erin lacks the knowledge modality essential for making that leap between the old man's statement and the emotional subtext underlying it. Omar bridges the gap in a moment of pure linguistic genius. He authors a new text which coupled with his nuanced enunciation and the face of the old man distils the existential moment for Erin who gleans from the statement the anguish, feelings of displacement and longing that the old man is experiencing on seeing his old home from which he was forcefully removed. By virtue of his complex characterisation, Omar is permitted the transgressive valorisation of translation techniques not available to a professional translator outside the realms fiction. But the ethics of the self-afforded to Omar does not stem from his role as translator. That's simply a task he undertakes as part of his more complex positionalities as an object of love interest, a representative Arab and link between two alien worlds. Only then, is it possible to afford him the poetic licence to engage in a hermeneutics of understating far beyond the call of an ordinary translator.

## The language of silence

The last example from the series is one that problematises the absence of language in all its forms. During Erin's visit to Hebron, Paul comes to her rescue following her arrest by Israeli soldiers after complaints from Jewish settlers that she came knocking on their door asking after Mohammed (cf. Kosminsky 2011d: 3'00–14'22). Hebron is home to almost 400 settlers who live in the midst of 165,000 Palestinians and are protected by almost 1500 soldiers. The controversial presence of settlers is one of the themes explored in *The Promise*. Paul had served three years in Hebron as part of the troops stationed there to protect settlers. He tells Erin how the turning point in his life came one day while he was stationed there.

> I pointed my rifle […] at this little Palestinian girl […] for a joke […] Just to show how tough I was […] And she started crying. She did not make a sound. She just stared at me with tears running down her cheeks. It was nothing. I don't know why it affected me, I still don't. I mean, people cry. They beg you for mercy every day in this job. But something switched off in me, in my brain. I just couldn't do it anymore. They threw me in jail. (Kosminsky 2011d: 7'42–8'44)

The experimental composer John Cage (1952) wrote a three-movement composition entitled 4'33. Performers are instructed not to play any instruments during the entire duration of the piece which can be interpreted as either a celebration of complete silence or as every sound that plays itself out in the silence. Cage often said he preferred the latter interpretation.

In a world preoccupied with words, there is often very little said about the power of silence. Paul's encounter with the girl demonstrates how pure silence is an impossibility. Silence is corrupted by an excess of meaning that permeates the space between interlocutors. Paul could never understand why this girl affected him so much. The countless people who begged him for mercy did not impact him the way this wordless girl did. The girl resembled John Cage's orchestra staring at the piece of music and the audience being forced to consider what seeps into the space previously occupied by words and music. Every rendition of John Cage's piece is unique because the ambient sounds in every context shift all the time. Similarly, Paul's fateful encounter with the girl suspended language and sound, allowing a deeper truth to overcome the din of relativistic signifieds. The truth hides in silence because language is the ultimate expression of ideology. Isn't Munch's *The Scream* (1893) the essence of scream precisely because of the absence of sound? The girl's wordless and soundless tears are reminiscent of Munch's horrified figure; disturbingly more poignant than language and sounds.

## Conclusion

There are a number of compelling reasons to examine the role of fictional translators from within both a linguistic and philosophical traditions. The examples investigated above situate the fictional translator within the wider socio-political context of the narrative and with the aid of philosophical insights about hermeneutics, essentialism, understanding and meaning, highlight a more complex role for the fictional translator than the mere reproduction/rendering of words into another language. The analysis maybe unique to *The Promise* but it is hoped the insights won't be and can be extended to examine the special situatedness of fictional translators vis-a-vis the narrative as a whole and not merely as characters whose functionality is limited to literal rendering of words between languages.

I conclude by remarking that the process of "translation proper" may often expose the translator to accusations that the target text has failed to grasp the power and impetus of the original but what is remarkable about Kosminsky's miniseries is that it dispensed with usual forms of translations and presented a unique aesthetics and ethics of rendering which as Jorge Luis Borges contended singles translation out as an activity whose merits reside in its displacement, irreverence, unfaithfulness and expansion rather than strict adherence to an original text (cf. Waisman 2005).

## References

### Primary sources

Kosminsky, P. 2011a. *The Promise: Part 1.* (DVD 81 min.). UK: Channel 4.
Kosminsky, P. 2011b. *The Promise: Part 2.* (DVD 87 min.). UK: Channel 4.
Kosminsky, P. 2011c. *The Promise: Part 3.* (DVD 83 min.). UK: Channel 4.
Kosminsky, P. 2011d. *The Promise: Part 4.* (DVD 105 min.). UK: Channel 4.
Monro, A. & Menon, S. 2009. *No Way Trough.* (Videoclip 7 min.). Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcYcw-uWqzk (last accessed 18 December 2012).

### Secondary sources

Barthes, R. 1982. *Camera Lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang.
Brecht, B. 1999. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle.* Translated by A. Beaton. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Cage, J. 1952. *4'33*. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUJagb7hL0E (last accessed 18 December 2012).
Comolli, J. 1980. "Machines of the Visible." In *The Cinematic Apparatus,* T. De Lauretis & S. Heath (eds.), 121–142. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Foucault, M. 1973. *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* No translator given. New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. 1980. "The Confession of the Flesh." In *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writing,* C. Gordon (ed.), 194–228. New York: Vintage Books.

Gadamer, H. 2006. *Truth and Method.* London and New York: Continuum.

*Gale Dictionary of Psychoanalysis.* 2012. Disavowal. B. Penot. Available at: http://www.answers.com/topic/disavowal-psychoanalysis (last accessed 18 December 2012).

Heidegger, M. 1962. *Being and Time.* UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Lacan, J. 2005. *Ecrits.* New York: WW Norton & Company.

Schopenhauer, A. 1910. *The World as Will and Representation.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

The Guardian. 2011. "A film-maker's eye on the Middle East." Peter Kosminsky (28/01/2011). Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/28/the-promise-peter-kosminsky-middle-east (last accessed 18 December 2012).

The Telegraph. 2011. "Peter Kosminsky on *The Promise*, his drama about Palestine." Peter Kosminsky (04/02/2011). Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8303231/Peter-Kosminsky-on-The-Promise-his-drama-about-Palestine.html (last accessed 18 December 2012).

Venuti, L. 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility.* New York: Routledge.

Waisman, S. G. 2005. *Borges and Translation: The Irreverence Of The Periphery.* Pennsylvania: Bucknell University Press.

Žižek, S. 1996. "'I Hear You with My Eyes'; or, The Invisible Master." In *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects,* R. Salecl & S. Žižek (eds.), 90–126. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Žižek, S. 2008. *The Plague of Fantasies.* London: Verso.

# Walter Benjamin revisited

## A literary reading in Todd Hasak-Lowy's short story "The Task of This Translator"

Fotini Apostolou
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

> The only writer of history with the gift of setting alight
> the sparks of hope in the past, is the one who is convinced of this:
> That not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious.
> And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.
> (Benjamin 1968/2003: 391)

### The task historicised

Todd Hasak-Lowy's short story "The Task of This Translator" gives a representation of the translator's task within the context of globalization. The story's point of departure, as its title suggests, is Walter Benjamin's seminal essay "The Task of the Translator", which was published in 1923 as an introduction to Benjamin's translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux parisiens*. In this chapter I will attempt a reading of this "task of the translator" through a discussion of Todd Hasak-Lowy's work and a revisiting of Benjamin's essay.

The short story is part of a collection of seven stories, under the same title, published in 2005.[1] This is the first literary work by Todd Hasak-Lowy, who teaches modern Hebrew literature at the Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the University of Florida. All the stories in the collection attempt to approach the position of the individual in a contemporary chaotic world

1. The stories are the following, in the order they appear in the collection: "On the Grounds of the Complex Commemorating the Nazis' Treatment of the Jews", "Will Power, Inc.", "The End of Larry's Wallet", "The Interview", "The Task of This Translator", "Raider Nation", "How Keith's Dad Died".

dominated by the virtually circulating capital which seems to have penetrated and alienated all private and public spaces and relationships. The detached, and at times highly sarcastic, narrative voice seems to emphasize the characters' loss and, even more importantly, the inadequacy of language as a means of communication. Adopting a Benjaminian perspective of history, Lowy's stories seem to suggest that "What hope there is comes not from the future but from a vanquished past that resists domination by the victorious enemy", to use Ronald Beiner's phraseology (1984: 426). Although the Angel of History is turned toward the rubble of history rather than the luring discourse of future progress, Lowy's characters appear to inhabit a world of presence and present that evades any link with the past, which is visible only in scattered memorabilia that have, however, been emptied of any content, and merely stand as uprooted constructions. Thus cut off from its link with the past, the modern subject is left suspended in a world of non-belonging, which has translated everything into mere empty signifiers, void of meaning.

The story I will focus on, "The Task of This Translator", recounts the experience of a humanities graduate with translation and history, or better with history through translation, because of an interpreting job he is called upon to undertake. The story follows the character in his desperate efforts to interpret from a language and culture he barely knows, in order to reconciliate a family long separated by a historic rupture.

In my discussion, I will try to locate the traces of the philosophical past in the story. "The Task of This Translator", as stated above, obviously takes as its point of departure Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator"; the title creates a confusion to the reader with its almost absolute identification with the title of the essay. The difference, hardly perceptible at first sight, is the change of the definite article "the" to the determiner "this", a change that marks a reversal in the approach, from the general to the specific, from the translator as a professional to a specific translator.[2] By quoting almost unchanging Benjamin's title, Hasak-Lowy "transplants" the former's text into the title of a short story collection and a fictional story dealing with contemporary reality. Steven Rendall in his paper "Translation, Quotation, Iterability" refers to Benjamin's view of "quotation":

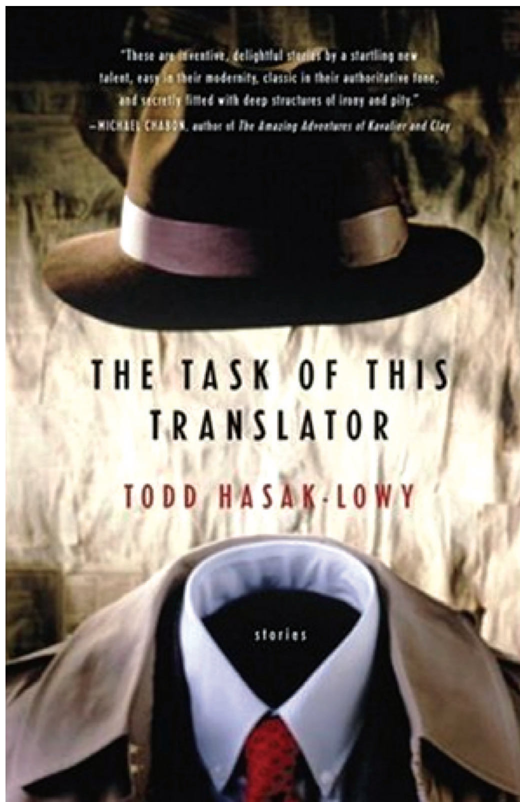
---

**2.** Derrida (1985: 179) refers to Benjamin's choice to allude to the subject rather than the process of translation: "From the very title […] Benjamin situates the *problem*, in the sense of that which is precisely *before oneself* as a task, as the problem of the translator and not that of translation […]. Benjamin does not say the task of the problem of translation. He names the subject of translation, as an indebted subject, obligated by a duty, already in a position of heir, entered as survivor in a genealogy, as survivor or agent of sur-vival."

> […] in the Kraus essay, Benjamin makes much the same claim for quotation that he makes for translation in 'The Task of the Translator'. Like translation, quotation 'transplants' a text into a new context, and in so doing both destroys and saves it. It 'destroys' the text by wrenching it out of its former context, turning it away from its previous intention and meaning, and at the same time 'saves' it by revealing in it an authentic truth that was obscured by its former context. (1997: 171)

Thus, Hasak-Lowy "destroys" Benjamin's text by wrenching it out of its "original" context and including it within a new one, while at the same time he "saves" it by forcing this perpetual return to the essay.

The book cover photograph, presenting a headless hat with the title of the book and the author's name in the place of the missing head (*The Task of This Translator* – Todd Hasak-Lowy), automatically places the author in the position of the translator, thus assigning to him "the translator's task", "obligated by the duty" not only of translating Benjamin's approach to a fictional reality but also the individual's experience/condition in a contemporary environment of isolation, uprooting, and lack of communication, among the plethora of mediators of



the individual and the collective experience. However, the task (*Aufgabe*) is by its very etymology ambiguous and contradictory; it alludes both to the translator's task and the translator's surrender; "it is an act of giving and rescindment; at the moment it gives, it gives up" (Lambert 2007: 16). So, the translator is caught up in this double bind of attempting to piece together the shards of the past text but facing a predetermined failure, since the result is not the reconstruction of a whole (that never existed in the first place) but merely the projection of its perpetual fragmentation.

The question that arises, then, is why the focus on translation; why is the title of this particular story chosen for the title of the whole collection? What is the relationship between translation and the issues mentioned above? What is it that translation brings to the foreground that is of such importance for the condition of the individual in a globalized world, and for the anxious effort of this individual to communicate through the systems that are available in contemporary developed societies?

In order to approach these questions, we need to attempt a reading of the text which gave rise to this title, Walter Benjamin's "The Task of The Translator", a quite dense philosophical text that has given new directions to translation theory, and has been interpreted by a number of distinguished scholars so far in many different ways.[3] Benjamin's essay sees translation within a historical context that does not take the "original" text as a point of departure, but only as a point in history, which has a past, a present and a future, and which changes through time. Within this context, translation serves as a vital link between past and present:

> The history of great works of art knows about their descent from their sources, their shaping in the age of the artist, and the periods of their basically eternal continuing life in later generations. (Benjamin 1955/1997: 154)

For Benjamin, there is no question of faithfulness to an unchanging original but an awareness of the changes a text inevitably goes through in its *Fortleben* (which has been translated as "continuing life", "afterlife", "*survie*"):[4]

---

**3.** An example are the contrasting views of de Man and Derrida on the essay as expressed in the former's "Conclusions: Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'" (1986) and the latter's "Des Tours de Babel" (1985). For an interesting approach to de Man and Derrida's conflicting "translations" of Benjamin's essay, see Eve Trevor Bannet (1993).

**4.** A number of scholars have commented on the terms *überleben* (survive, outlive somebody) and *Fortleben* (live on, continue to live), trying to establish their meaning in Benjamin's text. Harry Zohn uses the term "afterlife" for both, while Steven Rendall chooses "afterlife" and "survival" for the former and "continuing life" for the latter to reveal the difference between them. Derrida uses the word "*survie*" interchangebly, noting a difference in the following way: *Überleben* means "to survive death as a book can survive the death of its author or a child the death of its parents"; *fortleben* is "sur-vival as continuation of life rather than as life post mortem" (1985: 178).

> […] no translation would be possible if, in accord with its ultimate essence, it were to strive for similarity to the original. For in its continuing life, which could not be so called if it were not the transformation and renewal of a living thing, the original is changed. Established words also have their after-ripening. […] To seek what is essential in such transformations, as well as in the equally constant transformations of sense, in the subjectivity of later generations rather than in the inner life of language and its works, would be […] to confuse the ground and the essence of a thing; or, putting it more strongly, it would be to deny out of an impotence of thought, one of the most powerful and fruitful historical processes. (Benjamin 1955/1997: 155)

The task of the translator, therefore, "as an indebted subject, obligated by a duty, already in a position of heir", to use Derrida's (1985: 179) formulation, is to promote the original's "sur-vival",[5] and to establish a dialogue between the translation and the source text, as well as between past and present.

This dialogue has a restorative power that is represented by Benjamin though the metaphor of piecing together a vessel's fragments:

> Just as fragments of a vessel, in order to be fitted together, must correspond to each other in the tiniest details but need not resemble each other, so translation, instead of making itself resemble the meaning of the original, must lovingly, and in detail, fashion in its own language a counterpart to the original's mode of intention, in order to make both of them recognizable as fragments of a vessel, as fragments of a greater language. (Benjamin 1955/1997: 161)

Quite interestingly, a similar metaphor is used by Benjamin to present our relationship to history in his work "On the Concept of History" when he refers to the Angel of History, "who keeps the dead alive, that is deadly, who envisions for us their defeated force rather than their easy transumption by the latest political rhetoric" (quoted in Hartman 1980: 76).

> His face is turned toward the past. Where *we* see the appearance of a chain of events, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair, to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. (Benjamin 1968/2003: 392)

This is one of the instances where Benjamin uses the discourse of Jewish tradition to discuss politics, history, and culture; the allusion is probably to the "breaking of the vessels" (*Shevirat ha-Kelim*) in Lurianic Kabbalah, a theosophical approach

**5.** Joseph Graham explains in his Translator's Note of Derrida's "Des Tours de Babel": "*survie:* The word means 'survival' as well as 'afterlife'; its use in the text also brings out the subliminal sense of more life and more than life. The hyphenation of 'sur-vival' is an admitted cheat." (Graham 1985: 206)

to the creation of the world, which is based on the concepts of creation (through contraction/withdrawal), deconstruction (through the breaking of the vessels), and restoration (through the correct practices that will finally lead to a putting together of the vessel shards and thus to the restoration of initial harmony).[6] This concept, promoted by Lurianic Kabbalah after the persecution and exile of Jews in Spain, can be seen as a dialogue between history and religion; the return to the origins of Cosmos explains the historical experience of exile and hints to the hope of historical redemption. David Biale makes an extensive reference to Scholem's interpretation of this move: "The Kabbalists responded to the historical crisis by transposing it to a cosmic framework: The desire for historical redemption was reinterpreted as a symbol of the mystical desire to return the cosmos to its original harmony" (1979: 80).[7]

Benjamin resorts to a revisionism of this religious discourse to explain the task of the translator, a task similar to that of the historiographer in that they both have to piece together the shards of a broken vessel, a process that will allow the "truth" of the text, the truth of (its) history, to break in. His fragmentary approach, that breaks the illusive linearity of time and progress, can also be visibly perceived in his "Theses" through the writing style; his "Theses" are broken pieces of thought, sometimes expressed in a parabolic way, brought together in one essay.

The translator has a preferred position in this disruptive dialogue, because s/he opens into the language of the other; this ruptures the language and culture within which one is confined and allows a glimpse into the relationship between languages and cultures, and between their past and present. However, this remains a utopian task since the shards can never be fully restored. The translator, like the Angel of History, can only stare at the non-linear rubble of the past and attempt to piece them together but to no avail. Although "The Task" is more optimistic and hints at the achievement of a "pure language" through the "growth" of languages that is brought by translation, again this task seems to be moving only on a theoretical plane.

---

**6.** Eliahu Klein describes the process of reconstruction (*tikkun*) as presented in Lurianic Kabbalah: "The next stage in creation consists in utilizing this emerging creative energy that has lost control, collapsed or has become discarded cosmic flotsam. In Kabbalah, this state leads to the rebuilding and reconstituting of these 'shattered pieces' of light. Creation enters a new paradigm: The paradigm of *tikkun*, or the restoration of the initial experiment of creation. How does one fix and restore? By building and creating something better. In the unfolding vision of the Ari, the greatest *tikkun* happens when disjointed, disparate and disconnected energies become integrated; when created entities can relate with each other. Thus, the major Divine archetypes are described as emerging and evolving out of this collapse of energy, the shattering of the vessels." (2005: 25)

**7.** The historian Gersham Scholem, Benjamin's friend and correspondent, was an expert on the symbols of Kabbalah.

## The task assigned

In the story, the main character, Ben,[8] a student at a "center of higher learning" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 151), is at one point "forced" to become part of a list of translators, because one of his fellow students, Ted, sets up a translation agency as a result of his fascination with the prefix "trans": "Ted did develop a fondness for the prefix 'trans'. […] over time its semantic cousins – transportation, translation, transcendence, Transylvania, transplant, transsexual, transmission – wherever they appeared, pricked him somehow." (2005: 150) The prefix "trans" – a Latin noun meaning "across", "over" or "on the opposite side" – by being attached to completely different and unrelated words, is here bared of its meaning and left as an empty sign with no specific referent. Perhaps it stands for the characters' desire for a passage "beyond" their reality, which remains perpetually unsatisfied.

The passage to the "beyond" is only approached by Ben, whose moment of interpreting is a moment of awakening into history, but like everything else in Hasak-Lowy's collection of stories, it remains superfluous.[9] The first stage of the passage is the contact with the foreign language: Ben took "an obscure language. This language is a European language, but seriously Eastern European, entirely marginal in pretty much anyone's genealogy of languages, just barely getting invited to the Indo-European family table. Just barely. Balto maybe, Slavic probably." (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 151) The narrator here seems to reflect a general ignorance which leads to simplifications and generalizations not only about the language but also about the "unfortunates" who speak, or are spoken by, this language. This attitude deprives the Other of a specific and tangible identity and includes it in a broad category of negative connotations:

> This language hardly gets much mention outside of its local habitat, though it is the language spoken by those unfortunates that every fifteen years or so, whether under the auspices of fascist, Communist, or unspecified geopolitical misguidance, rise to international attention as they and their linguistic neighbours do horrible things to each other in the name of nation, religion, ethnicity, etc.
> (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 152)

**8.** The main character's name could be another allusion to Walter Benjamin, perhaps pointing to the sur-vival of the philosopher's text.

**9.** The focus on interpreting rather than written translation in Lowy's story further questions the idea of borders. As I will show later, the process of interpreting collapses any clear identifications and delimitations; it highlights the fluidity of identities, like the fluidity of languages, which merge one with the other in the simultaneity of the process. Moreover, interpreting through the physical presence of a mediating party that acts as a link and disrupts the communication chain, through the ethical demand for absence despite physical presence, the unavoidable gaps and misinterpretings, could be seen as a metaphor for the complexity and inadequacy of communication.

Evidently, the narrator adopts the hegemonic position of a language that "speaks" the reality of globality; this reality may, to use Manfred Steger's definition, signify "a *social condition* characterized by the existence of global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant" (2003: 7) but hides a well-organized system of control. For a representative of the American culture, this language is "obscure", "marginal", without specific origins, not part of the "family", spoken by "unfortunates" who would do "horrible things" to "their linguistic neighbours", and again this seems of little interest to the narrator; what is important is that the language remains "obscure" thus hidden, confusing, unknown.

Another empty sign, this language without a specific name and origin or territory, is vaguely present but mostly absent throughout the text, not only because of the absence of a name, but also because of its complete physical absence; not a single word of the language is given, apart from the client's name, Goran Vansalivich, which stands out as an isolated signifier probably pointing to the geographical territory of the Balkans, the "specter […] haunting Western culture" (Todorova 2009: 3).[10] In her very interesting book *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova suggests that the signifier "Balkan", "saturated with a social and cultural meaning" (2009: 21) and de-historicized, goes far beyond its geographical boundaries, to denote

> filth, passivity, unreliability, misogyny, propensity for intrigue, insincerity, opportunism, laziness, superstitiousness, lethargy, sluggishness, inefficiency, incompetent bureaucracy. 'Balkan', while overlapping with 'Oriental', had additional characteristics as cruelty, boorishness, instability, and unpredictability. Both categories were used against the concept of Europe symbolizing cleanliness, order, self-control, strength of character, sense of law, justice, efficient administration.
> (Todorova 2009: 119)

**10.** "Goran", as Wikipedia (2012a) informs us, "is a Slavic male first name often used in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia". According to the same source, the suffix –ovich also alludes to a Slavic or Baltic origin: "*-ich, -vich, -vych, -ovich, -owicz*: Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Russia, Republic of Macedonia (rare), occasionally Bulgaria". We read about Serbian surnames: "Most Serbian surnames (like Bosniak, Croatian and Montenegrin) have the surname suffix -ić (Serbo-Croatian pronunciation: [itɕ], Cyrillic: -ић). This is often transliterated as -ic or -ici. In English-speaking countries, Serbian names have often been transcribed with a phonetic ending, -ich or -itch. […] The -ić suffix is a Slavic diminutive, originally functioning to create patronymics. Thus the surname Petrić signifies *little Petar*, similar to Mac ("son of") in Scottish & Irish, and O' (grandson of) in Irish names. It is estimated that some two thirds of all Serbian surnames end in -ić and some 80% of Serbs carry such a surname." (Wikipedia 2012b)

In other words, the term Balkan (after World War I and particularly after the dissolution of Yugoslavia) has been made to stand for an un-homely "other" of civilized Europe.[11]

The story leaves us only with the name and incomplete translations through the inadequate interpreter (who knows only "Some basic greetings and conversation, a few hundred words, a handful of strange idioms. A poem by some survivor, victim, witness-type" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 153)), which hide rather than reveal meaning, as we can see from the following excerpt from the scene where Ben first meets his client:

> My name is Goran Vansalivich and I blah you blah. Blah years ago my brothers (passive marker?) blah by blah. I tried blah to blah (assert myself?) but I could not. Their younger children (passive marker?) blah from my country and blah to your country, blah blah blah blah. I tried to explain why I blah not blah blah, but they blah blah blah anyway blah blah blah blah. (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 156)

Given from the perspective of the prospective interpreter, this monologue, like the two more excerpts that follow it, is barely understood. Goran's monologues are depicted as dispersed fragments that are inserted in the flow of the narrative in the form of indented excerpts telling a story within the story and breaking the unity, the linearity of time and progress. The story is given in broken shards that are dispersed throughout the narrative. Like Benjamin's translator and historiographer, the reader and the main character try to put together the fragments in order to reconstruct the story behind the gaps, but there is still a void. The only information that surfaces through these fragments is that this man is telling a story about his brothers and their children, and his need to explain. So, it is probably a past mis-understanding (which gives rise to the need to explain) that has to be restituted via the translator, which brings us back to the title of the story and Benjamin's title, "the task" that the interpreter literally has to perform and which Derrida (1985: 175) so aptly describes:

---

**11.** The following are two references to the pejorative use of the term "Balkan": in the chapter "Balkan States" of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World (2012*) the authors Popovic and Karić mention that "The Balkans are often pejoratively described in the European social sciences as 'wild Europe', a region that is not quite Europe, a 'powder-keg', a land in which everything is topsy-turvy. This has helped create the negative reputation that is still associated with the Balkans in much of the European social sciences and historical studies"; the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2012) also makes a short reference to the pejorative use of the term *balkanization*: "The term also is used to refer to ethnic conflict within multiethnic states. It was coined at the end of World War I to describe the ethnic and political fragmentation that followed the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, particularly in the Balkans. (The term *Balkanization* is today invoked to explain the disintegration of some multiethnic states and their devolution into dictatorship, ethnic cleansing, and civil war)".

> The title also says, from its first word, the task (*Aufgabe*), the mission to which one is destined (always by the other), the commitment, the duty, the debt, the responsibility. Already at stake is a law, an injunction for which the translator has to be responsible. He *must* also acquit himself, and of something that implies perhaps a fault, a fall, an error and perhaps a crime. The essay has as horizon, it will be seen, a 'reconciliation'.

In his need to promote this "reconciliation" by piecing together the shards, Ben contacts "numerous schools, institutions, and bookstores" in order "to (re?)learn the obscure language in question", before he realizes that he has "to settle on poring through an old copy of this language's dictionary at the downtown library" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 155). He finally finds a film with "the original language undisturbed. Better yet, accompanied by English equivalents" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 159), which he tries to memorize by watching twenty-six times in five days, "rewinding, pausing, relistening, transcribing, and imitating" (2005: 159). The only information conveyed about the film is a sketch of the plot in the following lines:

> The smaller man – clever, but weak and apologetic – spoke softly and quickly, enraging Ben. His cellmate was animated and proud, his words, thankfully, delivered in slow, important portions, everything a speech or sermon […] Ben hated the little man, and was grateful that he, too, had eventually been captured and imprisoned alongside the leader he betrayed. Like a play unimaginatively adapted for the screen, scene after scene of conversations in the cell. The sadistic guard appearing occasionally. (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 159)

At some point, however, the film loses its pure linguistic value; it becomes a cultural product for Ben, but again undecipherable, despite the "English equivalents", and he tries "find out how it all ended":

> The ending seemed a bit unresolved, or at least open-ended. […] Dammit. The ending, what is it? Ben didn't like this. He did, sort of, but not really. More captivated than pleased. He had forgotten the whole foreign-language business in the meantime, and watched the film three times beginning to end determined to get to the truth. (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 160)

Contact with this obscure foreign culture seems to have invaded him somehow. The linguistic pursuit is now turned into a cultural pursuit, and his task is suddenly transformed from a purely linguistic endeavor to a deeper contact with otherness. The allusion here seems to be to Benjamin's conception of translation as expansion and growth; and it is this growth that Benjamin promotes in his essay through citing Rudolf Pannwitz maintaining the original play with capitalizaton, punctuation and syntax:

> our translations even the best start out from a false principle they want to germanize Indic Greek English into German instead of indicizing, Graecizing, anglicizing German. […] the fundamental error of the translator is that he holds fast to the state in which his own language happens to be rather than allowing it to be put powerfully in movement by the foreign language. […] he must broaden and deepen his own language through the foreign one […].
>
> (Benjamin 1955/1997: 163)[12]

His task, then, to a certain extent, leads the prospective translator to an expansion beyond linguistic forms and into a deeper cultural and political understanding; Ben is determined to find the truth, a truth that keeps evading him like the language itself, because it was never there in the first place, thus rendering the whole experience of watching a film radically foreign. Carol Jacobs describes this process of alienation: "For Benjamin, translation does not transform a foreign language into one we may call our own, but rather renders radically foreign that language we believe to be ours" (1975: 756). And it is more than just the plot that is hidden or the ending that is not an ending, it is also the very genre of the film that is under question, with the boundaries between reality/fiction becoming blurred. Everything, in a way, becomes "messy": "Things, in all its senses, had gotten a bit messy, again, in all its senses". (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 161)

The mess with the language, the mess with the film, contaminates everything, the house, even Ben's body. We should not forget that "Balkan" is associated with "filth" as opposed to Europe's cleanliness. And to make things worse, Ben grows to like that mess, captivated as he is by this foreign film, and this alien "stench" emitted by his body, so foreign that seems to belong to someone else: "The odor is so powerful and foreign, he must look at his image once more in the mirror to verify that this is indeed him and not some rank imposter" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 162). Ben's exposure to this otherness seems to have invaded him, but only for a fleeting moment. His stench is washed away and he returns to his old, clean and intact self.

However, this rich mess seems to lead nowhere else but to economics again. The "truth" of the film finally leads to money, thus collapsing everything to an overpowering capital, the only meaning in the "meaningless" plot of the film: "The only thing certain is that everyone can be bought, it's just unclear who's buying whom and why and in exchange for what and who's getting the better end of the deal. In the final account the middleman is the only obvious winner, and even he seems clueless" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 162).

---

**12.** For the violations of punctuation and capitalization in the quotation from Pannwitz, see Rendall (1997: 178).

## The task executed

In the next scene, the mess is transferred from Ben's body to the scene of interpreting in a hotel. Goran has arranged a reunion with members of his family in a highly formal ceremony in a hotel events hall. The relatives are "parentless parents", a fact noted down by Ben, and they are not pleased to see their uncle; they prove to be Goran's nephews and nieces whom he has not seen for 34 years and he wishes to talk to them about something Ben has not understood. And it is one of his nieces that finally enlightens Ben about the cause of their displeasure with their uncle: "'Uncle Goran', she hisses with acidic mockery, 'is a murderer'" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 168). Goran is thought to have killed his brothers and sisters 35 years ago during a period of turmoil in their country. After this fratricide, he is the only member of the family who stays in their homeland, and all the orphans with only one sister, the sole survivor apart from Goran, move to the United States. The gathering has been organized by him, who is now very wealthy, in order to convince them about "the truth", the fact that the story about the fratricide is a lie. The setting of the event is quite indicative of the rich uncle's intentions: After 35 years of silence, he chooses to speak to his family from a podium, employing a professional setting and mode of organization, thus giving to himself a position of authority and reserving a position of disempowerment for his audience, who will have to sit down and hear his version of the truth, delivered to them through an interpreter.

Ben's task finally materializes in the following words:

> A couple of dialogue from the movie keeps running through his mind: 'I'm not who you think I am.' 'Exactly, you are who I thought you were.' 'Sit down, please everybody', he speaks loudly, almost enjoying the authority of speaking someone else's words. (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 169)

The dialogue from the film, with the confusing repetition of the first and second personal pronoun, seems to illustrate the failure of identity and the power games involved in the interaction of this conflict. Ben flows into Goran's identity so that his task is accomplished, and this identification is further enhanced at the moment of the attack at Goran by two of his nephews, when the former "turns to Ben and says, each word terrifically enunciated, 'I will need your help now'" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 170). The two people on the podium, the speaker and his interpreter, are physically abused by two members of their audience, and this abuse in the case of the interpreter simulates a rape. "The main problem is the boot. First slicing up his thigh, it is now, at this very instant cleaving the translator's bottom in two and is firmly wedged into an obvious site of insertion." (2005: 171) The scene underlines the different forces acting on the historical text at the same time: The speaker, as

the only sur-vivor of the "original" past text who can communicate his/story; his sister, the only other survivor who, however, cannot convey anything in a comprehensible language but only in half legible signs, as she cannot talk and can barely write after a stroke she suffered the previous year; the audience, again as sur-vivors but of a secondary degree, since their version of the story has already been mediated for them through the stories of others (the audience in this case is the outcome of a historical rupture, the subject of a hybrid culture, a cultural translation); the interpreter, as the biased and clueless translator and conveyor of this historic past (he is employed by one of the involved parties); and the dead who are re-called to life, the silent subjects and objects of history, whose "true" narrative has to be revealed.

Apart from the obvious violence against speaker and interpreter by their audience, the scene is also interesting because of the surprising focus on Ben's role; Ben suddenly becomes "the translator" for the first time in the story, which marks an unexpected detachment on the part of the narrator, and serves as an indication of a twist in the focus of the plot. This is not Ben, the main character of the story any longer, but the translator/interpreter, practicing his trade. Relationships are also reversed; the dominant party of the communication, the ex-cathedra speaker, is deprived of his prevalent position by the dominated audience. His nephews, translated identities of Goran, who is the only father-figure for these "parentless parents" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 167) in this (m)other country, may speak only the language of the host country but their appearance marks them out as different, other. So, in a way, the young people as the translated other of the speaker abuse the "original" in an effort to assert their version of the story.

The episode also brings forward a violent break with the linear progression of events: speaker's address → translation → audience response → reconciliation. And it is not only the progress of the events of the present that is interrupted; it is also the progression of the historical narrative that is broken and left incomplete, in a sudden merging of past and present. His/story cannot be seen in a continuum, alluding to a Benjaminian perspective that "is advocating a non linear historical temporality. For Benjamin, the view of history as a continuum is fundamentally dangerous because it reinforces the ideology of mechanistic progress, which is dangerous no matter into whose hands it falls" (Steinberg 1996: 92).

However, after this moment of physical abuse, a destructive moment for the gathering, there is a re-construction of the setting and linear progression is re-established. The two nephews involved in the attack leave the room together with all the women and children, while Goran, Ben, and two other nephews are seated close together, and a mediated dialogue develops between the parties involved. The dialogue that follows leads to the final reconciliation of the family:

> He [Goran] speaks in a slow monotone: ‘They will not tell their children I killed their parents. I did not.’
> ‘You won’t tell your children he killed your parents. He did not.’ […]
> ‘He did!’ one of the brothers protests. ‘Bastard!’ […]
> Finally Goran removes a checkbook and pen from inside his suit pocket. He writes a check, tears it out, and hands it to Ben. It is written in the amount of $25,000. […] ‘For each family’, Goran says.
> ‘He wants to give this to every family’, Ben says handing the check to the one with the exaggerated face.
> ‘For what?’
> Ben translates.
> ‘They will believe me.’
> Ben translates.
> The brothers whisper to each other, alternately shaking and nodding their related heads.
> ‘Not enough,’ one rejoins.
> Ben translates. (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 173–176)

It all comes down to money, then. The ideological battles of history, which led to the murder of Goran’s brothers and sisters, the displacement of their children and the rupture of the family, are now resolved through capital. According to Jonathan Friedman (1990: 312),

> [t]he interplay between the world market and cultural identity, between local and global processes, between consumption and cultural strategies, is part of one attempt to discover the logics involved in this apparent chaos.

It is through economics that ideology and cultural identity are presented and negotiated. In this context, the role of the mediator/interpreter is not to convey the message(s) of the communicating parties but to represent the dominant ideology of his employer and world economics. Therefore, there is no actual reconciliation of meaning, a rapprochement between the two parties, but an over-coming of history, an absolute disregard of actual events.

Negotiations continue for some time until, in an evident repetition of the film plot, everything is resolved: The “clueless” middleman, Ben,

> speaks his best idea in years […]. ‘What if,’ *he rubs his unique chin*, ‘what if he pays you thirty now and another twenty in five years, but only after he checks with your children that you’re telling them the truth?’ […] ‘What truth?’ one of the brothers challenges. Ben holds his index finger to Goran and speaks to the brothers. ‘That he didn’t kill anyone.’ (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 176, emphasis added)

Distanced from his client after the abusive moment of the brothers’ attack, retaining a façade of self-identity through the use of the third-person pronoun for Goran, Ben manages to fulfill his task, fully empowered to negotiate and

manipulate power relations between the interlocutors. However, things are again quite messy as the "rubbing of his unique chin" underlines, and identities and identifications are not as clear as they may seem at first. A clear indication to Ben's identification with the family is the narrator's reference to the chin, whose importance as an identity mark is repeatedly stressed in the text since it marks the family as distinctly "other" in the new land. In other words, the interpreter abuses the clearly demarcated boundaries of his role as a neutral agent in the communication.[13]

This entire episode of the interpreting process underlines the complexity of the translator's task to reconcile the two languages and cultures, but also the past, present and future of the text. This reconciliation is presented in Lowy's story as a *pharmakon* (both poison and remedy at the same time).[14] Like the film, this interaction gives no access to "truth". What is the true story, or rather the true history? Did he or did he not commit fratricide? So, this "truth" is never revealed. The middleman is clueless not just of the language but also of the history and culture of the Other. This ignorance is shared by the narrator and thus transferred to the reader in an endless process of incomprehensibility.

The translator, instead of bridging the gap, seems to reveal the chasm between the parties of communication. The only culture hero and narrator know is the hegemonic culture of global capital through which everything is currently perceived and understood. Starting from the very beginning with the narrator's reference to Ted's "not so insignificant, intermittently delivered by bank wire at the command of his healthy as a bull father, who was uninterested in the morbid suspense of wills and impatient sons" (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 149) inheritance, which again annuls the very meaning of the word inheritance, since quite absurdly the father is still alive and strong and the inheritance money given at his command. Later, culture, politics, education are translated into some form of capital by the narrator, a practice which seems to empty everything of any "true" value or meaning:

**13.** Edwin Gentzler makes an interesting point on the word "abuse" as used by Derrida: "When Derrida uses the term as in a 'une 'bonne' traduction doit toujours abuser' [...], he used it because of the *multiplicity of referents* associated with the term, including those creative, playful connotations in French, always pointing his form of deconstruction toward the positive, the affirmative, the life-giving. In a typical Derridean rhetorical strategy, there is a kind of double-writing manifest, with *abuser* here connoting both pleasure and pain, mixing destruction with construction." (2002: 202)

**14.** The very word *pharmakon* underlines the power of translation to decide the undecidable as we can see in Derrida's discussion of *Phaedrus* in *Dissemination*, a discussion that "strikes at the very heart of philosophy itself" (Johnson: 1968/1981: xxv).

> He [Ben], too, attended this center of higher learning, which, again cost so much that were his parents to have taken and smartly hidden the money required for tuition, room, board, books, phone, recreational medication, trips home – the four-year total coming in just a few bucks over $140,000 – in a CD, money market, mutual fund, IRA, 401 (k) tax-elusive investment setting, and just keep their child alive and fed, getting him to deliver papers or pizza or processing data or anything until the age of thirty-five just to avoid debt, he could have retired, more or less, thanks to a bull market, which, essentially, would have made him a millionaire. (Hasak-Lowy 2005: 151)[15]

Even Ben's individual history is linked to economics:

> […] the duly past part of his life […] is so only a memory to be doubted. Something to do with potential and promise. Rising overall, unfazed by slight dips. Like the world's population or a retirement account. (2005: 162)

But this transcendental signified, it seems, is also devoid of any tangible presence; the narrator refers only to intangible assets that circulate around the globe without ever coming down to something tangible.

Even the promise of Goran's return and a repetition of the whole process further underlines the chasm opening up before the quest for the "truth":

> Goran slowly walks Ben to his car through the crisp air of the parking lot. 'When I return in five years, I want you to be my blah again.' 'Your what?' 'My translator.' 'Oh. Of course.' Goran reaches into his breast pocket and hands Ben a check. 'Thank you.' The short wealthy man walks away toward an idling car. […] Ben simply nods his convulsing head and mutely smiles his open and closed mouth, unable to remember how one responds to 'thank you' in Goran's language. (2005: 177)

In this context, the broken fragments of the vessel never make up a whole. To put it in Paul de Man's words: "The translation is the fragment of a fragment, is breaking the fragment – so the vessel keeps breaking, constantly – and never reconstitutes it; there was no vessel in the first place, or we have no knowledge of this vessel,

**15.** I will provide a "translation" for these abbreviations and terms, which I deem necessary in the context of a non-economic paper (cf. Investor Glossary (2012)): (1) CD is a Certificate of Deposit (time deposit); (2) "The money market is the market for short-term financial instruments. […] Companies and investors often use money market securities as temporary 'parking places' for storing cash"; (3) "A mutual fund is an investment company designed to pool the funds of smaller investors and place them under professional management. A mutual fund allows small investors to diversify their portfolios"; (4) "An IRA – Individual Retirement Account – is a tax-sheltered investment account available to US taxpayers"; (5) "A 401 (k) plan is a deferred compensation plan used for retirement".

or no awareness, no access to it, so for all intents and purposes there has never been one." (1986: 91) So, to return to the *arche* of the argument and Benjamin's title, *Aufgabe* is both giving and giving up, both an undertaking and a failure at the same time.

## Conclusion: The task of *This* translator

What is, then, the task of *this* translator? By transplanting Walter Benjamin's essay in a literary context, Hasak-Lowy (this translator) also attempts to piece together the shards of Benjaminian thought in order to reflect on the individual's condition in contemporary society. This effort to "translate" the past of Benjamin's essay into present reality serves as a link with past philosophical thought developed at a critical historical moment. Hasak-Lowy's story forces the reader to see translation within the context of Benjamin's philosophical approach, thus placing it within a historical, political, and cultural frame. By inhabiting all these spaces simultaneously, Lowy's story, like Benjamin's approach to translation, plays with traditional boundaries, boundaries between genres, languages, histories, nations, or periods. Benjamin's essay, as the point of departure, prepares the reader for a major rupture in the traditional divisions between original and translation, past and present, source and target language, and promotes the concept of reconciliation, transcendence of borders and limits.

This translator, then, promotes a dialogue between different discourses (literature, philosophy, history) and between different historic periods that co-exist in the text, thus establishing the sur-vival of Benjamin's essay in a different context and accomplishing Hasak-Lowy's task/duty as an heir, "as survivor in a genealogy, as survivor or agent of sur-vival" (Derrida 1985: 179).

## References


Bannet, E. 1993. "The Scene of Translation: After Jakobson, Benjamin, de Man, and Derrida." *New Literary History* 24 (3): 577–95.

Beiner, R. 1984. "Benjamin's Philosophy of History." *Political Theory* 12 (3): 423–434.

Benjamin, W. 1955/1997. "The Translator's Task." Translated by S. Rendall. *TTR: traduction, terminologie, reduction* 10 (2): 151–165.

Benjamin, W. 1968/2003. "On the Concept of History." Translated by H. Zohn. In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1938–1940* vol. 4, H. Eiland & M. W. Jennings (eds.), 389–400. Cambridge, Mass. & London: Belknap Press.

Biale, D. 1979. *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*. Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press.

Derrida, J. 1985. "Des Tours de Babel." Trans. Joseph Graham. In *Difference in Translation*, J. Graham (ed.), 165–207. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

Derrida, J. 1968/1981. "Plato's Pharmacy." In *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson, 61–155. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

*Encyclopedia Britannica.* 2012. Balkanization. Robert W. Pringle. Available at: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/50323/Balkanization (last accessed 17 December 2012).

Friedman, J. 1990. "Being in the World: Globalization and Localization." In *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, M. Featherstone (ed.), 311–328. London: Sage Publications.

Gentzler, E. 2002. "Translation, Poststructuralism and Power." In *Translation and Power*, M. Tymoczko & E. Gentzler (eds.), 195–218. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press.

Graham, J. 1985. "Introduction." In *Difference in Translation*, J. Graham (ed.), 13–30. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.

Hartman, G. 1980. "The Sacred Jungle 2: Walter Benjamin." In *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today*, G. Hartman (ed.), 63–85. Yale: Yale University Press.

Hasak-Lowy, T. 2005. "The Task of This Translator." In *The Task of This Translator: Stories*, 149–177. Orlando: Harcourt.

*Investor Glossary.* 2012. Welcome to Investor Glossary. Available at: http://www.investorglossary.com (last accessed 18 December 2012).

Jacobs, C. 1975. "The Monstrosity of Translation." *MLN* 90 (6): 755–766.

Johnson, B. 1981. "Translator's Introduction." In *Dissemination*, J. Derrida, vii–xxxv. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Klein, E. 2005. "The Next Stage of Creation." In *Kabbalah of Creation: The Mysticism of Isaac Luria, Founder of Kabbalah.* Ed. and Trans. by Eliahu Klein, 25–44. Berkeley [CA]: North Atlantic Books.

Lambert, H. 2007. *Les Murray and the Task of the Translator [and] The Raft*. University of Wollongong: Doctoral Dissertation.

Man, P. de. 1986. "'Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'". In *The Resistance to Theory*, 73–105. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

*Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World.* 2012. "Balkan States" (by A. Popović & E. Karić). Available at: http://www.oxfordislamicstudies. com/browse?_hi=2&_startPrefix=balkan&jumppage.x=0&jumppage.y=0 (last accessed 18 December 2012).

Rendall, S. 1997. "Translation, Quotation, Iterability." *TTR: traduction, terminologie, reduction* 10 (2): 167–189.

Steger, M. 2003. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Steinberg, M. 1996. "The Collector as Allegorist. Goods, Gods and the Objects of History." In *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, M. Steinberg (ed.), 88–118. New York: Cornell University Press.

Todorova, M. 2009. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Wikipedia*. 2012a. Goran. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goran (last accessed 17 December 2012).

*Wikipedia*. 2012b. Serbian Surnames. Available at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serbian_surname#Surnames (last accessed 17 December 2012).

# Of dragons and translators: Foreignness as a principle of life

## Yoko Tawada's "St. George and the Translator"

Klaus Kaindl
University of Vienna

Theorizing translation through literary texts has a long tradition, from José Luis Borges' "Pierre Menard, autor del Quixote" (1941/1989) and Carlos Somoza's *La Caverna de las Ideas* (2000) to Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* (1987) and Hans-Ulrich Möhring's *Vom Schweigen meines Übersetzers* (2008). This chapter analyses a short story by German-Japanese author Yoko Tawada, "St. George and the Translator" (2007), in which she reflects on the subject of translation and the character of the translator through literary means. The theoretical and methodological discussion is grounded in the intertextual relationships between Tawada's own essayistic writing on language and translation, Walter Benjamin's translation theory, and the story "Der wunde Punkt des Alphabets" by Anne Duden, which is the subject of Tawada's short story. This chapter begins with a brief introduction of the author, her writing habits, and her reflections on translation, followed by a closer look at the fictional translator in the story. We will see why the translator identifies with the character of a dragon by looking at Anne Duden's short story – an actual text (1995) – with which the fictional translator is engaged. This is followed by an analysis of the protagonist's translation methods, using Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" as a theoretical frame of reference. This chapter will show how Tawada applies Benjamin's translation philosophy within one of her literary works and how she transforms it in her own approach to language and translation.

## Writing as an experience of foreignness

Yoko Tawada was born in Tokyo in 1960, and studied literature at Waseda University. In 1982, she decided to move to Germany, where she has been living and working ever since.[1] She has a PhD in German Literature from the University of Hamburg and worked as a translator and interpreter. Since 1986, she has been publishing novels, poems, plays, essays and poetological texts.

Leaving Japan for Germany estranged Tawada from Japanese culture, while at the same time, she has also intentionally kept her distance from German culture. Her cultural experiences have not been based on assimilation processes; rather, they are, to some extent, experiences of foreignness out of which a freely chosen life in cultural in-betweenness, a life between two languages, has evolved. Home, for her, is "a hybrid, *both* here *and* there – an amalgam, a pastiche, a performance" (Bammer 1992: ix). This makes Tawada one of the "étrangers heureux" defined by Julia Kristeva (2000) as those who consciously decide against having a static identity and an essentialist concept of "home" and instead choose to utilise the opportunities granted by mobility and differences productively in their writing.[2] Accordingly, Tawada's texts often deal with transcultural processes of perception where the cultural contexts of actions are changeable. These liquid cultures, as they might be called with reference to Baumann's concept of "liquid modernity" (2000), are frequently the central topic of Tawada's stories and novels. Thus, this writer can be regarded as representative of a generation of authors who write translingually[3] and reflect on the processes that show transcultural life.

However, Tawada's approach does not sit comfortably within the concepts of hybridity and alterity proposed by Homi Bhabha. Cultural translation as a result of migration processes, in Bhabha's sense, is not Tawada's main literary interest; instead, her texts uncover and highlight differences crystallized in the alien nature of linguistic material. Language – and here, above all, the word – becomes a fundamental experience of foreignness; and linguistic limitations provoke creative thinking: "A language that has not been learned is a transparent wall. […] Each word is endlessly open, it can mean anything."[4] (Tawada 2002: 33) The corporeality and sensuality of words can be transferred to the other shore, but

1. For a detailed description of Tawada's reasons and motivations for leaving Japan and moving to Germany, see Kersting (2006: 42–51).

2. For a critical account of Kristeva's position in the context of migration, see Hron (2009: 20–24).

3. Kellman defines a translingual as "a writer who resides between languages" (2000: 9). For the discussion of the role of fictional translators in translingual writing see Wilson (2011).

4. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

Tawada believes they can also cause a physical sensation of pleasure or pain (cf. 2002: 40). Her writing, which is rooted in the corporeality of language, can best be described – in the words of Deleuze & Guattari – as "deterriorializing", and thus belongs to a category of literature that can be called "minor literature" (Deleuze & Guattari 1975: 33), literature where authors from a linguistic minority utilise the language of the majority, and in doing so, process and change the linguistic material, creating new meanings. Thus, Tawada transforms, reinterprets and changes the connotations of German letters, words, expressions, and metaphors from the perspective of the Japanese language. With this 'other' perspective on the German language, she unearths new meanings and deconstructs cultural matters of course at the same time.[5]

In keeping with this process, Tawada prefers a translingual identity to that shaped by a single language or culture in her writing: "I have many souls and many tongues" (Tawada 2002: 70). In this evolving interspace, the literature can be found; as Tawada stated in an interview: "As I write in two languages, I constantly discover black holes in the fabric of the languages. From these languageless gaps, literature emerges" (quoted in Esselborn 2007: 255). Consequently, Tawada alternates between languages and blurs the boundaries of language and translation in her writing. This becomes evident in the process of creating her texts: For example, she has written works in Japanese that have only been published in their German translation – the Japanese originals remain unpublished.[6] This fluctuating transposition between languages, as Szentivanyi (2004: 350) puts it, reaches its climax in *Das nackte Auge* (The Naked Eye), which Tawada wrote in German and Japanese at the same time – a writing process that Tawada herself describes as "continuous translation" (cf. Saito 2010: 285) in which Japanese is translated into German and then back into Japanese. In this text, the original is both embedded and neutralized in an endless translation process. On the one hand, the final text contains the original, while on the other, the status of the "original" is unsettled through translation loops. In doing so, Tawada, in a way, realizes Walter Benjamin's notion of the incompletability of the original – which is by no means a coincidence as Benjamin has had a strong influence on Tawada's work.

**5.** An example would be the short text "Ein chinesisches Wörterbuch" in the essay volume *Überseezungen* (2002), where, for example, "powerlessness" is translated as "twilight of the past" (cf. 2002: 31).

**6.** Especially at the beginning of her career – her literary debut in Germany was in 1986 – she had her texts translated from Japanese to German by Peter Pörtner without publishing the Japanese originals. Only since 1991, has she also been writing in German. She also writes texts that are published in Japanese, not all of which have been translated into German. The story chosen for this article is also only available in Japanese and in the English translation.

Tawada also uses linguistic material itself as a source of foreignness, playing with the writing systems of the Western alphabet and Japanese, with its *kanji* characters and phonetic *kana*.[7] Tawada traces the pictorial and spatial qualities of the Japanese characters in her literary and essayistic texts. This is not to highlight differences, but to foreground the transcultural processes that emerge from the contact between two writing systems. The central meaning of the script, or more precisely, of the letter, is an important feature of the story "St. George and the Translator", which is the subject of this analysis.

## Translating as a topic and motif in Yoko Tawada's works

As has already been suggested in the explanations above, translation pervades Tawada's life and works in a multitude of ways, or, as Matsunaga says, translation is "a constant writing process" (2002: 540) for Tawada: As someone who holds a PhD in literature, is a translated author, and has worked as a translator and interpreter herself, she has repeatedly commented on translation problems in philological and poetological works. As an author, Tawada has often addressed this topic in her literary texts, dealing with translating signs, bodies, and worlds as well as with the process of translation in the sense of crossing cultural, social, or linguistic borders. In these multiple translations of a reality written in signs, the main interest of Tawada is not de-alienation, i.e. making a text understandable in the sense of transferring it into one's own world of signs, based on ones own experiences. Instead, she focuses on highlighting – you might even say celebrating – foreignness, which she attempts to overcome by using foreign ways of writing, by defamiliarising language. Tawada addresses this explicitly in her "micro-ethnological" (Geisel 2001) essays and lectures on poetics (1998). Here, as will be discussed in more detail below, parallels can be found to Walter Benjamin's philosophy of translation, although Tawada radicalizes them.

Initially, Tawada relates translation to the concept of transformation, which is similar to Benjamin, who refers to translations as continua of transformations that cannot be described by means of abstract relations of equality and similarity (cf. 1991: 151). She distinguishes between three different meanings of translation in her essays. The first is the translation of writing, which, on the one hand, initiates translation processes through its imagery, and, on the other hand, has to be translated into sequences of phones. For Tawada, it is not the word, but the script

7. The Japanese writing system consists of three scripts: The Chinese *kanji* as well as the syllabaries *hiragana* and *katagana*.

and the character that represent the actual translation unit and the actual translation problem (cf. 1998: 35f). The second meaning of translation concerns the interlingual transfer of a text. Here, Tawada distinguishes between communicative and literary translation. The latter reveals the original's potential for foreignness and thus, according to Tawada, becomes the actual achievement of translation. In her volume of essays *Überseezungen* (2002: 35), she hopes to escape the linearity of language by means of an "interlinear translation"; to face the "magical unreadability" of the original in the translation, as well. Thus she claims that a translation "must obsessively pursue literality" (1998: 35). For Tawada, it is no disadvantage that this makes the reader aware of the fact that a text is a translation. On the contrary: In her opinion, this fact represents a quality criterion for a translation, which she considers an independent text form that is on a par with literature:

> After all, you don't say that this literature is good because you forget that it is literature. In my view, the charm of a translation is that it makes the reader experience the existence of a completely different language. The language of a translation carefully touches the surface of a text without becoming dependent on its core. (1998: 35f)

Finally, the third kind of translation consists of texts that seem like translations, but which have no "original" version. As with the translation of texts, Tawada sees the actual achievement in (one's own) literary production in the creation of foreignness and difference.[8]

Translators and interpreters appear as fictional characters not only in Tawada's essays, but also in her fictional works and serve as a canvas for the author's theoretical perspectives. In the plays *Die Kranichmaske, die bei Nacht strahlt* (1995) and *Till* (1998), we encounter two interpreters. The first is similar to the ferryman Charon in Greek mythology; he interprets between the living and the dead, and moves, in a way, in an inter-realm connecting reality and the imaginary world. The interpreter in *Till* accompanies a Japanese tourist group and gradually loses her task because foreignness is no longer seen as a communication barrier. In the Japanese-German novelette *Das Bad* (2010), we encounter an interpreter, as well. Here, the character is disgusted by her occupation and the fact that she has to take other people's words into her mouth, which, in the end, becomes a barrier to the interpreter searching for her own language.[9]

**8.** Thus, unreadability and foreignness are not unique characteristics of translations. Texts by, for example, Kafka or Kleist also have these characteristics. Therefore, Tawada refers to them as translations without an original (cf. 1998: 36).

**9.** A detailed analysis of these three works can be found in Matsunaga (2002: 534–539).

Translation finally takes centre stage in the short story "St. George and the Translator", published in the volume *Facing the Bridge* (2007). Here, as in many of her other literary texts, Tawada employs a number of intertextual relationships from which the story unfolds and which are essential for interpreting it. On the one hand, the actual text "Der wunde Punkt im Alphabet" (1995) by Anne Duden, which serves within the narrative as the text under translation by the story's protagonist, is quoted repeatedly in Tawada's story (although, at least in the English translation, neither Duden nor her story are specifically identified). Tawada also addresses but does not explicitly refer to Benjamin's theses on translation articulated in his famous essay, "The Task of the Translator" (1923/2000).[10] The theological foundation of the story can be seen as an echo of both Benjamin's religious and mystical description of translation problems, and the myth of Saint George, the dragon slayer, found in Anne Duden's story.

## The translator as a dragon

In the story "St. George and the Translator", a translator has sought seclusion on the Canary Islands to translate a text – "Der wunde Punkt im Alphabet" by Anne Duden – or rather, two pages of it. Duden's story deals with dragon slayers, such as Saint George and Saint Michael. In contrast to the traditional description of dragons as monsters, Duden regards them as the actual victims, who are silenced (cf. Duden 1995: 77). In Duden's view, dragons are persecuted, killed and silenced because they are different: "Their grave if inherent mistake is, without a doubt, that they are not human beings, that they are different." (1995: 78f) They can only escape death if they let themselves be domesticated, if they "submit themselves into a human's custody and learn some manners, if they abide by their command" (1995: 91). In Tawada's story, the characteristics and living situation that Duden ascribes to the dragon are transferred to the translator, who seems to identify with the dragon from the beginning.

The story starts with a fragment of the translation of Duden's text:

> *in, approximately, ninety percent, of the victims, almost all, always, on the ground, lying, shown as, desperately raising, heads, on display, are, attack weapons, or, the points of, in their throats, stuck, or …* (Tawada 2007: 109)

**10.** The translation by Harry Zohn, which is cited in the following after the reprint in the *Translation Studies Reader* edited by Venuti, was initially published in 1968.

These translations in italics are embedded in the actual story again and again.[11] However, it soon becomes evident that the boundary between the actual story and the inserted translations is merely typographic in nature. In fact, the text that is to be translated repeatedly enters the content of the story. The translation, which appears to interrupt the narrative continuity and is actually at the margins of the story, takes over the function of Derrida's "parergon" (1987: 54) to some extent as it influences the core of the story from outside.

The external influence of the translation of Duden's text on the story becomes evident at the very beginning. After the translation fragment cited above, the actual story begins with the following sentence: "Gripping my fountain pen as if it were a knife I looked out of the window" (2007: 109). The writing instrument becomes a weapon, the arm that holds this weapon starts itching and the translator imagines that it is injured. She perceives not only her fountain pen, but also her environment, as foreign and hostile. As the story progresses, she moves on the island like a foreign object, hardly communicating with its inhabitants. The natural world, too, seems hostile and threatening: The banana plants growing around her accommodation seem to move closer and closer, and the leaves of the palm trees look like swords to her. Feeling an undefined threat, seeing weapons around her, appears to be the immediate result of working on Anne Duden's text. The translator begins to feel pain like the dragon in her translation and sustains injuries: "Her upper lip starts to itch and later she experiences an unbearable pain accompanying the splitting of her nipple" (2007: 137).[12] Nevertheless, she starts working on the translation, which fills her with worry and anxiety as she is not making any progress and the deadline is approaching.

In fact, the unnamed translator has never completed a translation; her friend Ei has always had to help her. Ei has since given up the job as a translator and become a novelist, and she suggests the same to her friend: "'Why don't you stop translating and write instead?' she says looking straight at me. 'Translators don't count as artists you know'" (2007: 140). However, the protagonist did not become a translator because she does not have any talent to write, but because she wants

**11.** Gabrakova (cf. 2010: 386) draws a parallel between the island as the location of the story and the design of the text, in which the fragments of the translation are distributed throughout the actual story like islands.

**12.** In her texts, Anne Duden frequently refers to the act of writing as something physical; in her texts, language becomes a corporeal entity that can feel pain. As mentioned above, Tawada has a similar approach in her theoretical works (cf. 2002: 40) and transfers it to the translation in this story: The transfer of language is perceived as something physical – not pleasurable but rather violent and threatening.

to be a translator: “I translate because I want to not because I don’t have the talent to be a novelist” (2007: 140).

The translator’s boyfriend, who, like the dragon slayer, is named George, does not believe in her credibility as a translator, either. When she finds out that he will come to the island soon, she gets nervous because he does not understand her occupation. He says she should do “something physically more active” (2007: 125) and that she is not really suited to be a translator. In a way, George wants to liberate the translator from foreignness; this intention, which, becomes evident in the course of the story, provokes strong resentment from the translator, and she struggles against it – like the dragon in Duden’s story: “I despised George so much I couldn’t express it in words.” (2007: 147) However, not only does she feel pressured by her reviewers and her boyfriend, but she also feels that her editor does not take her seriously: “When I talked to the editor on the phone I could tell from his voice that he wasn’t very interested.” (2007: 126)

At the end of the story she succeeds in finishing her translation – two pages – although she has forgotten to translate the title of the story. However, her trip to the post office to mail the translation to her publisher becomes an obstacle course as she keeps meeting incarnations of Saint George, who try to prevent her from mailing it. In her flight, she loses her manuscript; her first complete translation is lost, and the story ends with a translator fleeing in panic from the Saint Georges surrounding her.

In Tawada’s story, the translator identifies with the dragon from Duden’s text. Like that dragon, she is a foreign creature that not only embodies, but also transports foreignness. Thus, Tawada uses Duden’s text not only as a source text for the translation by the protagonist of her story, but also as a canvas for the description of the role and the function of translators. As Frei Gerlach says, Duden’s story investigates “procedures of social inclusion and exclusion, situations of transition, and the potential of the other contained therein” (1998: 314). In Tawada’s story, the translator assumes the role of the outsider that the dragon plays in Duden’s text. Thus, the “gender dramaturgy” of Duden’s story (Frei Gerlach 1998: 314) can be reinterpreted as a translation dramaturgy in Tawada’s text, where the translator is torn between different demands. Like a dragon who avoids humans, she avoids the spotlight and prefers to remain invisible: “Rather than being in the spotlight like a solo performer I preferred to hide behind the author where no one could see me and finish translating before anyone noticed” (2007: 150).

In many literary works, translators are portrayed as untrustworthy beings due to their multilingualism, which makes them alien and uncontrollable, just as the dragon is traditionally portrayed as an alien creature that defies control and is, therefore, dangerous. In Duden’s text, it is not the dragons that are dangerous but rather the dragon slayers. Michael and George are no longer heroes but murderers

who strike with the full backing of society in order to restore the old order time and again (cf. Duden 1995: 81). Tawada's translator as a dragon also becomes a character that is being hunted after all attempts at domestication, of making her a translator who follows the common postulate of fluent and readable texts, have failed. When, in the end, she is chased by incarnations of Saint George, it is to prevent her from confounding the original – familiar – order of the text through her translation and from introducing foreignness into the world of the dragon slayers.

## Translating and the mystery of the word

Foreignness, which is a central feature of Tawada's works, suffuses the entire text of "St. George and the Translator". It is not without reason that Kersting describes the author's poetics "as a specific aesthetic of foreignness or alienation" (2006: 4). The way in which she treats the topic in this story resonates strongly with Benjamin's thoughts on translation expressed in "The Task of the Translator". Benjamin considers it essential to preserve the foreignness of the source text in translation. In his view, the task of the translator is not to convey the meaning and content of a text written in a foreign language to the reader, but rather to serve the language or languages by revealing their innermost reciprocal relationships. This cannot be achieved through the transfer of meaning, or, in Benjamin's words, the "statement" and the "imparting of information" (1923/2000: 75). For him, translation is about the "modes of intention" (2000: 78), those interspaces of language that go beyond grammar and expression, where foreignness becomes manifest between languages. Benjamin calls for a translation that follows the wording and syntax of the source text. The goal is to extend the boundaries of a language through translation, until finally everything can be expressed in every language and Benjamin's ultimate objective is achieved: the one "pure language". His demand that translation focus on "modes of intention" follows his definition of translation as "a mode" (1923/2000: 76). This means that the translation should not transport any meaning of its own but rather be open for the meaning(s) of the original. Therefore, the translator should not seek to interpret the source text in a specific way – an opinion shared by the translator in "St. George and the Translator":

> No matter where I turned there would only be three roles to play: Saint George or the princess or the dragon. I could try to talk my way out. 'I don't want to be any of them. I'm just the translator.' I could say which might work for a bit until I was forced into another decision. Translation is a process of making choices. That's why I didn't want to complete this one. Nor did I want to give up in the middle so I continued to slog on as usual. (2007: 140f)

The necessity of making decisions in translating and, thereby, interpreting the source text, cause the translator to shrink back from the task. She explicitly refuses to empathise with the text or the characters. Instead of choosing a role and, with it, a perspective on the original, the translator comes to the conclusion that "translation itself is something like a separate language" (2007: 147).

She seeks to achieve this "separate language" through a strictly literal translation. This can be illustrated by another translation fragment – these are always inserted into the story in italics, marking them as foreign objects even through typography:

> *... completely, seldom, most, from the background, emerge, one or two, young ones, appear at times, stay of execution, is granted, murderous, sight, wounds of the heart, however, cannot be avoided, for that very reason, they also, as though they're trying to howl, look, at any rate, their, small mouths, wide, are open ...* (2007: 117)[13]

In transferring the text into an interlinear version, the translator fully adheres to Benjamin's posit of pure language:

> A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not black its light, but allows the pure language […]. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. (1923/2000: 81)

The strictly literal translation that fragments the source text is itself chopped up by excessive commas; the lack of a clear demarcation of the beginning and the end of the sentence through capitalization or punctuation reinforces the impression of foreignness and the contrast to the actual story, in which commas are hardly used. Instead of using punctuation to delimit units of meaning, they are used to circumvent any, as Benjamin would say, 'imparting of information' and so to achieve Tawada's ideal of "magical unreadability" (1998: 35).

The result is a translation that the protagonist describes as "grains of sun-baked sand that won't stick to your skin" (2007: 113) or "pebbles falling down" (2007: 147). The fragmented appearance of her translation seems, at first glance, to be another reference to Benjamin's view of translation as "[f]ragments of a vessel" (1923/2000: 80). However, Benjamin speaks of fragmentation with regard to "a greater language" (1923/2000: 81), where the translation fragments are fitted together in pursuit of a "pure language". In Tawada's text, however, the fragments

---

**13.** Duden's German original reads: "Ganz selten nur, meist im Hintergrund, tauchen ein oder zwei Kleine auf, denen Aufschub gewährt wird, der mörderische Anblick, das Seelentrauma aber nicht erspart bleibt, weshalb sie auch zu schreien scheinen. Jedenfalls sind ihre kleinen Münder weit geöffnet." (1995: 77)

are not assembled; they remain separate, and the foreignness does not serve to achieve anything unifying such as the "pure language". Instead, the state of foreignness is the ultimate goal of translation.

In order to achieve this foreignness, Tawada radicalizes Benjamin's posit of strict literalness. In her afterword, Tawada's English translator Margaret Mitsutani notes that the title of the Japanese original is "Transplanting Letters", which is a very accurate description of the fictional translator's translation strategy (cf. 2007: 182). It is the letter or rather, the visual appearance of the letter "O" in the German word for victim, "Opfer", which becomes the archway through which the translator enters the original.[14]

> The word for 'victims' began with an 'O'. I noticed there were 'O's' scattered across the first page. Or perhaps it would be better to say that the page was full of holes eaten away by the letter 'O'. There was a wall behind formed by the white page so I couldn't see inside and the harder I looked the more it seemed I'd never break through. I colored the insides of all the 'O's' black with my fountain pen and felt a slight sense of relief. (2007: 113)

By finding an entrance in the letter "O", she is able to look behind the meaning fixed in place by writing and, in doing so, to reactivate the potential for transformation of language through translation. The surface of the writing, the content-related dimension of language, forms a kind of barrier that must be overcome. Here, again, Tawada seems to have been inspired by Benjamin's words: "For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade." (1923/2000: 81) In the story, however, it is not the sentence that is the wall but rather the foreign script as the fixed usage of the language.

In contrast to translation theories that see literalness as a means of preserving the original as unchanged as possible, Benjamin's objective is not the strongest possible likeness between the source and target texts – but quite the opposite: "[N]o translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original" (1923/2000: 77). Instead, he considers it the task of translation to ensure the continued existence of the original through "a transformation and a renewal" (1923/2000: 77). The translator in Tawada's story has the same idea of transformation and change through translation: "Perhaps translation was something like metamorphosis. Both the words and the story were transformed into something entirely new" (2007: 121). For both Benjamin and Tawada the translation, in its strict literalness, uncovers potential meanings hidden in the original.

---

**14.** Already in her essay "Das Tor des Übersetzers oder Celan liest Japanisch" (cf. 1996: 134), Tawada underscores that the original receives a new body in the translation. This body, for Tawada, is the physicality of the script.

However, the strict literalness that the fictional translator pursues is also criticized. Reviews often speak of her "blatant translationese" (2007: 121). Scholars, too, criticize her work: "[S]cholars seem to think translators are like students and like to point out my mistakes and dismiss my style as 'translationese'." (2007: 121) Her friend Ei repeatedly tells the translator to produce fluent texts; to be aware of the reader while translating; and to write sentences that can be read in one breath: "The trick is to read one sentence slowly while taking a deep breath, hold your breath while you translate the sentence in your head and rearrange the words, then, while carefully exhaling, write the translation down." (2007: 120) The translator doubts her work time and again: "How could this be a translation if the words didn't link up and even I couldn't understand what I was writing?" (2007: 143) However, a fluent translation that is reader-friendly and – as posited by Schleiermacher – brings the author to the reader is not an option for the translator, whose approach centres on literalness: "I hate writers who change a few things around to get a simple solution. Why do you think I decided to translate the story instead of writing a new version on my own." (2007: 126) Her goal is to address with the foreignness of the languages instead of adapting the text to presumed reader expectations.

## Translator and author

Benjamin repeatedly speaks of the relationship between the original and the translation in his essay. In his opinion, the translation does not have significance for the original: "[N]o translation, however, good it may be, can have any significance as regards the original." (1923/2000: 76) However, the translation is important inasmuch as it ensures the "afterlife" and "maturing process" of the original (1923/2000: 77). The duality of the original, which is at once self-contained and intermeshed with the translation, is addressed in Tawada's story through repeated encounters between the author of the source text and the translator. The author suddenly appears and walks beside the translator for a while. However, the dialogues that take place during these walks remain strangely unreal. Although they communicate with each other, there seems to be no direct connection between the two and the author remains distant, alien and makes the translator feel insecure. She complains that the author does not notice or need her: "The author obviously didn't need me. Whether the translator existed or not made no difference to her." (2007: 153) Nevertheless, the author is present – although she is not quite tangible and it remains unclear whether she only exists in the translator's imagination or if she really is there.

In the end, the author remains faceless and, in a way, a cypher for the translator: "Cautiously I looked up at her. I saw nothing […] just a blank space like the letter 'O'." (2007: 117) The letter "O" was surely not chosen arbitrarily and allows for a wide range of associations: The letter may stand for the German word "Opfer" (victim) and the author may, in a way, become a victim of the translator. Or the "O" may simply be the open archway through which the translator can enter the author's world. Or its empty expanse may be a projection surface in which the translator is reflected. How blurred the boundaries between author and translator are becomes very apparent when a meeting ends with the resigned words: "'Wish I'd known from the start it will end like this', one of us said." (2007: 134) It is not clear whether it is the translator or the author who says this. This indeterminacy concisely summarises the nature of the relationship – similar to Benjamin's – between the author and the translator, between the original and the translation.

In Tawada's story, the author is not an aid to the task of the translator. The latter is left to her own devices in completing the text and trying to get it published (she does not succeed). Her utopian project of a translation that is consistently removed from reception, strictly literal and, therefore, seemingly fragmentary, fails, mirroring Benjamin's words: "Indeed, the problem of ripening the seed of pure language in a translation seems to be insoluble, determinable in no solution." (1923/2000: 80)

## Conclusion

Tawada's story and the way in which it mirrors Benjamin's essay on translation is like that of a translation and its source: The story is "a mode" that arises from Benjamin's essay, giving it an "afterlife" and, at the same time, transforming it by literary means. Both Benjamin and Tawada address the foreignness of languages via translation. For both, translation is a mode that does not aim for similarity or likeness to the original but rather serves to showcase the foreignness and differences between languages. Tawada translates this foreignness into corporeal form on several levels. First, in the shape of the dragon, with whom the translator identifies and whose mythological meaning she deconstructs in imitation of Anne Duden: Danger is not rooted in its size, its scales, or its ability to breathe fire, but merely in the fact that it is visibly alien and different. At the same time, language itself is given a corporeal form that goes far beyond Benjamin's posit of no interpretative approach to text, strict literalness and the understanding of translation as a metamorphosis. In Tawada's story, the visual dimension of the script, the shape of the letter, becomes a three-dimensional object, the actual translation unit that

can grant access to a foreign language world. As a result, the act of translation itself becomes a physical experience of foreignness for which the translator is willing to accept pain and persecution.

Although the translator of the story fails; although she – according to de Man (1997: 192) – must fail in view of the translator's task; and although life in an interspace is painful and difficult, the translator obviously sees no alternative to the life she has chosen. This may be rooted in the mystery that Tawada (and Benjamin) sees in translation: Even if a translation fails, it remains fascinating as a task – fascinating like the dragon in Anne Duden's story who is described as "an eternal loser [...] who, no matter how often and how carefully you look at him, always lets another unexpected and unforeseen facet flash and glimmer, and who no single image can do justice" (1995: 82).

## References

### Primary sources

Borges, J. L. 1941/1989. "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote." In *Obras Completas 1923–1949*, 444–450. Barcelona: Emecé.

Brossard, N. 1987. *Le Désert mauve*. Montréal: Hexagone.

Möhring, H.-U. 2008. *Vom Schweigen meines Übersetzers*. München: Fahrenheit.

Somoza. C. 2000. *La caverna de las ideas*. Madrid: Alfaguara.

Tawada, Y. 1995. *Die Kranichmaske, die bei Tag strahlt*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch.

Tawada, Y. 1998. *Orpheus oder Izanagi/Till*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch.

Tawada, Y. 2007. "St. George and the Translator." Translated by M. Mitsutani. In *Facing the Bridge*, Y. Tawada, 176–186. New York: New Directions Books.

Tawada, Y. 2010. *Das Bad*. Aus dem Japanischen v. P. Pörtner. Tübingen: Konkursbuch.

### Secondary sources

Bammer, A. 1992. "Editorial: The Question of 'Home'". In *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 17: i–xxiv.

Baumann, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Benjamin, W. 1923/2000. "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's 'Tableaux Parisiens'." Translated by H. Zohn. In *The Translation Studies Reader*, L. Venuti (ed.), 75–85. London/New York: Routledge.

Benjamin, W. 1991. "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen." In *Gesammelte Schriften Vol. II–1*, W. Benjamin, 140–157. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge.

de Man, P. 1997. "Schlußfolgerungen: Walter Benjamins, Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers." In *Übersetzung und Dekonstruktion*, A. Hirsch (ed.), 182–227. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1975. *Kafka – Pour une Littérature Mineure*. Paris: Les éditions de Minuit.

Derrida, J. 1987. *The Truth in Painting.* Translated by G. Bennington and I. McLeod. Chicago/London: University Chicago Press.

Duden, A. 1995. "Der wunde Punkt im Alphabet." In *Der wunde Punkt im Alphabet*. A. Duden, 77–84. Hamburg: Rotbuch.

Esselborn, K. 2007. "'Übersetzungen aus der Sprache, die es nicht gibt.' Interkulturalität, Globalisierung und Postmoderne in den Texten Yoko Tawadas." *Arcadia* 42 (2): 240–262.

Frei Gerlach, F. 1998. *Schrift und Geschlecht: feministische Entwürfe und Lektüren von Marlen Haushofer, Ingeborg Bachmann und Anne Duden*. Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

Gabrakova, D. 2010. "'Wound in The Alphabet': The 'Punct(um)' of the Text or the F(r)iction of Translation." In *Yoko Tawada. Poetik der Transformation. Beiräge zum Gesamtwerk*, C. Ivanovic (ed.), 385–393. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Geisel, S. 2001. "Fremdkörper Sprache. Ein Spaziergang mit Yoko Tawada." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 23.2.2001. Available at: http://www.nzz.ch/2001/02/23/fe/article 71hps_1. 468004. html (last accessed 18 December 2012).

Hron, M. 2009. *Translating Pain. Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Kellman, S. G. 2000. *The Translingual Imagination*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Kersting, R. 2006. *Fremdes Schreiben. Yoko Tawada*. Trier: WTV.

Kristeva, J. 2000. "Y a-t-il des étrangers heureux?" In *Migrations et errances: Forum international. Proceedings of UNESCO conference 8/9 June 2000*, 53–66. Paris: Grasset

Matsunaga, M. 2002. "'Schreiben als Übersetzung'. Die Dimension der Übersetzung in den Werken Yoko Tawadas." *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* NF 12 (3): 532–546.

Mitsutani, M. 2007. "Translator's Afterword." In *Facing the Bridge*, Y. Tawada, 176–186. New York: New Directions Books.

Saito, Y. 2010. "Zur Genese der japanischen Textphasen von *Das nackte Auge*." In *Yoko Tawada : Poetik der Transformation. Beiträge zum Gesamtwerk,* C. Ivanović (ed.), 285–296. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

Szentivanyi, C. 2004. "'Anarchie im Mundbereich'. Übersetzungen in Yoko Tawadas, Überseezungen'". In *Kulturelle Topographien*, V. Borsò & R. Görling (eds.), 347–360. Stuttgart/Weimar: J. B. Metzler.

Tawada, Y. 1998. *Verwandlungen. Tübinger Poetik-Vorlesungen*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch.

Tawada, Y. 2002. *Überseezungen*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch.

Tawada, Y. 1996. "Das Tor des Übersetzers oder Celan liest Japanisch." In *Talisman,* Y. Tawada, 121–134. Tübingen: Konkursbuch.

Wilson R. 2011. "Cultural mediation through translingual narrative." *Target* 23 (2): 235–250.

# Taking care of the stars

## Interpreted interaction in Amadou Hampâté Bâ's *L'étrange Destin De Wangrin*

Karlheinz Spitzl*
University of Vienna

[Conquête: ]
I want your body; your soil; your labour; your soul; your love.
– A conflation of land and flesh, fear and desire.
(Black Audio/Film Collective 1991: 77)

### *Essai de conquête:* The colonial context of Western Africa

Invade. Destroy. Occupy. The second half of the 19th century saw an unprecedented race for resources on the African continent. European governments and entrepreneurs tried to expand their political and economic power to the detriment of the people, societies and states there. These wars, which mainstream history books usually refer to as the 'scramble for Africa', peaked right into the Berlin Conference of 1884/85. By signature of the unilaterally European 'General Act', the African continent was partitioned into imperialistic spheres of influence (cf. Schicho 2010: 75f). In this context, the French government, with insatiable greed, also reached out for its share. In Western Africa, it pressed its claim to an area that totaled about nine times the size of France, and whose arbitrarily drawn borders only existed on the colonizers' maps. This space, which was inhabited by a culturally and linguistically diverse population, was officially put under French administration in 1895, carrying the name of 'Afrique-Occidentale française (AOF)' (cf. Iliffe 2007: 193ff).

* Ruth Day! Un merci à toi, grand comme a moment of bliss, for your gentle, patient and flowering proof-reading thoughts on this text(ure).

The invaded territory offered no blank slate for the colonizers' experiments. They had to deal with a variety of more or less stratified, connected and competing social, cultural, political and economic systems and entities. In this context, the alien rulers were never able to establish more than "islands of sovereignty" at the crossroads of strategic routes (Wirz 2003: 12).[1] The image of an infrastructurally linked and politically and economically controllable unified territory remained an illusion (cf. Lawrance & Osborn & Roberts 2006: 19). Especially the rural areas were hardly visited by colonial officials. Compared to the size of the local population, the group of colonizers – i.e., officials, troops, entrepreneurs, missionaries and migrants – was vanishingly small. This is not to say that they lacked power. But they required other strategies than that of fear and terror in order to enforce their claims. In this regard, colonization seemed unachievable without some form of cooperation or implicit acceptance from the local population (cf. Gramsci 1988: 189ff). Thus, the colonizers had to strike a "bargain of collaboration", the negotiation of which was a day-to-day necessity (Lawrance & Osborne & Roberts 2006: 6). It is at this stage of conflict that the interpreters entered the struggle, and the relationship between linguistic (i.e. translatorial) and social violence becomes obvious. In the colonial context, the strife of divergent and often incommensurable perspectives had to be somehow mitigated by tropological substitutions. Translation – *μεταφορά* [metaphorá] –, therefore, could create and maintain a setting for establishing a *common* sense (in the literal meaning of this term).

The colonial administration established an internal interpreting section and provided for the training of its members. In 1894, they opened the *École des Fils de Chefs et des Interprètes* in Saint-Louis, the then capital of the AOF. The interpreters were locally recruited, and, depending on their duties, subdivided into 18 different official ranks (cf. Mopoho 2001: 618, 625f). Although officially in a position of little authority, they played a crucial role in the shaping of the colony due to their expertise as transcultural brokers. "[The interpreters] had considerable power to shape […] the meanings that auditors attach to the words of those whose language they do not speak." (McClendon 2006: 90) Moreover, they also had strong agency in the production of local knowledge (i.e., "the invention [and codification] of tradition", Ranger 1983: 212).

Moving within the coordinates of collaboration and resistance, they were able to control the flow of information between the administration and the population. Rather than seeking to destroy the colonial structures, they used the new opportunities to pursue their own agenda. In the microcosm of their petite reception

1. All translations mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

room[2], and with an aspiration for power, fame, and fortune, many of these interpreters were able to build their own little 'realm' (cf. Austen 2006: 159ff). However, their position generally remained fragile. As the colonial administrators had virtually absolute power over their employees, losing the former's confidence was a risky affair. In the colonial context, a sudden transfer of personnel or the abrupt end of an administrative career was nothing uncommon (cf. Klein 2006: 273).

For the local people, the interpreters' significance was obvious:

> During colonization […] the interpreter was a very, very, very important man. […] He was the true, true administrator of the White man […] It was the interpreter who reigned as chief […], who commanded a whole country, so to speak. One never went to the commandant; it was to the interpreter's that people went […] We knew what an interpreter was. It is only now, […] that the question of its definition surfaces […] it was all so obvious. This was common knowledge. Besides, I have many friends who are now high officials, executives who are sons of interpreters since the interpreter was the commandant.
>
> (Kourouma, quoted in Ouédraogo 2000: 1341f)

In the academic context, the colonial interpreters remain, nonetheless, the great unknown of the colonial equation (cf. Lawrance, Osborn & Roberts 2006: 4). Amadou Hampâté Bâ's novel *L'étrange destin de Wangrin*[3] (1973/1992) is a pioneering attempt to fill this gap.

## *Capital(e) littéraire:* Author & œuvre

Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1900/1901–1991) was an interpreter, translator, teacher, writer, historian, linguist, scholar of orature, anthropologist, ethnologist, and diplomat (serving on the UNESCO executive committee). He was born to an aristocratic family in Bandiagara (the then capital of Maasina, now Mali), and attended the Qur'anic *(qutb)* as well as the colonial school. At the age of 20, Bâ was hired by the colonial administration. Although he never served in the *Corps administrative des interprètes*, he was frequently assigned to interpret for his superiors in different parts of the AOF. In 1942, however, due to his membership in the *Tariqa Tijâniyya* (a Sufi order), Bâ was forced to leave his post in the administration. From then on,

2. The interpreter's 'outer office' – as compared to the spacious and luxurious 'inner office' of the *commandant*.

3. The following translations in footnotes refer to the English version which was translated by A. P. Taylor and published under the title *The Fortunes of Wangrin*, in 1999. In this article, translation is only provided where contextually necessary.

he devoted himself to research and writing. Bâ died in old age – by then, highly decorated by the former colonizers – in his home in Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) (cf. Heckmann 2005: 335–342).

*L'étrange destin de Wangrin* tells the story of a renowned, infamous and economically successful interpreter from cradle to grave. The plot focuses on the turn of the 20th century and virtually covers the whole AOF. At the beginning of the novel, Bâ (1973/1992: 7)[4] mentions that the characters have real-life counterparts (thus, evoking the power of the factual). He also points to the fact that it was Wangrin himself who asked him to record his story. Although Bâ was closely acquainted with Wangrin, he does not tell the latter's story from memory. Instead, he gives Kullel, a renowned griot at the Niger, as a reference. Apart from the fact that Wangrin's first language was Bamanankan, that of Bâ Fulfulde, and the book was written in French, the novel's already polyphonic character is further intensified through multiple recontextualizations and refractions. In this connection, the border between translation and non translation clearly dissolves (cf. Dizdar 2006: 330).

The protagonist's story is quickly told. At a young age, Wangrin devoted himself to the deity of 'Gongoloma-Sooké', "le grand confluent des contraires" (21)[5]:

> Gongoloma-Sooké était un dieu fabuleux que l'eau ne pouvait mouiller ni le soleil dessécher […] Les éléments n'avaient aucune prise sur lui. Il n'avait jamais ni chaud ni froid. […] Il épousa simultanément l'aurore et le crépuscule […] Gongoloma-Sooké était également le berger des étoiles. Il les faisait paître dans les plaines de l'espace sans fin et sans orientation. (20)[6]

After he had finished school, he quickly realized where power, fame and fortune could be achieved, and, thus, decided to become an interpreter ("le grand confluent des contraires"?). Due to his excellent knowledge of French, he was immediately hired by the colonial authorities: "Wangrin […] savait parler […] en français couleur vin de Bordeaux." (39) Once having smelled the scent of power, Wangrin could not stay off trail. He then used every opportunity to control the flow of information (when?, what?, how much?), and made sure that the conveyed meaning was in his best interests. Within a short amount of time, he became rich and famous. Unsurprisingly, however, the wheel of fortune kept turning, and his quick

4. All page numbers in brackets in the main article refer to the French original.

5. "the confluence of all opposites" (8).

6. "[Gongoloma-Sooke] could neither be soaked by rain nor dried by the sun […] The elements did not affect him in the least; he never felt hot or cold. […] Simultaneously, he married dawn and twilight […] Gongoloma-Sooke was also the shepherd of the stars and took them to graze in the endless, uncharted plains of the cosmos." (7f)

rise was followed by an even faster fall. Wangrin lost his grip on life, broke taboos and was finally doomed. In the end, even his thaumaturge knew no cure and Wangrin died alone, drowning in a ditch (353).

Amadou Hampâté Bâ made it into the international literary canon in 1974. In Paris, the former *capitale coloniale* (now *capitale littéraire*), he was awarded the *Grand prix littéraire de l'Afrique noire* (by the Association des écrivains de langue française), and the *Prix de la langue française* (by the Académie française) (cf. Heckmann 2005: 342). His publishers, the Union générale d'Éditions, commodified Bâ's œuvre for the literary market by highlighting its ethnographic background (with a focus on oral tradition and sociocultural differences). Wangrin was homogenized into the 'voice-of-Africa' literature (cf. Ndiaye 2007). The book's subtitle, pointing to a cabal (or trickery) – *Les Roueries d'un interprète africain* –, can be interpreted as an attempt to obscure the terror of colonial rule by means of irony. The reference to an 'African' interpreter shows that the publishers probably did not have an African audience in mind. But Wangrin was neither a 'trickster', nor typical for an 'African' context – he was an *interprète colonial*!

## *Les champs de lutte(s):* The interpreter – entangled and intertwined

Seen from the angle of interpreting studies, the author's comprehensive biographical description can be taken as a valuable resource. Bâ introduces us to a visibly strong and audacious interpreter – "comme une lionne-mère" (155) –, who sees interpreting as a powerful action. He characterizes Wangrin's position as that of a stone in a basketful of eggs: "Si la pierre tombe sur l'œuf, l'œuf se casse, et si l'œuf tombe sur la pierre, […]" (42)[7] According to Bâ, Wangrin's power could be compared to a coachman who lashes his horses to a gallop: "[L]'un symbolisant le roi, l'autre le commandant de cercle" (113). Within the asymmetry of the colonial field Wangrin positioned himself as the mouth(piece) of the colonizers. "Etre la bouche de quelqu'un, c'est être son auxiliaire le plus précieux et le plus indispensable. On ne saurait ni parler ni se sustenter sans la bouche." (370)[8] Like his tutelary god Gongoloma-Sooké, Wangrin wanted to be the shepherd of the stars who feared only one thing: A transfer to another galaxy … (17, 20)

---

7. "If the stone knocks against the egg, the egg breaks, and if an egg rattles against a stone, the same […] happens." (23)

8. "To be someone's mouth is to be someone's most precious and indispensable [aide]. Without a mouth, one could neither speak nor [eat]." (265)

His behavior towards his superiors was respectful and humble. “Je suis venu ici pour vous servir comme il vous plaira d’être servi.” (220)[9] From the perspective of the local commandants, “les dieux de la brousse” (216)[10], Wangrin (bound by oath, 33) was supposed to be a “modèle de dévouement” (63)[11], behave “docile comme du cuir corroyé” (114)[12], act as a “bon serviteur de la France” (35), and obey “comme un robot” (220). Once asked for his religion, he points to his liminal position:

> Je n’en ai pas de bien définie. […] Et tant qu’interprète, je dois ménager tout le monde. Aussi suis-je autant à mon aise dans la mosquée que dans le bois sacré des villages animistes. (112)[13]

Bâ also includes in the novel the view of the local people wherever Wangrin went. In the public eye, the office of interpreter was regarded as highly prestigious: “equivalent à un titre de noblesse” (191), and belonging to the “crème de la ville” (129). This was accompanied by an aura of being untouchable: “Qui pourrait oser, dans ce pays, toucher à un cheveu de l’interprète du grand commandant?” (155)[14] As a consequence, the loss of office usually also resulted in the loss of social standing. After his downfall – “sa misère devint totale” – Wangrin had to toil for a living in front of the General Post Office, “où il écrivait, moyennant salaire, la correspondance des illettrés” (346). Doesn’t that sound familiar to some professional interpreters of our time?

As an adept linguist – “remarquablement doué pour les langues” (38) – he fulfilled the necessary requirement for being hired by the colonial administration: “Je parle parfaitement le bambara, ma langue maternelle, le peul, le dogon, le mossi, le djerma, le haoussa et, passablement, le baoulé et le bété.” (221) In addition, he also spoke French, English, Spanish and Arabic (229). His employers regarded him as a “blanc-blanc ayant sucé le lait tiède d’une Blanche bien née de France”

---

**9.** “I have come to serve you in any manner in which you may desire to be served.” (154)

**10.** “the gods of the bush” (150).

**11.** “a model of dedication” (39).

**12.** “pliable as curried leather” (76).

**13.** “I don’t have any special [one]. […] As an interpreter, it’s my job to get on with everybody; I am as much at ease in a mosque as I am in the sacred groves of the animist villages.” (74)

**14.** “But who anywhere in this area would dare to touch a hair [on the head] of […] the Senior Commandant’s interpreter?” (106)

(27)[15]. Wherever he was posted, he quickly tried to become acquainted with local customs and manners. Wangrin was aware that his power depended on the trust of his 'clients'. For this reason, he usually tried to gain access to local networks. The locals regarded Wangrin as a "noir-blanc parfaitement réussi. Ne voilà-t-il pas qu'il sait se moucher et essuyer ses larmes à la manière des blancs-blancs?" (168)[16] As a professional interpreter, he cultivated his masquerade to perfection (cf. Fanon 1952/2005).

Through his expertise in the local custom of Sanankouya ("parenté à plaisanterie"[17]), and by resorting to the sphere of collective symbolism, Wangrin was able to mediate situations of conflict (258). As Wangrin had a delicate ear for the subtleties of language, he was able to hear the unspoken: "[…] comprendre les choses même quand elles ne sont dites qu'à mots couverts, ou simplement mimées." (123)[18] Professional quality was defined by him as follows:

> Il n'est pas donné à tout le monde de distinguer les larmes d'un crocodile des gouttes de l'eau dans laquelle il nage. Une pensée exprimée par allusion ou par paraboles est parfois semblable aux larmes du crocodile dans l'eau. (263)[19]

Wangrin also heeded the advice of Dayemaatiens, a renowned orator of the 13th century:

> […] la parole a horreur de trois choses: être avancée avant le moment propice, n'être pas dite à temps, ou être dite après coup. Il y a donc un moment, un lieu et une manière de parler. (67)[20]

---

**15.** "white-[w]hite nurtured on the lukewarm milk of a well-bred French-born mother" (12).

**16.** "accomplished 'white-[b]lack'. Look at him, drying his tears and blowing his nose like the 'white-[w]hites'!" (116)

**17.** "[Sanankouya] is a peculiar kind of relationship. Within that context, friends can mock one another and exchange home truths without any ill consequence or unpleasant reactions. This [Sanankouya] establishes among its members […] a duty of mutual assistance at all times. Called by some ethnologists 'joking relationship' or 'cathartic outlet', [Sanankouya] may exist between two individuals, two [sociocultural] groups, or even two countries." (Bâ 1999: 270)

**18.** "[…] captur[ing] the essence of what is being said even if it is merely suggested, or merely mimed" (82).

**19.** "[N]ot everyone is able to separate the crocodile's tears from the water in which [they are] swimming. A thought expressed through allusions or parables is not altogether dissimilar from the crocodile's tears […] [in] the water." (185)

**20.** "[…] words abhor the following three things: to be spoken before the proper time, not to be spoken at the right moment, or to be spoken too late. There are, then, suitable moments, places and ways, when it comes to speaking." (43)

His translational strategy was skopos-oriented, and diascopic in style (cf. Prunč 2000: 61, 65). Wangrin's translations were deliberately interventionst and strategic, disturbing and displacing (cf. Niranjana 1992: 162, 38). In this regard, it is important to note that dealing with ambiguity, for Wangrin, was not to be mixed up with falsity or trickery. As Kourouma (2001: 136) aptly put it: "A man has reached his fullest measure and become a thaumaturge when he has freed himself from the distinction between truth and lie." Creating or upholding ambiguity through translation also meant creating room for alternative reactions within this highly asymmetric and atrocious field.

Wangrin's identities and ways of using language were transveral, fluid. He had many names (translations of himself?) (22), with the idea of singlecentredness having no practicality in his life. He was, first and foremost, loyal to himself (and his multiple inner doubles[21]), but, being aware that interpreting required a multidimensional perspective, he usually approached things from different angles. We can look at it the following way: When travelling on land, of course, a bridge can be a path, but when going downriver, it might become an obstacle – the interpreter as a bridge (collaboration), or an obstacle (resistance), or … "Wangrin venait de faire d'une pierre, non pas deux coups, mais plusieurs." (181)[22] To Wangrin, conveying meaning was an open process, a continuum of relations, within the coordinates of aporia and ambiguity: "La parole de Wangrin est de l'or, et sa promesse de l'airain." (10)[23] Regardless of his self-centred and target-oriented actions, as an interpreter he never lost sight of the source: "Il marchait toujours le dos tourné vers sa destination." (21)[24]

In the volatile and violent setting of colonialism, a literal "champ de lutte" (Bourdieu 1978: 19), an interpreter had to retain some kind of composure: "Les éléments n'avaient aucune prise sur lui. Il n'avait jamais ni chaud ni froid." (20)[25] An emotional misstep at the wrong time could result in the total collapse of one's professional life. "Un interprète qui perd la face devient inutile." (50) In the case of Wangrin, his loss of face also meant the loss of his life: from *shepherd of the stars* to *falling star* …

**21.** According to the psychology of Bâ's sociocultural context, "within one's physical body many others exist". (Bâ 1999: 270).

**22.** "Wangrin had killed not just two, but several birds with one stone." (124)

**23.** "Wangrin's words are gold, and his promises […] as durable as bronze." (10)

**24.** "He always walked backwards toward his destination." (8)

**25.** "The elements did not affect him in the least; he never felt hot or cold." (8)

### *À la recherche de Wangrin perdu:* Interpreting between Bretton Woods and Timbuktu

The horrors of colonization were followed by the hopes of independence. The colonizers left and the former interpreters moved into their now vacant, spacious 'inner offices'. From then on, the interpreters-turned-political-kingpins were also formally in charge (cf. Wirz 2003: 13f, 23). But who succeeded them in their own former 'outer offices'? No Wangrin to be seen! Today's renewed invasion of the African continent has taken a different shape. The race of the colonial stakeholders has become a global(ised) one. In this process, the interpreters, again, play pivotal roles. Timbuktu has to be available 24/7 for Bretton Woods, and vice versa. With regard to many societal systems which are based on oral communication, the demand for interpreting work will continue to expand. At the same time, and somehow paradoxical, the interpreters are increasingly transferred from the real centre of interaction to virtual space (cyber zone). Faced with today's call centre cubicles, our hero interpreter would probably have wished nothing more than to return to his former petite reception room.

## References

### Primary sources

Bâ, A. H. 1973/1992. *L'étrange destin de Wangrin ou Les Roueries d'un interprète africain.* Paris: Editions 10/18.

Bâ, A. H. 1999. *The Fortunes of Wangrin.* With an Introduction by A. Irele and an Afterword by the Author. Translated by A. P. Taylor. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

### Secondary sources

Austen, R. A. 2006. "Interpreters Self-Interpreted. The Autobiographies of Two Colonial Clerks." In *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and clerks. African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa,* B. N. Lawrance & E. L. Osborn, R. L. & Roberts (eds.), 159–79. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Black Audio/Film Collective. 1991. "Expeditions: on race and nation." In *The Myth of Primitivism. Perspectives of art,* S. Hiller (ed.), 72–83. London/New York: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. 1978. "Classement, déclassement, reclassement." *Actes de la Recherche en sciences sociales* 24 (2): 2–22.

Dizdar, D. 2006. *Translation. Um- und Irrwege.* Berlin: Frank & Timme.

Fanon, F. 1952/2005. *Peau noire, masques blancs.* Paris: Seuil.

Gramsci, A. 1988. *A Gramsci Reader. Selected Writings 1916–1935.* Ed. by D. Forgacs. Translated by Q. Hoare & G. Novell-Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Heckmann, H. 2005. "Biographie chronologique sommaire." Dans *Ahmadou Hampâté Bâ, homme de science et de sagesse. Mélanges pour le centième anniversaire de la naissance d'Hampâté Bâ,* A. Touré & N. I. Mariko, (éds.), 335–42. Paris/Bamako: Karthala/Nouvelles Éditions Maliennes.

Iliffe, J. 2007. *Africans: The History of a Continent.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Klein, M. 2006. "African Participation in Colonial Rule. The Role of Clerks, Interpreters, and Other Intermediaries." In *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and clerks. African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa,* B. N. Lawrance & E. L. Osborn, R. L. & Roberts (eds.), 273–285. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Kourouma, A. 2001. *Waiting for the Vote of the Wild Animals.* Translated by C. F. Coates. Charlottesville (VA): University Press of Virginia.

Lawrance, B. N. & Osborn, E. L. & Roberts, R. L. 2006. "Introduction. African Intermediaries and the 'Bargain' of Collaboration." In *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and clerks. African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa,* B. N. Lawrance & E. L. Osborn, R. L. & Roberts (eds.), 3–34. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

McClendon, T. 2006. "Interpretation and Interpolation: Sheptstone as Native Interpreter." In *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and clerks. African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa,* Lawrance, B. N. Lawrance & E. L. Osborn, R. L. & Roberts (eds.), 77–93. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Mopoho, R. 2001. "Statut de l'interprète dans l'administration coloniale en Afrique francophone." *Meta* 46 (3): 615–626.

Ndiaye, C. 2007. "Kourouma, the Myth: The Rhetoric of the Commonplace in Kourouma Criticism." *Research in African Literatures* 38 (2): 95–108.

Niranjana, T. 1992. *Siting Translation. History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context.* Berkely: University of California Press.

Ouédraogo, J. 2000. "An Interview with Ahmadou Kourouma (November 24, 1997)." *Callaloo* 23(4): 1338–48.

Prunč, E. 2000. "Vom Translationsbiedermeier zur Cyber-translation." *TEXTconTEXT* 14.1=NF 4.1: 3–74.

Ranger, T. 1983. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." In *The Invention of Tradition,* E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds.), 211–262. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schicho, W. 2010. *Geschichte Afrikas.* Stuttgart: Theiss.

Wirz, A. 2003. "Körper, Raum und Zeit der Herrschaft. Einleitung." In *Alles unter Kontrolle,* A. Wirz & A. Eckert & K. Bromber, K. (eds.), 5–36. Köln: Köppe.

# Reaching a dead-end – and then?

## Jacques Gélat's *Le Traducteur* and *Le Traducteur amoureux*

Nitsa Ben-Ari
Tel Aviv University

## Introduction

The "fictional turn"[1] seems to have reached its apex. What was Else Vieira's term in the turn of the 21st century has inspired so much research in so many languages and cultures, that it must be indicative. Both of the fact that we're dealing with matters close to our hearts (namely "us" translators), and that we have finally come to the front stage, but also, I'm afraid, because post-structuralist studies left us with a dead-end, and so we tarry and loiter, afraid of what must come next. And it is this dead-end – or what I see as a dead-end – that I would like to discuss in the following chapter.

Vieira was, as we know, the first to pinpoint a growing tendency, that of using the translator/interpreter, previously "transparent", as a fictional protagonist. Her remark triggered the interest of translation research, which began to take vivid interest in this phenomenon. If, however, in 2000 she spotted the new tendency in dozens of novels, we have since witnessed an overwhelming number of novels pouring in from all over the world with the fictional translator/interpreter as main character.

As many of my colleagues, I was intrigued with this transformation of the translator/interpreter in literature. In an essay called "Representations of Translators in Popular Culture" (Ben-Ari 2010) I analyzed some of the many examples I had read, concluding with a short French novel by Jacques Gélat, *Le Traducteur*.

---

1. The term, as we know, was coined by critic Else Vieira (in Pagano 2000, quoted by Delabastita & Grutman (2005: 29)).

Gélat's novel from 2006 closely examined the translator's personality, aspirations and ethics and seemed to reach the grim conclusion, far from shocking then, and even less so now: The translator's secret wish is to become a writer. However, Gélat did not leave it at that: Once the translator has achieved this goal and becomes a famous writer, he is disillusioned with this achievement as well, realizing that so-called "original" writing does not exist. Reaching this dead-end, his protagonist renounces writing altogether. I chose to wrap up my essay from 2010 with Gélat's example, adding that, from then on the only way a translator or an interpreter could be represented in fiction was in the form of a parody. I gave a few examples such as Todd Hasak Lowy's *The Task of This Translator* (2005), or Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* (2003), both presenting hilariously inadequate interpreters, as if to say that fiction can no longer treat this subject other than humorously. What else can be said about translators/interpreters that hasn't been said in the avalanche of novels about them?

Then came the surprise which forced me to question my dead-end theory. In 2010 Gélat made a surprising comeback with a sequel, *Le Traducteur amoureux* [The Translator in Love], where he seemed to go back on his previous conclusions.

Now, his first novel, *The Translator*, was not the kind of bestseller that calls for a sequel, nor was his hero such a loss to the world of fiction that he was under pressure to bring him back to life, Sherlock Holmes style. Eugène Sue and Dickens received desperate calls from their readers to save this or that hero from certain death. Gélat's first book did not reach the masses – it was too subtle, too introverted, too academic, with practically no plot other than the inner strife of a frustrated translator. In fact, it was so devoid of "action" that I saw it as a fictional manifestation of post-structural "death of the Author" theories. If the sequel came as a surprise, therefore, it was mainly because it was *not* written under outside pressure; it seemed to emanate out of the sincere need on the part of the author to rethink his ending.

Having given this matter some thought, I would like to elaborate on this "rethinking", both Gélat's and mine, from the broader perspective we have meanwhile gained on this topic.

## Novels with fictional translators/interpreters – A typology

As I see it, the 21st century presented us with four types of novels with fictional representations of translators/interpreters. The first type comprises belated postcolonial novels from the periphery. *The Blue Manuscript* by Saliha Al Khemir (2008) is a typical example, where the issue of the hybrid is dealt with much in the same way as Leila Abulela's *The Translator* from 1999, devoid, though, of any happy-end delusion. The protagonist is a (female) interpreter, accompanying a

group of (male) archeologists and scientists, in pursuit of the mythical Blue Koran manuscript. Contrary to other female-interpreter protagonists, she will *not* find her voice in the crucial moment, when she should divulge the fact that the manuscript found by the expedition is a fake. Concomitantly, she will not find true love among the people she translates for.

Al Khemir (born 1959) is a Tunisian writer, illustrator, and expert in Islamic art whose work is concerned with cultural bridging and cultural dialogues. Her novel's identity politics are purist and pessimistic, and reject the possibilities cultural hybridities might offer. Her protagonist, Zohra, is emotionally crippled by her shared Tunisian and English cultural heritage. Love, she knows, will not come her way, because every man who shows an interest in her is in harmony with only one side of her, not the other. There is no possibility of a shared oriental-occidental identity here: Her mother is the west, her father the east. She grew up in the chasm that separated them.

The second type is that of Post-structural novels where fiction is but an excuse for representing intertext and "death of the Author" theories (Barthes 1984). Such is, for instance, *Les Larmes du traducteur* by Michel Orcel (2001), a novel with practically no plot, written as a sort of diary in Morocco, where its author is in the process of translating *La Gerusalemme liberata*. Parts of it read as an echo of Julia Kristeva's writings, which the author is in fact leafing through:

> La citation, l'empreint, la variation, et même le plagiat, ont tissé la littérature jusqu'à l'ère pré-moderne […] la connaissance des 'sources' […] enchante l'imaginaire pour ce qu'elle dissipe la gueule grandiloquente de *l'auteur*.
>
> (Orcel 2001: 58)

> Quotation, borrowing and even plagiarism have formed the tissue of literature till the pre-modern era […] Knowing 'the sources' […] fascinates the imaginary in that it dissipates the pompous chatter of the author.[2]

The third type comprises best-sellers that have discovered the advantages of using the interpreter as protagonist. There are many of them, thrillers, love stories, quasi historical war novels, among them *The Mission Song* by John le Carré (2006), *Travesuras de la niña mala* by Mario Vargas Llosa (2006), *Small Wars* by Sadie Jones (2009), *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*, by Ludmila Ulitskaya (2011). In all four the authors have gone to great pain producing true-to-life protagonists. Le Carré went into the smallest details depicting an interpreter's job in the Secret Service. Vargas Llosa may have been employed by UNESCO, if we judge by the scrupulously detailed description of an interpreter working for this international institute in Paris. Less attention to detail is manifest in Jones's novel, where the protagonist is a British interpreter posted with his family in war-torn Cyprus and where the plot

2. All translations mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

revolves rather around the devastation of the couple than the devastation caused by the atrocities of war; the same goes for Ludmila Ulitskaya's true story of the secret life of a Polish Jew acting as a Nazi interpreter. All four novels, and many others like them, have discovered the split personality of the hybrid translator torn between his identities and loyalties as an intriguing topic for a thriller or a best-seller.

The fourth and last type comprises parodies that can no longer take the subject seriously, such as the novel by Safran Foer (2003) or the short story by Todd Hasak Lowy (2005). Their protagonists are no longer translators/interpreters but either would-be interpreters, such as Alex Perchov, Safran Foer's protagonist, who provides the funniest non-equivalent solutions, or would-not-be interpreters such as Ben, in Hasak-Lowy's story, who provides more blank spaces than equivalents. Here is the hilarious attempt of the reluctant interpreter to decipher his "client's" introductory words upon their first meeting (2005: 156):

> My name is Goran Vansalivich and I blah you blah. Blah years ago my brothers (passive marker?) blah by blah. I tried blah to blah (assert myself?) but I could not. Their young children (passive marker?) blah from my country and blah to your country, blah blah blah blah. I tried to explain why I blah not blah blah, but they blah blah blah anyway blah blah blah blah.

The first trait that comes to mind when one compares these four types of novels with late 20th century counterparts is that their title does not necessarily mention translation or interpreting. Titles such as "The Translator", "The Interpreter" or "The Translation", abundant in all languages in the 1990s, have apparently been used up. By the same token, certain recurring metaphors have over time become cliché: The translator – a spineless figure, giving blood, but therefore losing blood and becoming bloodless (Cynthia Ozick (1971), Néstor Ponce (1998)), the interpreter who lends his voice but lacks a voice of his own (Susanne Glass (2003), Vargas Llosa (2006)), the hybrid as a torn personality (Carlos Fuentes (1993), Leila Aboulela (1999)), and most common – the translator as feminine/effeminate, compared to the author/authority who is male/virile. All these have vibrated with life in the 1980s and 1990's, but have since lost their spark.

## *Le Traducteur* and *Le Traducteur amoureux*

Jacques Gélat's *Traducteur* belonged, so it seems, to the 2nd category. Gélat (born 1958) was a cinematographer before he turned to novel writing. He published his first novel *Le Tableau* (1991) relatively late in his career, and when the book did not receive much public attention, despite being awarded a prize from the Société des gens de lettres, he returned to writing film scripts under various pseudonyms,

waiting several years before publishing four more novels in succession: *La Couleur inconnue* (2000), *Le Traducteur* (2006), *La Mécanique du mal* (2007), *Le Plaisir du diable* (2008), *Le Traducteur amoureux* (2010). The latter won him the Orange Book Award 2010 for Fiction (cf. "Orange Press Release" 2010). Gélat seemed to be well versed in novels of the fictional turn, not to mention post-structuralist theories. On the one hand, his novel brings intertextuality ad absurdum, with the protagonist losing the distinction between what he translates, what he writes, and what others have written. A book he translates miraculously helps him out of a dead-end in his own writing, providing him with the right "tone". The same book stops enchanting him when he finds out that it is not "original", but has "borrowed" from other books. On the other hand, if Gélat's novel sums up the main traits of previous fictional turn novels, it takes them a step forward: There is the habitual translator's dissatisfaction with his job, his wish to become less transparent, more creative, more than "just a translator", but the story does not conclude with the happy ending of becoming a writer. It describes his initial failure as a beginning novelist, then his gradual success, and finally his disenchantment with writing altogether.

Not much is new on the metaphor plane here: The "plot", the relationship with translation/writing, is a literary embodiment of the love metaphor. At first there is a brief period of infatuation with the translator's work, soon to be followed by small, and growing slips, infidelities which culminate in his adding more and more of his own to the text, till the final realization that he must write his own:

> Tous les traducteurs ont rêvé un jour d'écrire et je ne faisais pas exception. Depuis longtemps des feuilles traînaient dans mes tiroirs, notes diverses, plans approximatifs de romans, et même début d'une nouvelle. (Gélat 2006: 21)
>
> All translators have once dreamed of writing, and I am no exception. Papers have been accumulating in my drawers for a long time, various notes, plans for novels, even a beginning of a novella.

The split personality metaphor is there as well, though Gélat takes this too a step further, introducing the "Doppelgänger" – his old self, happy and content in the Lost Paradise of first love, which he endeavors, in vain, to recapture. At the peak of his literary career, the disillusioned author determines to stop writing altogether, and – much as a character he has invented for a future novel – assume a new identity, move to the periphery and start a new life. Death of originality, death of the author, death of the translator: Gélat presents us with a dead-end, the dead-end post-structural theories have lead to, if not for theorists, then for translators and authors.

The *Translator in Love* is a step backwards. It is literally a step backwards in that the author takes us to the 5th page of *The Translator* (the first four pages being reproduced word for word) and starts the novel anew from there. It is a step

backwards symbolically as well, and from two points of view. First, it provides a reason for the translator's transgressions, other than his growing wish to be more creative and eventually become an author. The reason, or rather the excuse for betraying his strict ethics of translation is his disenchantment with love, a revenge on his wife's unfaithfulness. To each step of Marie's estrangement from him, he reacts with an unfaithfulness of his own in the translations. Though on the surface he leads a happy life, blind to her growing indifference, subconsciously he is aware that his wife no longer loves him. Meticulously – as meticulously as he had enumerated his transgressions in the first novel, he now explains each one of them (a bit tediously perhaps): The first time she came home half an hour late was when he became aware of having replaced a semicolon by a comma. Whenever she was late, after that, a new semicolon was massacred.[3] The first sentences were omitted when she stopped contradicting him, a sure sign of indifference. Whole paragraphs, 24 of them, were omitted when she (found new love and) grew more beautiful daily. As the silence between them grew, he began adding words:

> C'est là que j'ai commencé à ajouter des mots dans le livre que je traduisait. À défaut d'avoir le courage d'en trouver pour Marie, j'en inventais dans mon texte. (Gélat 2010: 35)
>
> This is when I started adding words to the book I was translating. Since I didn't have the courage to find words for Marie, I invented them in my text.

Four years and nine translations were "massacred" in this way. There was certainly a system in the folly, and if the translator had shown signs of obsessive or compulsive tendencies in the first novel, they were amplified in the second. But is the parallel fidelity vs. infidelity in text and love life convincing? Or are we on the verge of parody here as well?

*The Translator in Love* is a step backwards for yet another reason, namely that Gélat makes use of the commonest belles-infidèles metaphor. He starts by describing translation as a love affair:

> Je procède toujours de la même façon. Une fois le livre en main je m'enferme chez moi. J'attends ensuite la nuit pour commencer à lire. […] c'est une première rencontre, une sorte de dîner aux chandelles, espoir d'une séduction possible, d'un plaisir à venir. (Gélat 2010: 11)
>
> I always proceed in the same manner. Once I get hold of the book, I shut myself at home. I then wait for evening in order to begin reading […] It is a first meeting, a sort of candlelight dinner, hope of a possible seduction, a pleasure to come.

---

**3.** Gélat uses verbs such as "massacrer", "guilliotiner", "atomiser", for the least of his transgressions.

> L'auteur et moi formons allors un couple heureux. Alors pourqoi l'avoir un jour brisé? Pourquoi avoir trahi? Pourquoi être devenu infidèle? (Gélat 2010: 12)
>
> The author and I then form a happy couple. Why then did I break it? Why did I betray? Why did I become unfaithful?

In the two years of crisis he undergoes when his wife leaves him, he doesn't accomplish any translation. Not surprisingly, his next love affair will be with the author of a book he had translated (and made most additions to), and this new love will lead to new translation endeavors. It is with the Japanese author, Megumi Kobayachi, beautiful, small, and yet masculine in her cutting ways and sparse language. It is his turn to be unfaithful in this new affair, since he is incapable of confessing to her how much he had altered in her original text. When Megumi finds out that he betrayed her, in fact that his additions may have contributed to her success in France, she breaks up with him, only to come back later with an offer of a sort of partnership: He will translate her new novel as she writes it, becoming, by this symbiosis, a co-author.

> Elle comprendrait que personne n'écrit seul. Tous les livres s'écrivent à deux. Le monde est toujours là. Les muses et autres inspirations ne sont rien d'autres que lui, le monde. Et, ici, le monde, c'est elle et moi. Il est impossible qu'elle n'ait pas compris que ses mots et les miens s'entendaient, se complétaient pour créer et embellir son histoire. (Gélat 2010: 192)
>
> She will realize that no one writes alone. All books are written in twos. The world is always there. And here, the world is she and I. It is impossible that she hasn't understood that her words and mine got along together, completed each other to create and embellish her story.

The love metaphor is thus resolved, yet in a very feeble solution, compared to the totality of the conclusion offered by the first novel.

In a paper presented in New York University (NYU) in 2010, Klaus Kaindl assembled an overview of translators' descriptions in fiction. His findings narrowed down to one recurring characteristic: Some oddity on the part of the translator, a slight deformity of sorts, spoils a generally handsome image. I didn't find this physical trait in our translator, for the simple reason that a first person narrator doesn't usually describe himself. But his character is presented in very fine details, and it is up to us to decide how it is typical of the fictional translator in general. The first trait that comes to mind is femininity, a trait that is amplified in the second novel. It is not considered "virile" to be thus devastated by your wife's loss of interest, nor to take revenge in massacring semicolons in your translation. In the common model it is the wife who is being deserted by her husband, seeking revenge, and sinking into a prolonged crisis that prevents her from working. Moreover, the translator's continuous soul searching and minute self analysis is

considered – I must stress the word considered, for we are in the realm of ready-made models – effeminate. So is his intuition, which he prides himself on. “Une intuition m’est ainsi venue cette nuit quand je n’arrivais pas à dormir”, he says (2010: 192) [I had an intuition last night when I couldn’t sleep.] So is his tortuous hesitation before making any move, his lack of self-confidence, his constant deliberations as to whether or not to leave a message on the answering machine: “Malheureusement elle était sur répondeur et, je ne sais pas pourquoi, j’ai tout de suite raccroché. Cela n’a fait que m’agacer davantage. Porquoi étais-je incapable de lui laisser un message?” (2010: 98) [Unfortunately her answering machine was on, and I don’t know why, but I immediately hung up. This made me even angrier at myself. Why couldn’t I leave her a message?] Our translator organizes an intimate afternoon reading circle at home. He is also an amateur cook, who delights in preparing elaborate, delicate small dishes to the close circle of friends and students invited to these meetings. He shares his gastronomic tastes with us: “Il existe une vaste controverse autour du pâté en gelée, vulgairement appele pâté en croûte. Ses amateurs s’opposent quant à ce qui en fait la splendeur.” (2010: 77) [There is a vast controversy around the pâté en gelée, vulgarly called pâté en croûte. Its lovers disagree on what makes its splendor.] And last but not least, of course, he is “just” a translator, at the service of a female author. Japanese, in fact, with the possible virile connotations of this attribution.

The second trait that characterizes our translator is his obsession: With words, turns of phrases, sounds, even punctuation marks on the one hand, and with his love life on the other. What saves him from being tiresome is the reader’s sympathy for the introvert and lonely French Woody Allen, with his occasional bouts of self-humor covering deep anxiety. L. L. Lambrich’s review in “Vient de Paraitre” (cf. “José Corti” 2006) suggests, if I may sum it up, that under the anecdotal metaphor, *Le Traducteur* is a novel on existential anxiety that, in a world of commercial logic poses the question of whether a talented writer should betray himself, or follow his route, at the risk of remaining silent.[4]

Apart from the rather brilliant idea of starting a second novel, which is not exactly a sequel, with the exact word by word rendition of the first four pages – quite original, one must admit – there has to be some other reason for re-writing *The Translator*. One can’t help but to assume that Gélat had second thoughts about

4. “Au-delà de la métaphore anecdotique, moins légère qu’il y paraît de prime abord, *Le Traducteur* apparaît comme un roman de solitude et d’angoisse existentielle, traduisant avec finesse et sensibilité une question qui, plus que jamais, dans un monde dominé par des logiques commerciales auxquelles la littérature a bien du mal à échapper, se pose aux écrivains talentueux et doués de quelques savoir-faire. Faut-il, pour continuer à plaire, se trahir soi-même au risque de se perdre et de se vivre, secrètement, comme un imposteur? Ou faut-il poursuivre cette quête intime, au risque de se taire, dans l’espoir que l’autre, un jour imprévisible, fera retour?” (L. L. Lambrich, quoted by “José Corti” 2006)

the dead-end presented in his first novel. Total disenchantment with being a translator as well as an author, especially when the boundary between them had been blurred by the post-structural intertext and "death of Author" theories, may have seemed too harsh in retrospect. He may have wanted to offer a more moderate solution, that of co-authorship, where author and translator are on equal footing. What he did, though, was to amplify the translator's dissatisfaction with being "merely" a translator. Supplying justifications such as the fact that many authors enjoy translating does not help his case:

> Le traducteur serait un écrivain qui s'ignore ou, au pire, un écrivain raté . […] Beaucoup d'écrivains sont traducteurs. Il est exact qu'ils le sont souvent pour l'argent, mais cela n'empêche pas leur plaisir." (Gélat 2010: 13)
>
> The translator seems to be a would-be author, or, worse, a failed author. Many authors are translators. True, they often do it for money, but this doesn't prevent them from enjoying it.

Nor does he sound convincing when he points out that translators know books better than their own writers:

> Je l'affirme définitivement: personne ne connaît mieux les livres que nous. Lecteurs, critiques, éditeurs, aucun de ceux-là ne connaît le poids d'un mot […] J'irai même plus loin: dans bien de domaines les écrivains eux-mêmes sont moins conscients que nous de leur travail. Leur style, bien souvent, leur échappe. (Gélat 2006: 21f)
>
> I hereby confirm: nobody knows books better than we do. Readers, critics, editors, not one of them knows the weight of a word […] I'd go even further: in many domains the authors themselves are less conscious of their work than we are. Their style often escapes them.

## Conclusion

Although quite different in genre, all four types of novels fictionalizing translators/interpreters in the 21st century share a common denominator: They are using the figure of the translator/interpreter after it had been used, perhaps exhausted by their predecessors. The move from "center", in a widening circle, to a "periphery" (be it in Even-Zohar's terms or in old Euro-centric geographical terms),[5] from

5. Even-Zohar (1990: 14) offers a possibility of various centers, which I propose to extend even more: "In this centrifugal centripetal motion, phenomena are driven from the center to the periphery while, conversely, phenomena may push their way into the center and occupy it. However, with a polysystem one must not think in terms of one center and one periphery, since several such positions are hypothesized."

Central to Eastern Europe, from Spain and North America to Latin America, and onwards to the Far East, the Middle-East, and North Africa, indicates a popularization of the topic. So does the move from a select public to the masses, also indicative of this process. The fact that some late novels revert to parody increases the sense of saturation with this type of novel (or protagonist) as is. A series of questions arises.

Shouldn't we draw the same conclusion as Gélat's first, more honest and more courageous novel? That the fictional turn has exhausted itself. How many more novels about frustrated translators/interpreters? Past parody, what remains is tedious repetition. Not Borges-like *réécriture*, but epigones. Remember Gélat's first novel, where the unfaithful *traducteur* has finally become a successful writer, has made it to the bestseller lists, and finally, unable to retrieve an innocent happiness of yore, unable to find his "Doppelgänger", gives up writing altogether and assumes a new identity in a "chambre de bonne dans un quartier populaire"? (2006: 124) He gives up his precious library, his writer's dues, his dream of writing "le gros volume de ma vie". He gives up words:

> Ainsi se débarrasser d'écrire, quand s'est devenu une seconde nature, n'est pas évident […] Oui, ne plus interpréter le réel, ne plus le traduire, mais s'y abîmer […] fut le plus périlleux. (Gélat 2006: 125)
>
> To get rid of writing in such a way, when it's become a second nature, is not self-evident […] Yes, no longer to interpret the real, not to translate it any more, but to sink into it […] was the most perilous.

Should we not draw the conclusion that the "death of Author" or "Translator equals Author" theories did not change the translator's status or self-appreciation? To quote Berman (1998: 19): "Il se veut écrivain, mais n'est que ré-écrivain. Il est auteur, mais jamais l'Auteur. Son œuvre de traducteur est une œuvre, mais n'est pas l'œuvre."

We are bound to conclude, aren't we, that the fictional interest in the translator[6] did not enhance his self-confidence. That making the translator visible, less transparent, giving him a voice of his own, bringing him to the center stage or whatever metaphor we use, did not diminish his innate "weakness", in his own eyes, as in the public eye.

That the interest in the translator has reached a dead-end, at least for Translation Studies.

Is the next Turn at hand?

---

**6.** I did not put translator/interpreter here, though cases where the interpreter is a would-be translator, then a would-be writer abound (*Travesuras de la Niña Mala* by Vargas Llosa (2006), *The Interpreter* by Susanne Glass (2003)).

## References

### Primary sources

Aboulela, L. 1999. *The Translator*. New York: Black Cat.
Al Khemir, S. 2008. *The Blue Manuscript*. New York/London: Verso.
Foer, J. S. 2003. *Everything Is Illuminated*. New York etc.: Harper Perennial.
Fuentes, C. 1993 . *El Naranjo*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara.
Gélat, J. 2000. *La Couleur inconnue.* Paris: Corti.
Gélat, J. 2006. *Le traducteur*. Paris: Corti.
Gélat, J. 2007. *La Mécanique du mal.* Paris: Mercure de France.
Gélat, J. 2008. *Le Plaisir du diable.* Paris: Corti.
Gélat, J. 2010. *Le Traducteur amoureux*. Paris: Corti.
Glass, S. 2003. *The Interpreter*. New York: Ballantine.
Hasak-Lowy, T. 2005. *The Task of this Translator*. Fort Washington: Harvest Books.
Jones, S. 2009. *Small Wars*. USA: Harper Collins.
Le Carré, J. 2006. *The Mission Song*. USA: Little Brown and Company.
Orcel, M. 2001. *Les Larmes du traducteur: Journal du Maroc.*Paris: Grasset.
Ozick, C. 1971/1983. "Envy, or Yiddish in America". In *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories*, 4–100. New York: E. P. Dutton.
Ponce, N. 1998. *El Intérprete.* Roasario: Beatriz Viterbo Editoria.
Ulitskaya, L. 2011 [2006]. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter*. Translated by Arch Tait. Woodstock N.Y.: Overlook Press.
Vargas Llosa, M. 2006. *Travesuras de la Niña Mala.* Lima: Alfaguara.

### Secondary sources

Barthes, R. 1984. "La mort de l'Auteur." In *Le bruissement de la langue*. Essais critiques IV, 63–69. Paris: Seuil.
Ben-Ari, N. 2010. "Representations of Translation in Popular Culture." *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5 (2): 220–242.
Berman, A. 1998. *L'épreuve de l'étranger*. Paris: Flammarion.
Delabastita, D. & Grutmann, R. 2005. "Introduction. Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation." In *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, D. Delabastita & R. Grutman (eds.), *Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*: 11–34.
Even-Zohar, I. 1990. *Polysystem Studies*. Special issue of *Poetics Today*, vol 11 (1).
"José Corti". 2006. Jacques Gélat. Available at: http://www.jose-corti.fr/titresfrancais/traducteur.html (last accessed 16 May 2012).
Kaindl, K. 2010. "Fictional Sociology: The Translators' Habitus in Literary Works". Paper presented at the Fifth ATISA conference, NYU, 23 April 2010.
"Orange Press Release". 2010. http://www.orange.com/en_EN/press/press_releases/cp100623en.jsp. (last accessed 16 May 2012).
Pagano, A. S. 2000. "Sources for Translation Theory: Fiction in Latin America." *ATA Chronicle* 29 (4): 38–44.

EPISODE II

# Travelling through sociocultural space

# From *La dolce vita* to *La vita agra*

## The image of the Italian literary translator as an illusory, rebellious and precarious intellectual

Giovanni Nadiani
University of Bologna at Forlì

### Introduction

In the late 1990s, Franco Berardi discussed the new jobs that had arisen due to the digitalization of society. Through "fragments" collected in 2001, Berardi (2001a) identified the living standards of millions of "cognitive workers", "cognitive proletarians", or "bio-workers" of the tertiary sector relating to the imagination and circulation of ideas, languages and symbols: Publishing, media, software, design, real estate and financial services, etc. (cf. Fumagalli 2010: 7). Berardi precisely identified the role of translators as knowledge workers by stating:

> The space-time globalization of labour is made possible within the Net: global labour is an endless recombination of myriad fragments producing, elaborating, distributing and decoding signs and informational units of all kinds. Labour is broken down into fragments that are recombined into the continuous flux of the Net [...] Every semiotic segment produced by the information worker must meet and match every innumerable other semiotic segment in order to form the combinatory frame of the info-commodity, semiocapital, [...] the worker can be reached anywhere and anytime from any point in the world, and can be called to reconnect to the labor flux [...] The mobile phone is the tool that makes the connection possible between the needs of the productive cycle of the capital and the mobilized living labour, so as to have the worker's whole day at disposal and yet pay only for the worker's fragments of labour time.[1] (Berardi 2001b: 78f)

These workers represent the paradigm shift of non-material labour that literally embodies "bio-work" or "human capital", in the sense that people's actual bodies are the "fixed capital", the vehicle by which wealth is created for the worker. The means of production they put on the market is themselves (cf. Revelli 2010: 97–104).

1. All translations from Italian are my own unless otherwise attributed.

Such a revolution of labour and work has been taking place for the last twenty years and has also affected translation (cf. Cronin 2003). Nowadays, translators are mostly doing piecemeal work within the advanced field of linguistics and engineering.

In this context, if on the one hand the language and engineering industry itself is devising more and more sophisticated tools in order to facilitate and speed up, that is to maximize within a given time frame, the work of the literary translator as well (and not just the work of scientific-technical and commercial translators) and not necessarily to the detriment of the translation's literary quality (cf. Nadiani 2009), on the other hand, the image of the literary translator as derived from a number of significant studies by translation scholars is still too strongly affected by a "generalist and culturalistic" approach that is not supported by rigorous statistical analysis of the professionals' actual working conditions and of the practical impact of their activity on a given cultural area. The best information on the ways in which the translators' working conditions are rapidly changing – also in consideration of the under-investigated forms of agency, which include the new modes of production and distribution (see for example Amazon) – seems to be still provided by the newsletters and websites of the various professional associations[2] or networks of associations such as the *Conseil Européen des Associations de Traducteurs Littéraires* (CEATL).[3] We believe that the established importance of translators as agents "responsible for major historical, literary and cultural transitions/changes/ innovations through translation" (Milton & Bandia 2009: 1) – a concept that dates back to Toury's idea of intellectuals as "agents of change" (Toury 2002: 151), which is certainly valid in principle but still remains to be proven on the basis of robust verifiable data – or of the role that translated literature, for example, plays within a given literary system (cf. Even-Zohar 1978, 1982) are today absolutely exaggerated, in consideration of other forms of agency whose impact and penetration force can count on much more powerful media. In depth, empirical and statistical studies are especially scarce that can justify the idea of literary translators as unparalleled mediators across languages and cultures. As far as we are concerned, we have attempted to empirically show how difficult it is to practically assess the impact of literary translation objects on a given cultural area and the actual role played in this by the respective agents (cf. Nadiani 2011). This was done taking as a starting point the adaptation to the field of translation of the concept of culture

---

**2.** For Italy see the newly founded STRADE (Sindacato Traduttori Editoriali - National Association of Literary Translators), which has already managed to launch a fiscal and legal vademecum which protects translators (http://www.traduttoristrade.it/vademecum/).

**3.** See for example a comparison of literary translators' wages across Europe (http://www.ceatl.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/surveyit.pdf).

as a set of permeable "shared habitats of meaning" (Hannerz 2001: 28f), which eternally intersect with, contaminate and fertilize each other, and on the basis of theoretical and operative models created by Mudersbach (2002) and subsequently by Floros (2002).

Even so, the image of the literary translator – what has just been observed despite this specific mutation – has kept its particular "aura", which remains unexplained given the working conditions of Italian translators: Very short turnaround times and relatively low remuneration typical of self-employed or freelance workers.[4]

One reason for this "aura" is explained by how translators are viewed in the collective imagination. They are considered the key to the mystery of all that is foreign, strange and different in a country that still lacks sufficient knowledge of foreign languages even at the important levels of politics, economics and public administration. Another reason is to be found in the prestigious and high-level translation work that has been carried out over the centuries by a number of eminent intellectuals, philosophers, writers and poets, such as Umberto Eco, Claudio Magris, Antonio Tabucchi and Gianni Celati just to mention a few illustrious members of the Italian cultural élite who are well-known on the contemporary international scene.

With a hint of rebellious anarchism and bohemian decadence, an important contribution to shaping the collective image of the translator in Italy – translators most often being women – has been conveyed by the work, life and fortunes of a unique and unconventional author: Luciano Bianciardi.

## The translator-intellectual's "Hard Life" in the metropolis

### The novel

The character of Moraldo in Fellini's film *I vitelloni* (1953) was created, incidentally, by two famous people coming from rural towns. Federico Fellini (1920–1993) and Ennio Flaiano (1910–1972) left the provinces to go to the big city, which was common for many Italian intellectuals of the Fifties. It embodies an aspect of the phenomenon of internal migration that had occurred over the two decades following WWII: From South to North, rural to urban areas, and from the mountains to the plains towards highly centralized industrial centres of production. Mostly young graduates, teachers and journalists moved towards the eminent cities of Milan and

4. In this respect, see the information available at the heading "Documenti" on the STRADE website (http://www.traduttoristrade.it/#).

Rome seeking careers in diverse professions ranging from cinema and televison to politics, journalism, advertising and publishing, etc. In their regions and hometowns many of them were socially very active with close ties to the labour movement and organisations passionately spreading culture and civic learning in their respective communities (cf. Ferretti 2009: 7ff). The unconventional, Tuscan-born rebel Bianciardi, after years of working as a middle school English teacher and as a high school history and philosophy teacher, as a library director, a contributor to local newspapers and a cultural activist in the small-town areas (which he ironically referred to as "Kansas City"), headed North to Milan where "you really work" (Bianciardi 1957: 107) with a sense of disillusionment and failure relating to his experience with party "intellectuals" and their language[5], following the Ribolla mine disaster (1954) in which 43 of those labourers he had fought for died.

Bianciardi arrived in Milan in the years of the so-called economic boom or "miracle". These were years full of remarkable changes which irrevocably established the mass consumption society. Milan was, and still is in many ways, the headquarters of many important factories, financial firms, newspapers and publishers; Milan was the emblem of the modern city, of Italy's complete mutation, having left its rural past behind and entered the world's most industrialised zone. At the same time, however, the role and the condition of the intellectual were also changing, undergoing a process of intense massification and degradation (cf. Muraca 2010: 40).

Bianciardi's cultural and economic centre is a foggy, hostile, narrow-minded city inhabited by a profit-oriented crowd, where the middle class is blinded by neo-capitalism. He is one of the first intellectuals in Italy to recognise and grasp that mutation of habits, mind and lifestyle even before Pasolini's *Scritti corsari* (1975). In his second pamphlet *L'integrazione* (1959)[6] and in his masterpiece *La vita agra* (1962), Bianciardi unveiled and denounced the dark side of the economic boom:

> Mass hedonism, leading classes' euphoria, reckless consumerism, massification, tertiarization, quartarization, conformism, the vices and twitches of the small bourgeoisie and of the intellectuals, political degeneration. (Muraca 2010: 41)

---

**5.** Bianciardi talks about his own experience in the memorable pamphlet *Il lavoro cultural* (1957). On the intellectuals' verbal and body language [*problema del linguaggio e della gesticolazione* degli intellettuali], see the hilarious pages of Chapter 6 (1957: 81–86).

**6.** In *L'integrazione* Bianciardi (1959) describes his experience at Feltrinelli's and his "invincible and innate aversion for the rules of a desperate productivism subjugating even the urban intellectual" (Jatosti 2008: 2).

As Ferretti (2009: 29, 49) points out, this is a "provincial" view which is unable – or unwilling – to theoretically and critically analyse nor probe deeper into the complex economic relationships and production processes, the political conflicts, the ongoing social mutations and the several diverse working opportunities such an environment nonetheless has to offer.

One of these opportunities is piecemeal translations into Italian from English – which Bianciardi had studied since childhood and had used as an interpreter for the Allies during the war. Thanks to his connections, Bianciardi began translating for the newly formed Feltrinelli publishing house as well as other important publishers of the time. The nameless hero of the novel that would make him well-known is also a translator, who, unlike his creator, will prove to be a lot more consistent and "greater", showing Bianciardi as a "little man and real writer" (Ferretti 2009: 53).

The sudden success of *La vita agra*, after a launch that was unusual for the time, makes it the first example of creating a character/author through book presentations and TV broadcasts, whose remarkable impact on sales encouraged publishers to buy the translation rights for publication in widely read languages. A big part of its success – although superficial and suggesting a fundamental misunderstanding – is due to the response of the militant critics, starting with Indro Montanelli's important review in the *Corriere della Sera* on October 2nd, 1962 entitled "An anarchist in Milan". Montanelli and other reviewers constantly highlight the obvious biographical side of the book, giving both the author and the protagonist a number of attributes – "fun", "ironic", "bitter", "biting", "anarchist", "satirical", "rebellious" (Falaschi 1992: 33ff) – founding the literary myth of the "angry" or as we would say today "indignant" intellectual-translator-writer or vice versa. This character, after all, is convenient to the cultural industry which, after "squeezing" and exploiting it thoroughly, will abandon it to its destiny. In fact, *La vita agra* is one of the darkest and most desperate books of the Italian postwar years, linguistically and structurally new, as intended by the narrator-author's alter ego:

> I shall construct my story at various levels of time, that is to say, both chronological and syntactical. I shall make past infinitives sound like brass and imperfects like bassoons […] I shall give you the integral narrative […] in which the narrator is involved in his narration in his capacity as narrator and the reader involved in his reading in his capacity as reader, while both are involved in their capacity as living men, citizens, taxpayers, and possessors of army discharge papers – complete human beings, in short. I shall set about rewriting my life-story, not just the same book, but the same page, gnawing away like a woodworm in a table-leg. Or I shall compose a linguistic medley of my own, combining a variety of regional dialects […] And I also shall give you the traditional novel, with at least three deaths,

> two pairs of identical twins and a legal acknowledgement. The neo-capitalist, neo-Romantic or neo-Catholic novel, as you will […] Give me the time and give me the means and I'll touch all the keys, both black and white, of contemporary sensibility. I'll give you indifference, disobedience, married love, conformity, sleepiness, spleen, boredom and indignation. (Bianciardi 1965: 26f)

*La vita agra* is

> a text dominated by the struggle of living and the universal energy wasting […], it tells of disintegration rather than integration […], it is a book about the nonsense of social life as it destroys individual biology (Falaschi 1992: 40f)

and at the core of such nonsense is the intellectual that came to the North from the province in order to avenge his companions' deaths in the mines by blowing up an anonymous skyscraper of a large company. Yet, as a translator he has become just a grain of sand to the all-consuming and dehumanizing publishing universe. The main character has no name in his so-called "independent" work as a translator, thus negating his personal identity. Not to mention his crazy time schedule that turns him, his girlfriend and the type writer into one elaborate production machine that renders any social relation impossible (cf. Ferretti 2009: 61), thus envisioning the piecemeal "bio-workers" of today:

> Anna sat at the machine typing, and while she was drawing the little squares I had time to light a cigarette. I lay on the bed with the book in my hand and the dictionary beside me and dictated.
> 'What page have we got?'
> 'We've started the tenth.'
> 'We're doing well, aren't we?'
> 'Fine.'
> 'Aren't' you a bit tired?'
> 'No, come on, dictate.'
> 'Just think, we've earned 4,000 lire already.'
> 'So we have.'
> 'Two for Mara [his wife], and one for the rent, and another for light, gas, telephone, milk and bread.'
> 'Yes, and now let's carry on and earn a little jam. Come on, dictate.'
> We managed to do as much as fifteen or twenty pages a day. Two for Mara, one for rent, one for light, gas, telephone, bread and milk, another for the instalments on the furniture and my clothes, and two for extras and cigarettes. And there was no need to take the tram and, except at the end of the month, when I went and delivered the finished work, no need to keep up relations with anybody.
> (Bianciardi 1965: 125f)

Between characters and novels under on-going translation that crowd the translator's dreams and the frenzy of the new consumerism that shows indifference even to death; between the meals and coffees at small inns or cafes with prostitutes and hungry comedians, with the impossibility of taking sick leave if he falls ill, *La vita agra* is not quite the romantic tale of the bohemian life of a in-organic *maudit* intellectual, but rather the portrayal of self-destruction in the impossibility of a different outcome in the false allure of pseudo-well-being. In this sense, as well as in its themes, it has little or nothing in common with its contemporary Italian worker or industrial literature.

> And then you had to work every day of the week, including Sundays, so many pages a day to meet all your obligations and, if you fell ill and had no mutual benefit society [health insurance], you would have to pay out hard cash for the doctor and the medicines and, as your earnings would cease, you would be doubly in the soup. (Bianciardi 1965: 128)

Although in strong opposition to the system, the translator, has to accept market conditions in order to survive. Not able to risk one day's absence, most translators and knowledge workers today have become human capital forced to self-market themselves and be constantly available (cf. Bauman 2005, Berardi 2001a, b) in order to get a job and keep it.

> I'm convinced that ten days after I had left here they wouldn't even remember what I looked like, and I would get no more work. *You have to be on the spot if you want work*, you have to be there to answer the telephone, because, however infuriating that instrument is, it is also your bread and butter.
> (Bianciardi 1965: 184, my emphasis)

Through his hero, Bianciardi highlights some deep and subtle features of the freelancers' alienation. In the new condition of the intellectual, who is gradually turned into a mere workforce directed by others with the changed perception of lived time and working time (that is no longer time for life), the work is only seemingly self-managed, but it is actually more oppressive as it is internally absorbed by the worker as well as being imposed by the working organization (cf. Nava 1992: 16). Even with skillful and cutting irony, satire and sarcasm, the narrator who remains nameless, cannot but state his defeat:

> In short, there's no help for it. We've got to stay here, because we are poor, and lack the courage to kick over the traces and begin living like real vagabonds. Until we have the courage to do that, we shall have to go on sweating it out here.
> (Bianciardi 1965: 185)

## The film

As a fan of the work of two other "provincials", namely Ennio Flaiano and Federico Fellini, Bianciardi most likely chose *La vita agra* as the title of his Milanese novel as a sort of ironic reply to their film *La dolce vita* (1960), which tells of life in Rome in the same years. Given the book's extraordinary success – with a title hinting at the economic capital of Italy – Ugo Tognazzi (1922–1990), one of the leading TV and cinema actors of the time, looking for a more committed role than his usual comedic ones, worked to turn the novel into a film.

Directed by Carlo Lizzani (born 1922), the film was released in 1964 and it starred Tognazzi and Giovanna Ralli. Bianciardi worked on the film script as a "script advisor" and made some important changes to the plot, notably the finale (cf. Bianciardi 1964).

Despite the actors', director's and writer's purpose of providing a biting satire of the economic miracle, the film turns out to be not much more than a comedy. The novel's linguistic depth and complexity become mere wordiness, while the different narrative plans are only partially reproduced in the editing of some scenes aiming at depicting the urban frenzy and chaos as well as the main character's outer and inner life. The complexity and the ambiguity of the book's hero only result in a series of socio-political cues in the movie. What is worse is that the translator (Tognazzi) lacks that sense of defeat and is not convincing in his opposition to the society of the boom, reducing him to just a comedic character aiming at making the audience smile. All this fits, however, with the way that the film unfolds: Unlike the book's character, who keeps working undefeated as a translator *on the spot*, the hero in the film, once refused by the publisher, ends up becoming a *copywriter* for a big advertising company and soon becomes successful and integrated into the big company which he first wanted to fight. Completely assimilated into the neo-capitalistic system and its double standards, he leaves his girlfriend, with whom he shared the dire straits of translation work, and agrees to go back to his wife and son and the lower-middle class "idyll" that he shared with them.

Such a finale clearly betrays the spirit of the novel[7] but does reflect the ambiguity as well as the fragile and passive mind of its author, who is eternally tormented and unable to make definitive choices (cf. Ferretti 2009: 100f), accepting with an eternal sense of guilt the role of a "character" that integrates into the media/literary *star-system* he is subject to "by suffering and enjoying even the most equivocal implications" (Ferretti 2009: 85): He is the angry anarchist you want to introduce to a big audience of readers and guests at Milan's high-society cocktail parties. As

7. In a certain way, in this ending we could see the fulfilment of the famous Italian saying "traduttore, traditore": A translator who betrays him/herself in favour of his/her integration into a consumerist society, although this reading might go beyond the director's intentions.

is known, after publishing a number of historic novels on the Italian Risorgimento without gaining much commercial success or critical acclaim and after working "for his bread and butter" as a contributor of articles and columns for various periodicals (from sports to porn magazines) all the time still working as a translator, Bianciardi doesn't endure too long and alcohol will put an end to his struggle leading him to die alone in the winter of 1971. Only twenty years later his work and image will be restored due, on the one hand, to the Bianciardi foundation's work, and on the other to the 1993 biography by Pino Corrias emblematically called *Vita agra di un anarchico* [the hard life of an anarchist], which tells of Bianciardi's most unconventional and rebellious aspects and also strengthens the "aura" surrounding the image of the translator with immediate impact on modernity.

## La Vita Agra 2.0 by Fulvio Sant

The image of the translator as an anarchic and rebellious individualist, which is in actuality rather an impractical one, was conveyed by Luciano Bianciardi, or rather by the following waves of biographic and journalistic relaying of his legend. In a work context based on maximizing profits and, conversely, on the maximum precariousness of workers, that image still remains fertile today from a literary and mediatic standpoint. In 2011 Flavio Santi appropriated that image in a uniquely provocative way.

Flavio Santi (b. 1973) is a translator (e.g., Wilbur Smith, Balzac, Giffon, Kelman), novelist and short story writer for some major Italian publishers such as Rizzoli and Mondadori. Santi is also a cultural journalist and adjunct professor of writing for special purposes in one of the many academic schools of linguistic mediation which have proliferated beyond the actual needs of the market.

At the beginning of 2011 Santi published the short novel/pamphlet *Aspetta primavera, Lucky* for a small new publisher. The title, which mimics the novel *Wait until spring, Bandini* (1938) by the Italian-American cult writer John Fante (1909–1983), whose works are constantly dissected within the many *creative writing* courses in Italy, is doubly ironic. On the one hand, it recalls the popular saying "wait and hope", referring to the author's alter ego Fulvio Sant (note the ironic and most subtle difference between the author's and the hero's names), the epitome of the precarious cultural worker. While on the other, it hints at Bianciardi's first name, Luciano, suggesting that "Lucky" Luciano Bianciardi's life and working conditions were just *lucky* if compared to those the character of Santi's story has to face, i.e. being a poorly paid translator who has to accept any job just to make ends meet. And yet Santi makes Bianciardi and his alter ego in *La vita agra* the patron saint of the literary proletariat, the "intellectual labour" as seen in *Il lavoro culturale*.

Through Fulvio Sant's thoughts and experiences, Santi provides an ironic as well as bitter portrayal of the Italian publishing situation in the new millennium, which gets by thanks to an army of highly qualified but underpaid workers (cf. Rea 2011). Santi directly addresses his Tuscan-born "archetype":

> Look, Luciano Bianciardi can kiss my ass […] Dear Bianciardi, you can't know, but we are the first generation of intellectual labourers. Funny that once Flaiano wrote that: "There are only the artists left to seem labourers". And now we really are, and not as a snobbish pose. There has been a slight evolution of mankind: from the metal-working proletariat to the multi-graduate proletariat. Today the poorer classes are those with the highest education. No money, no future, no regrets and nothing to lose. At least you were about to experience the 1968 revolution, your revolt against the cultural industry made some sense, you had high hopes, revolution, change, great stuff. Are you listening, Bianciardi, are you out there?
> (Santi 2011: 23f)

There are many direct and indirect inter-textual references[8] to Bianciardi and his alter ego, as well as to the structure of *La vita agra*, to its diverse issues – first of all the "jungle" of the publishing world and its fierce laws – the literary society or what is left of it in today's creative writing schools or the navel-gazing blogs, the variety of registers, all the way up to the acknowledgment of his own work as a translator, which he loves and hates:

> I have finally understood what I am: I am a word stuntman […] Stuntmen must do the dirty work. It's a hard job but someone has to do it, there goes a line in some old novel I translated. Who plods along in publishing? It's the translator. If he wasn't there, the great best-selling novels would be scrap paper. Who is paid ridiculous wages? It's the translator again. Closing the circle. (Santi 2011: 24)

Fulvio Sant is the precarious intellectual of the new-millennium, a labourer producing "culture". All he can do properly is write and he does everything with writing – especially translations – in order to survive, struggling to make ends meet in a world without passion or future, where every important thing is mere exchange of goods. Even his personal life is complicated: Just like Bianciardi and his alter ego, he is split between his wife and his lover. Fulvio is displaced and feels like an ostrich with its head in the sand or a glue-sniffing kid on the outskirts of the digital-cultural industry. All he can do is look for shelter in his very own drug that he himself created: Any spray can with any substance that he comes across. Even here his defeat finds no epiphany in a raging and sarcastic yet useless acknowledgment of his own condition:

---

**8.** Santi's book is full of references not only to Italian literature and entertainment and would deserve a more in-depth study.

> More than the new-millennium Bianciardi, call him also SuperBianciardi or ExtraBianciardi or UltraBianciardi or AnyPrepositionBianciardi, call him whatever you like, this sort of modern Frankenstein with some limbs of a humanities graduate, some of a language graduate, some of a PhD student, some of a writer, some of a translator, some of a scholar, some of a critic, or maybe he is just a multi-graduate and multi-jinxed Fantozzi[9], he is not only up for translations and various obviously underpaid publishing jobs – forewords, postscripts, straps, tabs, belts, pulleys, wharfs, warren girders. Not enough! He picks up almost all that has to do with writing in a sort of a mystic frenzy. In truth, it's the frenzy of an idiot. (Santi 2011: 45)

In a paternalistic and conformist society such as Italy, unwilling to allow space to the "invisible" generations of precarious and indignant workers who are repeatedly defined as "Italy's worst component" by an Italian cabinet-level politician, the success of Santi's book is certainly due to the attention given to it by some important not yet fully government-controlled media such as Rai Radio 3 and a few important National dailies. Another major reason for its success is by word of mouth over *social networks* as well as the numerous reviews, notes, and interviews on (not exclusively literary) blogs and websites, which elicited an enthusiastic audience response. This is clearly because many people in such audiences experience Fulvio Sant's condition day to day. With his work, Santi has also contributed to bring back once again Bianciardi both as a writer and as a person.

## Closing remarks

In the end, it is precisely works like Santi's – and obviously like Bianciardi's masterpiece – that dissipate the "fictional" element through literature, that sublimate the aura that still surrounds one of its invisible, hidden and obliging heros – the translator – on whom it's dependent for its circulation.

Today's translators – similarly to the "mythological" and anonymous older brother in Bianciardi's novel – have not stopped loving their job and they keep doing it with all "the effort, the intelligence and the humility he's [sic] capable of", because "for him [sic] working means translating" (Bianciardi 1972: 32f). However, they do this in a socio-economic context that is becoming more and more fluid, in fact liquid, unstable and precarious,[10] at the mercy of the financial-capitalist

**9.** A popular Italian film character of the Seventies/Eighties, whose misfortunes are similar to Wyle Coyote or Mr. Bean.

**10.** About these concepts and everything related to them please see Baumann's important and well-known works (2005, 2006, 2007).

"Weltrisikogesellschaft" (cf. Beck 2007, Arnoldi 2009, Gallino 2011), in which local phenomena may have unimaginable consequences on a global level. Translators are not willing to barter their hard work and professionalism for an inane and popular fictional image in literature and cinema, not even in Italy, a country in which the so-called knowledge workers have always faced challenges.

Starting from the realization of their socio-economic weakness and their marginal social standing, translators as intellect workers – indeed as intellectuals – more and more frequently view their osmotic role as workers who operate within various habitats of meaning as implying the action of *intellegere*, as interpreting the challenges put out by the complexity of the contemporary world, as a first step to encourage the creation of better working conditions for themselves and for the other precarious, intermittent or even "invisible"[11] road companions, so that working, that is translating, can stop being a factory of unhappiness (cf. Berardi 2001b).

## References

### Primary sources

Bianciardi, L. 1957. *Il lavoro culturale.* Milan: Feltrinelli.
Bianciardi, L. 1959. *L'integrazione.* Milan: Bompiani.
Bianciardi, L. 1962. *La vita agra.* Milan: Rizzoli.
Bianciardi, L 1965. *La vita agra. It's a hard Life.* Translated from the Italian by Eric Mosbacher. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
Lizzani, C. 1964. *La vita agra.* [Screenplay by Sergio Amidei, Luciano Vincenzoni & Carlo Lizzani. Story by Luciano Bianciardi. Produced by E. Nino Krisman Film Napoleon] (DVD 100 min.). Italy: Mymonetro.
Santi, F. 2011. *Aspetta primavera, Lucky.* Roma: Socrates.

### Secondary sources

Arnoldi, J. 2009. *Alles Geld verdampft. Finanzkrise in der Weltrisikogesellschaft.* Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.
Bauman, Z. 2005. *Liquid Life.* Cambridge: Polity.
Bauman, Z. 2006. *Liquid Fear.* Cambridge: Polity.
Bauman, Z. 2007. *Consuming Life.* Cambridge: Polity.
Beck, U. 2007. *Weltrisikogesellschaft.* Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

**11.** About this see the ongoing survey on the invisible publishing world carried out by Sidacato Lavoratori della Conoscenza-Cgil and STRADE (http://www.traduttoristrade.it/2012/inchiesta-editoria-invisibile/).

Berardi, F. 2001a. Cognitariat and Semiokapital. Franco Berardi 'Bifo' interviewed by Matt Fuller & snafu@kyuzz.org. Subsol. Available at: http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/bifotext.html (last accessed 5 August 2011).

Berardi, F 2001b. *La fabbrica dell'infelicità. New Economy e movimento del cognitariato.* [The Factory of Unhappiness] Roma: Derive & Approdi.

Bianciardi, L. 1964. "Luciano Bianciardi sul set de La vita agra." Archivi Rai. [L.B. on the set of the La vita agra film – from the RAI TV Archives] Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05b0HJTj3XQ (last accessed 7 August 2011).

Bianciardi, L. 1972. "Da alcune lettere a un amico grossetano [Tullio Mazzoncini]." *Confronti II* (3). Grosseto: 29–33.

Corrias, P. 1993/2012[2]. *Vita agra di un anarchico. Luciano Bianciardi a Milano.* Milan: Baldini&Castoldi.

Cronin, M. 2003. *Translation and Globalization.* London: Routledge.

Even-Zohar, I. 1978. "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem." In *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, J. S. Holmes & J. Lambert & R. van den Broeck (eds.), 117–127. Leuven: Acco.

Even-Zohar, I. 1982. "Russian VPC's in Hebrew Literary Language." *Theoretical Linguistics* 9 (1): 11–16.

Fante, J. 1938. *Wait until spring, Bandini.* [Italian Translations: *Aspettiamo primavera, Bandini,* traduzione di Giorgio Monicelli, Milan: Mondadori 1948; *Aspetta primavera, Bandini,* traduzione di Carlo Corsi, Turin: Einaudi 2005]. Mechanicsburg [PA]: Stackpole Sons.

Falaschi, G. 1992. "La 'fortuna' critica di Bianciardi." In *Luciano Bianciardi tra neocapitalismo e contestazione: Proceedings of the Conference Luciano Bianciardi tra neocapitalismo e contestazione Grosseto 22–23 March, 1991,* V. Abati et al. (eds.), 23–44. Rome: Editori Riuniti.

Fellini, F. 1953. *I vitelloni.* [Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli. Story by Fellini Federico, Tullio Pinelli. Produced by Lorenzo Pegoraro, Mario De Vecchi & Jacques Bar. Distributed by Janus Film.] ( DVD 104 min.). Italy: Mymonetro.

Fellini, F. 1960. *La dolce vita.* [Screenplay by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano, Tullio Pinelli, Brunello Rondi & Pier Paolo Pasolini. Story by Federico Fellini, Ennio Flaiano &Tullio Pinelli. Produced by Giuseppe Amato & Angelo Rizzoli. Distributed by Koch-Lorber Films.] (DVD 173 min.). Italy-France: Mymonetro.

Ferretti, G. 2009[2]. *La morte irridente. Ritratto critico di Luciano Bianciardi uomo giornalista traduttore scrittore.* Lecce: Manni.

Floros, G. 2002. "Zur Repräsentation von Kultur in Texten." In *Methodologische Probleme des Kulturtransfers,* G. Thome & C. Giehl & H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast (eds.), 75–94. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Fumagalli, A. 2010. "La nuova generazione. Terziario avanzato e lavoro autonomo." *Dinamo* 2: 7.

Gallino, L. 2011. *Finanzcapitalismo. La civiltà del denaro in crisi.* Turin: Einaudi.

Hannerz, U. 2001. *La diversità culturale.* [Original title: Cultural Complexity, Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning]. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Jatosti, M. 2008. "Ricordo in forma di cronologia di Luciano Bianciardi." In *Bianciardi!*, directed by M. Coppola [Book+DVD]. Milan: IBSN.

Milton, J. & Bandia, P. 2009. "Introduction. Agents of Translation and Translation Studies." In *Agents of Translation,* J. Milton & P. Bandia (eds.), 1–18. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Mudersbach, K. 2002. "Kultur braucht Übersetzung. Übersetzung braucht Kultur (Modell und Methode)." In *Methodologische Probleme des Kulturtransfers,* G. Thome & C. Giehl & H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast (eds.), 1699–225. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Muraca, G. 2010. "Luciano Bianciardi uno scrittore fuori del coro." *Notiziario del Centro di Documentazione. XXXXI (217).*

Nadiani, G. 2009. "Maschinenunterstützte Übersetzungspoetik? La stilistica dei corpora in aiuto del traduttore letterario. Il racconto di una parziale auto-analisi semiautomatica." In *Fachsprache, Wörterbücher, Multimediale Datenbanken. Empirische Forschungsansätze der Sprach- und Übersetzungswissenschaft,* W. Heinrich & C. Heiss (eds.), 263–288. München: Iudicium Verlag.

Nadiani, G. 2011. "La fucina traduttiva della rivista tedesca 'die horen' nella mediazione sistematica delle letterature straniere: primi elementi per un inventario." *Mediazioni. Rivista online di studi interdisciplinari su lingue e culture 11.* Available at: http://www.mediazioni.sitlec.unibo.it/index.php/no-11-anno-2011/76-articoliarticles-no-11-2011/189-giovanni-nadiani.html (last accessed 18 December 2012).

Nava, G. 1992. "L'opera di Bianciardi e la letteratura dei primi anni sessanta." In *Luciano Bianciardi tra neocapitalismo e contestazione: Proceedings of the Conference Luciano Bianciardi tra neocapitalismo e contestazione Grosseto 22–23 March, 1991,* V. Abati et al. (eds.), 5–22. Rome: Editori Riuniti.

Pasolini, P. P. 1975. *Scritti corsari.* Milan: Garzanti.

Rea, C. 2011. "Flavio Santi – Aspetta primavera Lucky (Review)." Via dei serpenti. Available at: http://www.viadeiserpenti.it/flavio-santi-aspetta-primavera-lucky.html (last accessed 8 August 2011).

Revelli, M. 2010. *Poveri, noi.* Torino: Einaudi.

Toury, G. 2002. "Translation as a Means of Planning and the Planning of Translation: A theoretical Framework and an Exemplary Case." In *Translations: (Re)shaping of literature and culture,* S. Parker (ed.), 148–163. Istanbul: Boaziçi University Press.

# From a faltering bystander to a spiritual leader

## Re-thinking the role of translators in Russia

Natalia Olshanskaya
Kenyon College, USA

## Introduction

It is an axiom of modern narratology that all the elements of a work of fiction are artificial constructs. The characters that populate a novel, short story or film, as well as the actions that they accomplish and from which they are inseparable, are what they are because that is how the author chose to present them. Authors are free to assign to their characters whatever properties they may wish, but in practice their choices are generally governed by some general principle(s) of selection, whether thematic, philosophical, ideological, or aesthetic (cf. Margolin 2007).

Since literature is an imminently social phenomenon, sociological or ideological analysis has long been a recognized approach to literary criticism. All authors are members of a particular society, which impinges on their lives, their working conditions, and their experience of the world. Consequently, their writings are inevitably influenced, positively or negatively, and indeed perhaps unconsciously, by their social environment and its ideology. Moreover, the stories that they tell all take place, and their characters evolve, within particular social settings, which usually bear some relationship, whether close or distant, to their own. All narratives exist in specific social contexts and are subject to specific social evaluations, since "not only the meaning of the utterance but also the very fact of its performance is of historical and social significance […]. The very presence of the utterance is historically and socially significant." (Bakhtin 1978: 120) Authors can scarcely avoid giving their stories an ideological dimension that interacts in one way or another with those of the larger society of which they are a part. As Mona Baker (2006: 139) so eloquently put it: "Individual textual narratives do not exist in isolation from the larger narratives circulating in any society, nor indeed of the meta-narratives circulating globally."

As is indicated by the above quotation from Mona Baker's *Translation and Conflict* (2006), the practice of translation has become a highly politicized phenomenon in today's world. The translator is the bearer of messages between diverse linguistic and cultural communities, and thus has the power subtly to shape and transform the ideological implications of such messages. Our awareness of the potential ideological sensitivity of translation practices has been heightened in recent years by the process of globalization and by the political and cultural conflicts to which it has given rise. For the former Soviet Union and the post-Soviet society that succeeded it, however, such awareness is nothing new. Because of its isolation and its relationship of conflict with the West, Soviet society developed an ambivalent attitude towards translation and translators, marked by a combination of admiration (or at least toleration), and suspicion, and some of that attitude persists in Russian society today.

The present study will examine three works of fiction in which the author has chosen to portray the protagonist as a translator, a choice with subtle ideological implications relating less to the practice of translation than to the status of the translator in society. One of these works is a Russian feature film made at the height of the Cold War, the other two, post-Soviet Russian novels. A comparison of these works in terms of the traits and actions attributed to the translator figure will illuminate the ideological orientation that has presided in each case over the choices made by the author in shaping the character. As we shall see, the development is essentially one of continuity, though not without the opening up of new possibilities in today's multicultural, interrelated world.

## The art versus the artist

It is a well-established fact that starting with the eighteenth century, the development of Russian secular writing in general, and literary genres in particular, have been influenced through translation. For several centuries, the immediate impact of translated literature on Russian culture has promoted a variety of ideological debates, ranging from strong opposition to all elements of foreignness as endangering important national fundamentals to a devoted commitment on the part of the Russian cultural elite to align Russian literature with the best Western European standards of the time. Changing views on translation and its function in the cultural development of Russia have been documented in several critical studies (cf. May 1994, Friedberg 1997, Witt 2011).

Already throughout the nineteenth century one could encounter a variety of comments on translators and their work, ranging from Aleksander Pushkin's famous 1830 diary entry "Translators are the postal horses of the enlightenment"

(Pushkin 1964: 515) to a much more critical assessment of translators and their qualifications in Ivan Turgenev's letters. "What a shameless Frenchman!" wrote Turgenev in 1854 about the French translator of his *Zapiski Okhotnika* [A Hunter's Diary] (Turgenev 1961–1968, 2: 225), or in his 1879 letter to Flaubert, while highly recommending Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Turgenev then noted: "Unfortunately the translation is by a Russian lady, and I usually do not trust these lady translators, especially when they approach writers as powerful as Tolstoy" (Turgenev 1961–1968, 12[2]: 193).

While the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of a new canon of translated literature in Russia, the view of translators as an obvious, yet unavoidable evil persisted. It was eloquently summarized by Vladimir Nabokov in the opening paragraph of his essay "The Art of Translation" (1981: 315):

> Three grades of evil can be discerned in the queer world of verbal transmigration. The first, and lesser one, comprises obvious errors due to ignorance or misguided knowledge. This is mere human frailty and thus excusable. The next step to Hell is taken by the translator who intentionally skips words or passages that he does not bother to understand or that might seem obscure or obscene to vaguely imagined readers; he accepts the blank look that the dictionary gives him without any qualms; or subjects scholarship to primness: he is as ready to know less than the author as he is to think he knows better. The third, and worst, degree of turpitude is reached when a masterpiece is planished and patted into such a shape, vilely beautified in such a fashion as to conform to the notions and prejudices of a given public. This is a crime, to be punished by the stocks as plagiarists were in the shoe buckle days.

Nabokov's understanding of translation as art is reiterated in several Russian titles of well-known studies on translation (cf. Chukovskii 1968, Liubimov 1964), and yet throughout the twentieth century few translators, at least during their lifetime, were recognized as true artists, capable of living up to the high standards of the art they practiced.

During the Soviet period, as translators and their work began increasingly to be used as an instrument of political games and propaganda, discourse on translation and translators, frequently sponsored by the government, became even more politicized. Shifting attitudes towards translators and translation were reflected in a variety of public policies and ideological debates. For example, in 1929, a leading Soviet newspaper, *Izvestiia,* opened a public discussion of unsatisfactory practices in the translation and circulation of foreign literature with an article by Osip Mandel'shtam. The article appeared under a revealing title, *Potoki khaltury* [*Floods of Hackwork*], added on by the editorial board of the newspaper (Mandel'shtam 1929: 4), and reflected the general critical attitude towards the state of translation.

Critical pronouncements about translators and their qualifications continued to be echoed by other famous Russian writers, despite the fact that many of them, especially under the Soviet regime, had to depend on translation for their livelihood.[1] Post-Soviet discourse on translation and translators has remained similarly ambivalent. The dichotomy between translation as art and translators as hack-workers, incapable of living up to the high standards of art, has naturally influenced the interpretation of the image of translator in various Soviet and post-Soviet cultural artifacts.

## From *Autumn Marathon* to *Sincerely yours Shurik*: Indecision or insincerity?

Over the last thirty years, translators' personae have been used in several Russian literary and cinematic texts in a variety of contexts, ranging from a more predictable metaphor for ideological and cultural tensions between home-grown and imported phenomena, or between the East and the West, to a less straightforward description of psychological conflicts between the old and the new, implicitly acting as a projection of social anxieties in Russia.

Shot in 1979 by Georgii Danelia, a prominent Soviet filmmaker of the period, the Soviet film *Autumn Marathon* centers around the life of its main character, the professional translator Andrei Buzykin. A winner of awards in the best director and best actor categories at the 1979 Venice Film Festival, the 1979 San Sebastian Film Festival and the 1980 Berlin Film Festival, *Autumn Marathon* has enjoyed considerable popularity in the Soviet Union. It is the story of an intelligent and kind person whose pathological indecisiveness makes it impossible for him to take control of his own life. His erratic actions and his inability to make up his own mind constantly hurt people around him.

The opening titles introduce the film to the viewer as "a sad comedy". Its script, written by Alexander Volodin, one of the most prolific and talented playwrights of the time, is probably more sad than comedic. Key-words to describe the film's contents would probably result in a somewhat curious combination of "midlife crisis, extramarital affair, infidelity, and translation."

The main character, Andrei Buzykin, teaches courses in translation at Leningrad University. He is also an established translator of English-language literature. His personality is a bundle of contradictions, since he is cursed simultaneously with decency and irresolution. A kind man, he never has the courage to tell the truth; he puts on a happy smile when he feels the least like smiling; he

1. See, for example, Joseph Brodsky's comments about the English translations of his own poetry and his opinion of some translators of the works of Osip Mandel'shtam and Marina Tsvetaeva. (Brodskii 2000: 76–80, 588–589). For more on Russian writers on translation, see Baer & Olshanskaya (2013).

shakes the hand of a man he despises; he tries to please everybody, but pleases no one, least of all himself. In the opening and closing sequences of the film, we see him jogging – an activity he hates, but politely endures. This frame of jogging or running away from facing real issues is a metaphor for Buzykin's attitude towards life. "I am not talented", he says in the opening scene, "I translate talented writers." This acknowledgement of the secondary nature of his work places translation into a non-creative, borderline zone.

There are two other translators in the film – Bill Hansen, a hippie-type professor from Denmark, who struggles and generally fails to understand the intricacies of Dostoevsky's language, and Varvara, an incompetent Russian lady, who is butchering, rather than translating, American novels. These two can be at best described as intrusive, irresponsible and funny, or in E. M. Forster's classification, as "flat characters" (Forster 1927), since they are endowed with "a single trait (or one clearly dominating the others)", and this makes their behavior within the plot "highly predictable" (Chatman 1978: 132). In any case, they serve to reinforce the negative image of translators conveyed more subtly in the complex portrayal of the protagonist.

A question which naturally comes to mind is: Why did the filmmakers choose a translator and his environment to serve as the embodiment of all these weaknesses? In the ideological climate of the 1970s, it was more or less natural that Buzykin would represent the intelligentsia, a group considered unreliable and suspicious by the Soviet political establishment. A continuous mistrust of the intelligentsia was already launched in the early years of the Russian revolution of 1917, when Lenin's notorious "ship of philosophers", in fact not one, but many ships, were driving out of Russia into exile its best intellectuals – a deliberate political move by the Bolsheviks, who wanted to clear the country of any potential ideological opposition or debate.[2]

And yet, why should Buzykin be a translator, a representative of this uncommon trade? Based on the strict political Soviet system of censorship with its artificial ideological barriers, one could come up with several plausible answers. One could argue, for example, that the filmmakers had to show that their film explores unhealthy moral traits which are uncommon for the generally sound Soviet society, or that the translators' closeness to western culture breeds western vices. The plot could even suggest a warning that living in-between two cultures may result in moral confusion.[3]

---

**2.** For more on the vagaries in the development of the intelligentsia's civil mission in the Soviet period, see Fitzpatrick (1992); Lovell & Marsh (1998).

**3.** This idea obviously contradicts current studies in cognitive psychology on so-called „dual identity" according to which moving between cultural boundaries enables individuals to „capitalize on both consequences and offer greater potential for conflict resolution" (Leonardelli et al. 2011: 111).

A similarly critical portrayal of translators seems to have persisted in Russian culture, for twenty-five years later, a 2004 novel, *Sincerely yours Shurik* by Liudmila Ulitskaia, depicts another faltering main character as a translator. The events in the novel take place in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, a period labeled by historians as a time of political stagnation. Unfortunately, the ideological message of the novel and the interpretation of its characters also seem to belong to the same era.

Ulitskaia's main character Shurik has been raised by his grandmother who, like many other representatives of the old Russian intelligentsia, had studied and lived abroad and whose knowledge and command of European languages was a natural part of her education. In Soviet times, the grandmother became a university teacher of French, and it was from her that Shurik has got his dated, old-fashioned version of the French language, which sounds much like the French from the salons of the Russian nobility in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. These elements of the narrative introduce the novel's underlying conflict between the old and the new, which is supported not only through the events of the plot, but also by the general atmosphere in the household of the main characters with their old-fashioned notions of decency, old-fashioned holiday celebrations and old-fashioned furniture.[4] Shurik and his family, although in a way charming, belong to a disappearing world; the title of the novel, *Sincerely yours Shurik*, a typical way to end a letter, signals the end of an era and a farewell to a certain type of people.

In addition, the novel's title suggests an ironic attitude toward the main character on the part of the author, since sincerity is definitely not one of Shurik's personal traits. Raised by women, without a father figure, he has developed a strong psychological dependence on them and an inability to make his own decisions. His mother and grandmother have made sure that he would grow up kind and friendly, and it is with a mixture of friendliness, detachment and lust that he responds to numerous sexual opportunities and demands from various women around him. He is at their service and at their mercy, without ever being able to follow his own desires or his personal feelings, if he has any. In this respect, there is an obvious resemblance between him and the faltering Andrei Buzykin from *Autumn Marathon*, who is torn between his relationships with his mistress and his wife. Like Buzykin, Shurik is also running his own marathon, being permanently in a hurry, attending to other people, running their errands, and not having any time to stop or to think.

On the other hand, if the professional credentials of Andrei Buzykin are never questioned, good-for-nothing Shurik becomes a translator by default. He translates technical texts, mostly patents, without understanding their meaning, only

4. For more on the functions of setting and its relation to character in fiction, see Chatman (1978: 141–145).

because this work brings money and also freedom, which Shurik interprets as freedom not to pursue any consequential personal goals. Reiterating that Shurik does his work thoroughly, yet without much intellectual involvement, Ulitskaia re-introduces the notion of translation as a secondary by-product.

Similarly to *Autumn Marathon*, the novel seems to cast doubt on the personal credibility of translators through several other problematic characters. One of Shurik's mistresses, Valeria, translates articles for women's magazines from Polish and other unidentified Slavic languages. Her talent as translator, based "on the intuitive skill of putting the right word in the right place, extends to positioning elements of life around herself, both objects and people" (Ulitskaia 2008: 365).[5] Severely physically disabled, she seems to be a true artist when it comes to manipulation and to disguising reality. Another translator, an expert in Eastern languages who specializes in translating Persian poetry, is a psychiatric patient with eight suicide attempts on her record. These secondary characters obviously suggest additional clues for the interpretation of the narrative since "within a given literary work each character tends to enter into mutually stabilizing and mutually illuminating relationships with all the other characters" (Hochman 1985: 65).

The novel received the Best 2004 Russian Prose Award, which was yet another acknowledgement of its author's popularity.[6] It was also an indirect confirmation of the fact that an ambiguous attitude towards translators and their work had undergone little change, if any at all.

## Translator as spiritual leader

An important notion in contemporary theories of social identification is the belief that individuals can flexibly categorize themselves as members of various social groups (Dovidio & Gaertner 2010; Yzerbyt & DeMoulin 2010), and that their exposure to new cultures broadens their creative potential. This idea seems to be at the core of today's image of a translator as developed in translation studies, and it has been successfully utilized in Liudmila Ulitskaia's 2006 novel *Daniel Shtain, perevodchik*. The novel was translated into English as *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* by Arch Tait, winner of the 2010 PEN *Literature in Translation Award*.

5. All translations from Ulitskaia's novels are mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

6. Winner of the 2011 Simone de Beauvoir International Human Rights Prize for women's freedom, Liudmila Ulitskaia has received the Russian Booker Prize, the Penne Literary Prize, and the Medici Award. A bestselling Russian author, she has written fourteen novels, six plays, and several stories for children. Several of her novels have been translated into other languages.

Ulitskaia's new book is densely populated by many characters from different times and countries, who speak various tongues. And at the center of this narrative is a person who has, through translation, bridged the gap between people of various ethnicities, religious beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. His story, both tragic and heroic, was inspired by the true life events of Oswald Rufeisen, a legendary Christian monk in Israel. The narrative takes us on a long journey through several continents where the translator Daniel Stein is always at the forefront of important historic and political events. His ability to interpret and translate across linguistic and religious divides, to communicate with people from all cultures stands as a symbol of love, freedom and tolerance.

During the war, posing as a gentile, he worked as an interpreter for the Byelorussian police, and later for the Gestapo, where he translated official German documents into Polish and Byelorussian, and also served as an interpreter for the local population. According to him, it was not uncommon that a lack of any knowledge of German among the local rural population resulted in miscommunication, personal tragedies and even deaths. As an interpreter, he also participated in the investigation of petty crimes, translating papers which contained false denunciations, complaints, and groundless accusations against innocent people. Those were written by poor, illiterate locals, one neighbor against the other, and Daniel tried to warn and help the falsely accused.

At this point, Daniel Stein raises the question of the ethical responsibility of the translator. He writes:

> I worked conscientiously, I made an effort to come up with the most exact equivalents when translating criminal cases, and there were lots of them: fights, thefts, killings. But, working for the Gestapo, I understood that I shared responsibility for everything happening there. Although I did not personally participate in the killing of people, I was aware of my complicity. (Ulitskaia 2007: 178)[7]

Daniel feels a strong moral urge to offset this complacency by helping people when possible, and he never misses a single chance to try and do so. For example, his access to secret information enables him to inform the residents of a Jewish ghetto in the area about the planned "final solution" operation. This information saves the lives of 300 people who will feel indebted to Daniel throughout the rest of their lives.

The reader learns about these details from Daniel's letters to his friends or from recordings of his talks, mostly talks delivered at schools in Israel and Germany.

---

7. This comment obviously echoes Mona Baker's statement that "as social actors, translators and interpreters are responsible for the narratives they help circulate, and for the real-life consequences of giving these narratives currency and legitimacy" (Baker 2006: 139).

There is never an effort to present himself as a hero, and there always seems to be an effort to understand both the victims and the killers. A firm pacifist, he strongly believes that wars "distort and destroy" people (Ulitskaia 2007: 357).

After the war, as a Catholic monk, Daniel moves to Israel. There he works with people who have fled their national homes and are going through cultural assimilation by way of their own national traditions. According to Daniel, each nation has its own way to Christ, and in the minds of the people, there is an Italian, a Polish, a Greek, and a Russian Christ. This idea is reiterated by another character, an Ethiopian priest, who claims that Africans have a hard time to accept European Christianity.

The linguistic nuances of various translations of the Gospel, leading to possible re-interpretations of the text, are mentioned by another character, Teresa Benda. This half-Polish, half-Lithuanian, former Catholic nun writes in one of her letters:

> I have read the Gospel in Russian, in Church-Slavonic, in Lithuanian, in German and in Latin, and each time, I have observed differences in my reception of the text. Indeed, God talks to people in different languages, and the subtleties of each language reflect the character and specificity of the nation. The German translation of the Gospel surprised me by its simplification if compared let's say, with the Church Slavonic version. I can only wonder about the richness of the Greek and Ancient Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. (Ulitskaia 2007: 247)

This multiplicity of world views makes Daniel suggest that "Truth is a complex structure which exists in a smaller, simplified version for some people, and in an extremely complex and profound form for others" (Ulitskaia 2007: 285). Such openness and willingness to understand and to accept attract to Daniel many different people of all ages and from all walks of life. During the war, these ranged from a Byelorussian peasant to a Nazi officer, from a young Polish woman to Catholic nuns. In Israel, they include well-known intellectuals and uneducated people, people from various ethnic backgrounds (Jews, Arabs, Germans, Poles) and from different religions (Orthodox Christians, Muslims, Catholics, and Jews).

It is in Israel that Daniel Stein observes first-hand the development of what he calls "Christian linguistics": "[I]n early days, religious services which had totally emerged from the Judaic tradition were changed from Hebrew to Greek, to Coptic, later to Latin and to Slavic languages, and now I face Poles, Czechs and French who pray in Hebrew." (Ulitskaia 2007: 170) Daniel, who has previously conducted services in Polish, switches to Hebrew, using some old existing translations and then himself translating other religious texts into Hebrew. This multi-cultural practice of Christian rituals creates an incentive for Daniel's further development of the ideas of a "poly-cultural" Christianity which other leaders of the Catholic

Church find objectionable. Daniel dreams of bridging gaps between religions; he organizes joint liturgies and requests permission of Rome to establish an all-Christian Union in Haifa.

Religion plays an important part in the novel, which in a way mirrors the revival of interest in Christianity in Russia. As has been shown by psychological research, religious collectives provide not only a sense of identity to its members, but also a sense of control in a random and chaotic world (cf. Kay et al. 2009). In today's Russia, with its shifting moral and societal values and changing political ideologies, religion impacts all levels of the self – the personal, the relational, and the collective.

Many characters in Ulitskaia's novel go through religious conversions to Christianity, move from one religious denomination to another, or wander in-between cultures. Like Daniel Stein, a Holocaust survivor, Ewa, becomes Catholic; her fanatical Communist mother converts to Anglicanism; an old Jewish woman requests baptism just before her death; an Arab Christian from a Muslim family falls in love with a German woman. These are just a few examples of such "mysterious conversions" to Christianity which some literary critics found questionable and strained, if only because of their circumstances and numbers. Ulitskaia's novel has also been criticized by Russian nationalistic groups for alleged neglect of ethnic Russians and Orthodoxy (cf. Sutcliffe 2009).

Cultural and religious differences between people and a divide brought about by miscommunication based on the existence of various religions and languages seem to be important elements in Ulitskaia's mapping of the chaotic picture of the universe. It is not by chance that as the epigraph for the book she chose a quotation from I Corinthians: "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue." (Ulitskaia 2007: 3)

In an attempt to combat this philosophy of chaos, the novelist creates Daniel Stein, an interpreter and translator, who has been inspired by the spirit of bringing happiness and peace to all people, and who, indeed, 'speaks with tongues' not only metaphorically, but in practice. He is capable of conducting inspiring tours of Israel in Polish, Romanian, Russian, Greek, German, Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, English and French. He studies Arabic, and he seems to have no difficulty in communicating with Arabs and Bulgarians. He seems to have a somewhat supernatural gift for languages, although his own assessment of his talent is quite modest. In one of his letters, he writes:

> I know many languages, but I must admit that I don't know them well enough. I cannot read Shakespeare in English, Moliere in French, or Tolstoy in Russian. I am convinced that every new language develops the person's cognition and his world. (Ulitskaia 2007: 319)

He acknowledges the dividing political and cultural force of people's inability to speak the same language. During a Pentecost service he quotes the Biblical scene where the Holy Ghost appeared from heaven and sent "cloven tongues like as of fire", and people "began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Ulitskaia 2007: 225).

A secondary character in the novel, another translator, Valentina Ferdinandovna, lives in Moscow and translates religious texts from English into Russian. While formerly her translations could appear only in "samizdat", that is the former Soviet underground publishing press, recently, they have been published by official publishing houses, on expensive glossy paper, and with her name as translator. Her translations of the Gospel into modern Russian are described as "opening new meanings and undertones", and as done "by the will of the heart" (Ulitskaia 2007: 342).

On a visit to Israel, she rejoices upon witnessing the multiplicity of Christian movements and suggests that it is especially important for her as a translator of religious texts who had personally researched the multiplicity of opinions on every aspect of Christianity. She tries to strengthen ecumenicalism through her Russian translations of the New Testament. Here again, Ulitskaia reiterates the importance of spreading the word of wisdom via translation.

The importance of translators' work is pushed into prominence by representatives of all religious denominations. For example, in one of her letters, a Russian Orthodox nun complains about the lack of true religious Teachers, the way they were understood in the Middle Ages. "Those were religious scholars, interpreters, and translators, today we mostly encounter curators." (Ulitskaia 2007: 226) The very opposition between the creativity of translators who interpret and research and those who merely preserve the wisdom of the world reiterates the importance of a translator's status[8] and could be one clue to answering the question about the title of the novel.

Why, indeed, has Ulitskaia called her work *Daniel Stein, Interpreter?* After all, the main character serves as a priest most of his adult life. Why not *Daniel Stein, Monk* or *Daniel Stein, Catholic Priest*?

In his understanding of the ethical principles of the Christian world, in his claims that all human actions have to be dictated by love, compassion, mercy and charity, and that this is the only answer of humans to God (cf. Ulitskaia 2007: 461), Daniel rises to the level of the true Teachers, that of the true translator who is the interpreter of the universal laws. Raising high the status of translators and their

---

**8.** Translators' activist role in disseminating world narratives within their own country, including those that challenge ruling domestic ideologies, has been discussed by scholars of translation (cf. Tymoczko 2000, 2003; Baker 2006: 33–38).

work, Ulitskaia establishes what Tzvetan Todorov called an *ideological* narrative, in which "certain isolated and independent actions, often performed by different characters, reveal the same abstract rule, the same ideological organization" (Todorov 1981: 45).

Ulitskaia's portrayal of a translator as a spiritual leader sets up a dialectical, "dialogic" relationship (Bakhtin 1963) between this novel and the negative images of translators promulgated by some earlier works in the Soviet tradition. This opposition is all the more intriguing in the case of *Sincerely yours Shurik*, published by the same author only two years earlier. Was it Ulitskaia's conscious intention to call into question the implications of her earlier novel? Had she undergone a kind of "conversion" in her view of the cultural mission of translation, in parallel with her religious conversion? Was this new orientation merely inspired by the powerful, highly positive real-life model of the protagonist? In response to his strong personality and the compelling events of his life, did she simply abdicate her freedom as a writer to shape the character in any way she wished?

It would have been tempting to suggest the existence of a direct linkage between the literary image and reality and to say that Ulitskaia's most recent portrayal of the translator as spiritual leader could point to a rising importance of the intelligentsia or that it shows evidence of a new Russian attitude towards its intellectual elite. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be the case, and the new direction marked by *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* appears to derive more from personal considerations relating to the novelist herself than from any fundamental change in post-Soviet society and its attitude towards intellectuals as exemplified by the figure of the translator.

In a recent article on the status of the intelligentsia in Russia, a progressive Russian writer and literary critic Stanislav Rassadin gave an overview of the long years of confrontation between the state and the intelligentsia and its devastating effects on individual behaviors and collective ideology in Russia. He arrived at a sad conclusion about an ideological vacuum in the so-called Putin's Russia, where the intelligentsia seems to have abandoned its traditional spiritual and ideological claims, which in turn has resulted in a general state of a hopeless and pervasive intellectual mediocrity (cf. Rassadin 2010: 14). Within this context, not only Ulitskaia's call for a spiritual leader, but also her assigning of this role to an interpreter/translator, reiterating the writer's belief in transformational cross-cultural experiences, seem meaningful, timely and more than appropriate.

## Concluding remarks

Although social reality and ideology are just one factor among many that writers may take into consideration in structuring their stories, and some authors and works obviously lend themselves better than others to this critical approach, the identification of related narrative constructs is significant as a particular way to conceptualize the interaction between culture and ideology. Narratives not only reflect but also shape the political and the ideological in a society. Reexamining contradictory discourses as they apply to specific texts provides us with an opportunity for more meaningful comparisons of ideologies and helps to find a better understanding of various ways in which narratives and politics have an impact upon each other.

A comparison of the images of translators produced within Russian culture over several decades shows that these images have been used essentially to legitimate a mistrustful attitude towards the intelligentsia in the Soviet and Russian societies, reiterating the translator's position in-between political authority and the people and his "intermediate" place between various cultures. The skeptical portrayal of translators in various Soviet and post-Soviet cultural artifacts continued to be reinforced via the traditional dichotomy between translation as art and translators as hack-workers, incapable of living up to the high standards of art. Despite some of the more recent narratives that mirror the complexity of the ongoing moral and political debates, post-Soviet discourse on translation and translators has remained ambivalent. In this context, even occasional attempts at portraying translators as free-thinking intellectuals and mediators in potential inter-group conflicts seem to be a welcome effort at redefining the role of intellectuals in society and suggest a possibility of rethinking the in-between position of the Russian intelligentsia in its relation to political power and to the people.

## References

### Primary sources

Danelia, G. 1979. *Osenniy marafon.* [Autumn Marathon] (DVD 90 min.). Soviet Union: Lenfilm.
Ulitskaia, L. 2007. *Daniel' Shtain, perevodchik*. [Daniel Shtein, a Translator]. Moscow: Eksmo.
Ulitskaia, L. 2008. *Iskrenne Vash Shurik*. [Sincerely yours Shurik]. Moscow: Eksmo.

## Secondary sources

Baer, B. & Olshanskaya, N. 2013. *Russian Writers on Translation. An Anthology*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing Ltd.

Baker, M. 2006. *Translation and Conflict. A Narrative Account*. London and New York: Routledge.

Bakhtin, M. 1963. *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo*. 2nd Edition. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura.

Bakhtin, M. 1978. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: a critical introduction to sociological poetics*. Translated by A. J. Wehrle. Baltimore [MD]/London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Brodskii, I. 2000. *Bol'shaia kniga interview*. [A Big Book of Interviews]. 2nd Edition. Moscow: Zakharov.

Chatman, S. 1978. *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Chukovskii, K. 1968. *Vysokoe iskusstvo*. [The High Art]. Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel'.

Dovidio, J. F. & Gaertner, S. L. 2010[5]. "Intergroup bias." In *Handbook of Social Psychology Vol 2*, S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert & G. Lindzey (eds.), 1084–1121. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Fitzpatrick, S. 1992. *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*. Ithaca, N: Cornell University Press.

Forster, E. M. 1927. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

Friedberg, M. 1997. *Literary Translation in Russia. A Cultural History*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Hochman, B. 1985. *Character in Literature*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Kay, A. C. & Whitson, J. A. & Gaucher, D. & Galinsky, A. D. 2009. "Compensatory Control: Achieving order through the mind, our institutions, and the heavens." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18 (5): 264–268.

Leonardelli, G. J. & Pickett, C. & Joseph, J. E. & Hess, Y. D. 2011. "Optimal Distinctiveness in Nested Categorization Contexts. Moving From Dueling Identities to Dual Identity." In *Social Cognition, Social Identity, and Intergroup Relations. A Festschrift in Honor of Marilynn B. Brewer*. R. M. Kramer & G. J. Leonardelli (eds.), 103–125. New York, London: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group.

Liubimov, N. 1964. "Perevod – iskusstvo." [Translation Is Art]. In *Masterstvo Perevoda – 1963* [The Art of Translation in 1963], 233–248. Moscow: Sovietskii pisatel'.

Lovell, S. & Marsh, R. 1998. "Culture and Crisis." In *Russian Cultural Studies*, C. Kelly & D. Shepherd (eds.), 56–84. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Mandel'shtam, O. 1929. "Potoki khaltury." [Floods of Hackwork] *Izvestiia* 7: 4.

Margolin, U. 2007. "Character." In *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, D. Herman (ed.), 66–79. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press.

May, R. 1994. *The Translator in the Text. On Reading Russian Literature in English*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Nabokov, V. 1981. *Lectures on Russian Literature*. F. Bowers (ed.). New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Pushkin, A. 1964. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij v desiati tomakh. Kritika i publitsistika*, [Complete Collected Works in Ten Volumes. Critical Works and Essays]. Volume VII. Moscow: Nauka.

Rassadin, S. 2010. "Razvoploschionnye. Intelligentzyia, intelligentnost', intelligent." [The Reconstructed. Intelligentsia, Spirituality, Intelligence.] *Novaia Gazeta* 75: 14.

Sutcliffe, B. M. 2009. "Liudmila Ulitskaya's Literature of Tolerance." *Russian Review* 68 (3): 495–509.

Todorov, T. 1981. *Introduction to Poetics*. Richard Howard (trans). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Tymoczko, M. 2000. "Translation and Political Engagement: Activism, Social Change and the Role of Translation in Geopolitical Shifts." *The Translator* 6 (1): 23–47.

Tymoczko, M. 2003. "Ideology and the Position of the Translator: In What Sense is a Translator 'In Between'?" In *Apropos of Ideology – Translation Studies on Ideology – Ideologies in Translation Studies*, M. Calzada Perez (ed.), 181–201. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

Turgenev, I. 1961–68. *Pis'ma* [Letters]. In *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem v dvadtsati vos'mi tomakh. Pis'ma v trinadtsati tomakh.* [Complete Collected Works in Twenty-Eight Volumes. Letters in Thirteen Volumes]. Moscow-Leningrad: Nauka.

Witt, S. 2011. "Between the Lines. Totalitarianism and Translation in the USSR." In *Contexts, Subtexts and Pretexts. Literary translation in Eastern Europe and Russia*, B. J. Baer (ed.), 149–170. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Yzerbyt, V. & DeMoulin, S. 2010[5]. "Intergroup relations." In *Handbook of Social Psychology Vol 2,* S. T. Fiske, D. T. Gilbert & G. Lindzey (eds.), 1024–1083. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

# Interpreting *Daniel Stein*

## Or what happens when fictional translators get translated

Brian James Baer
Kent State University

### Introduction

A number of translation scholars have noted a close connection between the recent spate of fictional portrayals of translators and translation and the post-modern condition. As Karen Littau puts it: "Translation with its Babel myth and its confusion of languages emerges as a privileged trope for the postmodern, precisely because it, too, is a site where the difficult acknowledgement of the divisions between texts, languages, traditions, cultures, and peoples occur" (2010: 437). Dirk Delabastita and Rainier Grutman made a similar point in the introduction to the 2005 special issue of *Linguistica Antverpiensia*, entitled *Fictionalizing Translation and Multilingualism* (2005: 29):

> Like (and often along with) 'travel', 'translation' has […] become a master metaphor epitomizing our present *condition humaine*, evoking our search for a sense of self and belonging in a perplexing context of change and difference.

That human condition, they note, is intimately tied to "the postmodern critique of Western rationality and empirical research" (2005: 29). Quite simply, when translators appear as characters in fictional texts, they challenge, if only implicitly, their traditional invisibility in cultural exchanges, becoming a part of the story. As such, they may serve as an effective vehicle for a postmodern critique of traditional textual hierarchies privileging the original and the author of the original over translations and translators and of the objectivity claims of positivist scholarship. The translator as literary character, with his or her own personal problems and professional aspirations – and very often in an emotionally-fraught relationship with the source text author – serves as the very embodiment of the postmodern notion that "all acts of reading, or acts of translation are collaborative acts of writing, are versionings" (Littau 2010: 446).

To the extent that fictional translators represent the embodiment of postmodern themes, it would appear that Russia, too, is fully participating in this postmodern moment: Fictional translators can be found in many works of contemporary Russian literature and film (cf. Baer 2005). Boris Akunin's (2010) dashing detective Erast Fandorin knows several western European languages as well as a few Asian ones, and often serves as an ad hoc translator when the need arises. Alexandra Marinina's (2011) detective hero, Nastya Kamenskaya, translates detective fiction from English, French, and German in her spare time. Viktor Pelevin's (2002) obsession with the globalization of markets, specifically, with public relations and advertising, is reflected in comic (mis)translations and disgressions on the translatability of Russian culture. And most recently, Liudmila Ulitskaya's *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* features a multilingual Jewish Catholic priest and Holocaust survivor who saves three hundred Jews from the Nazis through an act of mistranslation and later sets out to translate the Catholic liturgy into Hebrew for his congregation in Israel, with some notable omissions. These daring assertions of his agency as a translator, among other traits, have led many critics and scholars to see the work as a "postmodern classic".

## Defining postmodernism

Postmodernity emerged in the West as a "widespread current in art and literature, and also an entire world-view" in the late nineteen sixties (Seldon 1989: 71). For many writers, critics, and philosophers, postmodernity was seen as a function of the massive dislocations and technical advances that accompanied late capitalism, post-colonialism, and globalization, producing a profound sense of ontological uncertainty and fluidity that were reflected both in hybrid literary and artistic forms and in new "cosmopolitan" identities. With its tendency toward self-reflection and self-parody, postmodernism challenges meta-narratives, as well as traditional categories of identity-formation, perhaps chief among them, nationality. As Raman Seldon describes the effects of postmodernism, "Human shock in the face of the unimaginable (pollution, holocaust, the death of the 'subject') results in a loss of fixed points of reference. Neither the world nor the self possesses unity, coherence, meaning. They are radically 'de-centered'." (1989: 72)

It is perhaps no coincidence then that writers and critics seized on the term postmodernism in Russia in the late 1980s, during the period known as perestroika, when all the verities and master narratives of Soviet history and culture were turned on their head. And while the novels by Vladimir Sorokin and

Vladimir Pelevin, for example, did indeed reflect the general ontological uncertainty that marked Western examples of postmodernity, it wasn't long before scholars and critics began to caution against the blanket use of postmodernism in reference to late-Soviet and early post-Soviet cultural products. As early as 1993 the American scholar Marjorie Perloff declared Russian postmodernism to be an oxymoron, and in 1994 Nancy Condee and Vladimir Padunov argued that Russian postmodernism had a different teleology from its Western counterpart. In 1999 Mark Lipovetsky published his book-length study of postmodern *Russian Postmodernist Fiction: Dialogue with Chaos.* Paraphrasing Lipovetsky's argument, Eliot Borenstein, the translator and editor of the volume, notes in the introduction:

> [For Lipovetsky] Russian postmodernism is both an integral part of a worldwide phenomenon and a product of the Russian cultural reality. Lipovetsky firmly links postmodernism to the modernist tradition, tracing such key postmodern features as self-referentiality to their roots in Russian metafiction of the 1920s, which addresses two issues at once, one 'global', the other 'local'. [...] His demonstration of postmodernism's Russian modernist roots disarms national critics who claim that postmodernism is merely an ill-suited Western import. (1999: xvi)

In 2000 the Japanese Slavist Tetsuo Mochizuki asserted that, "Russian postmodernism is by no means a mere import of the European trend, but has its roots in Russia's cultural history" (2000). And as Tine Peeters remarks (2004):

> Postmodernism in Russia is evidently not an exact copy of Western postmodernism. It is rather a site of appropriation and transformation of globalized cultural forms, just as Russian Byronism was not simply a translation of an English literary trend, but a genuinely Russian phenomenon.

And, therefore, Peeters (2004) concludes, "One could say that even the most Westernized postmodern writers are still profoundly Russian."

It is the "Russianness" of Liudmila Ulitskaya's 2006 novel *Daniel' Shtain, Perevodchik* [Daniel Shtain, Translator] that I will attempt to unpack below through close readings of the English target text against the Russian source text and of the paratextual material surrounding those texts. The Russian dimension of the novel, I will argue, functions more to assert a traditional "Russian" identity than to celebrate a postmodern "fluidity". Rather than "de-centering" her hero's subjectivity in a postmodern fashion, Ulitskaya ultimately makes him the embodiment of a traditional concept of Russian identity with roots not in Jameson's late capitalism but in the Russian nineteenth century.

## A postmodern classic?

Ulitskaya's novel achieved a great deal of attention in the media in both Russia and the West. First published in Russian in 2006, it was awarded the prestigious National literary award *Bol'shaia Kniga* in 2007; it appeared in 2011 in an English translation by the seasoned translator Arch Tait, under the title *Daniel Stein, Interpreter,* for which Tait won the PEN *Literature in Translation Award*. Following the publication of the English translation, western scholars and critics raced to declare the novel a postmodern tour de force. Michael Autrey's review in *Booklist* describes it as:

> a postmodern epistolary novel [that] tells the 'true' story of the improbable, heroic life of a Polish Jew who translates for the Gestapo, saves part of a ghetto, escapes execution, hides in a convent, converts to Catholicism, joins the partisans, emigrates to Israel, and re-founds the Church of St. James, a community for which he performs mass in Hebrew. He offends church officials and violates orthodoxies, but Daniel is a sort of saint, doing the work of Christ. Two popes and a terrorist make cameo appearances. (Autrey 2011: 21)

The reviewer for the *Daily Beast* called it "a refreshing affirmation of the beauty of hybridity" (Rosenthal 2011), while the reviewer for the *Washington Post* described the novel as "a feat of love and tolerance" (Bukiet 2011). The Russian literary scholar Benjamin Sutcliffe, focusing on the hybridity of Ulitskaya's characters, also sees the novel as "an elaborated argument for tolerance" (2009: 496), and Bread Leigh's review on his Russia blog *Bears & Vodka* offers similar praise. "Ultimately", Leigh writes,

> the book is about pluralism. It's about religious tolerance and anti-dogmatism. It's about a man who speaks several languages, preaches in all of them, and relates to people free of catechism but full of faith. It's about how there is no single right answer, no single truth. The format and the cast of characters reinforce all these themes. […] But I think there's another reason for the enthusiastic critical response. Daniel Stein stands apart in post-Soviet Russian literature because it isn't trying to deal with the fallout of an empire, or of an ideology. It's not trying to show the corruption of early-stage capitalism. It's not trying to shock with language, sex, or violence. In short, *it's not about post-Soviet Russia*.
> (Leigh 2010, italics mine)

Although I will argue that the novel is indeed very much about post-Soviet Russia, I must begin by admitting that the temptation to canonize Ulitskaya's novel as a postmodern classic is entirely understandable. The author appears to engage directly with postmodern preoccupations on the level of both form and content. The fact that it is a "fictional" biography of the Jewish priest and Holocaust survivor Oswald Rufeisen, conveyed in fragments of letters, newspaper articles,

conversations, lectures, and sermons authored by a host of international characters challenges traditional notions of novelistic narrative structure and point of view. The fact that Ulitskaya herself appears occasionally to comment in letters to friends or to her publisher on the progress of the work highlights the constructed nature of the novel and exposes her own personal and professional motivations, while denying her any absolute authority – she is just another character. The novel, one could say, contains no authoritative authorial voice. As Ulitskaya, the character, writes to her agent: "I'm not a real writer, and this book isn't a novel. It's a collage. I cut out pieces of my own life and the lives of others and I paste them 'without paste' – caesura!" (2006: 469)[1] One could argue that Stein is the most authoritative voice in the novel, but the moniker *perevodchik*, or 'translator,' associates him from the start with the notion of mediation. In this way, as Margarita Levantovskaya (2012: 93) argues,

> Ulitskaya's broad application and investment in the allegorical value of translation makes a powerful contribution to early and current views of translation as a useful paradigm for thinking about not only textual but also social and political issues surrounding such concepts as authenticity and interpretation.

Many of the characters are "flamboyantly multilingual", as Damrosch (2005: 383) put it in reference to the characters in Milorad Pavić's novel *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1988), and so are difficult to categorize. Born into now fallen empires that were characterized by a mix of ethnicities, languages, dialects and confessions, these characters fit uncomfortably within more rigid post-war nationalist categories. Consider Eva Makanian, one of the central figures of the novel – in fact, her reflections open the book. After having been asked at a party whether she was Polish – because of her accent – Eva muses:

> This question always took me somewhat aback. It was hard for me to answer. Instead of a short reply, do I launch into a lengthy story about how my mother was born in Warsaw and I was born in Belorussia, Father unknown. About how I spent my childhood in Russia and landed in Poland for the first time in 1954, then returned to Russia to study at the university. About how I moved from there to West Germany and then, finally to America…

The reply she finally gives rejects national categories altogether: "I was born in Emsk. In Chernaia Pushcha." (2006: 9)[2] The fact that Daniel Stein, like Rufeisen,

---

**1.** All translations from *Daniel' Shtain, perevodchik* are mine unless otherwise indicated.

**2.** Emsk is Ulitskaya's fictional name for the actual town of Mir. Ulitskaya may have avoided using the real name of the town given the fact that *mir* in Russian, and in other Slavic languages, means 'peace' and 'world'. Ironically, using the real name might have seemed like a heavy-handed fictionalization to reflect the broader themes of the novel.

is initially denied citizenship in the State of Israel because of his conversion to Catholicism, despite being ethnically Jewish and a Holocaust survivor, also problematizes the category of ethnicity as essential, biological, given, as well as its relationship to nationalism. Brother Daniel's predicament reveals ethnicity itself to be a legal construct. And Stein's increasingly antagonistic relationship with the Catholic hierarchy over articles of faith does indeed suggest, as Leigh argues, that the beloved priest is deeply anti-dogmatic. This is a point of view that is supported by Rufeisen's own comments recorded in the 1990 biography by Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den* (1990: 241):

> My idea is to fight for a return to pluralism in the Church, with the hope that in Judeo-Christianity there will also be a return to pluralism. Somehow the two tendencies of pluralism will allow for the creation of a church that will have a Jewish character. The Church as it is now is not capable of accepting pluralism.

This postmodern reading of *Daniel Stein* is actively encouraged from the start by the English translation of the novel's title. In Russian the word *perevodchik* is a rather mundane description of an occupation. As the great Soviet translator Samuil Marshak (1959: 245) put it,

> We sense in the word *perevodit'* [to translate] something technical, not creative. This is perhaps fully justified in those cases when we are referring to the translation of a document, a letter or a conversation from one language into another.

Without an adjective specifying written or spoken, *perevodchik* can refer to either a 'translator' or an 'interpreter', whereas in English there is an unavoidable lexical distinction that must be made between the two. Therefore, the decision to translate *perevodchik* as 'interpreter', one might say, broadens the horizon of expectations for the English reader by making possible a figurative reading that is discouraged in the Russian.[3] The notion of the translator as 'interpreter' in the figurative sense is empowering and stands very much at the heart of postmodern reassessments of the translator's agency. This was a point driven home by George Steiner in his seminal work *After Babel*:

> 'Interpretation' as that which gives language life beyond the moment and place of immediate utterance or transcription, is what I am concerned with. The French word *interprète* concentrates all the relevant values. An actor is *interprète* of Racine; a pianist gives *une interprétation* of a Beethoven sonata. Through engagement of his own identity, a critic becomes *un interprète* – a life-giving

**3.** There exists another translation of this novel by a Russian émigré, Irina Erman. She chose to translate the title as *Daniel Stein, Translator.* Bread Leigh (2010), on his blog Bears & Vodka, gives the same translation, rendering *perevodchik* as "translator" rather than "interpreter".

> performer – of Montaigne or Mallarmé. As it does not include the world of the actor, and includes that of the musician only, the English term interpreter is less strong. But it is congruent with French when reaching out in another crucial direction. Interprète/interpreter are commonly used to mean translator. This, I believe, is the vital starting point. (1992: 28)

That metaphoric interpretation of interpreter is also supported by the rather enigmatic cover design of the English translation: The interpreter is presented as one who stealthily slips across borders. This representation of the interpreter also invokes the notion of a space "in between" languages, cultures and historical moments, insofar as the interpreter, unlike the translator, is very often positioned physically between the speaker and the recipient. The idea that the translator exists somehow in a space between is, as Maria Tymoczko argues in *Enlarging Translation* (2008), not only untenable from a systems theory point of view – there is no outside to the systems we inhabit – but it also serves to mystify the translator's actual allegiances and affiliations, constructing the translator as a romantic, alienated figure and thereby complicating any attempts to understand the translator's actual site of enunciation and so to delineate the ideology shaping the translated text and its reception in the target culture.

At the same time, the choice of "interpreter" for the title narrows the English reader's horizon of expectations by giving preference to Stein's work as an interpreter for the Nazis during World War II, thereby assigning his radical translation of the Catholic liturgy into Hebrew a secondary status. The cover photos of Tec's biography of Rufeisen also highlights his role as interpreter for the Nazis, suggesting the preferred Western interpretation of Rufeisen's life as a member of the resistance. Finally, the addition of "A Novel" to the English title also settles the question, left unanswered by Ulitskaya, of what in the work is fact and what is fiction.

## Postmodern or post-Soviet?

In any case, while this postmodern reading may seem obvious to the English reader and appears to be confirmed by the title and the cover design, it is in fact a reading that is predicated on ignoring a number of themes in the novel that point to an alternative, distinctly Russian interpretation of Ultiskaya's fictional project. I will discuss three major themes that are to a greater or lesser extent lost in translation but that serve to define Ulitskaya's source text as distinctly post-Soviet – as opposed to postmodern. In other words, I argue that Ulitskaya's source text does not relegate Stein to an ambiguous "space between", but rather thoroughly inscribes him within traditional Russian cultural scripts and frames.

Let me begin by contextualizing translation itself within a Russian cultural context. The Western scholars quoted at the beginning of this article interpret the current interest in fictional translators as a symptom of the postmodern condition marked by, among other things, the death of the author and the end of metanarratives. Russian writers have been deeply concerned with issues of translation since at least the early eighteenth century, following Peter I's policy of forced westernization. Translation became a matter of state importance and of national survival. In 1703 Peter issued an edict with instructions to translators on how to practice their craft, and in 1768 Catherine II founded the *Sobranie dlia perevoda inostrannykh knig* (Society for the Translation of Foreign Works) to support the translation of foreign works into Russian. Translation has since that time been seen by many Russians as service to the nation. As Vilen Komissarov (1998: 543) puts it:

> Literary translations [in the late eighteenth century] were expected […] to meet important social and cultural needs. Translators regarded their work as a service to their country, and they expressed this belief in forewords and prefaces to their translations. They believed that their mission was to enlighten and instruct their compatriots, to set moral standards and to create a new Russian literature. From that time on literary translation always enjoyed a high status in Russian culture.

And while for some Romantic writers, translation was seen as an embarrassing reminder of Russia's belated modernity – "No one", Wilhelm Kiukhel'beker lamented, "but our run-of-the-mill translators translates translators" (1979: 458) – for others it represented a means to overcome that belatedness – consider Dostoevsky's portrayal of Alexander Pushkin as a universal man, capable of taking in foreign influences and rendering them thoroughly Russian, allowing Russian culture to speak the "last word" to the world. Russian translators, like Vasilii Zhukovsky, took enormous liberties with the source texts they translated, seeing translation primarily as a vehicle for enriching Russia's "young" culture. It is customary for Russians still today to claim that Russian translations of Western classic authors such as Shakespeare surpass the originals. As Andrew Wachtel (1999: 52) puts it,

> Members of the Russian cultural elite proposed a model that emphasized their nation's peculiar, spongelike ability to absorb the best that other peoples had to offer as the basis for a universal, inclusive national culture.

Translation through Russian, then, was seen as the path to a universal culture that, in Dostoevsky's formulation in his 1880 speech at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow, "would utter the ultimate word of great, universal harmony" (Dostoevsky 1880/1985: 980). The imperialist assertion of Russian cultural superiority here suggests a clear distinction between Russian universalism (absorption into Russian culture) and cosmopolitan postmodernism (as disintegration and fragmentation).

To date Russia's preoccupation with translation appears to have more to do with Russia's sense of belated modernity, stretching back to the time of Peter I, than it does with contemporary postmodern concerns. As Svetlana Boym (1995: 134) notes:

> The notions of the "nomadic self" and "transcendental homelessness" might sound familiar to the reader of Western modernist and postmodern theory; in the Russian context, however, they date back to the nineteenth century and signify an opposition to the modern ideology of individualism and to modernization in general.

In that light, Daniel Stein's work as a translator and interpreter appears less radical, or at least, less postmodern.

My second point concerns Ulitskaya's fictional interventions in the life of Oswald Rufeisen. In fact, she herself admits, "For me, it was more important to follow the truthfulness of the literary narration rather than the historical truth" (quoted in Braungardt 2009). Those interventions, I would argue, rather than construct the priest as a postmodernist *avant la lettre*, as Western critics would have it, serve instead to *russify* the Jewish Catholic priest, specifically by associating him with the great nineteenth-century writer and intellectual Lev Tolstoy. For example, Ulitskaya draws this connection on a meta-literary plane level where it is easy to see parallels between the eclectic form of Ulitskaya's novel and that of Tolstoy's magnum opus *War and Peace*, which was famously described by the American writer Henry James as a "baggy monster" (1934: 84). Moreover, the birthplace of Eva Makanian, one of the main characters in the novel, and in some ways the symbolic center of *Daniel Stein*, is the town of Chernaia Pushcha (Dark Forest), which is the almost perfect semantic inverse of Tolstoy's famous residence Iasnaia Poliana (Clear Meadow).

More direct references to Tolstoy, however, concern Stein's rather idiosyncractic translation of the Roman Catholic liturgy into Hebrew and his subsequent excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church. Both of these plotlines were largely invented by Ulitskaya; while it is true that Oswald Rufeisen did indeed refuse to recite the creed at high mass and avoided references to the Holy Trinity, he did not undertake a translation of the liturgy into Hebrew, and he died in the good graces of the Church. The additions on Ulitskaya's part function, I would argue, to "russify" Stein, situating him within the traditions of the Russian, then Soviet, intelligentsia, as exemplified by Tolstoy.

Stein's translation of the liturgy is an especially radical one for at least two reasons. First, he removes the Credo, or Creed in which he no longer believes. Second, he undertakes this translation into Hebrew, which for most of his congregation is not their native language. In a sense, he creates this Hebrew version

of the liturgy for a congregation he hopes may one day emerge in Israel – Hebrew-speaking Christians. This project makes him a suspicious character in the eyes of the Jewish authorities and of the Catholic Church. For this, Ulitskaya's Stein is excommunicated.

Most educated Russian readers would easily recognize this reference to Lev Tolstoy, who undertook his own idiosyncratic translation of the gospels, which led in turn to his excommunication. Moreover, Stein's refusal to translate the Credo, Latin for "I believe," references Tolstoy's first published explanation of his new religious views entitled "What I Believe." Like Stein's, Tolstoy's translation is an abridgment; the author sought to remove accretions to Christ's original teachings and combined the four gospels into one. As he explained in the preface to his translation, entitled *The Gospel in Brief. The Life of Jesus* (2011: xxii):

> Studying Christianity, I found next to this source of the pure water of life an illegitimate intermixture of dirt and muck that had obscured its purity for me; mingled with the high Christian teaching I found foreign and ugly teachings from church and Hebrew tradition.

Tolstoy's translation then is not an example of postmodern play; rather it is, like Stein's translation of the liturgy, an attempt to return Christianity to its source, to remove the obfuscating interventions of churches. While Tolstoy acknowledges that we have only versionings of the gospels (the first version of the canonical Bible, after all, was itself a translation, written in Greek, not in the actual language of Jesus, Aramaic), he is convinced that through careful reading and study he can convey the ultimate "meaning" of Christ's teaching. (In an ironic twist of fate, Tolstoy's translation of the gospels was first published in an abridged French translation, which Tolstoy considered a "perversion of his writing" (Condren 2011: xi)). In any case, this association of Stein with Tolstoy presents the Jewish priest less as a postmodernist than as an honorary member of the Russian intelligentsia, which has for centuries now been the standard bearer of the dream of a Russian universal culture standing in stark opposition to an American-style pluralism.

The fact that Stein has no concrete associations with Russia does not invalidate this reading or obscure the references to Tolstoy, for this connection is based on an idealistic vision of the Russian intelligentsia defined not in terms of ethnicity or class but as an imagined community of readers. As Svetlana Boym (1995: 139) explains,

> [i]t is culture and education that constitute a Russian community. However, what distinguishes Russians is not so much *what* they read but *how* they read – by passionately transgressing the boundaries between life and fiction, by wishing to live out literature and, with its help, change the world.

Like Ulitsksaya's novel itself, Stein's translations – both for the Nazis and for his congregation in Israel – exhibit a passionate transgression of the boundaries between life and fiction, between truth and lies. In other words, the Jewish Catholic Daniel Stein reads – and translates – like a Russian *intelligent*. In this way, he embodies a uniquely Russian universalism, capable of synthesizing all the greatest works produced in the world, which Dostoevsky saw as epitomized in the life and works of Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin.

The third and final point that allows me to draw a clear distinction between a post-Socialist and a postmodern reading of *Daniel Stein* concerns the character Eva Makanian. Eva is one of only two characters in the novel living the United States, which turns out to be, I would argue, a rather significant fact. For most of the novel Eva is estranged from her mother who was a zealous member of the resistance during World War II when she gave birth to Eva in the forest, and an even more zealous communist after the War. Eva is vaguely discontent with her life. Divorced from her first husband, she comes to suspect her second husband, Grisha, of having an affair with her adolescent son, his stepson. The suspicion grows apace with her increasing disenchantment with America and American cultural values. The family moves from Boston to Los Angeles, deeper into the belly of the beast, where Eva comes to an imperfect peace with her son's homosexuality, eventually allowing her son and his boyfriend to move into her house. While on the surface everything appears copacetic, Eva is troubled by her son's lifestyle and by her own tacit acceptance of it. She eventually approaches Brother Daniel for advice.

Eva then recounts his advice to her friend Esther: "Daniel said that he, too, like me, experiences a profound horror [*tikhii uzhas*] before this vice and had never encountered homosexuals. And he said that it would be better if Aleks lived on his own so as not to involve me in his relationships. Because I need to save myself from destruction [*razrusheniia*]" (Ulitskaya 2011: 437). Stein's use of "horror" and "destruction" is striking insofar as it draws a rather clear connection between the events of the Second World War he witnessed and the homosexual lifestyle. After that, Eva appears only once more in the novel, in a letter to Esther that is included right after the transcript of their conversation. In the letter she recounts that her estranged husband was seriously injured in a car accident and that she was now "living like an automaton" (2011: 439). She then disappears from the novel. The absence of any reply from Eva regarding Brother Daniel's advice suggests that she is unable to follow through with it but is also unable to fully reconcile herself to her son's lifestyle. She is condemned then to live out her live in a state of moral uncertainty and anxiety. This plotline is distinguished from the many others in the novel by the fact that in every other instance the characters follow Brother Daniel's advice, and it invariably brings joy and peace to their troubled lives. Homosexuality,

it turns out, represents the limit of Brother Daniel's racial and religious tolerance and of his anti-dogmatism. The motif, however, has been largely ignored by critics who prefer to see the novel as a postmodern celebration of pluralism and hybridity. Sutcliffe acknowledges in a footnote his decision not to treat the problematic theme, but offers no explanation: "This discussion does not address gays, another marginalized and often victimized group in Russian society." (2009: 501)[4]

## The limits of pluralism

A key to understanding this rather depressing subplot is suggested in Ulitskaya's short story "Golubchik" [Darling], first published in 1995. This story also recounts the seduction of a young boy by his stepfather and so provides a rather direct intertextual reference. The title is a play on words. The Russian root *golubchik*, meaning 'darling' or 'dear', has as its root *goluboi*, or 'light blue', which in Russian slang means 'gay'. Moreover, as a form of address, *golubchik* is most often used by adults with children, but has also been appropriated by Russian gays as a campy sign of intimacy among themselves. In the story, the stepfather, a respected musicologist, not only initiates his stepson into adult sexual relations but also schools him in the intricacies of classical music, representing the ancient Greek model of age-stratified homosexual relations. After his stepfather's death, Slava is adrift. He has an intense, spiritual relationship with a fellow music student, Zhenya, but the now adult Slava has physical desires that cannot be satisfied by music alone. He begins cruising Moscow parks and eventually picks up a stranger, dressed, not coincidentally, in a cowboy shirt. Of approximately the same age, Slava and his partner represent what is referred to an "egalitarian" relationship, the cornerstone of global gay culture. When they make love, it is violent and, Ulitskaya implies, soulless insofar as Slava, during their lovemaking, no longer hears music in his head. (A child prodigy with an innate feel for music, Slava constantly heard music in his head.) The story ends tragically with Slava being brutally murdered in a park (cf. Ulitskaia 2001).

The work is a damming portrayal not so much of homosexuality per se but of a homosexual lifestyle that is indexed in the story as American (remember his lover's cowboy shirt) and soulless (it stops the music). This interpretation reflects the general sentiment among post-Soviet Russian writers and intellectuals, who

4. None of the scholarly articles dedicated to Ulitskaya's novel and published in the West (Levantovskaya 2012, Sutcliffe 2009, Vojdović 2011) has treated the motif of homosexuality in the novel.

while attributing an innate artistic sensitivity and refinement to homosexuals, condemn American-style gay identity as profoundly *nekul'turno* [uncultured] – one of Vasily Aksyonov's (1996) characters in the short story "Around Dupont Circle" refers to the American gay subculture as *vul'garno* [vulgar]. This negative assessment stems from the view that an exclusive gay identity is egotistical, narcissistic, a reflection of the inflated Individualism of Western, and in particular, American, culture. As Svetlana Boym (1995: 153) notes, "Individualized sexuality is a part of the Romano-Germanic individualized worldview, while communal rhythmical pathos is part of the realm of Eurasia." More simply put, an exclusive gay identity is seen as un-Russian.

I imagine few readers would interpret "Golubchik" as an expression of global postmodern angst. In fact, Ulitskaya makes it clear that the subject of her story is the crisis of Russian national identity in a post-Soviet world. For example, she names the stepfather Nikolai Romanovich, a rather obvious reference to the last tsar Nikolai Romanov, inscribing the tale within modern Russian history and suggesting historical parallels between the chaos following the fall of the Romanov dynasty and the chaos that accompanied the fall of the Soviet Union, when the glories of Russian high art were cheapened, debased, pushed aside in the post-Soviet marketplace, now filled with cheap cultural products from the West. (Slava, incidentally, is not only a nickname for Vladislav, it is also the Russian word for 'glory', a term widely used in Soviet-era slogans).

The theme of homosexuality in *Daniel Stein,* then, is neither an example of postmodern diversity nor is it an "innocent" detail to add "local color" – a taste of life in twenty-first century Los Angeles. Rather, it belongs to a broad post-Soviet discourse on homosexuality that plays an important role in post-Soviet national and territorial bordering. Ulitskaya's insistent connection of homosexuality with the United States, for example, reflects and reinforces a post-Soviet symbolic geography that defines Russia against the US so as to inscribe Russia within a European cultural zone. But it is also an assertion of the uniqueness of Russian culture within Europe, its spirituality and soulfulness, which can be traced back to the nineteenth century. In *How Russians Read the French*, Priscilla Meyer demonstrates how the re-writing of contemporary French novels by Russia's greatest nineteenth century writers, Lermontov, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, functioned to distinguish Russian culture from its French counterpart, in particular, from what the Russians saw as a cynical and sensational take on human sexuality. As Meyer (2010: 218) puts it,

> Russia's distanced evaluation of French Romanticism, which rejected the world and diction of the solitary solipsist and of French realism, with its tendency to sensational sociological exposé, helped Russian writers define both their sense of national identity and their conception of the purpose of literary art.

She goes on to note,

> the very necessity of turning to the French for models in creating a national Russian literature made the desire [on the part of Russian writers] to highlight their own distinctiveness even more acute than the difference between worldviews alone would have done. (2010: 210)

Within that context, the contemporary disdain for homosexuality as an exclusive identity, a lifestyle with its own subculture, can be interpreted as an expression of a distinctly Russian notion of universalism, with its roots in nineteenth-century Russian thought on the unique, hybrid identity of Russia. This universalism, based on a common high literary culture, infused with spiritual values as opposed to religious dogma, should not be confused with Western notions of pluralism. In Russia today, among gays and straights, liberals and conservatives, global gay culture, based on the American model of exclusive and totalizing sexual identities, functions as a powerful, negatively-charged metonym for a soulless and egotistical West, and "Russian gay rights activists have to fight for the very recognition of LGBT people as a social group" (Sharova 2010: 74).

To read the subplot of Eva and her son *à la russe* then is to see in Brother Daniel's advice a pointed rejection of a hegemonic American culture celebrating diversity and pluralism in favor of a traditional Russian notion of universalism. This assertion of Russia's difference – its untranslatability, if you will – in the midst of a work that appears to celebrate the endless proliferation of versionings would seem to confirm a limit to pluralism. And beneath the postmodern veneer of multilingualism, global migration, and the critique of authoritarian instititions in Ulitskaya's novel, Daniel Stein himself changes little. His fundamental character is fixed; there is nothing "fluid" about him. "The hero", in the words of the Slavist Jasmina Vojvodić, "remains essentially identical to himself" (2011: 141). In this way, one could argue, Daniel Stein serves as an embodiment of the concept of Russian culture as synthesizing and universal, transcending ethnic identities while nonetheless reflecting a specifically Russian suspicion of unbridled pluralism.

## Misreading Russia

Despite the warnings of scholars regarding post-modernity in post-Soviet Russia, writers, readers, and critics find it hard to resist the temptation to construct the chaos of post-Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe as a symptom of postmodernity. Consider, for example, the Ukrainian interpreter in Jonathan Safran Foer bestselling novel *Everything is Illuminated.* When asked how well he speaks English, he

replies: "I am fluid" (2002: 4), instead of fluent. Fluid is, of course, a buzzword in writing on postmodernity, used to describe a subjectivity liberated from restrictive and exclusive identity categories, be they ethnic, national, colonial, economic, gender-based or even sexual – Homi Bhabha's (1994) "hybrid" and Julia Kristeva's "happy foreigners" (1991: 3). And so, Sasha's substitution of fluid for fluent functions as a kind of metaliterary Freudian slip, revealing the author's intention to present-day post-Soviet Ukraine as his postmodern playground.

And Foer is not alone. Surprising as it may seem against a backdrop of sexism, homophobia, and resurgent nationalism, a number of Western scholars and journalists who travelled in Russia in the early nineteen nineties "discovered" a liberating postmodern fluidity in the subjectivity of post-Soviet subjects. The American anthropologist Laurie Essig, for example, declared, "sexuality in Russia is too fluid to be 'trapped'" (1999: 135). It is, she concluded, queer *avant la lettre*, postmodern. The Russianist Luc Beaudoin came to a similar conclusion, claiming that the "gendered construction of Russian gay men is somewhat more fluid [than the construction of American gay male identity]" (2006: 229). The Canadian filmmaker Steven Kokker traveled to post-Soviet Russia in search of what he called a "sexually fluid generation," as did the British novelist Duncan Fallowell who, after spending one hot summer in St. Petersburg, declared, "People's sense of identity is liquid. Russia itself is a liquid." (1994: 302) The American journalist David Tuller shared Fallowell's assessment: "For through my travels and interviews," Tuller explains (1996: 42),

> and, especially, my weekends at the dacha – where we partied, chugged vodka, and chatted all night – I experienced, in startling and unexpected ways, a different kind of sexual freedom than I had found in the golden gay enclaves of New York and San Francisco.

Frank Browning declared Tuller's Russia to be a "liberating alternative" to America's gay culture (quoted on the cover of Tuller 1996).[5]

But post-Soviet Russia and Eastern Europe have proven in the end to be something of a grave yard for postmodern dreams. Sarah Rubin Suleiman, who spent her childhood in Budapest, was perhaps the first to admit to misreading

**5.** This projection of sexual freedom onto the East, and onto Russia, in particular, has in fact a long history. Alexander Etkind, for example, traces the influence on Freud's thinking of "the Russian stereotype", "a conception held by Westerners that Russia is an exotic place where even the most incredible excesses are possible, be they political or sexual" (1997: 88). And Freud, whose most famous patients were Russian, is purported to have commented: "These Russians are like water; they fill any containers, but do not retain the form of any." (quoted in Etkind 1997: 225)

post-communist as postmodern. In an article written in 1993 entitled "The Politics of Postmodernism after the Wall (Or What Do We Do When the Ethnic Cleansing Starts)," Suleiman takes to task Western scholars, herself included, who projected their postmodern political aspirations on other peoples and societies, in particular, those emerging from under the communist yoke:

> The idea of a postmodern paradise where one can try on identities like costumes in a shopping mall, appears to me now as not only naïve, but intolerably thoughtless in a world where whole populations are murdered for the sake of ethnic identity.
> (Suleiman 1993/1997: 51)

The fall of communism did not usher in a new postmodern hybrid subjectivity – the "happy cosmopolitan" – rather, it gave new life to traditional, essentialist ethnic, ethno-nationalist, and ethno-religious identities. Indeed, subsequent research in the field of Sexuality Studies has revealed that the sexuality of post-Soviet subjects is constrained if not by a notion of exclusive sexual orientations, then by the no less restrictive categories of active/passive and masculine/feminine.

The misreading of postcommunist as postmodern was also the subject of David Damrosch's seminal article "Death in Translation," which compares the international reception of Milorad Pavič's critically acclaimed *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1988) to its reception back home. The theme of translation runs throughout the work – indeed it is presented as a translation of three different encyclopedias in three different languages using three different scripts – and this is certainly one of the factors contributing to its "status as a work of international postmodernism". However, Damrosch points out, "the book's international success involved the neglect or outright misreading of its political content" (2005: 381). Specifically, the celebration of the novel's playful postmodernity is predicated on a certain blindness – an inability or unwillingness on the part of international critics to see the theme of Serbian nationalism, specifically, Serbian ressentiment over its perceived oppression as the majority ethnic group in the multi-ethnic dystopia of modern Yugoslavia. Damrosch notes that Catalan readers are likely to pick up on this theme and, I would imagine, Russian readers as well. In any case, Pavič's novel, Damrosch maintains, "contains a political polemic that had been hidden in plain sight from international audiences who had welcomed the novel as 'an Arabian Nights romance,' 'a wickedly teasing intellectual game,' and an opportunity 'to lose themselves in a novel of love and death,' as the flyleaf of the American edition describes the book" (2005: 381).

## Conclusion

The tendency on the part of the English readers and critics to read Ulitskaya's novel as a plea for postmodern pluralism may reflect a general idealizing tendency in the West to see World Literature as a utopian space where national limits, as Goethe suggested, "are transcended." Whether works of literature in translation ever truly transcend national limits is in dispute, but it seems clear that the postmodern discourse surrounding the reception of Ultiskaya's novel in English has obscured a reading based on a uniquely Russian interpretation that places a distinct limit on Western pluralism in the form of tolerance for homosexuality. Not coincidentally, Ulitskaya's short story "Golubchik" (2001) has yet to be translated into English, and I suspect it never will be.

## References

### Primary sources

Foer, J. S. 2003. *Everything is Illuminated. A Novel.* New York: Harper Perennial.
Ulitskaia, L. 2001. "Golubchik." In *Veselye pokhorony,* 282–306. Moscow: Vagrius.
Ulitskaia, L. 2006. *Daniel' Shtain, perevodchik* [*Daniel Shtain, Translator*]. Moscow: Eksmo.
Ulitskaya, L. 2011. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter: A Novel.* Translated by A. Tait. New York: Overlook.

### Secondary sources

Aksyonov, V. 1996. *V raione ploshchadi Diupon.* In *Negativ polozhitel'nogo geroia. Rasskazy,* 253–69. Moscow: Vagrius.
Akunin, B. 2010. *Priklyucheniya Erasta Fandorina*. Komplekt iz 12 tomov. Moscow: Zakharov.
Autrey, M. 2011. "Review of *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* by Liudmila Ulitskaya." *Booklist* (15 March): 21.
Baer, B. J. 2005. "Translating the transition: The translator-detective in post-Soviet fiction." *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 4: 243–54.
Beaudoin, L. 2006. "Raising a pink flag: The reconstruction of Russian gay identity in the shadow of Russian nationalism." In *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture,* H. Goscilo & A. Lanoux (eds.), 225–40. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.
Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London/New York: Routledge.
Borenstein, E. 1999. "Editor's introduction: Postmodernism, duty-free." In *Russian Postmodernist Fiction. Dialogue with Chaos,* M. Lipovetsky, xv-xviii. New York: M. E. Sharpe.
Boym, S. 1995. "From the Russian soul to post-Soviet nostalgia." *Representations* 49 (Winter): 133–166.
Braungardt, G.-M. 2009. "Review of *Daniel Stein* by Liudmila Ulitskaia. *NDR Kultur* (May 29)." Available at: http://www.ndr.de/kultur/literatur/buchtipps/nbdanielstein100.html (last accessed 2 Jan 2013).

Bukiet, M. J. 2011. "*Daniel Stein, Interpeter* reviewed." *Book World. Washington Post* (10 May). Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/book-world-daniel-stein-interpreter-reviewed/2011/03/17/AFVSZtgG_story.html (last accessed 30 April 2012).

Condee, N. & Padunov, V. 1994. "Pair-a-dice lost: The socialist gamble, market determinism, and compulsory postmodernism." *New Formations* 22: 72–94.

Condren, J. 2011. "Foreword." In *The Gospel in Brief: The Life of Jesus, by Lev Tolstoy*, Justin Condren (trans.), vii–xiv. New York: Harper Collins.

Damrosch, D. 2005. "Death in Translation." In *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, S. Berman & M. Wood (eds.), 380–398. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Delabastita, D. & Grutman, R. 2005. "Introduction. Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation." *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 4: 11–34.

Dostoevsky, F. 1880/1985. "Speech at the Pushkin Monument." In *The Diary of a Writer*, Boris Brasol (trans.), 967–980. Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith.

Essig, L. 1999. *Queer in Russia: A Story of Sex, Self, and the Other.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Etkind, A. 1997. *Eros of the Impossible: The History of Psychoanalysis in Russia.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Fallowell, D. 1994. *One Hot Summer in St. Petersburg*. London: Jonathan Cape.

James, H. 1934. "Preface to the revised version of *The Tragic Muse*." In *The Art of the Novel. Critical Prefaces, by Henry James*, 70–97. New York: Scribner.

Kiukhel'beker, V. 1979. "O napravlenii nashei poezii, osobenno liricheskoi, v poslednee deciatiletie" [On the Direction of Our Poetry, Especially Lyric, in the Past Decade]. In *V. K. Kiukhel'beker. Puteshestvie, Dnevnik, Stat'I,* N. V. Koroleva and V. D. Rak (eds.), 453–459. Leningrad: Nauka.

Komissarov, V. 1998. "Russian tradition." In Routledge *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, M. Baker (ed.), 541–549. London and New York: Routledge.

Kristeva, J. 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves.* Translated by L. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Leigh, B. 2010. "Reviewed: *Daniel Stein, Translator*." *Bears & Vodka*. Available at: http: //bearsandvodka. com/?p=1401 (last accessed 30 April 2012).

Levantovskaya, M. 2012. "The Russian-speaking Jewish diaspora in translation: Liudmila Ulitskaya's *Daniel Stein, Translator*." *Slavic Review* 71 (1): 91–107.

Lipovetsky, M. 1999. *Russian Postmodernist Fiction. Dialogue with Chaos.* Ed. and trans. Eliot Borenstein. New York: M. E. Sharpe.

Littau, K. 2010. "Translation in the age of postmodern production: From text to intertext to hypertext." In *Critical Readings in Translation Studies*, M. Baker (ed.), 435–449. London and New York: Routledge.

Marinina, A. 2011. *Smert' kak iskusstvo.* Moscow: Eksmo.

Marshak, S. 1959. "Iskusstvo poeticheskogo portreta" ["The Art of the Poetic Portrait"]. *Masterstvo perevoda* I: 245–250.

Meyer, P. 2010. *How Russians Read the French. Lermontov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Mochizuki, T. 2000. "Synthetic research on Russian postmodernism in the nineties." Available at: http://kaken.nii.ac.jp/en/p/10410107/2000/6/en (last accessed 28 April 2012).

Pavić, M. 1988. *Dictionary of the Khazars. A Lexicon Novel.* Translated by Christina Pribičević-Zorić. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Peeters, T. 2004. "The postmodern situation in Russia." *Slavica Gandensia* 31. Available at: http://russianpostmodernism.blogspot.com/ (last accessed 29 May 2012).

Peeters, T. 2004. “The postmodern situation in Russia.” *Slavica Gandensia* 31. Available at: http://russianpostmodernism.blogspot.com/ (last accessed 29 May 2012).

Pelevin, V. 2002. *Homo Zapiens.* Translated by A. Bromfield. New York: Penguin.

Perloff, M. 1993. Russian Post-Modernism: An Oxymoron? Available at: http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.193/sympos-2.193 (last accessed 30 April 2012).

Rosenthal, R. 2011. “A faith without boundaries.” Available at: http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/ 2011/04/23/daniel-stein-fire-season-and-other-books-reviewed.html (last accessed 30 April 2012).

Seldon, R. 1989. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory.* Second Edition. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Sharova. V. 2010. “Byt' ili ne byt' gei praidu. Opyt dvkh stolits Rossii” [“Is gay pride to be or not to be? The Experience of Russia's Two Capitals”] *Gendernye Issledovaniia* 2–21: 72–89.

Steiner, G. 1992. *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Suleiman, S. R. 1993/1997. “The politics of postmodernism after the wall (Or what do we do when the ethnic cleansing starts),” In *International Postmodernism. Theory and Literary Practice,* J. W. Bertens & H. Bertens & D. Foukeme (eds.), 51–64.

Sutcliffe, B. M. 2009. “Liudmila Ulitskaya's Literature of Tolerance.” *Russian Review* 68 (3): 495–509.

Tec, N. 1990. *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Tolstoy, L. 2011. *The Gospel in Brief. The Life of Jesus*. Trans. Dustin Condren. New York and London: Harper Perennial.

Tuller, D. 1996. *Cracks in the Iron Closet: Travels in Gay and Lesbian Russia.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tymoczko, M. 2008. *Enlarging Translation.* Manchester: St. Jerome.

Vojvodić, J. 2011. “Transfery Danielia Staina” [Daniel Stein's Transfers]. *Russian Literature* LXIX (1): 141–155.

Wachtel, A. 1999. “Translation, imperialism and national self-definition in Russia.” *Public Culture* 11 (1) (Winter): 49–73.

# Fictional translators in Québec novels

Patricia Godbout
Université de Sherbrooke

In *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, Sherry Simon (2006) examines the role played by translation in the various literary movements that have shaped that city. The division that the title refers to is first and foremost the one between the French-speaking population (the city, originally called Ville-Marie, was founded by the French in 1642) and the English-speaking group, which developed after New France was transferred to Great Britain in 1763.

Simon explores what she calls the "contact zones" (2006: 7) and the "cross-town journeys" (2006: 28) undertaken by Anglophone writers across the east-west divide, the French having traditionally resided in the east end and the English in the western section of town. In other words, translation is used in her fascinating essay as a structuring principle to try and explain certain geomorphological characteristics of Montreal's literary terrain. In this study I would like to take a look at how this "division" is articulated in certain Québec novels featuring fictional translators.

In her article titled "Representations of Translation in Popular Culture", Nitsa Ben-Ari (2010) examined the evolution of the literary representation of translators and interpreters in fiction in the past 30 years or so, from the 1970s to the early 21st century. The corpus that she studied reflects the attitude of the protagonists to their profession. Ben-Ari shows that the ancillary position of the translator hasn't changed much. "Diachronically, and symbolically", she concludes, her corpus "traces a cycle that begins and ends with reluctant translators/interpreters", characters who would rather be doing something else, like living their own lives instead of someone else's. But even when they do, it is often to no avail (2010: 235).

My own reflections are part of preliminary results of an on-going research project on fictional translators in Québec literature from 1960 to this day. So far, I have been able to identify 151 Québec literary works written in French by 114 different authors, and 23 written in English by 15 writers, containing at least one fictional translator or interpreter, who is either a central or secondary character. Those works are for the most part novels, with a few short stories and

plays. I've chosen here to start by going back in time prior to 1960 in order to see how translation was represented in earlier fiction. Ben-Ari rightly states that the "move to center stage" of the translator and interpreter character began in the seventies (2010: 221). As we'll see, characters created by francophone writers before that time tend to fall in the category of translators and interpreters working, as Ben-Ari puts it, "quite literally, behind the scenes, their occupational and personal image […] that of intermediaries not interesting enough to be literary personae" (2010: 221).

## Translation and moral weakness

The earlier translator character that I came across appears in Harry Bernard's *La maison vide*, a very conventional and conservative novel published in 1926. In the 1920s, Bernard (1898–1979) was a journalist for *Le Droit* in Ottawa. He also did translations for this newspaper. He wrote a Ph.D. thesis on the regionalist novel in the United States (1913–1940). Harry Bernard was the first French Canadian writer to produce a major study of American literature.

The story takes place in Ottawa, Canada's capital, in the early 1920s. François Dumontier is an English-to-French translator of the Debates in the House of Commons. His is a relatively well-paid and well-regarded civil servant's job. When the parliamentary sessions are on, he works at night to have the translated proceedings ready for the next morning – a service still offered today. But the rest of the year is quite easy-going. On the whole, the narrator writes, Dumontier enjoyed his professional life "qui n'exigeait pas plus de travail épuisant que d'effort de pensée" – which wasn't very demanding, in other words, physically or mentally (Bernard 1926: 26). At one point though, François becomes bored with his "dull and meaningless"[1] life (1926: 85), and ponders over the fact that he's wasted his talent (1926: 164), an implicit reference to his position of second fiddle as a translator.

The title of the novel, *La maison vide*, or "The Empty House", refers to the fact that the Dumontier's home is deserted by everyone, especially by Madame Dumontier, *une mondaine* who is always going out to some social meeting or cocktail party. The problem with this, we are told, is that in this way this French-Canadian family is losing sight of its traditional values – which are presented as being part of French Canada's difference and survival. One pillar of this *survivance* is women's abnegation.

1. The translation of excerpts from various literary works in this article is mine.

François Dumontier tries to impact on the situation a little, mainly by telling his wife that he can't keep up financially with her extravaganzas. But basically he is nothing but "an ordinary man", a "punctual civil servant" (Bernard 1926: 166), entangled in the banality of life, lacking courage to change anything. In short, what we have here is a "*roman à thèse*" emphasizing the need for the French Canadians to stay clear of invasive American and Anglo-Canadian[2] values and ways of life – exemplified by Madame Dumontier's frivolous behaviour (the term "frivolous" being very relative here, of course, for we are light-years away, for example, from Paris' *Moveable Feast* portrayed by Hemingway).

The fact that the novelist Harry Bernard chose to associate moral weakness and a moral dilemma with the character of the translator, is significant here. Dumontier is aware of the path that he should follow but lacks the moral vigour to follow it. The inability to choose and the lack of energy seem to suit the fictional translator character well, a character, as we all know who typically dwells in between worlds. Furthermore, setting the story in Ottawa, a bilingual city where the pressures exerted on French Canadians by the presence of Anglophones were ever increasing, also allows the author to stress the perils facing the French-Canadian traditional values – *les institutions, la culture et la foi* – in a rapidly changing society. In this case what matters is not *what* the fictional translator is translating, but his weakness of character which prevents him from efficiently acting as a shield to alterity.

In the 1940s Québec enters a period historians have called "la Grande Noirceur", or Great Darkness, coinciding with the years Maurice Duplessis was in power as the province's Prime Minister (1936–1939 and 1944–1959). A very conservative ideology was pervading social and cultural life, but a strong desire to be rid of the influence of the powerful Roman Catholic Church, for one thing, was gradually being felt.

At the onset of this "Grande Noirceur", Pierre Baillargeon publishes a novel called *Les médisances de Claude Perrin* (1945/1973). Like Baillargeon himself, Claude Perrin is a writer and a translator. Being gravely ill, he returns to his hometown to write his memoirs. He says he's always wanted to be a writer – but he's a writer without a literary oeuvre. Here we see a clear instance of the would-be writer, a regular figure in the world of the fictional translator, as Ben-Ari has shown (2010: 233). For Perrin, life is a writer's first draft. Living for him is like reading an English book. If, for Vladimir Nabokov, novelists are God's translators, for Perrin, God is certainly English-speaking. According to Perrin, what the writer does when he takes up his

**2.** Note that English Canadians also had to position themselves toward American values in order to assert their own difference.

pen is to freely translate this life of his that reads like an English book, condensing certain parts, making others clearer (cf. Baillargeon 1945/1973: 120).

Claude Perrin explains in the novel that after having put an end to his studies to become a medical doctor due to health problems, he had no choice but to take a menial job ("un petit emploi") to make ends meet. He ended up working as a translator for an advertising agency. His working conditions were miserable. But, above all, as he writes: "Je vendais mon esprit à des Anglais" (Baillargeon 1945/1973: 167). He doesn't go so far as to say that he was selling his soul. But his work is clearly presented as a loss, a very perilous enterprise.

The leitmotiv of the novel is a quest for individuation, for originality. Perrin thinks he's identified a trait of the French spirit – concision – and he deems this trait incompatible with the English character. A good writer, according to him, is untranslatable (cf. Baillargeon 1945/1973: 101). We are thus presented here with virtual linguistic tensions: Tensions that reside in the character's mind, and are an ontological transposition of street brawls in a search for originality and identity.

In the study of her corpus, Nitsa Ben-Ari highlights what she calls "blood" metaphors related to translation, in which life and death issues are at stake. She gives the striking example of the translation of Yiddish into English which "means the death of Yiddish" (2010: 222) as exemplified in a short story she examines. The way translation is used by Baillargeon points to a fear of "blood contamination" by a French minority in a largely Anglophone North-American context. But the emphasis has shifted from the fate of the collectivity to that of the individual in its midst.

This shift from the collective to the individual is perhaps brought to its apex with the publication, in 1950, of *La fin des songes*, a novel written by Robert Élie in the vein of the "roman psychologique". At the beginning of the book, the fictional translator Marcel Larocque works for a Montreal newspaper. He would love to write articles, but never manages to do so. He doesn't like his job: He wonders how he manages to go back, day after day, to this "travail idiot de traducteur" (Élie 1950: 16). Marcel is profoundly unhappy. He doesn't love his wife. "That's his life, and there's nothing else to it", the narrator writes (1950: 16). Marcel is "lonely, terribly lonely" (1950: 43). He hardly interacts with other members of the fictional literati in the novel. His colleagues, journalists working with him for the newspaper located in Old Montreal, are nothing but pretentious chatter-boxes (1950: 105).

In the second part of the novel, we get to read Marcel's personal diary, where he talks about his "dual personality" (Élie 1950: 147). The connection between his psychological problems and his profession as a translator come immediately to mind, but such a link is never explicitly made in the novel. One of the dichotomies at the center of the book is the one between the world of dreams ("les songes") and the harsh reality. "Reality is always frightening when it catches up with me at the end of my dreams", Marcel notes in his diary (1950: 196), before committing suicide by throwing himself in front of a tram. After his death, a friend says of him

that he no longer knew how to connect with others. So here we have this translator – a person normally able to be attentive to others – who is totally incapable of communicating. He is a total failure. It's as if Claude Perrin's angst is carried to the extreme. The Other doesn't have to have an external materiality. The dilemma is internalized, and the consequences for the Self are tragic. What is of particular note here is the absence of irony on the part of the author in dealing with this gloomy theme. Marcel is a failure, he barely has any physical materiality, his life is a black hole that will soon swallow him. His occupation as a translator only serves to emphasize his existential impasse from which there is no escape.

## A new tone

The year 1960 marks the beginning of what is called the *Révolution tranquille*, or Quiet Revolution, in Québec (note the oxymoron built into the appellation, one term somewhat negating the other). Most people stopped abiding by the clergy's rules in all aspects of their lives, the education system was modernized, Hydro-Québec (public electricity utility) nationalized and various cultural institutions created. In the field of literature, new voices were being heard, Hubert Aquin, Réjean Ducharme, the *Parti Pris* poets, among others.

I'll concentrate here on two of the dozen or so fictional translators featured in Québec novels and short stories of the decade. I selected those titles because they are both indicative of shifts then taking place in Québec from a literary as well as a social point of view. The first book is Léa Pétrin's *Tuez le traducteur* (1961), a "humoristic novel" which was awarded the same year the "Grand Prix de l'humour canadien". Of course this is not to imply that most of the books of the 1960 decade depict translators in a humourous way. But one of the reasons I chose to dwell on this book is because the tone it adopts marks a clear break from the way translators were portrayed until then.

In *Tuez le traducteur* a translator named Monsieur Claquot, who's worked for more than thirty years for "Les Entreprises Talbeau" in Québec City, is fired after having poorly translated the slogan for a new ad campaign. During the course of the novel, various translators are taken on for a trial period, in each case with disastrous results. The president of the company, Monsieur Talbeau, wonders at one point "if there's one competent man in the whole city willing to simply be a good ordinary translator" (Pétrin 1961: 155). This seems to suggest that the problem with those applicants is that they are not ordinary enough, and don't necessarily want to stay in the shadow of everyone else, as is expected of them. This brings to mind the derogatory remarks very often served during the same period to women who wished to break away from their traditional role.

One of the candidates confesses that he would like in fact to abolish all the translators' positions. He is distressed by the fact that French Canadians are "a nation of translators", "a nation of servants" (Pétrin 1961: 89) – a phrase which echoes Léon Lorrain's assertion dating from 1936 that French Canadians were a "un peuple de traducteurs" – in other words, of "imitators", or "losers" (Lorrain 1936: 9). Thus French Canadians as a people are losing themselves in translation.

The president of the company then realizes that his translator Claquot was doing a good job, and that he should have kept him on. "Les Entreprises Talbeau" has also launched a campaign to valorize the use of the French language in the company. "Nous avons une grande langue!" (Pétrin 1961: 205), Talbeau declares, which is a play on words, because in Québec French at any rate, "avoir une grande langue" also means to have a ready tongue. So the obsession with the proper use of French in Québec is gently made fun of in the book. At the end of the novel, the president organizes an event to launch a new product, and to award a medal to his translator Claquot for his long career with the company. But on the night of the ceremony, Claquot sends a message asking to be excused because he found a well-paying translator job… in Toronto (in enemy territory!).

One wonders, fifty years after its publication, what was intended to be funny in the book. That a businessman should decide to put French forward in his company? That some translator candidates should have asked to be more than second fiddles? The very fact, however, that the whole sense of linguistic insecurity then felt by many Québécois is treated with this kind of light-heartedness signals a definite shift in perceptions, at a time when language issues are about to play a paramount role in Québec society and politics. This novel thus signals in a way a shift back to collective concerns about language and identity. As Lise Gauvin (2000) wrote in a book aptly titled *Langagement* – a mot-valise combining "langage" and "engagement" –, the decades to follow would be marked by a "surconscience linguistique" – or linguistic Über-consciousness – prevalent in Québec literary production. My aim is to try to determine how this affects the way translation and translators are constructed.

In 1962, Andrée Maillet publishes a collection of short stories called *Les Montréalais*. In one of the stories called "Les conspirateurs", we follow a group of five young men who meet once a week in a café to scheme "revolutionary" actions, like irrupting in the office of the then very Catholic Université de Montréal to proclaim that God does not exist. One of them is a translator, who works for a Montreal daily newspaper. His name is Jérémie, and he's always lamenting his fate. He is a chain-smoking bachelor, with stooped shoulders and a sombre look. His co-conspirators make fun of his professional occupation. When he tells them at one point that their discussions are pointless and a waste of time, one of them

retorts: “Maybe. But tell me, Jerry, what else are you keeping busy with, when you’re not translating advertisements for corsets and girdles?” (Maillet 1962: 31)

As sullen as he may be, Jérémie nevertheless is one of the boys, and the group he belongs to isn’t your typical homogenous pre-Quiet Revolution crowd either. One of them, for instance, is a Russian filmmaker working for the National Film Board, and they’re having their meetings in a coffee shop opened a few years before by a Hungarian immigrant who fled his country in 1956. Jérémie, who sometimes thinks of himself as an unsung hero when he’s faced with an arduous translation (Maillet 1962: 93), comments at one point on the efforts made by French-speaking publicists to create ads in French for Québecers instead of having to translate the ones that are written in English: “Here we have a perfect illustration of the myth of Sisyphus: on the one hand, we have Anglicization; on the other, *refrancisation.*” (1962: 94) Thus irony, conspicuously absent from Robert Élie’s *La fin des songes* published twelve years earlier, is used here to depict a despairing situation, typical of what Ben-Ari (2010: 235) calls “modernistic absurdity”.

In the seventies, Québec novels featuring fictional translators will move toward a more postmodern approach, in which translators become at times allegorical figures. It certainly is the case in Jacques Poulin’s *Les Grandes Marées* (1978) – one of the titles examined by Ben-Ari in her article. The translator’s “nom de code” is “Teddy Bear” – or TDB – short for “traducteur de bandes dessinées”, for a Québec City newspaper. His boss, who is concerned with Teddy Bear’s happiness and well-being, settles him on l’île Madame in the Gulf of St. Lawrence,[3] where Teddy Bear can work on his translations, but also act as an island-keeper. Of course, the image of a translator living alone on an island is not coincidental. Poulin himself worked as a translator for a Québec newspaper called *Le Soleil.* Also, the fact that the translator’s happiness is somebody else’s business is worth underscoring here.

Teddy Bear, however, will not enjoy the island all to himself for very long. Soon the boss’s helicopter – which is the equivalent of the hand of God in the creation of this new world – literally drops new people on the island. First, a young woman, Marie, who will become Teddy Bear’s lover. Then, other persons like the boss’s wife, an Author, a Professor, an Ordinary Man, and an Activity Leader who’s supposed to take care of the group’s dynamics. At one point, Teddy Bear realizes that the boss isn’t publishing the comic strips he’s asking him to translate because he’s replaced him with a machine. In other words, the translator is totally useless

**3.** It’s an actual island now owned by Laurent Beaudoin, chairman of the board of Bombardier, a big aeronautics and transportation firm based in Québec. The name of a neighbouring island is an example of an inventive “translation” of an English place name into French: l’île Sottise is in fact a corruption of South-East Island.

and redundant. As for Marie, she gets tired of her life on the island and leaves. And after that, Teddy Bear himself realizes that the other insulars want him out. Not knowing what to do and where to go, he swims over to a nearby island.

In the novel, Teddy Bear's relationship with the English language is not based on fear of the invading Other, although the translator is very meticulous about the proper use of French. Throughout the story, the translator's love of words and of dictionaries is emphasized. His way of deflecting tension and seeking inspiration when he has a hard time translating a passage is reminiscent of the techniques and habits of some writers: While he's pacing the floor, he's holding in his hands an old tennis ball that he's kneading compulsively (cf. Poulin 1978: 141). One is tempted to think that through this character of a fictional translator, the author is really talking about the throes of authorship – as well as the fragility of all human relations, and the difficult use of language to establish any contact at all with the Other, whoever he or she might be.

## Probing language through translation

The actual translation process is used to probe the relationship between reality and fiction in a very interesting way in Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve* (1987). A rapprochement is also made in that novel between translation and women's use of language, both of them being ancillary discourses. The fear of the translator – due to the potential of infidelity and treason that his work carries – is connected to the fear of women's words, very often associated with seduction and temptation. The fact that Nicole Brossard joins both discourses makes her novel powerful, in a subtle and intriguing way.

The book is divided into three parts: In the first, the reader is presented with a novel titled "Le désert mauve", written by Laure Angstelle and supposedly published by Éditions de l'Arroyo; in the second, we have the translator Maude Laures's reflections on her translation project; and finally, we get to read her "translation", from French to French, called "Mauve, l'horizon". The "first" novel, written in the first person, tells the story of Mélanie, a fifteen-year-old girl living in the desert with her mother. Another woman, Angela Parkins, the mother's lover, is shot by a man referred to as "l'homme long".

The fictional translator in Brossard's novel gives the author the opportunity to take a close look at the connection between reality and fiction. As Anne Marie Wheeler writes: "For Brossard, one of writing's biggest enigmas is where language and reality diverge, as revealed by the process of translation" (2003: 440). The translator Maude Laures's reading of Laure Angstelle's novel is the starting point of an awakening to the power of language. In the course of her translation, Maude

Laures wonders how Angela Parkins' brutal end could possibly have been avoided. As Beverly Curran writes, "Maude Laures wants to discuss the death of Angela Parkins, but not from the perspective of a reader" (2000: 174). She would like to become one of Laure Angstelle's characters to change the course of the story. But the "author" will not let her escape the harsh reality of a man who kills a woman because he can't stand to see two women together. The new space of intervention – the new reality? – for writer and translator is to be found instead, as Curran puts it, "in the figures of a woman writing, a woman reading, and women talking; their fictional appearances having an effect each time a new woman reader picks up the text" (2000: 176). The translation theme in Brossard's hands becomes a metaphorical tool which allows her to explore the arduous access that women have to language.[4]

Another novel from the 1980s, *Heroine*, by Gail Scott (1987), has elements in common with Brossard's – the exploration of the particular use of language by women being one of them – but also differs from it in important ways. An important difference is that Gail Scott is an Anglophone writer, *une Anglo-Montréalaise*, and it's through that lens that Québec society and language issues are viewed and constructed by her in the novel. As Catherine Leclerc writes in her essay called *Des langues en partage?* (2010), when *Heroine* was published in 1987, it distinguished itself from previous Anglo-québécois literature by putting the French presence to the forefront both in the story and the actual writing of the book, through the use, for instance, of code-switching. The novel is set in a French milieu and filled with its preoccupations and linguistic reality. Gail Scott's work shows a new interest, from an Anglophone perspective, for the interaction between linguistic groups on the Montreal scene. Catherine Leclerc looks at the specific "co-linguism" generated by Scott's writing. In an essay called "My Montreal", Scott herself reflects on how "the French erupts into the English text, puncturing it, subverting the authority of both languages" (quoted in Leclerc 2010: 198).

*Heroine* is set in Montreal in the seventies, a decade marked in the political arena by the rise of the movement for the independence of Québec, and the election of the sovereignist *Parti québécois* in 1976. The heroine is called Gail, like the author, and recounts in a first-person narrative her arrival in Montreal in the early seventies, from Ontario. She works night shifts as a translator for a news agency. She decides at one point to write a novel, and even takes a month off her translator job to work on her book. As she goes through various experiences a new vision of her heroine emerges. "French is associated with an anti-establishment ideal and serves as an appealing vehicle for the heroine-in-progress", Leclerc writes (2010: 199).

---

4. For a detailed discussion of this book see Godbout (2010).

The ways in which French Montrealers and the French language are constructed in *Heroine* are part of an effort to renew the "translation" of Québécois reality for the benefit of English Canadians. As Sherry Simon has shown, the historical tendency in English Canada has been to take an ethnographic look at the French Canadian dominated, non-threatening, "Other".[5] Gail Scott enters the scene at a time when these figures of alterity decide to assert their difference. But, as Leclerc points out, the narrator's openness to the French fact paradoxically has the potential effect of obliterating that difference. As far as the representation of translation is concerned, translation and literary creation are not presented in oppositional terms. One doesn't contradict or challenge the other, as is so often the case elsewhere.

## Translation as structure

To conclude, the preliminary results presented here tend to show that translation is very often connected with the fear of losing one's identity on the part of the Québécois. The translator is a (not even beautiful) loser and the Québécois are afraid of losing themselves in translation. This linguistic insecurity as an identity trait blends in very well with the often unfulfilled desire to become a writer on the part of the fictional translator in Québec literature. This character nevertheless changes over time, as is to be expected. He starts out as a pretty unhappy type who works as a translator for lack of any other more favourable option. In more recent works, translation as a form of communication is presented allegorically as a dead-end (as in Jacques Poulin's *Les grandes marées*) or used to explore the connection between words and the reality they're supposed to refer to (as in Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve*).

The way the "Other" is perceived also changes: The English Canadian and the English language are not constructed solely as the eternal oppressor. There are also more female translators as we go along. And as we have seen in Brossard and Scott, fictional translation is intricately weaved into women's relationship to language and to their own body. These writers have thus played a role in shifting the reader's attention from the translator as a character to translation itself as a fictional motif. It is perhaps no coincidence that this shift occurred after Québécois literature had become more recognized and established. By that I mean – and this is a hypothesis that more research will or will not confirm – that in the earlier period, prior to the mid-seventies maybe, the fictional translator could hardly have had any other purpose than that of pointing to the Francophones' subaltern role in most spheres

5. See, among other titles, Sherry Simon (1988) "Dissymmetries In Canadian Translation".

of life and their inability to find their literary voice. After Québécois literature became somewhat more established, however, translation began to be approached from other angles and sometimes used in literary works as a structuring principle or tending toward allegory or parody, in phase with postmodernity's aesthetics – as Nitsa Ben-Ari's research has also shown (cf. 2010: 235). The study of Québec novels featuring fictional translators from 1990 onwards will enable me to see how this trend continued to manifest itself.

## References

### Primary sources

Baillargeon, P. 1973. *Les médisances de Claude Perrin*. Montreal: Éditions du Jour.

Bernard, H. 1926. *La maison vide*. Montreal: Bibliothèque de l'Action française.

Brossard, N. 1987. *Le désert mauve*, Montreal: L'Hexagone.

Élie, R. 1950. *La fin des songes*. Montreal: Beauchemin.

Lorrain, L. 1936. *Les étrangers dans la cité*. Montreal: Presses du Mercure.

Maillet, A. 1962. "Les conspirateurs" and "Mœurs amoureuses de cinq Montréalais". In *Les Montréalais*, Montreal: Éditions du Jour, "Les romanciers du jour" series, 11–35 and 39–123.

Pétrin, L. 1961. *Tuez le traducteur*. Ottawa : Librairie Déom.

Poulin, J. 1978. *Les grandes marées*. Montreal: Éditions Leméac.

Scott, G. 1987. *Heroine*. Toronto: Coach House Press.

### Secondary sources

Ben-Ari, N. 2010. "Representations of Translation in Popular Culture." *Translation and Interpreting Studies* 5 (2): 220–242.

Curran, B. 2000. "Reading Us Into the Page Ahead: Translation as Narrative Strategy in Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* and Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve*". In *Reconstructing Cultural Memory: Translation, Scripts, Literacy*, L. d'Hulst & John Milton (eds.), 165–177. Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi.

Gauvin, L. 2000. *Langagement. L'écrivain et la langue au Québec*. Montreal: Boréal.

Godbout, P. 2010. "Übersetzung, Realität und Fiktion: Nicole Brossards *Le Désert mauve*." Trans. Carola David. In *Machtlos, selbstlos, meinungslos? Interdisziplinäre Analysen von ÜbersetzerInnen und DolmetscherInnen in belletristischen Werken*, K. Kaindl & I. Kurz (eds.), 119–126. Vienna: LIT-Verlag.

Leclerc, C. 2010. *Des langues en partage? Cohabitation du français et de l'anglais en littérature contemporaine*. Montreal: XYZ éditeur (Théorie & Littérature series).

Simon, S. 1988. "Dissymmetries In Canadian Translation." *Translation Review* 27: 40–43.

Simon, S. 2006. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Wheeler, A.-M. 2003. "Issues Of Translation In the Works Of Nicole Brossard." *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 16 (2): 425–454.

# Pseudotranslations in 18th century France

Sigrid Kupsch-Losereit
Heidelberg

## The pseudotranslation – Term and concept

In 18th century France, real authors often introduce themselves anonymously, in the first person, as – fictitious – translators of novels or narratives. The translator is therefore present as a narrator on the metalevel and strives to make reliable, realistic statements about the translation in the paratext and also to point out the alterity of the following text. The entire paratext, however, which evokes an imagined original text, is fictitious, for the most part made up: the author/s of the original text (e.g. the Persians in Montesquieu), the *alter ego* as the translator, the source, the title and the subtitle of the so-called original text, information such as translated from or translated by, editor, generally also publisher and place as well as dedication to an imaginary person. Paradoxically, these false pieces of information as well as the comments made by the pseudotranslator in prefaces, introductions, annotations and/or in the narrator's discourses reinforce the Reality Effect (cf. Barthes 1968). This is most often the case when the pseudotranslator gives an indication of the conversational and translational situation, or of the generally adventurous circumstances in which the manuscript was found. Reinforcement of the effect of reality also occurs when the reasons (e.g. commissioned work) and the motives for the translation are communicated (giving pleasure, making a contribution to education, introducing foreign cultures, enhancing the French language with new literary genres, styles and dimensions of expressions) or if the pseudotranslator addresses the narrative mode and the "how" of the translation as a quoted discourse and conceals himself as a translator, i.e. someone who basically speaks in quotation marks, behind the creative original author posing as a real figure. As such, the authenticity of the narrative/tale could not be questioned: they were real and followed clear evidence.

These texts that present themselves in the fictional part of the text (see paratext) but also within the fiction as translations of a foreign-language, imagined

original text are called pseudotranslations. The original text, however, is only accessible through imagination.[1] These pseudotranslations raise many questions, three of which I would like to elaborate on:

1. What are the socio-political and cultural development conditions for such pseudotranslations?
2. Do narrative characteristics exist for pseudotranslations? The example: Montesquieu.
3. Which indicators mark the imagined foreign language of pseudotranslations?

## Pseudotranslations – Alibi and tool

It is possible to determine two – not explicitly mentioned – motives for pseudotranslations. First, they act as an alibi. The authorship is denied in order to avoid censorship. The tools and processes of censorship – surveillance and discourse control – in France in the 18th century have been analysed in great detail.[2] We know that a book that didn't represent the views of the French crown or church was considered a threat to the established social order. The assessment by the censors, the *Librairie* and the *Conseil du Roi*, and not the message of a book was the determining factor for censorial measures: banning, printing privileges or *permission tacite,* a tacit, semiofficial sales/printing license for foreign, mainly French books printed abroad in order to avoid censorship. By disguising himself, the translating author transmits literature that is critical of society and religion, materialistic or erotic while evading the responsibility for it. Hence, in 1748 Voltaire dedicated his tale *Zadig ou la destinée* to the "Sultane, Sheraa par Sadi" (1994: 55). In 1759 in Geneva, Voltaire published: *Candide ou l'optimisme, traduit de l'allemand de Mr. le docteur Ralph avec les additions qu'on a trouvées dans la poche du docteur, lorsqu'il mourut à Minden, l'an de grâce 1759* (1994: 145) and in 1774, also in Geneva, *Le taureau blanc, traduit du syriaque par Mr. Mamaki, interprète du roi d'Angleterre pour les langues orientales* (1994: 527). A further book by Voltaire: *Les lettres d'Amabed, etc., traduites par l'abbé Tamponet* (1994: 477) is particularly risqué because the abbé Tamponet, professor at the Sorbonne, who had stopped the publication of the encyclopaedia, is hereby instrumentalized for

1. General information on pseudotranslations in Collombat (2003), Rambelli (2008), Toury (1995). See also Eco (1992: 217–255) on fakes and forgeries with examples taken from literature (1992: 236–242). The theoretical basis of the concept of translating we use is the skopos theory (Vermeer 1996) as well as deconstructivist and culturally sensitive approaches (Gentzler 2001, Bachmann-Medick 2010).

2. Darnton (1985, 1995); Mass (1981, 2007); Hobohm (1986); Keil (2011).

translating a work of Enlightenment. Voltaire vehemently denies authorship of all these tales. Jean-Baptiste Boyer d'Argens also masked his *Lettres juives* which were published in Amsterdam in 1736 and received a *permission tacite* in 1742 (cf. Mass 2007: 352) as translations in the dedication and the preface. Crébillon fils[3] also feigns a translator: *Les amours de Zeokinizul roi des Kofirans. Ouvrage traduit de l'arabe du voyageur Krinelbol*, as well as his imitator Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle: *L'Asiatique tolérant, traité à l'usage de Zéokinizul, roi des Kofirans, surnommé le Chéri, ouvrage traduit de l'arabe du voyageur Bekrinoll, par M. de *****. In order to increase his translation's claim to authenticity, the abbé Prévost purports to have personally received the English version of the memoirs of *Cleveland, fils naturel de M. Cromwell* from Cromwell's son (cf. Herman 1990: 3).

A further form of protection is a rejection of personal responsibility for the translated content and dissociation from the view of the author (e.g. Argens, La Beaumelle, Voltaire). A translator is never responsible for the feelings and opinions of the characters in the translated work and the translator of Lucretius was never put on trial because of the opinions of this philosopher (cf. Argens 1736 t. 1: 5f and t. 2: 7).

Furthermore, there are ideological and literary-aesthetical reasons for pseudotranslations (cf. Lombez 2005: 108f). They serve as ideological instruments with which to exercise political and cultural influence. The pseudotranslator apparently fully submits to the standards of the source text. He is a fraudulent fictitious source-text oriented translator who shifts the ethics of translation away from questions of fiability and fidelity even when he pretends to be a target-oriented translator, like Montesquieu (cf. Collombat 2003: 148). Under the pretext of an imagined foreign-language original text, he becomes a mediator of a supposedly foreign culture, eliminates prejudices toward other nations (Grafigny 1753: 2f), can voice furious social criticism and promote subversive political ideas. The constructed, fake original text questions the generally accepted political order as well as nationally and culturally assured values and patterns by revealing different social and cultural lifestyles (tolerance, justice, non-violence).

As a literary instrument, pseudotranslations fulfil the most important function that Toury assigns them: "a convenient way of introducing novelties into culture" (1995: 41). Pseudotranslators know the readers' expectations of translations, which derive from specific languages and textual traditions. They fulfil these expectations and take advantage of the tolerance toward translations as non-standardised texts (cf. Toury 1995: 41–46). They evade the canonical rules of classical aesthetics – *vraisemblance* (verisimilitude) and *bienséance* (propriety). They extend restrictive

3. Crébillon fils had to suffer several weeks of imprisonment and was banished from Paris because of his satirical roman à clef and his libertine, sensual-hedonistic texts (cf. Mass 2007: 338 on prison sentences of other authors).

national literary standards and the literary system. At the same time, they fulfil their wish of giving novels, which up until the 18th century had not been part of the canonical genres and had been considered baroque, unreliable, indecent, picaresque etc., a literary status – one of the main reasons for pseudotranslations (cf. Charles 2005: 135f). The solution is to use non-canonised text types such as memoirs and collected letters as a reference. These "free" text types are allegedly always based on unpublished original manuscripts that do not follow French but foreign-language taste and style criteria. The true author does not write in his own name because his work would be judged by expectations of form and topic guided by the national literature. The pseudotranslator who, time and again, emphasises not only the *vraisemblance* but also the veracity of his translation, the conformity between source text and translation, can introduce improvements of topics and characters as well as linguistic-textual forms of representation of mindsets (e.g. positive portrayals of suicide or adultery), practices and behaviour. In addition, he can describe the sensuous pleasures and frivolity of a society caught in the *code de bienséance.* A pseudotranslation can import literary patterns from other traditions because it masquerades as a literal *Imitatio* of the source text, only occasionally smoothes the language according to the rules of the *bienséance* but denies innovations and any kind of manipulation of the source text.[4] Content and representation emancipate from linguistic hegemony: bold means of expression, frivolous discourses, blending of styles without any distinction between routine and the extraordinary, exotic imagery, austere, ironic and laconic narrative style, fast narrative pace and the so-called aesthetic of natural expression or of the natural style[5] that break up the stylistic code of classicism become possible. Referring to a translation as a means of protection from literary activity can therefore be seen as a reaction to censorship and to less marked, anachronistic forms, topics and figures found in a national polysystem. As such, Voltaire does adopt the narrative style patterns of the adventure and travel novel or the plot of the Hellenistic novel (separation, denunciation, retrieval, happy end) but only in order to parody them and break up aesthetic-cultural standards. Montesquieu includes, as we shall see later on, further cultural texts into the national literary canon.

4. Cf. La Beaumelle (1748: 18), Crébillon (1999: 461) and Argens (1736 t. 2: 6) explicitly emphasise that, despite taking some liberties, they never stray from the original meaning, always produce a correct and precise translation and attempt to retain the atmosphere and colouring of the original text.

5. Herman (1990: 7f) gives further examples for the natural style in pseudotranslations which was influenced by Richardson. He demonstrates how these natural expressions are increasingly moving away from the periphery (foreign countries) and are advancing into the centre of the French literary system (especially after the translational turn in 1760 when pseudotranslations did not comply with canonical criteria vs. standard translations that cater to French taste).

## Narrative characteristics of pseudotranslations

When describing the characteristics of pseudotranslations, we proceed from the key concepts that Bal (2009) and Schmid (2010) specify for narrative texts.[6] But we will only examine the specific narrative traits, which are so dominant that their description is considered relevant for our texts; these concern concepts such as: narrator and actor (alter ego), event and story, characters and focalization (perspective).

Let us take a look at the order and manner in which the narrative, the pseudotranslation, is presented to the reader. Initially, one notices the textual anchoring between commissioned work and chance discovery while the author remains anonymous (Argens, Crébillon, Grafigny, La Beaumelle, Montesquieu, Prévost, Voltaire). One of the many techniques of the epistolary novel is the multiperspectivity of perception and writing style – there is no narrator, attitude and perception change with each person. This technique was adopted in the tales and novels of Voltaire, Montesquieu, Argens, Grafigny etc. The narrative perspective is that of the respective observer or reporter, often as one person who publishes found or lost or recovered letters. The events are thus not communicated by an omniscient author but by one or many delegated narrators acting as witnesses of the portrayed events. In Voltaire's *Histoire de Jenny ou le sage et l'athée par M. Sherloc, traduit par M. de la Caille* (1994: 597), the delegated translator de la Caille entrusts his quill to other figures such as e.g. Boca Vermeja. The delegated narrators, who seemingly take over from the author/translator and are effectively his substitute or alter ego, speak in the third-person (e.g. M. le docteur Ralph in *Candide*) or first-person, sometimes even using "I" in indirect speech.[7] In a mere first-person narration, identification with the translator would occur and there would not be the perspective of a narrated/quoted discourse. Aside from the translators, fictitious publishers pipe up as well. This results in the text having numerous observer and commentator roles. This shrewd self-referential narrative technique enables translators and editors to comment on the narrative and its attitude. Madame de Grafigny, for example, pretends to be the editor of *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (Grafigny 1753: 1), a collection of letters from the young Peruvian woman Zilia to her lover Aza, which she herself translated from Peruvian to French. However, due to her insufficient knowledge of French,

6. On the definition of narrative texts and the descriptive categories, see Bal (2009: 3–11).

7. Both modes of narration, the authorial and the narrated thoughts of the first person, are equally represented as facts and truths whereby the conventional narratology, the narrative practice of the 18th century is overturned. Stewart (1969: 20, 34–40) shows that the first-person account is proof of an authentic, credible tale whereby the novel assumes the character of a historical document.

the initial translation was quite flawed.[8] Mme de Grafigny discusses the translation criteria (modified-faithful, successful-unsuccessful, good-bad) in regard to lexis, grammar and style. She addresses the translation process and the linguistic alterity which imply that the text is a translation in so far as the aforementioned grammar errors and stylistic shortcomings are proof of the authenticity of the language and the phrasing of the letter. Further proof can be found in the corrections of the letters made by Zilia, after her language skills improved, for the French reader: Zilia revises the style, avoids metaphors or emotionally-charged pictures and deletes sentimental expressions (Grafigny 1753: 6f). However, the translation process as described by Grafigny (1753: 195, 199) and by the statements made by Zilia within the fiction, is just as fictitious as the source text as no such process can take place if the source text is only imagined.

The self-reflection on the translation process is also visible in the emphasis on an exact, faithful translation. Mme de Grafigny lays claim to truth in her “Lettres originales” (cf. 1753: 4) which must also be verisimilar (cf. 1753: 1). Argens, who allegedly translated all the correspondence between his letter writer, who lived under a pseudonym in Paris, and the correspondents, bestows upon it the character of a real document and claims that the adventures described in these letters are completely true (cf. 1736 t. 1: 9). Further evidence for the authenticity of the translation is a metalinguistic comment that points out a gap in the source text (cf. La Beaumelle 1748: 14). The rendition of speech, mainly dialogues, also suggests a faithful translation as it is an immanent part of the source text and already needs to be documented as a written text (Grafigny, Montesquieu, Voltaire). However, if in the fictitious events people speak to one another in different languages (e.g. in *Candide*), while the (fictitious) language of the dialogue is consistently French – i.e. the processing text design performs the change of language – then it is a pseudotranslation within the fiction.[9] The reader is aware that the original bilingual dialogue has been translated into French by the author who imagined a foreign-language utterance. The claim to truth as a criterion, which is raised time and again, does, however, not only refer to the faithful translation – a truth in what is said – but also to an accordance between what is said and the extra-linguistic reality, no matter how improbable and fantastical the narration may seem (e.g. Crébillon 1999: 463). In his *Histoire de Jenni*, Voltaire makes contemporary characters perform in meticulously designed historical settings in order to make the account seem genuine and to suggest an accordance between fiction

8. See Kulessa (1997: 23, 49, 96f) on the authenticity of the language in Zilia’s letters and on the role of the editor. Details on the role of the abbé Prévost as a pseudopublisher in Herman (1990: 3f).

9. Donat (2011) gives a definition of pseudotranslation within fiction and refers to some interesting examples in film and literature.

and real events. A further example illustrates how the distinction between quoted "genuine" discourse, the translation, and narration – does the author and/or the translator speak in the first person – is revoked in intra- and intertextual references: In his eponymous story *L'homme aux quarante écus,* Voltaire's character says that he then read the philosophical tale *Candide*, translated from the German by Dr. Ralph, and that he read in the true tale of *Candide*… (cf. 1994: 460f). And in response to the question whether the atrocities in *Candide*, namely that two thirds of all soldiers had syphilis, were true, his interlocutor, a surgeon, replies that this is all too true (cf. 1994: 464). Here, a pseudotranslation (the story *Candide*) is playfully and innerfictionally drawn on in order to intertextually substantiate the credibility of a statement and the existence of a real fact. This confusion of fiction and reality (narrator's comment: true tale) allows the reader to understand the story as a literary game of reference and to recognise the ironic wording as a satirical parody of the depravity and inconsistency of a dysfunctional society.

The self-reflection can also be observed in the translator's ironic role playing, which attempts to appeal to the audience's taste. He knows the reader's expectations of the translation (*belles infidèles*), pretends to take these into consideration – propriety, polite phrases, avoiding too direct or hedonistic expressions, defusing unsuitable, offensive passages – but cannot or will not completely fulfil them. In the introduction to *Le Temple de Gnide*, the anonymous translator Montesquieu promises – in an ironic fashion – to observe the order of the prevailing cultural discourse and the standards for the moral assessment of specific actions as found in the original text. He stresses the accuracy of his translation but also the fact that he abandoned the dry, emotionless expressions in favour of those closer to the author's thoughts (cf. Montesquieu 1979a: 387). This leads to a discourse on creativity which, above all, is of structural importance. On the one hand, the game of hide-and-seek – author behind translator – reflects the literature market and the censorship that does not allow creative, original achievements. On the other hand, the borders between original and copy, and between author and translator become blurred in the satirical commentary. The translator, ultimately, makes corrections in order to improve readability and apparently changes the foreign atmosphere.

The described narrative style, in which original and translation as well as the discourse of the respective protagonist and the discourse of the translator as a first person narrator and implied author are no longer clearly distinguishable, is perfected in the *Lettres Persanes*. In the preface to the *Lettres*, Montesquieu introduces himself anonymously as a translator of letters by educated Persian Muslims (Usbek and Rica) who chose Paris as a safe haven, and their interlocutors and correspondents. He pretends to align the translated work with French customs, keep typical Asian linguistic habits away from the reader and spare them boring expressions and exaggerated adulations:

> I am therefore nothing more than a translator: all my endeavor has been to adapt the work to our taste and manners. I have relieved the reader as much as possible of Asiatic phraseology, and have spared him an infinitude of sublime expressions which would have driven him wild. Nor does my service to him end there. I have curtailed those tedious compliments of which the Orientals are lavish as ourselves… (Montesquieu 1899)

He seems to exercise a kind of censorship in accordance with the translation discourse as *belles infidelès* in this assimilation to his own language and in the denial of alterity. However, he does not adhere to the indications as he introduces the lifestyle and customs of French society from a Persian perspective.

For this purpose, Montesquieu employs the gaze of the Other, a popular literary pattern in the 18th century. Usbek and Rica always remain outside observers whose historico-cultural foreign understanding is based on unprejudiced observations and who regard the strange foreign society from a distance. In any case, the literary perspective of the stranger's gaze allows the translator to comprehensively criticise society without consequences. In addition, the quoted discourse has a fictional textual status and therefore allows recent linguistic liberties and topics: indictment of religious intolerance, Jesuit casuistic, corruption at court and in the legal system, mockery of civil servants and servants of God, of ridiculous institutions, criticism of the church and clerical dignitaries, feudal society and the tyranny of the absolutist monarch, religions that justify murder and crime and pervert the scale of good and evil.[10] The impartial foreigner with his Persian mindset turns into a projection platform for the discontent with the own culture. The allegedly foreign observations reflect – in a hardly encrypted manner – the political and social situation in France during the Enlightenment. Some examples can illustrate this: In letter 124, a fictitious decree of the French king, whose name is not mentioned, to his subjects contains absurd orders and bans. The letters 132 and 138 castigate the fraudulent machinations of foreign ministers (introduction of copper coins instead of gold coins etc.) and the devastating influence of the French Finance Minister Law who introduced paper currency, allowed betting and caused a monetary catastrophe. The report on the Indian ambassador and educator of the prince (letter 126) also alludes – in analogy – to the arrest of the Duc de Maine, the great uncle of Louis XV. The fiction has a noticeably clear reference point (cf. Mass 1981: 82f, 156f) and the reflection, on the one hand, criticises society and on the other hand protects from persecution. The protagonist Usbek's dual motivation for his trip to Paris – thirst for knowledge and escape from enemies and Serail intrigues (cf. letters 1 and 8) – also has a narrative function for the

---

**10.** Cf. the severe criticism of the *Académie française* (letter 123), of Louis XIV and his favouritism (letters 24, 37, 92, 124 etc.), of the pope and the church (letter 29) and of the *Sorbonne* (letter 109) etc. On the interpretation of the 147 letters, see Runyon (2005).

translation: Just as Usbek flees from the Serail intrigues in his search for truth, the French translator, disguised as a Persian, can mock every nation without being persecuted. The ambiguity of the text is based on the representation of the Orient as a cipher for criticism of both religion and state.

The translation – apparently – reveals itself as such in that it retains descriptions of realities, Oriental atmosphere, Oriental dating and onomastics (indication of place and proper name) as well as the according culturally-shaped attitudes.[11] The pseudotranslation, however, is exposed by the implied translator's textual counteraction of these attitudes. He/she supports the ideals of cultural relativity[12] (cf. Montesquieu 1979b: 245) and is committed to the moralistic of the early Enlightenment in an amusing narrative form. The tale of the troglodytes (letters 11–14), for example, in which Usbek speaks as Montesquieu's alter ego, suggests that only a society based on justice and tolerance is desirable; and in the erotic tale *Ibrahim and Anaïs* (letter 141), an innerfictional pseudotranslation, enlightened thought openly shines through.

The translator, who pretends to want to translate Arabic documents, pays homage to the prevailing taste of Oriental tales which were in fashion then, and implicitly hints at *One Thousand and One Nights*. Galland's French version of the collection of fairytales from 1704 is a translation of a previous text based on a compilation of anonymous tales of unknown origin. He extended it with new tales, adapted it to the contemporary taste and defused the sexually suggestive passages. Ever since then, Galland's alleged translation has been considered the original work that was translated into other European languages. There has, however, never been, and in no language, an authentic original version; the idea of the existence of a unique original is obsolete. As such, Montesquieu's translation, which is characterised by convoluted tales on a micro level (model *1001 Nights*) as well indistinguishable narrator's and characters texts (cf. Schmid 2010: 118–174), does not refer to an original text. Instead, the translation refers to other fictions by inserting further cultural texts such as recipes, tales, parodies, oral messages, stories, legends and translated tales about/from Persia etc.[13] and thereby suggests the authenticity of the depicted

---

**11.** On the represented strangeness in translating realia and culturalities and the superposition of intertextual references, see Bachmann-Medick (2004: 157, 159f).

**12.** Proof of transcultural conflicts of values can be found in a cynical statement in letter 75: as the Christian rulers abolished slavery in accordance to the principles of equality, they imported them from infidel countries and thereby forgot their religious principles. See Kulessa (1997: 27–33) on Mme de Grafigny for details on the stranger's gaze.

**13.** Some examples for inserted documents in the letters: a letter of complaint in letter 145, the ridiculous speech of a general in the war council in letter 111, a *savant's* letter in letter 142, an amusing commentary in letter 78, a publically read letter and a provincial doctor's prescription to a doctor in Paris in letter 143, the translation of a Persian tale in letter 142, a pious legend in letter 18 etc.

reality. The correspondence within the fiction, in which the various partners alternately refer to preceding comments or other reports/narrations etc., the numerous variations of quotes as such, and cited quotes lead to an intratextual web of dialogues that is a crucial structural component. The first-person, perspective and theme continually change. Through the continuous change in discourse relating to style and statement form, Montesquieu discusses the relationship between fiction and reality as the insertions in the fictional text merge with the critical-ironical representation of historically true facts. This narrative method allows Montesquieu to conduct metafictional – linguistic- and epistemological-philosophical – discourses which interrupt the narrative process relevant to present times, comparatively refer to what has previously been said and to consider the judgement of posterity (cf. letter 146) into account (cf. Mass 1981: 85). The constructed nature of the original text becomes visible through the insertions and variations of the textual transmission. Original texts are not a fixed entity and translation does not duplicate them. They are effectively manufactured and a distinct original text is created.[14] The translator becomes the author of an epistolary novel, the *Lettres Persanes*. The metatext becomes a prototext in the target literature.

## Indicators for pseudotranslations

The question arises whether, after reading the paratext, the reader will realise that the main text is not a translation but the staging of said paratext. The analysis of the narrative characteristics in regard to pseudotranslations is thus interesting as it provides further indicators for imagined foreign languages. Based on my observations, the following summary of significant indicators for pseudotranslations can be identified:

1. The paratext is fictitious: author-translator, source, title and subtitle of the so-called original, publisher, place.
2. Information such as translated from or translated by is wrong. The author makes misleading statements in prefaces, introductions or comments.
3. Unpublished "original" manuscripts serve as source texts.
4. The translator receives the manuscript by accident and under adventurous circumstances.
5. Invention of the translator's alter ego with more or less exotic names (Krinelbol alias Crébillon; Bekrinoll alias La Beaumelle; Mr. le docteur Ralph, l'abbé Tamponet, Mr. Mamaki etc. alias Voltaire; Zilia alias Grafigny).

---

**14.** On pseudotranslations that turn into prototypes for new literary genres, see Rambelli (2008: 210).

6. References to an incomplete source in the text (Argens).
7. Intratextual and intertextual references to verify the authenticity of the original (Montesquieu, Voltaire); an intertextual true-false-network emerges.
8. Metafictional comments and innerfictional, embedded narratives remove the distinction between first-person translator, author, and figure (Montesquieu letters 11–14, 141, etc.; Voltaire).
9. Metatextual and innerfictional references to grammar mistakes and stylistic shortcomings of the (pseudo)translation as well as to the translation process verify the authenticity of the language and the phrasing of a letter (Grafigny and Zilia in the *Lettres d'une Péruvienne*).
10. Within the fictitious world, people speak to one another in different languages which are not those of the French version: the change of language is an innerfictional pseudotranslation (Voltaire and Montesquieu letters 103, 104, 145 etc.).
11. Disconcerting style, peculiar linguistic style, strange sounding patro- and toponymy (i.e. La Beaumelle: Zéoteirizul, Zéokarotizul, Les Kanviliens, Klarnadi de Kilerieu, Tsandenidt) etc. are indicative of "faithful" translations; pseudotranslations do not adhere to the canonical criteria (Grafigny, Montesquieu, Voltaire) while standard translations cater to French taste.
12. Inclusion of new cultural texts in the national literary canon (Montesquieu, Voltaire).

These most conspicuous characteristics of fictitious translations are not a list of fixed features but the first four, which can be found in the works of all the authors (Argens, Crébillon, Grafigny, La Beaumelle, Montesquieu, Prévost, Voltaire), are habitually associated with genuine translations in the receiving culture and they take advantage of a culture-internal conception of translation. Apparently, the legitimation of the texts as translations is, above all, the result of the paratextual signals, especially translated from/by. But these signals – in keeping with the deconstruction of translational action – are a trap: the reader expects the translation of an original; but that has been produced through translation. In addition, the metafictional and intertextual representations (indicators 5–12) in pseudotranslations dismantle the status of the original. Thus, the concept of authorship in the 18th century, which emphatically understood the author's authenticity and originality as Creator of the work,[15] is undermined. The forgery destroys the dominant myth of original and originality because, in the pseudotranslation, the opposition between original and translation implodes.

15. Höfele (1999) illustrates this concept of authorship on the basis of literary forgery in the 18th century.

## References

### Primary sources

Argens, J.-B. de Boyer, marquis d'. 1736. Lettres Juives, ou correspondance philosophique, historique & critique, entre un juif voiageur en différens Etats de l' Europe, & ses correspondans en divers endroits. Available at: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark: /12148/bpt6k106702r/f1.image (last accessed 10 March 2012).

Crébillon, C. 1999. "Les Amours de Zéokinizul, roi des Kofirans. Ouvrage traduit de l'Arabe du voyageur Krinelbol." In: *Oeuvres complètes* Tome 1, 461–516. Paris: Classiques Garnier.

Grafigny, F. D' Issembourg D' Happoncourt de. 1753. *Lettres d'une Péruvienne* (2 tomes). Paris: Duchesne.

La Beaumelle, L. A. de. 1748. L'Asiatique tolérant, traité à l'usage de Zéokinizul, roi des Kofirans, surnommé le Chéri, ouvrage traduit de l'arabe du voyageur Bekrinoll, par M. de ****. Available at: http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark: /12148/bpt6k82267x/f2.image (last accessed 10 March 2012).

Montesquieu, C. L. S. de. 1899. Persian Letters. Translated by John Davidson. Available at: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Persian_Letters/Introduction (last accessed 12 August 2013).

Montesquieu, C. L. S. de. 1979a. " Le Temple De Gnide". In : *Œuvres complètes* Tome 1, 387–413. Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 81).

Montesquieu, C. L. S. de. 1979b. "Lettres Persanes". In: *Œuvres complètes* Tome 1, 129–373. Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 81).

Voltaire. 1994. *Romans et contes.* Paris: Gallimard (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 3).

### Secondary sources

Bachmann-Medick, D. 2004. "Von der Poetik und Rhetorik des Fremden zur Kulturgeschichte und Kulturhistorie des Übersetzens." In: *Die literarische Übersetzung in Deutschland. Studien zu ihrer Kulturgeschichte in der Neuzeit,* A. P. Frank & H. Turk (eds.), 153–192. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.

Bachmann-Medick, D. 2010$^4$. *Cultural turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*. Reinbek: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch-Verlag.

Bal, M. 2009$^3$. *Narratology: introduction to the theory of narrative.* Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press.

Barthes, R. 1968. "L'effet de réel." *Communications* 11 (1): 84–89. Available at: http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/comm_0588-8018_1968_num_11_1_1158. (last accessed 10 March 2012).

Charles, S. 2005. "Traduire au dix-huitième siècle." In: *The eighteenth century now: boundaries and perspectives*, Jonathan Mallinson (ed.), 133–147. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation (SVEC 10).

Collombat, I. 2003. "Pseudotraduction: la mise en scène de l'altérité." *Le Langage et l'Homme* 38 (1): 145–156.

Darnton, R. 1985. *Literaten im Untergrund. Lesen, Schreiben u. Publizieren im vorrevolutionären Frankreich.* Unter Mitarbeit von Henning Ritter. München: Hanser (Hanser-Anthropologie).

Darnton, R. 1995. *The forbidden best-sellers of pre-revolutionary France.* New York: Norton.

Donat, S. 2011. “Markierung von Pseudoübersetzung in Literatur und Film.” Paper presented at the International Conference *Pseudoübersetzungen. Imaginationen anderssprachiger Originale*, 27 September 2011, Innsbruck, Austria.

Eco, U. 1992. *Die Grenzen der Interpretation.* Übersetzung: G. Memmert. München/Wien: Hanser.

Gentzler, E. 2001. *Contemporary translation theories.* Clevedon [u.a.]: Multilingual Matters.

Herman, J. 1990. “Le Procès Prévost traducteur. Traduction et pseudo-traduction au dix-huitième siècle en France.” A*rcadia - International Journal for Literary Studies* 25 (1): 1–9.

Hobohm, Hans-C. 1986. “Der Diskurs der Zensur. Über den Wandel der literarischen Zensur zur Zeit der ‘proscription des romans’ (Paris, 1737).” *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* X: 68–82.

Höfele, A. 1999. “Der Autor und sein Double. Anmerkungen zur literarischen Fälschung.” *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift,* N.F. 49: 79–101.

Keil, A. 2011. *Zensur und Aufklärung. Zum Verhältnis literarischer Freiheit und staatlicher Repression im Frankreich des 18. Jahrhunderts.* München: GRIN Verlag.

Kulessa, R. von 1997. *Françoise de Grafigny: Lettres d’une Péruvienne. Interpretation, Genese und Rezeption eines Briefromans aus dem 18. Jahrhundert.* Stuttgart: Metzler (Ergebnisse der Frauenforschung, 46).

Lombez, C. 2005. “La ‘traduction supposée’ ou: de la place des pseudotraductions poétiques en France.” *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 4: 107–121.

Mass, E. 1981. *Literatur und Zensur in der frühen Aufklärung. Produktion, Distribution und Rezeption der Lettres Persanes.* Berlin/ Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann (Analecta Romanica, 46).

Mass, E. 2007. “Kirchliche und weltliche Zensur in Frankreich in der Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts zur Zeit Benedikts XIV.” In: *Zensur im Jahrhundert der Aufklärung. Geschichte – Theorie – Praxis*, W. Haefs & Y.-G. Mix (eds.), 331–355. Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag.

Rambelli, P. 2008. “Pseudotranslation.” In: *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies,* Mona Baker (ed.), 208–211. London: Routledge.

Runyon, R. P. 2005. *The art of the Persian letters. Unlocking Montesquieu’s “secret chain”*. Newark: University of Delaware Press.

Schmid, W. 2010. *Narratology: An Introduction.* Berlin/New York: de Gruyter.

Stewart, P. 1969. *Imitation and illusion in the french memoir-novel, 1700 – 1750. The art of make-believe.* New Haven and London: Yale U.P.

Toury, G. 1995. *Descriptive translation studies and beyond.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Vermeer, H. J. 1996. *A skopos theory of translation. (Some arguments for and against).* Heidelberg: TEXTconTEXT.

EPISODE III

# Experiencing agency and action

# On the (in)fidelity of (fictional) interpreters

Ingrid Kurz
University of Vienna

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the significance of interpreters in international communication. Interpretation research has tended to look at the socio-cultural role of interpreters rather than narrowly focusing on the process of interpreting. At the same time, interpreters have been increasingly starring in books and movies. Works of fiction featuring interpreters as central characters range from short stories to novels, from love stories to crime fiction and, as Michael Cronin (2009: xii) points out, translators – and he means interpreters – have also made it into mainstream Hollywood movies.

Films and fiction are a valuable source for researchers because they reflect – and to a certain extent shape and reinforce – perceptions of our profession: "[…] motion pictures are a potent source of images and representation of what translation might or might not involve." (Cronin 2009: xi) Fiction can offer us new insights precisely because it is governed by criteria and considerations which differ from those which we as practitioners or researchers apply.

One aspect which I feel merits closer scrutiny is the (in)fidelity of (fictional) interpreters. The present chapter, therefore, will focus on books and films in which interpreters – for various reasons – fail to convey the sender's message and provide anything but a faithful translation.

As we will see, some of the failures on the part of fictional interpreters are crucial/indispensable for the story, while others are not. Some go undetected, others are immediately revealed. Some instances of infidelity are intentional, whereas others are not and happen because of insufficient linguistic/translatorial skills.[1]

1. Some of the books and films presented in this chapter have been discussed elsewhere (cf. Viaggio 2005, Grbić 2005, Kolb 2005, Cronin 2009, Kurz 2005, 2007, 2010), but will be reviewed here strictly with regard to the aspect of (in)fidelity.

## Professional conduct – Fidelity, impartiality and conflicting loyalties

Virtually every professional association of interpreters has a Code of Ethics that its members are expected to follow. Such ethical principles include fidelity, confidentiality, impartiality and professional conduct. From the very beginning, interpreters reflecting on and writing about their profession have made it clear that it is the interpreter's task to convey a speaker's intended message as clearly as possible. According to Herbert (1952: 25), the interpreter should "enable his audience to know accurately what the speaker intended to convey, and to make on the audience the impression which the speaker wishes to be made."

Karla Déjean Le Féal writes in a similar vein:

> What our listeners receive through their earphones should produce the same effect on them as the original speech does on the speaker's audience. It should have the same cognitive content and be presented with equal clarity and precision in the same type of language. (1990: 155)

Gile (1995: 59) agrees that the absolute fidelity rule is that the message or primary information should always be re-expressed in the target-language text, but goes on to say that "the Translator is working for the Sender, but also for the Receiver and the Client, whose purposes and intentions may not tally." (Gile 1995: 28) He also points out that

> The Sender-loyalty principle is not the only loyalty principle to be found in professional Translation. Some Translators see themselves as working for the Receiver irrespective of the interests of the Sender. Others feel their loyalty is due to the Client rather than to the Sender or the Receiver. (1995: 30)

Anderson describes the interpreter as someone who serves two clients at the same time. "He is the 'man in the middle' with some obligations to both clients – and these obligations may not be entirely compatible." (Anderson 1976: 218) Cronin (2009: 92) speaks of "the potential complicity of the interpreter".

The following snippets from books and films will show fictional interpreters violating the principle of fidelity. Questions arising in this context are whether similar scenarios/scenes have occurred or might occur in real-life situations and to which extent these portrayals tally/clash with the self-image of professional interpreters.

## The fictional interpreter – His/her master's voice?

### Betraying the client to prevent foul play

In *The Greek Interpreter*, one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 56 Sherlock Holmes stories, which was adapted for an episode of the 1984/85 TV series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Cox 1985), the protagonist is a member of our profession. Mr. Melas is a respected Greek interpreter and "a remarkable linguist" (Doyle 1987: 224) who has lived in London for many years. He is basically an escort or community interpreter who works for foreigners in need of help: "For many years, I have been the chief Greek interpreter in London, and my name is very well known in the hotels." (Doyle 1987: 225) In one of his assignments he is driven to a house in the middle of the night. This in itself is nothing unusual for him because, as he tells us, "It happens not infrequently that I am sent for at strange hours by foreigners who get into difficulties, or by travellers who arrive late at night and wish my services." (Doyle 1987: 225) When confronted with a Greek man whose mouth is sealed with big pieces of sticking plaster, however, Melas immediately suspects that foul play is involved and devises an ingenious method to detect what is going on. When he notices that the people who recruited him do not understand a word of Greek, he starts adding his own brief questions to the questions he is asked to translate. The captive, who is unable to speak through the sticking plaster, writes down all his answers. He refuses the request to sign some documents, and the half-spoken, half-written dialog goes like this:

> 'You can do no good by this obstinacy. *Who are you?*'
> 'I care not. *I am a stranger in London.*'
> 'Your fate will be on your own head. *How long have you been here?*'
> 'Let it be so. *Three weeks.*'
> 'The property can never be yours. *What ails you?*'
> 'It shall not go to villains. *They are starving me.*'
> 'You shall go free if you sign. *What house is this?*'
> 'I will never sign. *I do not know.*' (Doyle 1987: 228f)

Melas feels he is close to solving the puzzle, when a woman, who turns out to be the captive's sister, steps into the room and the conversation is abruptly stopped. His client thanks him, pays him for his services, drives him back to London and tells him, "if you speak to a human soul about this – one human soul, mind – well, may God have mercy upon your soul." (Doyle 1987: 229)

Despite an explicit oral contract not to divulge anything, despite the handsome sum he got paid and despite the serious threats against him Melas decides to betray his employers. He contacts Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson and tells them, "[…] I know there is foul play going on, and I want to help that unhappy man if I can." (Doyle 1987: 231) In doing so, Melas has decided to play a secret and dangerous game right under the nose of his employers.

In Doyle's story, the interpreter is depicted as an upright, courageous man who refuses to become an accomplice to what he suspects is clearly unlawful and follows his moral code, thereby risking his own life. With Sherlock Holmes' help, of course, the case gets solved. Melas renders the words of his employer correctly, but purposefully violates the principle of fidelity by adding his own questions to those of his employer, thus acting as an advocate for the man who he feels is in danger.

How does Melas' behavior compare with what is expected of real-life community interpreters? Advocacy is a recurrent theme in the literature on community interpreting:

> Advocacy implies defending the client. In other words, the community interpreter is seen as a guide and counsellor as well as a power broker working in favour of his 'underprivileged' client. (Roberts 1993: 241)

Although there is no unanimity about how far the community interpreter should go in this respect, the consensus is that the interpreter should avoid becoming emotionally involved with a client. Given the exceptional circumstances of the story, however, Melas' personal involvement and breach of fidelity are clearly justified on moral grounds.

## Siding with the underprivileged

The protagonist in Suki Kim's book *The Interpreter* (2003) is Suzy Park, a 29-year old Korean-American who, as the daughter of immigrants, has interpreted for her parents from early childhood and now works as an interpreter for the New York City courts. One of her job requirements is not to get involved. Her job is just to show up and translate into English verbatim what the witness testifies in Korean. "One of the job requirements was no involvement: Shut up and get the work done." (Kim 2003: 14f) This is basically fine with her. Except it does not always go as smoothly as that. Suzy often finds herself cheating.

Even though Suzy has to solemnly swear that she will translate from Korean into English and vice versa to the best of her ability, she finds herself in situations

where she intentionally mistranslates in order to help a Korean, particularly when she is aware that there is a cultural misunderstanding.

> […] the opposing side might try to make a case out of the fact that the plaintiff, when struck by a car, told the police that he was feeling fine and refused an ambulance. 'Surely,' the lawyer insists, 'the injury must not have been severe if you even refused medical attention!' But Suzy knows that it is a cultural misunderstanding. It is the Korean way always to underplay the situation, to declare one is fine even when suffering from pain or ravenous hunger. This might stem from their Confucian or even Buddhist tradition, but the lawyers don't care about that. 'Why did you say you were fine at the time of the accident if you weren't? Were you lying then, or are you lying now?' the lawyer presses once more, and Suzy winces, decides that she hates him. The witness gets all nervous and stammers something about how he's not a liar, and Suzy puts on a steel face to hide her anger and translates, 'I was in shock, and the pain was not obvious to me until I got home and collapsed.' Then the lawyer looks stumped and moves on to the next question.
> (Kim 2003: 15f)

Suzy knows that what she does is wrong and that she will lose her job if anyone finds out. "But truth, she has learned comes in different shades, different languages at times." (Kim 2003: 16)

Is Suzy's behavior realistic/credible? She is bound by the Code of Ethics of her profession, but as an agent of both languages and cultures she experiences the controversial issues of ethical conduct and the moral dilemmas in court. Court interpreters have a moral, professional and legal commitment to convey the complete meaning of the speaker's message (Mikkelson 2000: 49) and need to comply with the ethical standards of accuracy and faithfulness. This means that they are expected to keep their opinions and emotions in check and adopt a neutral attitude. Nevertheless, "It has been often been observed that people of the same ethnic group as the interpreter view him/her as an ally and ask for advice or clarifications […]." (Keratsa 2005: 3) As a result, the interpreter

> […] faces the dilemma of assisting and becoming personally involved in the process by elaborating the claimant's utterances in such a way so as to meet the court's requirements and help achieve communication between the parties.
> (Keratsa 2005: 4)

Again, it is not difficult to find parallels in real life. Barsky (1996: 45) describes the functions performed by interpreters in the context of refugee hearings and tries to demonstrate "the important difference that […] having one interpreter rather than another, can play in deciding the outcome of the hearing."

There are examples of interpreters who, like Suzy, helped their compatriots by interpreting in their favor before the courts or immigration. In *I Was Dreaming to Come to America* (Lawlor 1995), a collection of personal stories and documents of the experience of immigrants who passed authorities through Ellis Island, the chief immigration station in the USA between 1900 and 1925, Edward Ferro, an immigrant who later on became an Ellis Island inspector, is quoted as saying,

> The language was a problem […], but it was overcome by the use of interpreters. We had interpreters on the island who spoke practically every language. It would happen sometimes that these interpreters – some of them – were really soft-hearted people and hated to see people being deported, and they would, at times, help the aliens by interpreting in such a manner as to benefit the alien and not the Government. (quoted in Lawlor 1995: 24)

## A most improbable case of manipulation

In *A Heart so White* by Javier Marías (1995), Juan, the narrator, and Luisa, his future wife, are both interpreters. This is how they meet: at a meeting between a high-ranking male Spanish politician (male) and a high-ranking British politician (female) where they are alone with the two leaders. Luisa has been chosen as supervisory interpreter to check on Juan's interpretation. The high-ranking Spanish politician (presumably Felipe Gonzáles) knows not a word of English, and the high-ranking British politician (presumably Margaret Thatcher) knows not a word of Spanish.

Commenting on the work of interpreters, Juan at one point notes that there is "[…] nothing to stop the interpreters making any changes they like to the content of the speeches and no possibility of any real control or available time for denials or amendments" (Marías 1995: 53) and goes on to say,

> […] even though we rarely add jokes of our own (we'd risk losing our job), it's hard sometimes to resist slipping in the occasional falsehood. The international representatives […] have no option but to trust us. (Marías 1995: 54)

On this particular occasion, Juan opts for falsehood. He is bored with the conversation between the two politicians for whom he is interpreting and, instead of translating the question: "Would you like me to order you some tea?" he asks, "Tell me, do the people in your country love you?" (Marías 1995: 59), thus steering the conversation into a completely different direction. Luisa opts not to give him away.

What, if anything, is realistic about the scene described above? While it is true that for sensitive political meetings frequently both sides bring their own interpreter whom they trust, everything else belongs to the realm of fiction.

Viaggio (2005: 135) points out that the interpreter has the freedom to change the wording of the source text as long as he does not change the meaning. So, instead of saying "Do you mind my smoking?" he could say "Is it OK if I smoke?" or "Does my cigarette bother you?" or "Please tell me if my smoking bothers you." What he must never do, however, is change the content of the text, let alone put his own words into the speaker's mouth.

The scene described in the book is a top-level meeting for which two professional interpreters have been recruited – most likely because of their competency and professionalism. An interpreter who decides to manipulate the conversation usurps a power that he does not have and, what is even worse, he abuses this power. He clearly violates Article 3/1 of the AIIC Code of Professional Ethics, which says, "[…] the acceptance of an assignment shall imply a moral undertaking on the members' part to work with all due professionalism", as well as Article 4/2, which says, "they shall refrain from any act which might bring the profession into disrepute." (AIIC 2009) Juan's outright misinterpretation is a flagrant breach of AIIC's Code of Professional Ethics, of course. It is indispensable for the development of the story, but totally unrealistic.

## A case of despicable manipulation

In *Astérix et les Goths* (Goscinny & Uderzo 1963) Panoramix, the Druid, has been captured by the Goths who want him to reveal his formula for the magic potion. Téléféric, the Gothic chieftain, talks to the Druid through an interpreter.

| | |
|---|---|
| Gothic chieftain: | Si ce druide refuse mes propositions, je serai très contrarié, Cloridric, je ferai tuer le druide et toi avec, compris?! |
| Interpreter: | Ou … oui |
| Gothic chieftain: | Demande-lui s'il accepte de mettre sa magie à notre service … |
| Interpreter: | Acceptes-tu de mettre ta magie à notre service? |
| Druid: | Jamais! |
| Interpreter: | Peut-être … |
| Gothic chieftain: | Qu'il réponde par oui ou par non! |
| Interpreter: | Oui ou non? |
| Druid: | NON! |
| Interpreter: | OUI! |
| Gothic chieftain: | Parfait! Et quand va-t-il nous montrer sa magie? |
| Interpreter: | Dans une semaine, à la pleine lune. |

(Goscinny & Uderzo 1963: 26)

Cloridric translates his chieftain's questions correctly. However, he has his own agenda and, besides, he is afraid of being punished if he does not give Téléféric the

answers he expects. Although the Druid outright refuses to give away his recipe, the interpreter, in trying to save his own skin, willfully mistranslates the Druid's answers and makes his chieftain believe that he will receive the magic formula during the night of the next full moon. His scheme fails, however, because the Druid understands Gothic, and he gets duly punished.

Again, we may ask whether something like this could happen – or has actually happened – in real life? Do we know of interpreters purposefully distorting the message because they had their own agenda or held a grudge against one of the parties? Historical records show that there have indeed been interpreters who were found guilty of duplicity and deceit. Probably the best known example is that of Felipillo, one of Pizarro's interpreters during the conquest of Peru, "a malicious youth, as it appears, who bore no good-will to Atahuallpa, and whose interpretations were readily admitted by the conquerors, eager to find some pretext for their bloody reprisals." (Prescott 1979: 944).

Felipillo was detected of having had an affair with one of the royal concubines and was consequently despised by the Inca ruler. When he learned about the monarch's feelings towards himself, he regarded him with deadly hatred (Kurz 1991: 4) and contributed to Atahualpa's death by deliberately misinterpreting Pizarro's messages as well as Indian witnesses' testimony during the Inca ruler's trial:

> A number of Indian witnesses were examined, and their testimony, filtrated through the interpretation of Felipillo, received, it is said, when necessary, a very different coloring from that of the original. (Prescott 1979: 973)

Atahualpa was found guilty of conspiring against the Spanish and was sentenced to death. Ultimately, Felipillo paid for his crimes and was hanged " – when, as some say, he confessed having perverted testimony given in favor of Atahuallpa's innocence, directly against the monarch." (Prescott 1979: 981)

## A case of manipulation everyone will applaud

The Italian film *Life is Beautiful/La vita è bella* (Benigni 1997) won both the Academy Award for best original dramatic score and best foreign language film in 1999. Roberto Benigni also won the Oscar for Best Actor. The film tells the story of Guido, a Jewish Italian who must employ his fertile imagination to help his family during their internment in a Nazi concentration camp. Guido hides his son from the Nazi guards, sneaks him food and tries to humor him. He does not speak a word of German, but volunteers to interpret the German guard's explanation of the camp's rules.

| | |
|---|---|
| German guard: | Alles herhören, ich sage das nur einmal. |
| Guido: | The game starts now: whoever is here is here, whoever is not is not. |
| German guard: | Ihr seid nur aus einem einzigen Grund in dieses Lager transportiert worden – |
| Guido: | The first one to get 1,000 points wins. The prize is a tank! |
| German guard: | Um zu arbeiten. |
| Guido: | Lucky him! |
| German guard: | Jeder Versuch der Sabotage wird mit dem sofortigen Tode bestraft. Die Hinrichtungen finden auf dem Hof durch Schüsse in den Rücken statt. |
| Guido: | Every day we'll announce who's in the lead from that loudspeaker. The one with the least points has to wear a sign saying "jackass" right here on his back. |
| German guard: | Ihr habt die Ehre, für unser großes deutsches Vaterland arbeiten zu dürfen und am Bau des Großdeutschen Reiches teilzunehmen. |
| Guido: | We play the part of the real mean guys. Whoever's scared loses points. |
| German guard: | Drei Grundregeln solltet Ihr nie vergessen. Erstens: versucht nicht zu fliehen. Zweitens: folge jedem Befehl. Drittens: Jeder Versuch eines Aufstandes wird mit dem Tod durch Erhängen bestraft. Ist das klar? |
| Guido: | You'll lose your points for three reasons. One: if you cry, two: if you want to see your mommy, three: if you're hungry and you want a snack. Forget about it! |
| German guard: | Ihr solltet glücklich sein, hier arbeiten zu dürfen. Es wird niemandem was geschehen, der die Vorschriften befolgt. |
| Guido: | It's easy to lose points for being hungry. Just yesterday I lost forty points because I absolutely had to have a jam sandwich. |
| German guard: | Gehorsamkeit ist alles. |
| Guido: | Apricot! |
| German guard: | Und noch etwas: |
| Guido: | He wanted strawberry. |
| German guard: | Bei diesem Pfiff, alles raus auf den Hof, aber schnell! |
| Guido: | Don't ask for any lollipops, you won't get any. We eat them all! |
| German guard: | Antreten in Zweierreihe. |
| Guido: | I ate twenty of them yesterday! |
| German guard: | Schweigt! |
| Guido: | What a stomach ache … |
| German guard: | Jeden Morgen … |
| Guido: | But they sure were good. |

| | |
|---|---|
| German guard: | … ist Appell. |
| Guido: | You bet. |
| German guard: | So, eines muss ich euch noch sagen. Dort hinten werdet ihr arbeiten. Ihr werdet die Dimensionen des Lagers leicht begreifen. |
| Guido: | Sorry if I'm going too fast, but I'm playing hide and seek. I have to go now or they'll find me. (Benigni 1997: 73'01–75'31) |

Of course, the movie is not about interpreting at all. However, this brief "interpreting" scene – one of the most moving ones in the entire film – is crucial for the development of the story. Guido is not an interpreter and does not intend to be one. His "interpretation" of the German guard's explanation of the camp's rules is not addressed to the speaker's target audience, i.e. the other inmates of the concentration camp, but solely to his son. Guido admirably manages to imitate the speaker's intonation as well as his facial expression and gestures so that the guard, who does not understand a word of what his "interpreter" is saying, does not suspect anything. Although Guido's fellow inmates are confused by what they are hearing, they play along with him. Through his unorthodox "interpretation", or rather the invention of a suitable story, he convinces his son that the camp is just a game in which the first person to win a thousand points wins a tank.

Although, at a first glance, this scenario looks completely unrealistic, Guido might indeed have stood a chance of being appointed a *Lagerdolmetscher* (camp interpreter). The official language in all Nazi concentration camps was German. All orders and directions were delivered in German, but the inmates represented between 35–40 different national or ethnic groups, each of them having their own language. Thus, interpreters were needed. According to Małgorzata Tryuk, who studied the records of prisoners in the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, *Lagerdolmetscher* (camp interpreters) were prisoners who had indicated that they had a knowledge of German. "Camp interpreters were either assigned ex officio or selected from the groups of prisoners." (Tryuk 2010: 136) One of their duties was to be active during the arrival of new prisoners at the camp when they had to interpret the "camp welcoming ceremonies" (Tryuk 2010: 134). Tryuk gives a fascinating account of camp interpreters' complex duties and roles and the attempts of some of them to ease the hardship of other prisoners, thereby often risking their own lives. She points out that there were no codes of conduct or norms regulating their work:

> […] the generally accepted deontological norms for interpreting in community settings were not applicable to concentration camps, and different norms were adopted which were clearly justified, under the circumstances. (2010: 15)

She concludes by saying,

> Camp interpreters were not, and could not remain unbiased, neutral observers of the reality in which they were required to interpret. In no other situation has an interpreter played such a deeply human role. (2010: 143)

## Failing the client owing to lack of skills

Despite the efforts of interpreting schools, professionals and professional organizations to dispel the idea that it suffices to have some knowledge of a foreign language in order to translate or interpret, there is still a widely held belief that anyone familiar with a language other than his/her mother tongue is a natural interpreter and therefore qualified for this job. This reality is also reflected in works of fiction. A beautiful illustration of how an interpreter who clearly lacks adequate linguistic skills nevertheless manages a tricky situation with chutzpah is Todd Hasak Lowy's *The Task of This Translator* (2005). For a discussion of this story cf. Apostolou (in this volume). However, an interpreter with insufficient command of linguistic and translatorial skills may leave their clients in a state of utter perplexion as shown in Sofia Coppola's movie *Lost in Translation* (2003). Starring Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson the film was a major success and was nominated for four Academy Awards.

Bob Harris, an aging American actor, is in Tokyo to shoot a commercial for a well-known brand of Japanese whiskey. The scene where he is being directed to shoot an advertisement for Suntory whiskey opens with a whispered Japanese conversation. We learn that an interpreter is needed. An interpreter is found. The director talks to Harris in Japanese telling him to look at the whiskey bottle, to express emotion as if the whiskey were an old friend, and suggests an analogy with Humphrey Bogart. He stresses the importance of the product and the slogan by making an emphatic gesture saying "Suntori time". The interpreter's rendering of this lengthy passage in Japanese is extremely brief. All she says is, "He wants you to turn, looking at camera." Harris' bemused comment is: "That's all he said?", to which the interpreter's answer is, "Yes, turn to camera." When Harris asks a short question, "Does he want me to turn from the right or from the left?", the interpreter comes up with a long-winded translation into Japanese, but then renders the director's explanation by simply saying, "Right side. And, uh, with intensity." Again, Harris is slightly bewildered. "Is that everything?" he asks. "It seemed like he said quite a bit more than that." (Coppola 2003: 8'31–9'51)

Given the rudimentary translation of the director's instructions, Harris is completely at a loss to understand what is going on in the language of the studio.

The interpreter is clearly incompetent and unable to bridge the linguistic and cultural divide, and the actor "is not so much lost in translation as lost for the want of translation".[2] (Cronin 2009: 84)

## Discussion and conclusions

With translation (including interpreting) being ubiquitous in the real world, it is not surprising that it has emerged as a theme or plot device in fiction. There has been a veritable upsurge in fictional representations of translators and interpreters in recent years. As Delabastita & Grutman (2005: 28) point out, "it is no coincidence that a a year after the resounding success of *Lost in Translation*, Hollywood brought out *The Interpreter*, hoping to cash in a second time on the translation theme." These fictional representations are attracting increasing levels of attention, indeed to the point that the "the fictional turn" in translation studies has recently begun to serve as a catch phrase (Delabastita 2009: 112). The growing awareness of the significance of translation in intercultural communication is also reflected in the changes of its fictional representation from simplistic and naïve portraits to questions about the translators' role, e.g. their potential power to distort and manipulate.

This chapter has focused on the portrayals of interpreters in 4 books and two movies. The examples discussed here show how these (fictional) interpreters have failed to provide a faithful interpretation for a variety of reasons, such as advocacy, interpreters' own agenda, incompetency, lack of linguistic/translatorial skills. They illustrate both willful and unintentional misinterpretation and slanting of the message. These scenarios were contrasted with real-life situations.

What is interesting is that the interpreters' infidelity is discovered only in two out of eight examples, viz. in *Astérix* (because the Druid understands the Gothic language), and in *Lost in Translation* (where the interpreter's incompetency is obvious). In all other instances the infidelity on the part of the interpreter goes unnoticed.

How could this happen? The answer is that listeners cannot assess the quality of interpretation services simply because they lack the understanding of the source language. Since the user cannot understand the original, he/she is unable to judge whether there is sense consistency. This leaves room for manipulation on the part of interpreters. Shlesinger (1997: 127) holds that "smooth delivery may create the false impression of high quality when much of the message may in fact be distorted or even missing," and Gile (1991: 127) maintains that users are not reliable judges of fidelity: they can assess the "packaging", but may not be able to asses fidelity.

2. For a comprehensive analysis see Cronin (2009), Baranowski (2009), Scherzler (2011).

These excerpts clearly show that interpreters can be central to the mechanics of the plot in many different ways and that they can truly make a difference. They are by no means automatic language converters, language computers or intelligent parrots but act as cultural mediators, helpers, gatekeepers and power brokers. They are what Cronin (2009: x) calls "agents" or "active presences" and clearly defy the notion of "invisibility" (Venuti 1995).

## References

### Primary sources

Benigni, R. 1997. *Life Is Beautiful (La vita è bella).* Translator of subtitles not credited. (DVD 121 min.). USA: Miramax Films.

Coppola, S. 2003. *Lost in Translation.* (DVD 97 min.) USA: Focus Features.

Cox, M. 1985. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: The Greek Interpreter.* TV series: Season 1, Episode 9. (VHS 50 min.). UK: MPI Media Group.

Doyle, A. C. 1987. "The Greek Interpreter." In *The Sherlock Holmes Mysteries. 22 Stories, Signet Classic,* 220–238. New York: Penguin Books.

Goscinny and Uderzo. 1963. *Astérix et les Goths.* Neuilly-sur-Seine: Dargaud.

Hasak-Lowy, T. 2005. "The Task of This Translator." In *The Task of This Translator,* 149–177. Orlando etc.: Harcourt.

Kim, S. 2003. *The Interpreter.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Marías, J. 1995. *A Heart so White* (translated from the Spanish by Margaret Jull Costa). London: Harvill.

### Secondary sources

AIIC – Association internationale des interprètes de conférence. 2009. Code of Professional Ethics. Available at: http://aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article24.htm (last accessed 30 April 2012).

Anderson, R. B. W. 1976. "Perspectives on the Role of the Interpreter." In *Translation: Applications and Research,* R. W. Brislin (ed.), 208–228. New York: Gardner Press.

Baranowski, M. 2009. *Professionalität von Berufsdolmetschern in Spielfilmen.* Unpublished MA thesis, University of Vienna, Vienna.

Barsky, R. F. 1996. "The Interpreter as Intercultural Agent in Convention Refugee Hearings." *The Translator* 2 (1): 45–63.

Cronin, M. 2009. *Translation goes to the Movies.* London/New York: Routledge.

Déjean Le Féal, K. 1990. "Some Thoughts on the Evaluation of Simultaneous Interpretation." In *Interpreting – Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (ATA Scholarly Monograph Series IV), D. Bowen & M. Bowen (eds.), 154–160. Binghamton (NY): SUNY.

Delabastita, D. & Grutmann, R. 2005. "Introduction. Fictional representations of multilingualism and translation." In *Fictionalising Translation and Multilingualism*, D. Delabastita & R. Grutman (eds.), *Linguistica Antverpiensia 4*: 11–34.

Delabastita, D. 2009. "Fictional representations." In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies,* M. Baker (ed.), 109–112. London: Routledge.

Gile, D. 1991. "A Communication-Oriented Analysis of Quality." In *Translation: Theory and Practice. ATA Scholarly Monograph Series 5,* M. L. Larson (ed.), 188–200. Binghamton (NY): SUNY.

Gile, D. 1995. *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training.* Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Grbić, N. 2005. "Selbst blaue Augen haben ihren Preis. Eine Dolmetscherin zwischen den Kulturen. Suki Kims *The Interpreter*." In I. Kurz & K. Kaindl (eds.) (2005), 49–58.

Herbert, J. 1952. *Manuel de l'interprète. Comment on devient interprète de conferences.* [Engl.: The interpreter's handbook. How to become a conference interpreter] Genève: Librairie de l' Université Georg.

Keratsa, A. 2005. "Court interpreting: features, conflicts and the future." *Translatum Journal 5.* Available at: http://www.translatum.gr/journal/5/court-interpreting.htm (last accessed 26 August 2012).

Kolb, W. 2005. "'I am Alexander Perchov. I am your humble translator.'" Der nicht immer bescheidene Held. Jonathan Safran Foers *Everything is illuminated*." In I. Kurz & K. Kaindl. (eds.) (2005), 59–66.

Kurz, I. 1991. "The interpreter Felipillo and his role in the trial of the Inca ruler Atahualpa." *The Jerome Quarterly* 6/4: (3–4), 11.

Kurz, I. 2005. "Einsatz unter Lebensgefahr." Sir Arthur Conan Doyles *Der griechische Dolmetscher*. In I. Kurz & K. Kaindl (eds.) (2005), 137–142.

Kurz, I. 2007. "The fictional interpreter." In *Interpreting Studies and Beyond. A Tribute to Miriam Shlesinger,* F. Pöchhacker, A. L. Jakobsen & I. M. Mees (eds.), 277–289. Copenhagen Studies in Language. Copenhagen: Samfundslitteratur Press.

Kurz, I. 2010. "'Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten?' Dolmetscher wider Willen. Kurt Vonneguts 'Der arme Dolmetscher' und Todd Hasak-Lowys 'The Task of This Translator'". In *Machtlos, selbstlos, meinungslos? Interdisziplinäre Analysen von ÜbersetzerInnen und DolmetscherInnen in bellestristischen Werken,* K. Kaindl & I. Kurz (eds.), 201–208. Berlin/ Wien: LIT.

Lawlor, V. 1995. *I Was Dreaming to Come to America. Memories from the Ellis Island Oral History Project.* Viking: Penguin Group (USA).

Mikkelson, H. 2000. *Introduction to Court Interpreting.* Manchester/Northampton: St. Jerome Publishing.

Prescott, W. H. 1979. *History of the Conquest of Mexico and History of the Conquest of Peru.* The Modern Library. New York: Random House Inc.

Roberts, R. B. 1993. "Community Interpreting in North America." In *Translation – the Vital Link. Proceedings of the XIIIth World Congress of FIT,* C. Picken (ed.), 239–252. London: Institute of Translation and Interpreting.

Scherzler, T. 2011. "Dokumentarfilm vs. Spielfilm: Dolmetscher als Protagonisten." In *Interpretes Mundi – Deuter der Welt,* D. Andres & M. Behr (eds.), 269–293. München: Weidenbauer.

Shlesinger, M. 1997. "Quality in Simultaneous Interpreting." In *Conference Interpreting: Current Trends in Research,* Y. Gambier & D. Gile & C. Taylor (eds.), 123–131. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Tryuk, M. 2010. "Interpreting in Nazi concentration camps during World War II." *Interpreting* 12 (2): 125–145.
Venuti, L. 1995. *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*. London/New York: Routledge.
Viaggio, S. 2005. "Die Hirngespinste des Javier Marías oder: Die Ungeheuerlichkeiten, die man über uns zu hören bekommt. Javier Marías' *Mein Herz so weiß*." German translation: H. Lamberger-Felber & R. Schwarz. In I. Kurz & K. Kaindl (eds.) (2005), 127–136.

# Interpreting conflict

## Memories of an interpreter

Marija Todorova
Hong Kong Baptist University

### Introduction

Memories of war and violent conflict are told and retold in movies, novels and poetry. Narrating memory is one of the social functions of literature and film and one of the central questions of memory studies. The possibilities are limitless when it comes to literary representations of the memories of violent history, such as war, terror, and genocide. Still, we rarely hear the voice of the interpreters in creating such memories. Condemned by their prescribed 'invisibility' and neutrality, their side of the story remains untold. As Stahuljak (1999: 44) puts it, "[t]he transmission of history erases the traces of the medium of its transmission and of the history of the medium."

Recently, however, a number of linguist's memoirs have started to appear from different war zones around the world. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter* (2011) by Ludmila Ulitskaya is based on the life of Oswald Rufeisen, the real Brother Daniel, a Carmelite monk, who miraculously survived the Holocaust by working in the Gestapo as a translator during the Second World War. *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur* (2008) was written by Daoud Hari, who decided that he would "use his brains and not a gun to make a better life" and whose skill at languages allowed him to work as a translator and guide for Westerners on fact-finding trips across the border into Darfur. *Baghdad Bound: An Interpreter's Chronicles of the Iraq War* (2006) by Mohamed Fadel Fahmy offers the memoirs of an interpreter caught in the midst of the Iraq war.

A more recent book, published in Belgrade, is *The Girl from Bondsteel* (2011) by Tanja Janković. The book's main protagonist, Dijana, talks about her life as an interpreter for the US troops deployed to Kosovo immediately after the war. In the following text I will focus on *The Girl from Bondsteel* – which does not in fact claim to be a memoir but does acknowledge elements of "autobiography" (the author herself was an interpreter at the U.S. military base in Kosovo) – as a means

of exploring the role of interpreters in war zones. It is these autobiographical elements, which as it will later be shown go beyond mere superficial resemblance, that allow this fictionalized representation of the work of an interpreter in a war situation to be looked at through the prism of contemporary research at the intersection of memory studies and translation studies.

Before proceeding with this particular example, it would be useful to briefly look into the lines of distinction between the genres of autobiography, memoir and fiction, which are often problematized and blurred in this book.

## Autobiography or fiction

Autobiography, as a style of writing about the "self-life", came to be classified as a genre only in the late eighteenth century. Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as "[a] retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (quoted by Anderson 2001: 2). According to Lejeune, in order for a work to be autobiography the author must implicitly state that the author and the protagonist are the same (cf. Anderson 2001: 3). The author depicts truths about himself/herself through his/her experiences and the way s/he describes them. The way in which the writer illustrates past events says much about "who he thinks he is" (Porter & Wolf 1973: 5). A memoir, on the other hand, may only tell the story of a finite span of time within the subject's life, and will usually focus more on the individual's memories, feelings, and experiences. These are not event- or fact-driven stories, but rather musings or expressions of the inner emotions of the subject. Memoirs may also combine historical fact with memories of the autobiographer.

A fictional autobiography is written from the point of view of a fictional character. The common identity of the protagonist and the author could be similar, but are not always identical. The self that the author constructs becomes a character within the story that may not be a completely factual representation of the author's actual past self (cf. Anderson 2001: 3). For this style of writing that blends characteristics of both fiction and autobiography, Serge Doubrovsky coined the literary term "autofiction". As Alex Hughes (2002: 569) notes:

> autofiction may be understood as a narrative modality that inhabits the referential space likewise colonized by autobiography proper, but at the same time offers a patently enriched and treated, hence fictionalized, and metamorphotic, version of the life-story of the autofictionneur.

The difference between traditional autobiography and the genre of autofiction is that autobiographers are attempting to depict their real life while writers of autofiction are only basing their work upon real experiences. Writers of autofiction are not expected to be as historically accurate as possible as autobiographers are. Autofiction draws from the life of the writer with the addition of fictional elements to make the work more than just a life story.

Autobiography has always been a popular genre but recently we have witnessed increasing interest in it. Linda Anderson says that it is impossible to "decide once and for all about the status of autobiography as either truth or fiction" (Anderson 2001: 132). Literary scholars are intensely interested in memory-related issues, from several vantage points, including the accuracy of autobiographical fiction. Usually, these texts are written without the aid of diaries or notes, so their truthfulness (especially of such complex events as violent conflict) may be questioned. In addition, every part of the world has its own narrative and the preferred narrative forms for making sense of the history. There is also the aspect of memory itself. Characters in novels remember their past, so the memories created by the novelist must be realistic, neither too vague nor too specific. And of course novelists draw upon their own memories of events to create the new events, much as individuals do when imagining the future. That is, just as many of the same brain mechanisms that are involved in remembering the past are used in envisioning the future (cf. Szpunar & Watson & McDermott 2007), so too novelists use their memories and knowledge from past experience when creating imagined lives and events in their novels:

> [R]emembrance [means] to insist on specifying agency, on answering the question who remembers, when, where and how? And on being aware of the transience of rememberance, so dependent on the frailties and commitments of the men and women who take the time and effort to engage in it. (Winter 2006: 3)

Narratives of war have often been subject of autobiographical accounts. Daniel Schacter (2002: 9) observes that our memories are not photographic, producing snapshots of the past. Instead, our memory recreates and reconstructs

> our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes in the process of reconstructing we add feelings, believes or even knowledge we obtained after the experience. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotions or knowledge we acquired after the event.

Let us now take a look at how these issues play out in Tanja Janković's novel, *The Girl from Bondsteel*. Written after leaving Kosovo in 2004 to work as a full-time journalist in Belgrade, Janković's first book claims to be a fictionalized account of the time she spent at Camp Bondsteel, the main base of the United States Army

under KFOR[1] command in Kosovo. *The Girl from Bondsteel* is a thrilling adventure story interwoven with a forbidden romance between two young people on the two different sides of what leading politicians and elites instrumentalized as an ethnic conflict. Dijana closely resembles the author, Tanja Janković, in many aspects: They have both worked as interpreters in Bondsteel when they were about twenty years old. They are both of Serbian sociocultural background, and both have been born in Vranje. They have studied political sciences in Belgrade, spent time in South Africa and started working at the Bujanovac press-centre upon return to their homeland. In an interview given on TV B92's morning programme 'Novo Jutro' from 29 July 2011, the author insisted that the novel was narrated from the perspective of a fictional protagonist (cf. TV B92 2011). However, in another presentation of the book in the TV programme 'Dobro Jutro' at TV Pink on 26 July 2011, she mentioned that the book was based on her 3-year experience of serving as an interpreter in Kosovo (cf. TV Pink 2011). We can also compare the novel with a short piece penned by the author for "Press online" on 3 January 2009, entitled "All the secrets of Bondsteel", where she writes in first person and uses her own name. Events described in this short piece closely resemble parts of the novel (cf. Press online 2011). We may conclude that this fictional work then, loosely based on the author's life, is an example of autofiction.

## Interpreters at war

Narrated by the character of the Serbian interpreter Dijana, this book provides a rather realistic picture about the life of an interpreter in a war situation. Inghilleri & Harding (2010: 166) offer a detailed typology of the roles translators and interpreters can take in zones of war conflict. They include "civilian interpreters hired by the military for their language and cultural skills, local hire 'fixers' who work with international journalists and military 'linguists' who operate in a dual capacity as interpreter and soldier are directly involved in the quotidian events and outcomes of war." Their level of involvement in the conflict can range from direct participation in combat, or the witnessing of the significant loss of life, often involving risking their own lives, to operating at a greater distance from the immediate physical violence of war (e.g. translating war propaganda or intelligence data, interpreting in courts or elsewhere for victims and perpetrators, or translating war literature.)

1. The Kosovo Force (KFOR) is a NATO-led international peacekeeping force in Kosovo (cf. KFOR 2012).

Those who participate in wars and post-conflict peacekeeping operations as interpreters respond to the rules of supply and demand. They are rarely professional interpreters and often end up playing that role by chance, simply because of the virtue of having a functional knowledge of the languages involved. Dijana, just like the book's author herself, studied political science and used to work at the International Press Centre in Bujanovac. After sending her CV to TRW, a company recruiting interpreters to work with the American troops in the Balkans, and completing a series of tests to demonstrate she "wasn't a spy [and] knew English," Dijana finds she has a job, thanks to her skills and the fact that Erik, one of the TRW supervisors, has a crush on her. "With all these qualifications, in not more than ten days, she found herself at Bondsteel. Position – interpreter, and with a salary high enough to tell everyone: 'Bother you all! I am quitting school!'"[2] (Janković 2011: 71).

Dijana is said to enjoy her role because of the possibilities to meet high political and military officials, to be in "the centre of the action". She takes an active role, not only during performing her duties as an interpreter, but when she is off duty as well: She makes immense efforts that go well beyond her position to make sure her injured friend Suki is provided with the proper medical help. The book also offers information about other interpreters and their working conditions, motivations, and different treatment. Macedonian male interpreters are shown going to shooting practice together with the soldiers; girls from Albania are said to be working as interpreters with the ultimate hope of becoming "American brides"; interpreters with American citizenship reportedly earn "three times more than local interpreters, and […] [are] protected like polar bears" (Janković 2011: 138). We learn how they live, what they do for fun, how they socialize.

Locating a linguistic mediator at the very center of the narrative allows Janković to explore the liminality and unique positioning of the interpreter vis-à-vis the parties in the conflict, as well as the professional principles of neutrality and lack of involvement in the conflict. Baker (2006: 26) has observed that translators and interpreters in conflict situations are always "firmly embedded in a series of narratives that define who they are and how they act in the world". Moreover, she argues, they cannot "escape responsibility for the narratives they elaborate and promote through their translating and interpreting work". Angelelli notes that the interaction between the self and the other during the interpreted communicative event is influenced by a number of social factors, including age, gender, sociocultural group, class, etc. She goes on to ask:

2. All translations from Serbian into English are mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

> Why is it that interpreters, powerful individuals who have occupied center stage since the origins of cross-cultural communication, have traditionally been portrayed (and even more importantly, have allowed themselves to be portrayed) as mere language conduits, invisible parties in the communicative event, deprived of agency, yet capable of performing complex linguistic and information processing tasks? More pointedly, why do we assume that all interpreters, regardless of their own individual differences or the social interaction within which they work, play their roles in the same way? (Angelelli 2004: 1)

Questioning the validity of the principle of interpreters' neutrality and invisibility, Angelelli argues in favor of a more nuanced view of the role of interpreters. She notes the discrepancy between the prescribed interpreters' role and their work in practice, where they bring their self in the process of interaction, and where the settings in which they work and the people they work with introduce a set of constraints and needs on the communicative events they facilitate:

> Until now the interpersonal role has not been problematized. Instead it has been assumed to be that of a neutral and accurate language converter. …Some interpreters believe that this invisibility is plausible, while others […] perceive their role as powerful and visible, seemingly acknowledging the agency they possess. (Angelelli 2004: 3)

Newmark (1991: 41) writes that in the future translators "must be seen as key figures in promoting better understanding among peoples and nations. […] They have the authority to mediate between parties, and they have their own responsibility to moral as well as factual truth". The basic role of interpreters is to facilitate communication, but the role of interpreters in conflict situations and third party interventions likely demands more than the usual responsibilities and skills employed by interpreters in other situations: They need be more sensitive to the background situation, emotions, and able to sense perceptions and feelings. They also need to help create trust, open communication, to understand cultural differences and emotions. In Janković's book, her protagonist refers precisely to these qualities when she describes herself as a "highly adaptable person" (Janković 2011: 61) with diplomatic skills. To a certain degree, it can be said that these skills are required of interpreters in most given situations, with the difference being their heightened importance and even the possibility of fatal consequences when these skills lack in situations of conflict mediation.

According to Fisher (2011: 5ff) mediation is a political process in which the sides to a conflict accept one or more third parties which are not involved in the conflict, which enjoy the trust of the conflicting parties and are considered potential supporters to the overcoming of the impasse caused by reaching a dead

end in the conflict. Mediation can be official and unofficial. Official mediation is based on a mediation mandate, and agreement on such issues as the rules of participation. Unofficial mediation activities usually include dialogue and problem resolution workshops, as well as local mediation by internal mediators. The result achieved by a successful mediation is accepted and acknowledged by the parties to the conflict. In any case, there can be no mediation without communication, and thus communication is an indispensable factor to the success of the mediation mission, regardless whether it entails concluding high-level international agreements, which involve professional mediators and professional interpreters, or field negotiations between members of the armed forces or humanitarian organizations and the local population, which involve hiring local language assistants. Dijana often finds herself in the position of serving as an unofficial mediator. Thus, in the beginning she attempts to make the foreigners realize that not all Serbs are chauvinists and war criminals and simultaneously she tries to explain to the local Serbs that not all foreigners are spies (Janković 2011: 61).

However, by the end of the novel, Dijana finds herself in a completely different situation. Abandoning her liminal position, she takes up a side, and decides to "[…] risk her job, […] falsely translating and telling them [the Serbian population] what she was not supposed to tell […]" (Janković 2011: 147)

In the aftermath of the violent conflict in Kosovo, the practice of translation could have easily been seen by the two parties involved in the conflict as an either/or situation: collaboration/complicity with the 'enemy' or potential ally demonstrating a form of resistance. However, it might also involve serving the dominant English language while simultaneously finding an opportunity to manipulate and undermine it. Dijana operates in this liminal, seemingly contradictory zone, but her identification within the Serbian community is not as an ally. Instead, even though she abandons her prescribed neutrality and sides with the Serbians, Dijana is perceived by the local Serbian population in Kosovo as a collaborator with their 'enemy', and therefore ultimately a traitor to her own sociocultural group:

> She took their [Serbian local community] side and against the Americans even when they were wrong, but only now, at this protest, she knew they will always see her as a traitor who works for the occupier and that they will never forgive her for living at a military base with 5.000 soldiers. She was politically and ethically undesirable. (Janković 2011: 145)

This situation was echoed by the book's author in an interview with the Southeast European Times on 15 August 2011, in which Janković recalled her own experience as an interpreter in Kosovo:

> They [i.e., the American soldiers] defended me from my own nationals! That was one of my most difficult moments in Kosovo. The Serbs in Strpce [a Kosovo Serb enclave] protested against UNMIK's[3] decision to terminate their escort. The situation was out of control and the Serbs burned the police station in Strpce, attacked the soldiers, stones were flying in all directions. I tried to protect myself so I told them not to throw stones at me because I was 'theirs'.
>
> They became more evil after hearing my words, shouting that I had sold myself to the United States and should be ashamed that I worked for the occupiers. They were so enraged against me that the soldiers had to lock me in one of the armoured vehicles until it was all over. It was horrible.
>
> (Southeast European Times 2011)

Despite such resentment from her own sociocultural community, Dijana maintains the belief that she is ultimately helping them through her work as an intermediary:

> Although some of them called Dijana 'an American whore and a spy', she understood the importance of the interpreter in situations like this. She knew that her presence will alleviate their position, that she could warn them, or just encourage them, and this could mean a lot to them. (Janković 2011: 146)

Inghilleri (2008) has discussed the ethical conflict for an interpreter that arises when a code of (professional) ethics is contradicted by the political, military and social conditions on the ground; the local translator/fixer is caught between two power differentials in a physical conflict, risking his or her life and identity. In one sign of a paradigm shift, the concepts of interventionism, hybridity and translational transnationalism have been appropriated and modified in research on the way interpreters function in situations of conflict. Textual interventionism has aligned well with recent studies of interventionism and activism in political, military, medical and legal interpreting (cf. Baker 2006, 2009; Inghilleri 2005; Munday 2008; Stahuljak 2010; Wadensjö 1998). These studies recognize that interpreters take an active socio-linguistic role in the interpreting process; and that their intervention is often culturally and ethically necessary. Interpreting research has also lent support to the view that the concept of interculturality, which places the translator firmly *within* a language and culture, may be more accurate than hybridity, which tends to position the translator as *between* them (cf. Pym 2001, Tymoczko 2003):

> Therefore, the responsibility of translation that she [the translator] assumes in becoming a translator in and of the war puts her in the position which is neither strictly political or national nor entirely 'neutral' and 'objective'. It is this in-between space of the translator's responsibility that is very hard to define.
>
> (Stahuljak 1999: 47)

3. United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (cf. UNMIK 2012).

The established code of ethics for interpreters continually prescribes their neutrality: that they need to stay invisible in the process of interpreting. As a counterpoint to the 'neutralist' narrative, 'interventionist interpreting' becomes a potential site not only to legitimate the identity of a minor, peripheral culture, but also that of the interpreter him/herself. From an interventionist viewpoint, the focus is increasingly on the issue of the translator's ethical and political responsibility. As Baker (2008: 102) points out regarding interpreters' responsibility:

> [T]ranslators and interpreters are unavoidably and actively involved and connected to issues of responsibility towards others, regardless whether this involves real situations of judicial, political, military, or ideological conflict, or through representation of such situations in fictional accounts which they translated. From this position, they get to experience firsthand the tension between self-preservation and the real or symbolic violence over others.

Interpreters' interventions during the communicative interactive process can be spontaneous – similar to 'immediate coping', a strategy of situational response to avoid rigidity in the ever-shifting context of interpretation where abstract ethical rules of interpreting no longer apply (cf. Monacelli & Punzo 2001: 280) – as well as calculated, in situations of relative calm when interpreters are consulted more as local informants and fixers than as interpreters. Interpreters in these situations retain the original testimony intact, but supplement it with their own whenever the opportunity arises.

## Conclusion

Tanja Janković's semi-autobiographical work of fiction offers insight into the unique positioning of the interpreter as a mediator between two sides in a violent conflict, while at the same time exposing the full precariousness of that position during, as well as around the actual linguistically mediated encounter. It is an account of how an interpreter copes with the difficult situation of being the "in between"; balancing between the two sides in the conflict, the Serb and the Albanian; but also the third party, that of the American troops protecting the fragile peace and arriving to Kosovo with their preset perceptions. The novel's main protagonist Dijana is nothing of the neutral and invisible interpreter one is served as a model in interpreter's training. She is an agent: Outspoken, not afraid to offer her opinion to her supervisors, she takes initiative and acts. She "cannot but give her judgment at the end" (Janković 2011: 27). Dijana's "frankness and amiability" (Janković 2011: 128) at the end of the day gains her the sympathy of her high-ranking army employers. The question may be raised as to whether The Girl from Bondsteel's underlying motivation is to serve as a justification of the author's

problematic relationship with her own sociocultural community. But whether or not her decisions and actions are ultimately ethical requires a much broader interpretative framework than the narrow agentless positioning of the interpreter offered by theories prescribing her/his impartiality and neutrality and focused on accuracy and faithfulness. What we can say for certain is that the text does indeed bear witness to the many different roles an interpreter assumes during her work and life in a military camp, the difficult decisions she is required to make on a daily basis, and the problematic nature of her allegiances that result from that process.

Janković's narrative can be seen as a testimony, however fictionalized, of the one actor in the translation process who is not usually allowed to give a first-person reflection on the process, but is relegated to the role of serving as the voice of others. This fictionalized testimony might even be one of the rare means available to the interpreters to present their story, provide their voice, and their memory of the history not as neutral viewers, but as active participants in the events.

## References

### Primary sources

Fahmy, M. F. 2006. *Baghdad Bound: An Interpreter's Chronicles of the Iraq War.* Victoria: Trafford Publishing.

Hari, D. 2008. *The Translator: A Tribesman's Memoir of Darfur*. London: Random House.

Janković, T. 2011. *Devojka iz Bondstila [The Girl from Bondsteel].* Beograd: Laguna.

Ulitskaya, L. 2011. *Daniel Stein, Interpreter.* Translated by Arch Tate. London: Overlook.

### Secondary sources

Anderson, L. R. 2001. *Autobiography: New Critical Idiom.* New York: Routledge.

Angelelli, C. V. 2004. *Revisiting the interpreter's role: A Study of conference, court, and medical interpreters in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Baker, M. 2006. *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. New York: Routledge.

Baker, M. 2008. "Ethics of Renarration – Mona Baker is Interviewed by Andrew Chesterman." *Cultus* 1 (1): 10–33.

Baker, M. (ed.). 2009. *Critical Readings in Translation Studies.* London & New York: Routledge.

Fisher, J. R. 2011. "Methods of Third Party Intervention." In *Advancing Conflict Transformation: The Berghof Handbook II,* Austin, Beatrix & Fischer, Martina & Giessmann, Hans J. (eds.). Opladen/Farmington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publ.

Hughes, A. 2002. "Recycling and Repetition in Recent French 'Autoficion': Marc Weitzmann's Doubrovskian Borrowings." *The Modern Language Review* 97 (3): 566–76.

Inghilleri, M. 2005. "Mediating zones of uncertainty: Interpreter agency, the interpreting habitus and political asylum adjudication." *The Translator* 11 (1): 69–85.

Inghilleri, M. 2008. "The Ethical Task of the Translator in the Geo-political Arena: From Iraq to Guantánamo Bay." *Translation Studies* 1 (2): 212–223.

Inghilleri, M. & Harding, S. 2010. "Translating Violent Conflict." *The Translator. Special Issue: Translation and Violent Conflict* 16 (2): 165–173.

KFOR – Kosovo Force. 2012. What is KFOR? Available at: http://www.nato.int/issues/kfor/index.html (last accessed 17 December 2012).

Monacelli, C. & Punzo, R. 2001. "Ethics in the fuzzy domain of interpreting: A 'military' perspective." *The Translator* 7 (2): 265–282.

Munday, J. (ed.). 2008. *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies.* London & New York: Routledge.

Newmark, P. 1991. *About Translation.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Porter, R. J. & Wolf, H. R. 1973. *The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Press online. 2011. Sve tajne Bondstila. Available at: http://www.pressonline.rs/arhiva/read/54962/SVE-TAJNE-BONDSTILA (last accessed 21 October 2012).

Pym, A. 2001. "Introduction: The Return to Ethics in Translation Studies." *The Translator* 7 (2): 129–138.

Schacter, D. L. 2002. *The Seven Sins of Memory: how the mind forgets and remembers.* New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Southeast European Times. 2011. Kod "Devojke iz Bondstila" radoznalost je nadjačala predrasude. Ivana Jovanović (15 August 2011). Available at: http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/sr_Latn/features/ setimes/articles/2011/08/15/reportage-01 (last accessed 4 September 2012).

Stahuljak, Z. 1999. "The Violence of Neutrality-Translators in and of the War [Croatia, 1991–1992]." *College Literature (Cultural Violence)* 26 (1): 34–51.

Stahuljak, Z. 2010. "Minor Empires Translation, Conflict, and Postcolonial Critique." *The Translator* 16 (2): 255–74.

Szpunar, K. K. & Watson, J. M. & McDermott, K. B. 2007. "Neural substrates of envisioning the future." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (USA)* 104: 642–647.

TV B92 – Novo jutro. 2011. Tanja Janković, autor knjige Devojka iz Bondstila (29/07/2011). Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqER2GTHKW0&feature=relmfu (last accessed 21 October 2012).

TV Pink – Dobro jutro. 2011. Devojka iz Bondstila (26/07/2011). Available at: http://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=Fiqbck_odOI&feature=relmfu (last accessed 21 October 2012).

Tymoczko, M. 2003. "Ideology and the Position of the Translator: In What Sense is a Translator 'In Between'?" In *Apropos of Ideology – Translation Studies on Ideology – Ideologies in Translation Studies*, María Calzada Perez (ed.), 181–201. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.

UNMIK – United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo. 2012. About UNMIK. Available at: http://www.unmikonline.org/Pages/about.aspx (last accessed 17 December 2012).

Wadensjö, C. 1998. *Interpreting as Interaction.* London: Longman.

Winter, J. 2006. *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the 20th Century.* Yale: Yale University Press.

# Truth in translation

## Interpreters' subjectivity in the truth and reconciliation hearings in South Africa

Alice Leal
University of Vienna

### Introduction

Jacques Derrida, in his essay/interview "Le Siècle et le Pardon", translated by Michael Hughes as "On Forgiveness", proposes a disconcerting paradox or aporia whereby "forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable". The Algerian-born philosopher later rephrases the paradox as follows: "forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself" (Derrida 2001: 32f). In his view, therefore, one can only truly forgive the unforgivable – because something easily forgivable does not even call for forgiveness in the first place. Chiefly referring to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa (more below), Derrida adds that forgiveness can be obtained only between victim and perpetrator. So the moment a third party is involved, one can no longer speak of forgiveness, but rather of "amnesty, reconciliation, reparation, etc." (Derrida 2001: 42).

With Archbishop Desmond Tutu at its forefront, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* was set up in 1995 in South Africa to deal with the crimes committed under apartheid law (cf. Anthonissen 2009: 101ff). Apartheid, as a legal system of racial segregation, was institutionalised by various National Party governments between 1948 and 1994 – even though systematic racism started far earlier and did not end in 1994 (Allen 2005: 3). By placing victims and perpetrators face to face and by allowing them to tell their version of their stories in their first language, the South African government expected to promote reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa, thus taking a step in the opposite direction of, for example, the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War. By 2001, over 22,000 cases had been processed and, after 1888 days of hearings, 849 amnesties were granted out of a total of 7125 applications (Marquardt 2007: 5).

Allowing victims and perpetrators to express themselves in their first languages was paramount to fostering truth and reconciliation. As Anthonissen

(2008: 166) explains, "[it] was intuited that speakers who were to relate or disclose sensitive, emotionally charged experiences could hardly do so in other than their first language", so as not to "limit the openness or spontaneity that the process of testifying would require". And so interpreters had to be engaged for the 11 languages spoken during the hearings, namely Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Sotho, Swazi, Tswana, Tsonga, Venda, Xhosa and Zulu. It is precisely the experience and the perspective of the interpreters engaged in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (henceforth TRC) that are in the spotlight in the musical *Truth in Translation*, a theatrical piece that premiered in Kigali, Rwanda, in August 2006 and has since toured various post-conflict zones, such as the Western Balkans, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, amongst many others (cf. Lessac & Masekela 2006a). In the present chapter, we will learn more about the TRC interpreters as they are portrayed in *Truth in Translation*, throwing light – as the subtitle suggests – on the issue of the translators' and interpreters' subjectivity.

## Truth in translation: "Can we forgive the past to survive the future?"

Directed by Michael Lessac, celebrated screenwriter, television and film director, and with original music by Hugh Masekela, "arguably South Africa's most distinguished musician" (Lessac & Masekela 2006b), *Truth in Translation* has a multicultural cast of just over a dozen musicians, actors and actresses. Lessac, who had recently established the Colonnades Theatre Lab-South Africa as a non-profit organisation to promote drama in South Africa, had been meaning to write a piece in which the notion of forgiveness was particularly overwhelming. That is when he came across the TRC. Having grown up in New York and being more familiar with fighting than with forgiving, he had his initial difficulties understanding what had happened in South Africa. However overwhelming he may have found the narratives that filled the hearings, he still could not quite grasp them. "It became apparent to me that something had happened here [in South Africa] that was extraordinary, but I couldn't understand it. It was something that was so human", Lessac admits. He then realised that the only way for him to tell the story was through the eyes of the interpreters (cf. Lessac & Masekela 2006c). Perhaps because he identified with them, torn between the viciously antagonistic sides involved in unspeakable crimes, trying to come to terms with the notion of forgiveness?

Convinced, at any rate, that the story of the TRC had to have the interpreters in the spotlight, Lessac gathered a number of TRC interpreters and filmed them brainstorming about their experiences in the amnesty hearings. He later held a

3-week workshop in Johannesburg with actors and actresses chosen at numerous auditions all over South Africa and worked, together with them, on the script for the musical. All songs and narratives are based on the actual transcriptions of the TRC hearings, along with local songs and poems. Altogether, preparations for the production took over three years (cf. Lessac & Masekela 2006d).

One of the lead characters in the musical is a journalist played by Andrew Buckland, whose task is to document the amnesty hearings. The true protagonists are nevertheless the interpreters, whom the audience get to know right in the opening scenes as they are hired to work at the TRC. As soon as they begin interpreting the horrific narratives that fill the hearings, they cannot help but become emotionally entangled – despite their 'mandate' not to become involved (see indented quotation below). In a nutshell, the musical portrays their struggle to comply with this mandate – as we can see in the musical's summary in its official webpage (Lessac & Masekela 2006d):

> They [the interpreters] translated simultaneously in the first person, with no time for thought and no option to turn away. Everything flowed through them – lies and truths, forgiveness and rage, pain and celebration. They absorbed everything without having the time to process what they were hearing and speaking until it came back to them in dreams, in their relations with each other [...]. Their mandate was to 'not become involved.' Their attempt to follow this mandate is their story. This struggle to remain impervious to what they witness, to use whatever they can find to keep them from self-destruction, leads to the growing awareness that they are not that different from the people for whom they interpret.

But in addition to telling this story through the interpreters' eyes, drawing inspiration both from the real interpreters' accounts and from the testimonies of victims and perpetrators, the *Truth in Translation* project also embodied a social dimension. Indeed, along with the staging of the musical itself, the cast held workshops to encourage the local populations – mostly from post-conflict zones – to discuss the issue of forgiveness. The question 'can we forgive the past to survive the future?' was at the heart of these debates, and so was the very notion of forgiveness. In Lessac's words, "[w]e are taking this play to conflict and healing zones around the world where people still live with, or still might not be able to let go of, thoughts of victimhood, entitlement, vengeance and denial" (quoted in Lewis 2007).

Another noteworthy aspect of this social project is the fact that, through these workshops, the cast became emotionally entangled with the local tragedies of the audiences to whom they performed, bringing them even closer to the real TRC interpreters' reality during the hearings. In other words, both the TRC interpreters and the cast of *Truth in Translation* were not to become involved with the narratives, not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of professionalism. Yet

both realised that this was easier said than done. In an article mostly on the cast of *Truth in Translation*, Maggie Jaruzel argues that "the most lasting impact [of the musical] might be upon the South African performers themselves." The actress Quanita Adams, for instance, explains that "[*Truth in Translation*] is about more than just acting. […] It's really about having the work live with you." On a similar note, another cast member, Nick Boraine, asserts that "[*Truth in Translation*] was so complex and came with a difficult mission to be away from my wife and home for so long. But it wasn't just the play. It was also doing the workshops and encouraging people to tell their personal stories." He goes on to ask, perplexed, "[q]uite frankly, how do you go back to frivolity after this?" (Jaruzel 2007).

Like the TRC, the play has been partially successful in its endeavour to promote truth and reconciliation. Although the musical has been critically acclaimed and celebrated all over the globe, there have been audiences less willing to discuss whatever atrocities were committed in their countries, perceiving any attempt to foster reconciliation as rubbing salt into their wounds (cf. Ross 2006). During the hearings, for example, there were numerous overt protests against the idea of reconciliation. One participant in a TRC youth hearing famously remarked, for example, that "[r]econciliation is only in the vocabulary of those who can afford it. It is non-existent to a person whose self-respect has been stripped away and poverty is a festering wound that consumes his soul" (quoted in Hatch 2009). There have nevertheless also been audiences who found the Truth and Reconciliation project a liberating opportunity to at long last lick their wounds (cf. Gardner 2007). Having toured 11 countries in three different continents, *Truth in Translation* is currently being adapted for the big screens and is expected to come out in 2013 (Lessac & Masekela 2006e).

## The interpreters: "You must not become involved!"

"You must not become involved" is the opening line of the theatrical production *Truth in Translation* (Lessac & Masekela 2006c). Watching the videos of the actual TRC interpreters brainstorming about their experiences, it becomes clear that this ("You must not become involved") proved to be greatest challenge of all. The interpreters refer to themselves as ideal 'pipes' through which information should freely flow but, in reality, feel more like 'sponges' absorbing everything that is being said. Anthonissen (2008: 180) asks, very aptly, "could the 'channel' remain untouched, uncontaminated?". Yet more significantly, the TRC interpreters feel like 'actors'. The parallel with acting is rather meaningful because, as the interpreters emphasise, it is up to actors and actresses to give life to narratives, to convey emotion through their tone of voice, to embrace that 'I' that speaks and make it

your own. At the amnesty hearings they were the 'actors and actresses' conveying those emotions. As one interpreter very aptly remarks, it was up to them to "make or break" the narratives (Lessac & Masekela 2006c). Şebnem Bahadır, for instance, sees interpreting as a sort of "dramatic performance", as "involvement and detachment", and applies a method of "interpreting enactments" to interpreter training (Bahadır 2011: 177f, 186; also cf. Bahadır 2010).

Indeed, interpreting in the first person, *acting*, turning into that 'I' that speaks, proved to be far more torturing than the interpreters could have anticipated. A particular TRC interpreter speaks of not being able to believe those horrid stories he was interpreting; another claims that, in order to be able to interpret in the first person, she had to picture the narratives, to play a little film in her head in which she was assigned the leading role; another explains that he did not need to imagine the stories of the perpetrators for whom he was interpreting as he had grown up surrounded by them. In fact, the environment was so emotionally charged that a few interpreters were famously reported not to have been able to cope (Lessac & Masekela 2006c).

Dealing with lies was also a major hurdle the TRC interpreters struggled to overcome. Khetiwe Mboweni-Marais, a TRC interpreter and herself a political activist during the apartheid era, found that interpreting perpetrators and putting up with their lies was almost unbearable:

> You had to identify with that person and say I did this or I did that. Some of the incidents we knew to be true through media reports or families or comrades. But they came there and completely denied it. You felt so angry you felt like punching them in the face while they were speaking, especially as that lie had to come through me, through my voice. (quoted in Ross 2006)

However, the difficulty was not solely restricted to putting up with lies, but also to coming to terms with the fact that the truth is multifaceted. Indeed, this particular issue comes across very clearly in the musical, as Lyn Gardner from *The Guardian* explains: In *Truth in Translation*, "we see [the interpreters'] increasing confusion as they realise that there are as many versions of the truth as there are languages spoken in South Africa" (Gardner 2007).

Based upon real interpreters' accounts such as the ones presented here, the musical stages the struggle surrounding this very challenge, i.e., "You must not become involved". Rather than passive, objective players or neutral 'pipes' through which information flows without impediment, the young interpreters in *Truth in Translation* are portrayed as active human mediators, actors and actresses that give life to narratives, individuals entitled to their own ideology, personal history and subjectivity. From the point of view of Translation Studies, it is as Anthonissen (2008: 167) puts it, referring to Anthony Pym and Miriam

Schlesinger: "The sociolinguistic identity of the translator/interpreter needs to be at least partially reconstructed if one is to understand the active role of an interpreter in the communication process." Ten years after the end of the hearings, Anthonissen analyses (in the same article) interviews made with TRC interpreters and remarks that "references to the emotional weight of the witness recount recur[red] at regular intervals, on almost every occasion that a new topic [was] introduced" (Anthonissen 2008: 173).

One must also take into account the fact that *Truth in Translation* is a musical, which heightens the emotional element. After all, many of the actual testimonies recorded in the transcripts of the hearings were turned into songs sung by the actors-interpreters. It is as David Lewis puts it: "song seems an appropriate and natural way of expressing emotions that are almost too complicated and painful for spoken words" (Lewis 2007). One of most poignant examples of this is perhaps the song Teddy Bear (original Hugh Masekela number based on testimony), which reads as follows (Lessac & Masekela 2006f: 20):

> Teddy bear (men x 4)
> Six men stormed into the house
> And blew off my husband's head
> My daughter cries in her sleep
> Wipe the blood from my father's face
> Father Christmas,
> Please bring me a smiling teddy bear
> My daddy is dead.

Quanita Adams (see previous section), who sings this particular song in the musical, admits that "I often can't open my eyes when I sing it. There are times I want to cry, but I can't because I have to go right into another scene" (quoted in Jaruzel 2007).

## The question of subjectivity: "Is the translator allowed to be a subject?"

In his 2001 *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities beyond Reason*, Douglas Robinson asks the audacious question, "Who translates? Who is the subject of translation? Is the translator allowed to be a subject, to have a subjectivity?" (Robinson 2001: 3). Indeed, this question is at the heart of *Truth in Translation*. Though one may understand the strongly emotional elements at play in a context like the TRC's, one still expects interpreters (and translators too, for that matter) to act professionally and perform objectively. But to what extent is this expectation realistic? Or rather to what extent is the issue of subjectivity a relevant issue in the first place?

When this chapter was presented at the University of Vienna in 2011, the reactions of the audience were quite diverse. While there were those who sympathised and empathised with the fictitious interpreters for their struggles in *Truth in Translation*, a few professional interpreters came forward to assert that subjectivity is not at all at play when one is truly professional. Indeed, Robinson argues that even though "modern translation theory has discredited the idea of the translator as passive conduit and vessel […], [this same] notion still persists today among many; and historically it is stronger still" (Robinson 2001: 15).

But rather than equate the presence of subjectivity with lack of professionalism, or the presence of objectivity with professionalism (as if the objective and the subjective could be perfectly separated from each other), it seems more interesting to discuss the issue of subjectivity in a postmodern light – very much in tune with the musical *Truth in Translation*. The fact that the interpreters' subjectivity is in the spotlight does not indicate that the fictitious interpreters are unprofessional. It rather shows that they are willing – rather, they are *forced* – to come to terms with their subjectivity. And the word *subjectivity* need not immediately evoke ideas such as *emotion, crying, moods*; let us rather concentrate (at least initially) on subjectivity as "internal reality", the fifth definition in *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* (1999). In fact, let us start by deconstructing the dichotomy subject versus object altogether, the basis of structuralist thought.

In Jacques Derrida's (1976/1997) *De la Grammatologie*, translated by Gayatri C. Spivak as *Of Grammatology*, the deconstruction of this dichotomy (and dichotomies in general, for that matter) is proposed in the following terms, explained in the translator's preface:

> The opposition of the subject and the object, upon which the possibility of objective descriptions rests, is also questioned by the grammatological approach. The description of the object is as contaminated by the patterns of the subject's desire as is the subject constituted by that never-fulfilled desire. We can go yet further and repeat that the structure of binary oppositions in general is questioned by grammatology. (Spivak 1976/1997: lix)

In other words, a pure division between objectivity and subjectivity is unfeasible, as is any pure division between the extreme poles of any dichotomy. In the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, Derrida's double-bind (cf. Derrida 1996: 26–31) is at work: When faced with a double knot, one may try to loosen one knot, but not without causing the other one to be tightened. Therefore, the lack of watertight opposition between the terms of the dichotomy subject-object does not allow one to 'purely' opt for one side instead of the other. As Spivak very aptly explains, "[t]he solution is not merely to say 'I shall not objectify.' It is rather to recognize at once that […] any distinction between 'subjectification'

and 'objectification' is as provisional as the use of any set of hierarchized oppositions" (Spivak 1976/1997: lix).

The issue of subjectivity has a special place in various philosophers' works, from Kant to Lévinas, from Descartes to Heidegger and Nietzsche. Jacques Derrida, albeit suspicious of a notion of subjectivity linked with a metaphysics of origin and (self-)presence, describes subjectivity as constituted by obligations towards *alterity*. Barry Stocker explains Derrida's notion of subjectivity as follows: "The relation between the self and its other is not an isolation of the self from its other, but rather changes the self that is shown to be impossible outside that relation, which exists within *subjectivity*" (Stocker 2006: 125, my emphasis). So hospitality, hostility and subjectivity go hand in hand, as Derrida asserts: "Comme hôte ou comme otage, comme autre, comme altérité pure, la subjectivité (…) doit être dépouillée de tout prédicat ontologique" (As host or hostage, as other, as pure alterity, subjectivity must be stripped of all ontological predicates – Derrida 1997: 191, my translation). In this sense, we are to understand subjectivity here *not* as the perfect opposite of objectivity; *not* as a set of moods and emotions; and *not* merely as "internal reality".

In Translation Studies and in adjacent areas, there have been a number of highly interesting contributions that place subjectivity in the spotlight and go beyond a merely dualistic approach – a movement that is conspicuous in *Truth in Translation*. Take, for instance, the Brazilian scholar Maria Paula Frota, whose PhD thesis, carried out under Rosemary Arrojo, was published in 2000 under the title *A Singularidade na Escrita Tradutora: Linguagem e Subjetividade nos Estudos da Tradução, na Linguística e na Psicanálise* (Singularity in Translational Writing: Language and Subjectivity in Translation Studies, Linguistics and Psychoanalysis). Drawing inspiration from psychoanalysis, Frota shows that language – and hence translation – is the *stage* for subjective singularities. 'Subjective' because, in part, they derive from one's unconscious and take place regardless of one's will, and 'singularities' because they go beyond the differences in the linguistic system and hence cannot be recognised as mistakes. Once the idea of 'subjective singularity' in translation and interpreting is embraced, the notions of objectivity, literal renderings, translators' invisibility and neutrality can be easily deconstructed.

In Literary Theory, critics like Stanley Fish have greatly contributed to a discourse that is well aware of the illusory character of dichotomies, particularly of the one in the spotlight in the present chapter. In "How to Recognize a Poem when you See One", for instance, Fish (1980: 332) explains that "the opposition between objectivity and subjectivity is a false one because neither exists in the pure form that would give the opposition its point". In an attempt to provide an answer to the question he asks in the title of his paper, Fish goes further and asserts that

> we do not have free-standing readers in a relationship of perceptual adequacy or inadequacy to an equally free-standing text. Rather, we have readers whose consciousnesses are constituted by a set of conventional notions which when put into operation constitute in turn a conventional, and conventionally seen, object. (Fish 1980: 332)

So, in other words, a reader-subject cannot have a pure relationship with a poem-object, because what constitutes the reader-subject will ineluctably have an impact on his/her perception (why not *constitution*?) of the poem-object. Not to mention the fact that, when subject comes in contact with object, it is likely that a part of that object will from then onwards constitute the subject, too – host and hostage, as Derrida might say.

Works such as these go beyond the dualistic approach still ever so popular in some areas of Translation Studies and show that dichotomies need not be abolished but rather questioned and deconstructed. So in this sense, instead of trying to write a straightforward reply to Robinson's question "Is the translator allowed to be a subject, to have a subjectivity?" I would rather propose a new question: Can the translator help but be a subject, but have a subjectivity? No s/he cannot, as the musical *Truth in Translation* clearly illustrates. And 'having a subjectivity' does not mean being less professional; in fact, it does not even imply that things are done differently once one acknowledges the role that one's subjectivity plays in one's work. Rather, being a subject and having a subjectivity means being willing to discuss the issue of subjectivity, it means heightening one's awareness of the role it plays. This is another reason why translators and interpreters who overtly allow themselves to 'be a subject' must not and cannot be deemed less professional than those who claim to be fully objective. In fact, those who are open about their subjectivity could actually be considered *more* professional, because they are clearly more *aware* of the forces at play when they translate and interpret. Anthonissen, for instance, referring to the abovementioned interviews with TRC interpreters, remarks that many expressed an "urge to intervene" or admitted that "it was easier to interpret when one had empathy with the speaker" (Anthonissen 2008: 179f). Such remarks illustrate the fact that those interpreters *are* subjects, allowed to have a *subjectivity*.

So before we end this section, let us go back to the questions asked above, namely to what extent is it realistic to expect translators and interpreters to be objective and to what extent is the issue of subjectivity a relevant issue in the first place? In light of the conclusions presented in the previous paragraph, the answer to the second question has to be (a paradoxical) 'yes and no'. It is relevant because it is unavoidable, because its impact influences one's choices, one's attitude, one's reactions. It is relevant and hence it must be incorporated into our translation and

interpreting manuals, it must be openly discussed in our translation and interpreting classes – but not in order to try and mitigate its impact. And precisely for this reason it can be deemed irrelevant. Because – back to the first question – it is not realistic to rule out subjectivity and even if we choose not to talk about it, it is still going to be there. It is irrelevant because, regardless of our conscious attitude towards it, it is going to play its role. The paradox or aporia is somewhat like the gradual infiltration of English vocabulary into numerous languages around the globe. It is relevant and a highly interesting research topic, but at the same time it is irrelevant because discussing it is not going to prevent it from happening.

## Back to forgiveness: "[It] must announce itself as impossibility itself"

Derrida suggests that we can only (try to) forgive the unforgivable, that only when forgiveness represents an impossibility, death, an insurmountable obstacle, can it be considered true forgiveness. Determining whether the TRC managed to foster forgiveness between the countless victims and perpetrators involved in the numerous crimes committed under apartheid law is far beyond the scope of this chapter (cf. Anthonissen 2009: 112–119). But perhaps we could use Derrida's typically paradoxical view on the issue of forgiveness and extend it to the issue of subjectivity in translation and interpreting.

The crimes committed during the apartheid era and the subsequent establishment of the TRC make up a rather extreme context, in which the call for forgiveness – to follow Derrida's thesis – could not be any greater, and the likelihood of it being genuinely granted, any lower. But also for the interpreters the TRC represented an extreme situation, and this is why *Truth in Translation* is about them. 'Extreme' because in comparison with other interpreting jobs they will have done here and there – presumably at conferences, hospitals and court rooms – nowhere (or hardly anywhere) was the atmosphere so emotionally charged. And, since we are at it, let us not forget the cast of *Truth in Translation*, for whom the entire project has also turned out to be a rather extreme experience in comparison with other acting jobs they had done in the past.

So since the atrocities committed under apartheid coupled with the amnesty hearings in South Africa constitute an extreme situation, the issue of forgiveness is also driven to extremes. And, from the point of view of the TRC interpreters and the cast of *Truth in Translation*, so is the issue of subjectivity. Because, as Derrida defends, it is relatively easy to forgive and forget when not much is at stake, when there is not much to pardon after all. In a similar fashion, it is relatively easy for interpreters to claim full objectivity when the context hardly intrudes upon one's subjectivity in a noticeable way.

Extreme, special situations such as these make the issues of forgiveness and subjectivity surface more violently. They help us to discuss these issues and understand their distinguishing features – no wonder Jacques Derrida used the TRC to draw up his very notion of forgiveness. They nonetheless also remind us of less extreme situations, of everyday situations, in which forgiveness and subjectivity still play their roles. Concentrating now on subjectivity in translation, it seems obvious that it might be easier to overlook the translators' and interpreters' subjectivity in less extreme settings, in everyday settings upon which we base our lectures and theories. But perhaps we could take advantage of these special situations to open the debate, to rethink our theories and practices – as Derrida does in his "On Forgiveness". In fact, this sort of reflection that stems from non-everyday situations appears to be at the heart of *Transfiction*, a space for rethinking translation and interpreting with the help of insight derived from fiction.

## Final remarks

The theatrical piece *Truth in Translation* makes the issues of forgiveness and subjectivity particularly conspicuous. Both share the forefront of the play, sometimes with the victims' and perpetrators' struggle to reconcile and sometimes with the interpreters' struggle to remain objective taking the spotlight. Associated with Derrida's notion of forgiveness, the issue of subjectivity acquires special meaning for us in Translation Studies. Extreme contexts, such as the TRC's in South Africa, make it evident that translators and interpreters *are* subjects with their own subjectivity, which in turn calls for a more critical attitude towards the hegemony of objectivity in Translation Studies.

Let us not forget that being *a subject* has little to do with being sentimental or performing less satisfactorily. It rather refers to the acknowledgement that ideology and personal history inevitably influence one's attitudes, choices and opinions. It presupposes that my subjectivity is made up of my relation to others, to alterity. Indeed, in her conclusions referring to the abovementioned interviews with TRC interpreters, Anthonissen (2008: 185) argues that when

> the content of the interpreted text is strongly emotional, interpreters are aware of the ambiguity that on the one hand they have to keep going and give a rendering that carries the literal and attitudinal meanings with integrity, while on the other hand they do have personal responses that cannot be completely suppressed or denied.

In this sense, a more critical attitude towards the hegemony of objectivity would entail overt debates on the issue of subjectivity and its effects; it would entail making room for subjectivity in our theories and models; it would entail searching for

traces of subjectivity in our students' attitudes and fostering awareness of these traces; it would entail openly accepting these subjective traces, these "subjective singularities" (Frota 2000) in our lectures and exams; it would entail, in summary, a suspicious attitude towards anything that claims to be objective, impartial and unbiased – *not* because being objective, impartial and unbiased is wrong, but because one cannot make such claims without considering the other side of the dichotomy, i.e. the subjective, the partial and the biased (double-bind). For Pöchhacker (2006), for example, the discipline of Interpreting Studies must, indeed, take its first steps in this very direction:

> The discipline of Interpreting Studies, which has been shaped by a particular conception of professional interpreting, is thus challenged to examine its role and positionality in an ideological perspective. The recent shift in the way the discipline conceptualizes interpreting opens up promising pathways in this direction.

## References


Allen, J. 2005. *Apartheid South Africa: An Insider's Overview of the Origin and Effects of Separate Development*. USA: iUniverse.

Anthonissen, C. 2008. "On Interpreting the Interpreter: Experiences of Language Practitioners Mediating for the TRC." *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 3: 165–188.

Anthonissen, C. 2009. "Considering the Violence of Voicelessness: Censorship and Self-Censorship Related to the South African TRC Process." In *Justice and Memory: Confronting Traumatic Pasts. An International Comparison,* R. Wodak & G. Auer Borea (eds.), 97–122. Vienna: Passagen Verlag.

Bahadır, Ş. 2010. *Dolmetschinszenierunge: Kulturen, Identitäten, Akteure*. Berlin: Saxa-Verlag.

Bahadir, Ş. 2011. "Interpreting Enactments: A New Path for Interpreting Pedagogy." In *Modelling the Field of Community Interpreting: Questions of Methodology in Research and Training,* C. Kainz & E. Prunč & R. Schögler (eds.), 177–210. Wien/Berlin: Lit Verlag.

Derrida, J. 1976/1997. *Of Grammatology*. Translated by G. C. Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, J. 1996. *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (transl. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. 1997. *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas.* Paris: Galilée.

Derrida, J. 2001. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (transl. Michael Hughes). London/New York: Routledge.

Fish, S. 1980. *Is there a Text in this Class? The Power of Interpretive Communities*. USA: Harvard University Press.

Frota, M. P. 2000. *A Singularidade na Escrita Tradutora: Linguagem e Subjetividade nos Estudos da Tradução, na Linguística e na Psicanálise.* Campinas: Pontes/Fapesp.

Gardner, L. 2007. "Truth in Translation." *The Guardian* (08/08/2007). Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2007/aug/08/theatre.edinburghfestival20071 (last accessed 22 October 2012).

Hatch, J. B. 2009. *Race and Reconciliation: Redressing Wounds of Injustice.* United Kingdom: Lexington Books.

Jaruzel, M. 2007. "'Truth in Translation' tour influences audiences… and cast." Mott News. Available at: http://www.mott.org/news/PublicationsArchive/MottMosaic/December2007v6n3/cs%20December% 202007 (last accessed 22 Oktober 2012).

Lessac, M. & Masekela, H. 2006a. Truth in Translation. Available at: http://www.truthintranslation.org/ (last accessed 22 December 2012).

Lessac, M. & Masekela, H. 2006b. Truth in Translation: About us. Available at: http://www.truthintranslation.org/index.php/v2/masekela/ (last accessed 24 December 2012).

Lessac, M. & Masekela, H. 2006c. Truth in Translation: Media, Awards & Links. Available at: http://www.truthintranslation.org/index.php/v2/media_links/ (last accessed 22 December 2012).

Lessac, M. & Masekela, H. 2006d. Truth in Translation: The Play. Available at: http://www.truthintranslation.org/index.php/v2/the_play/ (last accessed 22 December 2012).

Lessac, M. & Masekela, H. 2006e. Truth in Translation: The Film. Available at: http://www.truthintranslation.org/index.php/v2/the_film/ (last accessed 22 December 2012).

Lessac, M. & Masekela, H. 2006f. Truth in Translation: Educational Material. Available at: http://www.truthintranslation.org/educational_materials.pdf (last accessed 22 December 2012).

Lewis, D. 2007. "Theater Review: Truth in Translation." *Culture Northern Ireland* (12/10/2010). Available at: http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article.aspx?art_id=156 (last accessed 22 October 2012).

Marquardt, J. 2007. *Der ANC zwischen Wahrnehmung und Wirklichkeit: Das Selbstverständnis des African National Congress im Spiegel der Wahrheits- und Versöhnungskommission*. Germany: GRIN Verlag.

Pöchhacker, F. 2006. "Interpreters and Ideology: From 'Between' to 'Within'." *TRANS Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften* 16. Available at: http://www.inst.at/trans/16Nr/09_4/poechhacker16.htm (last accessed 22 December 2012).

*Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*. 1999. (CD-ROM Version 3.0) New York: Random House.

Robinson, D. 2001. *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities beyond Reason.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Ross, W. 2006. "Translating the Truth about Apartheid." *BBC News* (08/11/2006). Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6122014.stm (last accessed 22 October 2012).

Spivak, Gayatri C. 1976/1997. "Translator's Preface." In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida, J., ix–lxxxviii. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Stocker, B. 2006. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Derrida on Deconstruction.* London/New York: Routledge.

# Witnessing, remembering, translating

## Translation and translator figures in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* and Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*

Sabine Strümper-Krobb
University College Dublin

In Brian Friel's play *Translations* (1981) a postmodern concept of history is expressed by the rather unlikely figure of Hugh, a teacher at a hedge school in an Irish-speaking community in County Donegal in the 1830s. Royal British Engineers arrive to carry out the first Ordnance survey and record the local Gaelic place names for cartographical purposes – only to replace them with English ones. In the final part of the play, Hugh makes a statement about the link between history and language: "it is not the literal past, the 'facts' of history, that shape us, but images of the past embodied in language." (Friel 1981: 66)

Hugh is a speaker and teacher of classical languages who converses with his barefooted pupils in Latin and Greek, yet initially stubbornly refuses to speak English. His son Owen, who is acting as interpreter for the engineers, complains that his father is hanging on to a past that is no longer feasible and which will soon give way to a system of free national schools teaching the English language. However, while the prodigal son Owen, notorious fence-sitter between the two cultures, ends up returning to his Irish roots after witnessing the brutal way in which the English soldiers react to the disappearance of one of their own, it is none other than Hugh who, towards the end of the play, points to what could be termed the postmodern, linguistic turn in our conception of history. This is the conviction that history is only ever accessible through language, that it is shaped, constructed and transmitted linguistically, and that there is not one history, one past, but different images of it. In fact, Hugh not only accepts that these images are constantly changing but recognizes the important role that imaginative investment as part of individual or collective memory has to play to connect the past and the future: "'we must never cease renewing those images', he warns, 'because once we

do, we fossilise'" (Friel 1981: 66). The "renewing" of images is, ultimately, a process of rewriting. The title of Friel's play can thus take on a number of different meanings: in the first instance, it refers to the renaming process to which Irish place names are subjected in order to suit the administrative needs of the rulers, and to the ensuing transformation of the landscape and relationship of the locals to their environment. Ultimately, however, it can also be applied to the process of writing history, the translation of historical fact into different images of the past – all of which are shaped in and by language and in which the boundaries between reality and fiction are blurred. "Translation", in Friel's usage, thus serves as a metaphor for the appropriation and construction of reality.

The argument that the "facts" of history do not shape us would seem to be directly contradicted by the events of the play in which very concrete facts (the power wielded by the British over the villagers) determine the people's fate. "Facts" of history, it could be argued, have always shaped people in a very real and concrete manner; however the way in which we access the "facts" of history, i.e. the past, poses an interesting question – one that has been to the forefront not just of postmodern literary and historical criticism, but also of those works of fiction drawing attention to precisely how narratives construct history and asking how or whether it is representable at all.

The so-called "fictional turn" in translation studies has, in recent years, directed attention to the literary treatment of translation in fiction (in the form of fictional translator figures, aspects of plot, translation as theme or motif, or even as a structural element). One of the main functions of the thematization of translation in literary texts is its contribution to metafictional discourse (Delabatista & Grutman 2005: 26, Strümper-Krobb 2009: 122). This can be seen as a reflection of the change that postmodernism has brought to notions such as originality or authenticity, while, at the same time, placing great emphasis on mediation and simulacrum. "Historiographic metafiction", defined by Linda Hutcheon as "novels which are both intensely self-reflective and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages", must be considered in this context (1988: 5). I would argue that Friel's play can be attributed to this genre, particularly in the light of the play's conclusion when, in a desperate lament, Hugh likens the disappearance of his younger son Owen to events chronicled in the *Iliad*. Current events are thus cast as a re-enactment of ancient models, and human fate is shown as transcending both linguistic and chronological barriers.

In order to illustrate the treatment of translation in more recent fiction, I want now to turn to two novels: *Fugitive Pieces* (1998) by the Canadian author Anne Michaels, and *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) by the American author Jonathan Safran Foer. In both, the question of the accessibility of the past and the writing of history, i.e. the relation between narration and history, is important. Both novels

deal with the Holocaust. I want to argue that in both, translation contributes to the exploration of the question whether and how the past is remembered, mediated and represented, although the role translation plays for the plot, language and characterization may not be equally prominent in the two texts.

## Translation in *Fugitive Pieces*

In Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces* (1998) translation, on the level of plot, plays only a marginal role. The novel deals with the problems of bearing witness and testimony, and of narrating the Holocaust. The protagonist is the Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivor Jakob Beer who, at age 7, hidden in a wall, witnesses the murder of his parents; he is subsequently saved and brought to Greece by the geologist Athos. Later, both emigrate to Canada.

Only one third into the novel does the profession chosen by the adult Jakob get a mention. In one of the few passages in the novel in which actual facts are reported, we learn that Jakob translates the work of poets banned in Greece. From then on, he remains involved in translation as a way of "supporting himself" (Michaels 1998: 108); a formulation that takes on more than just factual significance in the context of a novel in which references to language and translation are often metaphorical.

While his work as a professional translator is mentioned only a few times in the novel, and is mostly presented as background information – at some point we hear, for example, that he works as a part-time translator for an engineering company (Michaels 1998: 120) – I would argue, however, that the profession attributed by Michaels to her fictional Holocaust survivor is more than simply a detail of figure characterization seen as a logical consequence of Jakob's biography and his acquired language skills. Already in the prologue of the novel, Jakob is introduced as a "translator of posthumous writing from the war" (1998: [1]), that is, as a mediator of the past. Everything he does in Canada can ultimately be seen as translation work. After Athos's death, he edits and later translates into Greek the unfinished work of his mentor: a book about attempts by the Nazis to prove their own superiority through false contextualization of archaeological findings. The title of this work, "Bearing false witness" (1998: 103), creates a contrast between the intentionally falsifying rewriting of history by the Nazis and Jakob's own testimony, which he is only able to write once he has found people who listen to him. It also alludes to the fact that images of the past are always linguistically constructed and are thus open to manipulation.

Michaels's novel has shifts in narrative perspective. The first part – by far the longer section of the novel – is narrated by Jakob himself and gives an account

of his rescue and his life first in Greece and then in Canada. The first-person narrator in the second part of the novel is Jakob's student Ben, who tries to posthumously reconstruct from Jakob's notebooks his history – arguably also an act of translation.

Both Jakob and Ben are survivors of the Holocaust, Jakob belonging to the first and Ben to the second generation. Both represent the problem of witnessing the Holocaust as analysed by Dori Laub (1992). Laub explains that, by eradicating physical witnesses and dehumanizing survivors, thereby depriving them of any humane addressee, testimony to the Holocaust has often been made impossible for those who experienced the trauma at first-hand. In Michaels's novel, Jakob is silenced by his own traumatic experience and especially by the gap in what he hears while hidden in the wall when his family is taken away. After listening to the murder of his parents ("Noises never heard before, torn from my father's mouth. […] I heard the rim of the saucer in circles on the floor. I heard the spray of buttons, like white teeth", Michaels 1998: 7),[1] it takes him a few days to notice that he cannot remember having seen or heard what happened to his sister Bella. Remembering her absence, i.e. the void in his witnessing, haunts him for years to come. The student Ben, by contrast, has grown up as the son of Holocaust survivors who do not speak about their experiences while clearly being affected by them in all they do. Only a photograph found by accident reveals that he had older siblings who were killed by the Nazis. Because of these absences and silences, neither Jakob nor Ben is able to witness their own past. However, they are able to become witnesses and to give testimony when they become translators of the testimonies of others. Jakob, according to the prologue, becomes the "translator of posthumous writing from the war" (Michaels 1998: [1]), while Ben "translates" the notes left behind by Jakob into an account of his mentor's life.

Michaels's novel thus deals in large part with the witnessing and writing of history, and with the role of language and of mediation in this process. References to translation and language abound. While for a long time Jakob believes that his "life could not be stored in any language but only in silence" (1998: 111), as this silence reflects the absence of his sister as well as his own failure to remember her disappearance, he eventually follows the advice of his mentor Athos: "Write to save yourself" (1998: 165). For a long time, speaking a language that Bella does not understand seems like a betrayal to him: by translating himself, he has lost himself, has disappeared. Yet ultimately he accepts his role as mediator for others, as the one who is able to connect the past and the future: "Each morning I write

---

1. Kertzer states that in Michaels's novel "it is indeed the listening, not seeing, that is traumatic" (2000: 204).

these words for you all. For Bella and Athos, for Alex, for Maurice and Irena, for Michaela." (1998: 191) As Jakob himself recognizes that the "poet moves from life to language, [while] the translator moves from language to life" (1998: 109), the act of translation becomes a metaphor for survival.

## Translation in *Everything is Illuminated*

The novel *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) weaves together different literary forms and writing styles, while shifting between different times and narrative voices. Chapters telling the story of the Ukrainian village of Trachimbrod from its foundation in 1791 to its destruction 150 years later during a Nazi raid alternate with chapters in which a first-person narrator – the Ukrainian translator and interpreter Alex Perchov – gives an account of the journey he undertook with an American Jew (who shares a name with the novel's author) in search of the woman whom they believe to have rescued the American's grandfather from the massacre of Trachimbrod. A third strand of the novel consists of letters the interpreter writes to the fictitious Jonathan Foer, in which he both comments on the Trachimbrod story sent to him by Jonathan and also reflects on comments Jonathan has apparently sent to him about his travel account. The novel ends with the last of these letters, dated 22 January 1998.

Foer's work fits the characterization of "postmodern novel" and, more specifically, postmodern historiographical metafiction. This is suggested by its mixture of styles and perspectives, its departure from a conventional chronological narration of historical events, and its "emphasis on the mimesis of process (on the writing itself) rather than mimesis of product (the world represented)" (Eaglestone 2004: 128). While the fictitious author-figure Jonathan and the fictitious translator Alex take over the narrative voice in different parts of the novel, all three strands are ultimately connected by the translator figure, as the letters he writes reflect both on the story authored by Jonathan and the travel account authored by himself. This underlines the central role that Foer attributes to his translator figure. The translator Alex becomes the mediator of the story of Trachimbrod but also of the personal stories of the two main protagonists which, in the course of the novel, start to overlap and merge.

At the center of Foer's novel is the search for (personal) histories which is shown as a process of the construction of narratives. The importance of the exploration of such personal histories is hinted at early on in the novel by the term "Heritage Tours", the name of the travel agency the fictitious Jonathan employs for his quest, and by the description of its clientele as "Jews, who try to unearth

places where their families once existed" (Foer 2002: 3). Equally importantly, the function of "translator, guide, and driver" (2002: 4) as facilitators of this search is mentioned in the same sentence. This suggests that a direct access to the past is not possible but that some process of mediation or translation is necessary. However, translation is not just a useful metaphor that helps to describe the process by which past events find their way into the reservoir of images and stories comprising our individual and collective memory. In Foer's novel, translation plays a role on several levels: on the level of plot, on the level of narrative language and finally, as a metaphor for the act of witnessing represented by Alex and the subsequent writing of histories it thereby facilitates.

## Translation as an element of plot

Translation or, rather, interpreting, is an element of the plot in Foer's novel. The frequent intentional mis-translations to which the first-person narrator, both in his travel account and in his letters, freely admits, contribute to the comedy of the novel. While travelling by car with his grandfather and with Jonathan, Alex keeps the peace by not translating correctly particular remarks his grandfather makes and by which he assumes Jonathan could feel offended. With disarming honesty Alex admits that he transmits to Jonathan what he calls "a befitting non-truth" and that he decides "to translate his [the grandfather's] anger into useful information for the hero" (Foer 2002: 57). Both formulations reveal an understanding of translation as a potential (and here: deliberate) distortion of the original message to serve a particular purpose. In Foer's novel, this representation of translation serves several functions. Firstly, the additions and embellishments Alex adds to his translations have a comical effect, precisely because, as a narrator, he so freely admits to them and therefore so openly breaks with what would commonly be understood as an interpreter's professional code of behaviour. Secondly, however, it is important to note that there is a difference between Alex as the protagonist who mistranslates messages, and Alex as the narrator who reflects on his own interpreting and what it means for the mediation of the past. When Alex explains, for example, that he expands on the reason for the trip when relaying it to the grandfather, "so that Grandfather would understand the story more" (2002: 58), this suggests that facts alone cannot always mediate the truth. Truth is, instead, a construct as it is dependent on situation, perspective and interests, and changes with translation.

## Translation as an element of language

The language used in the parts of the novel narrated by the interpreter suggests that the narrator is not a native speaker of English and that, while writing letters to Jonathan, he translates simultaneously onto the page what he formulates in his head in his own language. The often seemingly inappropriate and frequently newly-coined words and phrases are features of a grammatically and lexically awkward and at times downright incorrect translational language which, on the one hand, contributes to the element of comedy in the novel, but, on the other, creates a certain distance to the narrated events by adding to a decidedly postmodern "inconsistent style that playfully chops and changes" (Eaglestone 2004: 129). The reader's attention is frequently diverted away from what is being narrated to the medium of the narrative language. The comical effect results from the impression that Alex seems to make an elementary translation mistake, often choosing from several possible equivalents those that are inappropriate in the given situation. However, as will be shown later, it is precisely this comical fictional translationese, at first sight so often narrowly missing the point, that is revealed as a medium able to relate the true sense of the story much better than a pragmatically- or dynamically-equivalent translation could; one example is the narrator's use of the dynamically but certainly not denotatively or connotatively equivalent word "witness", where a simple "see" or "hear" would have been more appropriate. Foer lets the artificial translator's language reveal the truth of the close relationship between witnessing and translating in the remembering, reconstructing and narrating of history. By violating conventional norms this translational usage of language creates an alternative notion of correctness. Inadequacy and second-handness create, in the Benjaminian sense, a new text, a new language.

## Translation as metaphor

The exchange between the two protagonists, in which both reflect on the writing of the story of Trachimbrod and the writing of the story of their joint travels, takes place after Jonathan's return to the US and is mediated solely through the letters the interpreter sends to Jonathan. In these letters Alex reacts to comments by Jonathan which are not made available to the reader – so again, the mediation both of the product of writing and of the reflections about the process of writing rests with the translator.

The epistolary exchange focuses repeatedly on the question of the possibility of determining the boundary between historical truth and fiction. Both Alex and Jonathan are cast as both author and as translator. Both are responsible for

remembering the past and writing history and in doing so both are, as Alex puts it, "nomads with the truth" (Foer 2002: 179). This metaphor undermines any conception of truth as stable and stagnant, and instead shows it as dynamic and changeable, shifting between different viewpoints. Both Alex and Jonathan translate their experiences of the joint trip into a story that often departs from the actual course of events. Both change events, commenting when they think this produces a "better story". This can be illustrated by one particular example when Alex, in his travel account, changes a scene in which a Ukrainian hotel owner tries to deceive the American visitor. In the newly-invented scene his attempt is futile, which makes the American appear far less helpless in the unfamiliar environment:

> This is now an excellent scene. I have considered making you speak Ukrainian, so that you could have more scenes like this, but that would make me a useless person, because if you spoke Ukrainian, you would still have need for a driver, but not for a translator. (Foer 2002: 101)

The vocabulary used here reveals history to be a construct – just like fiction. Not only is an occurrence during their trip referred to as a "scene" (almost as if it was part of a drama or screenplay), similar in effect to referring to Jonathan as the "hero" in the earlier example, but Alex also contemplates writing different versions of the events.

It is noteworthy that the quoted comment propagates, on the one hand, a notion of the translator whose existence is utterly dependent on his usefulness for those for whom he mediates, but who, on the other, undermines this notion by adopting the role of author. At a later stage, Alex points to the parallel between himself and the writer, when he talks of himself and Jonathan in the first-person plural and attributes to both a common task: "With our writing we are reminding each other of things. We are making one story, yes?" (Foer 2002: 144) Just as the demarcations between history and narration, fact and fiction, are impossible to establish clearly, the conventional hierarchy between author and translator, in which one is responsible for an imaginative original creation and the other for second-hand mediation and copy, is undermined in Foer's work. At the same time, the quote links the "making of a story" to the act of reminding and remembering.

## Mediation, remembering, witnessing

While defining the "reminding each other of things" as a task for both translator and author, Foer – and this is where his novel meets that of Anne Michaels – ultimately projects onto the translator the main responsibility for passing down the story of the two protagonists, for facilitating the testimony to the atrocities that occurred in Trachimbrod, and for uncovering the connections between the two

families that have so far been inaccessible to the third generation (represented by Alex and Jonathan) because of the absence of a witness.

The joint search for Trachimbrod, the village where Jonathan's grandfather came from, develops into a journey into the past of both men's families – which turn out to be connected, as both represent opposite sides of the same events. While of Jonathan's family only the grandfather survived and all others were killed in the massacre in that part of the Ukraine, Alex's grandfather ensured the survival of his family by not helping a Jewish friend during a Nazi raid on the neighbouring village of Kolki. For both grandfathers, these were traumatic experiences that were never talked about in their families. Only years later does Jonathan's grandmother give his mother a photograph – seemingly a fragment of the family's history – which is now supposed to help Jonathan reconstruct the past as it is believed to show the woman who rescued his grandfather from certain death. Here, a parallel can be drawn to Michaels's novel, where a photograph accidentally found by Ben shows the siblings he had never known he had. To piece together the past of his family, Ben's wife acts as a mediator, for she is the only one Ben's mother has told about the trauma that has so far been silenced in the family.

Laub argues that the absence of a witness makes it impossible to register and record the trauma of the Holocaust (cf. 1992: 75). What he means is the fact that not only were the physical witnesses to the events of the Holocaust systematically eradicated, but those who survived had been dehumanized and deprived of a humane "other" to whom their testimony could have been addressed. In Michaels's novel, this absence of testimony is represented by the silence which, for a long time, Jakob feels locked into and which, in Ben's family, results from his parents' inability to talk about the trauma of losing their children. Foer's novel exposes the absence of a witness and thus the disconnect between past and present by featuring two protagonists who are both representatives of what Marianne Hirsch (1997) has termed "Postmemory" – personally affected by the traumatic events of the Holocaust through their family histories but also distanced from them by a gap of two generations and by their grandparents' and parents' inability to talk about the trauma of the past, again similar to Michaels's text. Any connection to the past on their part requires a creative investment and narrative construction when dealing with the memories of others.

The photograph Jonathan was given by his mother is the only testimony of the events in Trachimbrod. The picture shows his grandfather with an unknown family and, on the back, a line reads: "This is me with Augustine, February, 21, 1943." (Foer 2002: 60) From this picture Jonathan constructs part of his own history; he convinces himself that the photo shows his grandfather's rescuer and that she is called Augustine. However, this alleged witness only exists in (photographic) representation, the veracity of which must be doubtful. The use of the photo as

evidence is an act of interpretation, an act of attaching meaning – and is thus related to the act of translation. So, the search for Trachimbrod is, at the same time, the search for the confirmation of this interpretation.

At first, the search is unsuccessful. Despite careful orientation with the help of old maps, Jonathan, Alex and his grandfather cannot find anybody who would be able to tell them about Trachimbrod; nobody seems to even know the place. The fact that none of the people they ask seem even able to identify the name Trachimbrod as a place name shows how completely the memory of the village has been wiped out:

> Not one of them knew where Trachimbrod was, and not one of them had even heard of it, but all of them became angry or silent when I enquired. […] It was seeming as if we were in the wrong country, or the wrong century, or as if Trachimbrod had disappeared, and so had the memory of it. (Foer 2002: 114f)

Foer's novel thus thematizes the absence of witness testimony – symbolized here by the absence of the place where that witnessing would have happened. The quoted passage also suggests that any reconstruction of the memory of Trachimbrod requires crossing geographical and temporal borders, entering a different space and time, in other words: carrying out an act of translation. In Foer's novel, the testimony which, according to Laub (1992: 57), remains to be constituted, is created during the encounter with a woman who, neither called Augustine nor the grandfather's rescuer, turns out to be the only surviving witness to the atrocities of Trachimbrod. In this encounter, the interpreter plays a central role. The key to this role lies in the act of listening. It is only the act of listening – to again quote Laub – which can enable the act of witnessing for the survivors, because only the act of listening can provide the witness with the addressee that he or she needs:

> Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other – in the position of one who hears. (Laub 1992: 70)

The role of listener is, of course, also synonymous with the role of the interpreter, for the physical act of listening is a pre-condition for the act of interpreting.

Michael Cronin defines the important function that interpreters have had throughout history as a "testimonial function" and supports this claim by pointing to the oral nature of the activity of interpreting and the personal presence at negotiations and historically important encounters that this entails (Cronin 2006: 81). While not personally present during the witnessed events, the listening of the interpreter figure in *Everything is Illuminated* is still necessary to elicit the testimony to the destruction of Trachimbrod. It is a responsibility that, in contrast to Jonathan, Alex is unable to refuse. When Jonathan can no longer bear what he hears, Alex

allows him to opt out of the witnessing process: "'I don't want to hear any more,' the hero said, so it was at this point that I ceased translating" (Foer 2002: 185f). However, Alex himself keeps listening, which means that the author transfers the responsibility for mediating the memory and reconstructing the history of Trachimbrod from the writer to the translator and thus moves him out of the role of uninvolved mediator into the role of a witness himself. As Beverly Curran has pointed out, by assigning to the interpreter such an active role, Foer makes him carry a moral and historical responsibility which is certainly at odds with the idea of interpreting as a mechanical and neutral process (cf. Curran 2005: 197).

As listener and translator, Alex takes on a burden that Jonathan himself is spared. Jonathan, as Alex points out "cannot know how it felt to have to hear these things and then repeat them, because when I repeated them, I felt like I was making them new again" (Foer 2002: 185). This is precisely the role as Laub decribes it for the listener who facilitates the constitution of Holocaust testimony: "The listener […] is a party to the creation of knowledge *de nove*. […] The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening he comes to partially experience trauma in himself." (1992: 57)

The role of "listening" is an important one also in Michaels's text. When Ben first meets Jakob he is struck by Jakob's ability to listen: "You listened, not like a priest who listens for sin, but like a sinner, who listens for his own redemption. What a gift you had for making one feel clear, for making one feel – clean. As if talk could actually heal." (Michaels 1998: 208)

In Foer's novel, translation encompasses both inter-lingual translation and transmission across generational divides. The act of translation transcends its conventional limitations; translation becomes, in the Benjaminian sense, the enabler of the original, the act that brings the original into being. However, by making testimony possible only through a translator figure, Foer also underlines the fact that such testimony is constituted through language and is, thus, always a construct, a linguistically shaped image. This places the focus again on the medium of language in the writing of history.

In the portrayal of the overlapping of the processes of remembering, witnessing, narrating and translating, Foer's novel blurs the boundaries between translation and the invention of historical truth, memory and fiction. All are equally revealed as constructs that cannot be meaningful without imaginative investment. Foer gives the translator the responsibility for establishing a new relationship to the past, which is facilitated by the interpreter's listening to the testimony of the sole survivor of the destruction of Trachimbrod. In a historical situation in which direct testimony – a direct realization of experience in language – is not possible, the translator figure, as professional listener and mediator, becomes the actual link between past and future. The end of the novel once more underlines this task of

the translator. The novel concludes with a letter written by Alex's grandfather just before he commits suicide. This is the only part of the novel in which the narrative voice is not Jonathan's or Alex's. However, even these passages are ultimately revealed to be a translation. The letter is addressed to Jonathan: it contains the important last fragment of the puzzle revealing the truth about the effect that the grandfather's betrayal of his Jewish friend has had, and still has, on Alex's family. Sender and addressee do not share a language however, so the grandfather's letter has to be mediated by the translator Alex: "If you are reading this, it is because Sasha found it and translated it for you." (Foer 2002: 274) Once more, the narrating of history is shown to be the translator's task.

## Conclusion

In her study on the relationship between memory, narrative and identity, Nicola King characterizes the act of remembering as a translation process in which the images that make up our memory are "reconstructed within the language that is always inevitably a translation or interpretation" (2000: 4). The link between remembering and translation is echoed by Beverly Curran in her identification of "the past and its translation into cultural memory or traumatic withholding" as a central concern of Foer's novel (2005: 195) or, more generally, by Susan Bassnett's claim that "translation, like memory, writes the future, and it does so through re-writing the past" (2003: 309). When linking translation and "re-writing" with memory in this way, the role of language – and, in particular, of mediating through language – in remembering and narrating the past, is highlighted. This is exactly where the translator figures and the motif of translation in the two novels have their place. In attributing a central role to a translator or interpreter figure, both Jonathan Safran Foer and Anne Michaels foreground and reflect on the process of mediation inevitably involved in the representation of the past and the writing of history. Both novels show clearly that history is mediated through language, that it is, as such, open to interpretation, and that there are therefore always different versions/images of the past. Through the voice of the translator or interpreter, the authors reflect quite explicitly on the processes of remembering and writing history. As witnesses and mediators who stand removed from the events that are witnessed and, at the same time, facilitate their reconstruction through language, the interpreter Alex Perchov and the translators Jakob Beer and Ben show that the narration of history is, both literally and metaphorically, an act of translation.

## References

### Primary sources

Friel, B. 1981. *Translations*. London: Faber and Faber.
Foer, J. S. 2002. *Everything is Illuminated.* London: Hamish Hamilton.
Michaels, A. 1998. *Fugitive Pieces*. London: Bloomsbury.

### Secondary sources

Bassnett, S. 2003. "Translation as Re-Membering." In *Cultural Memory. Essays on European Literature and History,* E. Coldicott & A. Fuchs (eds.), 293–309. Oxford: Peter Lang.
Cronin, M. 2006. *Translation and Identity*. London: Routledge.
Curran, B. 2005. "The Fictional Translator in Anglophone Literatures." *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 4: 183–199.
Delabatista, D. & Grutman, R. 2005. "Introduction. Fictional Representations of Multilingualism and Translation." *Linguistica Antverpiensia* 4: 11–34.
Eaglestone, R. 2004. *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Hirsch, M. 1997. *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Hutcheon, L. 1988. *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. New York, NJ: Routledge.
Kertzer, A. 2000. "Fugitive Pieces: Listening as a Holocaust Survivor's Child." *English Studies in Canada* 26: 193–217.
King, N. 2000. *Memory, Narrative, Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Laub, D. 1992. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening." In *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, S. Felman & D. Laub (eds.), 57–75. New York, NJ: Routledge.
Strümper-Krobb, S. 2009. *Zwischen den Welten. Die Sichtbarkeit des Übersetzers in der Literatur*. Berlin: Weidler.

# Translating the past, negotiating the self

## Discursive resistance in Elisabeth Reichart's *Komm über den See*

Renate Resch
University of Vienna

Given the fate of so many fictional heroes and heroines who engage in the art of translation it does not come as a surprise that the middle-aged heroine of Elisabeth Reichart's novel *Komm über den See* (Come Across the Lake), first published in 1988 and reprinted in 2001, is crisis-ridden. That Ruth Berger's crisis is linked to questions of language and discourse does not come as a surprise either, given the fate of so many fictional translators and interpreters. The self-reflexive nature of modern narrative texts gives this novel and many others a high degree of authenticity by introducing a language-sensitive heroine.

Her crisis is rather multi-dimensional: First of all, her professional self is at stake. Not long before the novel sets in, Ruth was a self-confident professional woman successfully working as an interpreter in a technical company. In her presence nobody was bored except herself (cf. Reichart 2001: 26), she reflects later when thinking about the period in her life when she was the first-class interpreter who every morning put on the mask of her professional self and started interpreting, smiling, always smiling (cf. Reichart 2001: 93). But then doubts befall her and make her wonder whether this should have been all she would do in her life (cf. Reichart 2001: 27). Worse still, she is hit by serious health problems, namely mouth ulcers, sickness and feelings of disgust when performing her job, which ultimately force her to leave her position and retrain as a teacher for English and history.

Second, her concept of self as a woman is shaken, there is no trace left of the serenity that once governed her life. When the novel sets in, she finds herself stuck in her flat in Vienna, unemployed, bored to desperation and devoid of any self-confidence. Doomed to spend a whole summer waiting for the school authority to allocate her to a teaching position she tries to keep herself busy with the occasional translation assignment but mostly pesters the postman on his daily rounds asking him for letters, hoping for the important letter that would mark the beginning of her new career. But of course there are none, at least not for the time being. No

wonder the postman makes fun of her, seeing her as the deserted wife whose husband well knows why he will not come back (cf. Reichart 2001: 28). Indeed Ruth Berger lives on her own after having divorced her husband. His lifestyle as a judge who regularly indulges in smoking marijuana when in private only to convict people for possession of illegal toxic substances the next day would no longer fit her values neither would his unwillingness to communicate. A close female friend committed suicide, another is struggling with severe mental problems. Being estranged from her father, an actor whose career thrived in the Nazi-regime, and with her mother long dead, she is indeed rather isolated.

Her mother's fate is very prominent on Ruth's mind and an important factor in her concept of self. Her mother was a member of the resistance movement during World War II. She was ultimately seized by the Gestapo when she was walking down the street with Ruth and was arrested and tortured. These memories of her mother's blood stained face, of her desperately urging her little girl to run away haunt Ruth: "das Gesicht der Mutter war blutverschmiert, aber sie konnte noch schreien, schrie: "Lauf weg! Lauf!" und als sich […] einer der Männer nach dem Kind umdrehte, begann es zu laufen, lief und lief und läuft und läuft, dachte Ruth, wenn ich nicht gerade warte." (Reichart 2001: 15) It was also these events that caused her emotional restlessness and spurred her academic interests. As a research topic for her dissertation to qualify her for teaching history she chose to discuss the fate of women resistance fighters in Austria.

Third, Ruth is deeply troubled by issues of language and communication. Reflecting on her childhood and how the wars affected her generation, she ponders over the word "child of war": "Stadtkind, Einzelkind, Kriegskind – alle Kinder in diesem Land bisher Vorkriegskinder, Kriegskinder, Nachkriegskinder, Zwischenkriegskinder, Vorkriegskinder" (Reichart 2001: 14) only to come to the conclusion that all children of her country were either pre-war, war or post-war children, terms whose covert connotations of reproach judged them rather than described them: "Selten dienten diese Worte als Information, […] sie wurden meist als Vorwurf verwendet." (2001: 14). And worse still, there were numerous instances in her early life when there were no words to name the unspoken, when vital issues were not addressed, like the seizure of her mother: "[…] die Verhaftung der Mutter. Hatte [das Kind] einen Namen für den Vorfall?" (2001: 15) When her mother does finally come back, traumatized from torture and humiliation, there are cryptic comments like "Alles nur deinetwegen" (It was all only for you) (2001: 184) but what exactly happened and why is veiled in vague allusions until her mother's early death and beyond.

Ruth's professional crisis, her identity crisis as well as her communication problems are closely linked with her past. It seems that Ruth never had a chance to relate her emotional self to language, to relate words to the reality she

experienced. Ruth struggled hard to fight her alienation with language, becoming even a *Wunderkind* language student and a star interpreter. However, her endeavours were futile. Working on a translation she now realizes that the sentences she uses are not her own: "Nur fremde Sätze sind in mir" (Reichart 2001: 43). Her late friend's verdict, that Ruth was very talented for languages except her own (cf. Reichart 2001: 43) Ruth had once rejected but now rings terribly true. Looking back on her time as an interpreter she remembers herself as the only woman among all these men and the only one who did not utter sentences of their own (cf. 2001: 93). She is worried whether she will be successful in her new career, mostly because she would detest having to go back to the pre-determined sentences ("zurückkehren in die vorgegebenen Sätze" (2001: 19)).

The longing for her own sentences to establish her own identity and the parroting of pre-determined sentences seen as a sign of her identity crisis – this seems to be the dichotomy the novel sets out to explore. But do these notions do justice to the intricacies of identity building? Can our psychological make-up be linked to language in general and our individual use of language in particular? What about our society's use of language, past and present? And is translation something that causes a crisis, perhaps even an identity crisis? These questions will be posed in the following, drawing upon discourse and translation theories. In doing so, we will follow our heroine to the Austrian provincial town Gmunden, where she is finally allocated to a teaching position, and develop our tools of analysis along the way.

## Discourse and the individual: Subject positions

When Ruth arrives in Gmunden, a small Austrian town situated by a beautiful lake surrounded by mountains, one thing becomes quite clear: No matter how idyllic the surroundings may be, her feelings of self, the question whether she will feel accepted or rejected in who she thinks she is, are determined by the social context and by the prevailing values. Values – what is considered moral or immoral, beautiful or ugly, justified or to be rejected and everything in between – are of course often expressed explicitly but more often communicated implicitly by what is said and talked about and how. Values thus find expression in practically all the communication practices people engage in.

Discourse theory proves useful when exploring the interrelations of language use in society, the values they express and the impact these communication practices have on the individual. Drawing upon Foucault's theories on science, history and ideology discourses have been defined as institutional ways of expression that function as a framework for possible statements and are linked to social actions and thus effect power (cf. Link 2005: 18). As "systematically organized sets of

statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution", they "define, describe and delimit what is possible to say and not possible to say" (Kress 1989: 7). Discourses thus regulate the flow of knowledge and the distribution of power in society and implicitly express value positions of institutions and individuals. They also help to differentiate in-groups and out-groups: "Any discourse reproduces its own borderlines and thus defines its own specificity with respect to other discourses" (Robyns 1994: 57).

The individual is seen in his or her specific socio-historic context of power relations, and it is these power relations which shape the individual and in turn are shaped by him or her (cf. Jäger & Jäger 2010: 13). The discursive conditions "construct certain subject positions […] which describe and prescribe a range of actions, modes of thinking and being for an individual" (Kress 1989: 37). In short, the discourses we are exposed to shape our values, our scope of thinking, our possibilities for action and our image of self. "Der Diskurs als ganzer ist eine regulierende Instanz; er formiert Bewusstsein" (Jäger & Jäger 2010: 13). It is in this formative power of discourse that constantly shapes and reshapes the individuals' subject positions that our selves seem to be language-related and text-bound.

The texts and discourses that informed Ruth's subject position were certainly shaped by leftwing student life in Vienna and her studies of Austrian history in the 1960s. In Gmunden, she is definitely out of place: In the small provincial town her outlook upon the world and her values are at odds with those of most of the people she meets. The general atmosphere is claustrophobic. Ruth does not know how to deal with all the people who address her by name without her having mentioned it before (cf. Reichart 2001: 49). Ruth finds herself under observation from neighbours and colleagues, who constantly comment on her actions. A relationship to a young man she meets is broken off as soon as she realizes that people are talking about it (which is very soon). When her health problems reappear and she needs to see a doctor, she prefers to travel to Salzburg in order to keep her medical record out of the little town's gossip, a futile endeavor as it turns out later.

The pressure to perform is strongly felt but Ruth cannot comply with the prevailing norms of Gmunden. As a consequence, her health and her precarious psychological state begin to deteriorate further. Images of herself drowned in a bog relieving her of the pitfalls of language and communication haunt her, as well as memories of a family member called Brigitta, whom she cannot place. The lake in all its beauty is some consolation for her during the day but also has its sinister aspects, particularly at night when its dark surface conjures up nightmares of war crimes, suffering and suicide. The lake whispers "Komm über den See", trying to lure her into putting an end to her life.

## Discourse and cultures: Ideologies

What Ruth experiences in Gmunden can be compared to culture shock. The town does not seem to have changed much since the Nazi era and the restoration of a democratic order. Nationalist and even national socialist discourse is still rampant. Nationalist ideology is present in everyday life and special events: A circle of old and new Nazis even publicly celebrate to commemorate the anti-Jewish terror of November 1938, which marked the beginning of the systemic prosecution of Jews in the Third Reich. Ruth learns this from a journalist who visits the town. However, his report about this will not hit the Austrian news, as the ORF, the Austrian Broadcasting Association, regrets to have no use for it (cf. Reichart 2001: 63). Similarly, there is no talk in town about the Nazi concentration camp of Ebensee, which is not far from Gmunden, where 1800 people were murdered between 1943 and 1945. When Ruth finds out that a former Nazi resistance fighter living on the outskirts of the town, is isolated by her family and ignored if not despised by the population, this does not come as a surprise either. The general refusal to face the past is just normal in the social context she is now part of.

It is equally clear that criticism of the Nazi past of Gmunden and of Austria for that matter is not part of the local ideology. As said before, discourses delimit what is possible and not possible to say, and it is not possible to refer critically to the Nazi era without raising eyebrows, causing irritation and open opposition. The Nazi past simply cannot be talked about. In discourse theory this phenomenon is referred to as *Sagbarkeitsfeld*, a discursive formation which encompasses possible statements in a particular society at a certain point in time – and makes statements, questions, perspectives and sets of problems that deviate from the given *Sagbarkeitsfeld* inconceivable and if uttered intolerable (cf. Link & Link-Heer 1990: 90). Discourse practices in Gmunden illustrate this: War time atrocities are simply not talked about or are played down as exaggerations. Twenty years after the end of World War II Nazi-resistance is still considered immoral and treacherous with regards to the ordinary soldiers who as so often said only performed their duty. However, it is possible to refer to Ruth's father and his success as an actor in Nazi-Deutschland: To Ruth's dismay the school's headmaster presents her to the faculty as the daughter of this famous actor, an old friend of his, who he is sure everybody will remember. He is happy to say that from among all the applicants for the teaching position he has decided in favor of Ruth for the sake of their old friendship (cf. Reichart 2001: 96).

However devastated Ruth may be, she feels she cannot set things right and position herself as she wants to as a professional and as a woman. The headmaster's patronizing tone, his attempts to intimidate Ruth illustrate yet another aspect of discourse, namely its ideological power. "The ideological loading of language use

and the relations of power which underlie them" (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258) are too strong to be fought against. Being in a position of power, the headmaster keeps expressing his expectations towards Ruth in professional and personal matters, at first paternally, later with unveiled threats. In addition, her mostly male colleagues offer advice as to what to teach, to make sure to steer clear of left-wing writers like Bertolt Brecht and also how to be a woman: Being a woman her intuition would naturally lead her to the right decisions, one of her colleagues thinks (cf. Reichart 2001: 96).

The mostly covert sexist discourse in which men define women is a general trait of the provincial discourse depicted in the novel and illustrates the way in which discourses function as "a system of production, distribution and reception of messages viewed by their producers or receivers as linked because they rely partially on a common set of norms" (Robyns 1994: 57). In the culture of Gmunden most people discursively engage in reproducing these power relations. "Discursive practices have major ideological effects: they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between (for instance) social classes, women and men and ethical/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent and position people" (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258). In Gmunden, it is in the interest of most people that gender relations should stay the way they have always been and that Austrian national history should not be besmirched by touching upon unpleasant subjects or by mentioning unpleasant people.

However, Ruth and the few friends who speak a different discourse and express different values are also part of Gmunden. The clash of values and ideologies depicted in the novel illustrates how there is no such thing as a homogenous culture. The ideological battles different groups of society engage in are also discursive struggles, in which various subcultures try to promote their view of the world and to make their discourse the dominant one. Culture can therefore be defined as the site of resistance against forms of representation that do not comply with our own (cf. Wolf 2006). Thus, cultures can be seen as sites for discursive battles. In the culture of Gmunden, the latent aggression against Ruth and the overt attempts to manipulate her are prompted by her otherness and her discursive resistance.

The ideological and discursive diversity within Austrian post-war culture depicted in *Komm über den See* not only gives impetus to the plot of the narrative, but also governs its textual composition. The textual strategies in the novel depict Ruth's flow of thought, her memories and dreams as well as her personal experience, with intermingling passages of historical and political discourse. The hybrid nature of the text is most conspicuous in four sections that mark the end of the chapters of the book. They stand out typographically and differ in tone and content from the rest of the text. In these short passages the voices of women

resistance fighters describe the hardships of being part of the resistance movement and give air to their emotions, their fears of betrayal, their disappointments, during the war and beyond when discursive denial degraded resistance fighters to victims of war rather than honoring their struggle for keeping up humanity in the face of terror:

> Wir und Opfer? Wir waren es doch, die versuchten zu überleben, als Menschen zu überleben. Ich sage nicht, daß es uns ohne bleibende Verstümmelungen gelang, aber woher wüßtet ihr von den großen Träumen der Menschen, von Träumen mit der Kraft, über euch hinauszureichen, die die Erde umschließen in einer weichen Umarmung – wenn sie nicht wachgehalten und weitergelebt worden wären von uns… (2001: 152)

The tacit discursive agreements as to how to deal with the Austrian past have changed significantly since the period depicted in the novel. This illustrates yet another aspect of culture, history and discourse: In a postcolonial, transnational concept of culture the production and reproduction of cultural values can be seen as effected in a process of translation from one generation to the next (cf. Wolf 2006), with cultural change being part and parcel of this translation process. So perhaps the discursive conflict Ruth faces is caused by the fact that she is part of the next generation and has left the time, as exemplified by Gmunden behind? Perhaps Ruth will not have to be translated and domesticated into a culture she cannot identify with? Will she be able to make her way across the lake, and not perish in the process?

## Discourse and translation: Identities

It is obvious that Ruth is characterized as the "other incarnate" in the context of Gmunden. The conflicts within her are not only caused by her problematic individual history but are also the result of the discursive otherness she faces in a context where norms and values completely different from her own prevail. It is also obvious that Ruth is a major threat to many people she meets in Gmunden as her sheer existence seems to threaten the prevailing value system, most conspicuously in relation to gender and professional norms and concepts of national history. The "discursive interference" (Robyns 1994: 57) is caused by Ruth's migration from Vienna to Gmunden.

Drawing from postcolonial concepts of culture, *Komm über den See* and the conflicts it describes can therefore be read as an instance of translation in a metaphorical sense, as a "translation of cultures" insofar as values, ways of imagining, thinking and acting are transferred from one cultural context to another (cf.

Wagner 2009: 1). But are the translation processes described in *Komm über den See* as metaphorical as they seem? Translation proper as "an explicit confrontation with "alien" discourse, is only the most conspicuous instance of the conflicts which characterize the constant construction of identity" (Robyns 1994: 57) and translation de facto pervades all discursive modes (cf. Cooke 2011: 43f). Not only in translation proper, also instances of metaphorical translation become manifest in discursive modes of expression (cf. Wagner 2009: 6). In the case of *Komm über den See*, different discourses originating from different subcultures within one language/culture have to be negotiated, a process which has been described as intralingual translation (Reiß 1981, Resch 2003, Schmid 2008).

The plot also impressively describes "the inequality of interdiscursive relations, i.e. the fact that the construction of identity is linked to unequal power relations" (Robyns 1994: 57) and its consequences for both superior and inferior: Those with less symbolic power suffer problems in establishing their identity and expressing their stance in a given context at a given time. Those in power use "imperialist" discursive strategies in their attempt to defend their own identities. They do so by using discursive strategies that marginalize the "other" or domesticate it into the prevailing norms. Negotiating "sameness" and "otherness" always entails negotiating identities, our own and those of others. This implies that translation as "identity construction can be seen as ideological: In establishing its identity, a discursive practice constructs, reproduces or subverts social interests and power relations." (Robyns 1994: 57f)

The conflict between Ruth and the headmaster and the value systems they represent can be seen in this light, a conflict that Ruth will have to continue to fight. The headmaster refuses to give his permission to invite Anna Zach, the resistance fighter living in Gmunden, to the school to talk to the pupils. But meeting up with her at least helps Ruth to put an end to the doubts about her mother's true identity and reveals a surprising fact about her own. When tortured by the Gestapo her mother had given away the names of other members of the resistance movement, among them Anna Zach's. The betrayal was forced out of her by means of threats that they would seize and torture her child too. The vague "Alles nur deinetwegen" (It was all only for you) (2001: 184) that Ruth had heard so often after her mother had come back now finally makes sense. She also learns that after the war her mother decided to change her daughter's first name, because the Gestapo's threats still rang in her ears. So the little girl was no longer called Brigitta and her name was changed to Ruth, a translation that must have left the child very troubled.

Knowing all this marks a new beginning for Ruth/Brigitta. When Anna tells her not to run away and to "Komm über den See", to cross the lake as far as it takes to get "bis zu dir" (to herself) (Reichart 2001: 186) Ruth/Brigitta feels

confident enough to finally bridge the gap between her selves, past and present. Will she finally make peace with both the national and her personal past? Will she, after all be able to resolve the discursive battles within her and keep up her discursive resistance in the hostile environment? The end of the novel suggests that Anna Zach might be helpful in this process, since she has ample experience in being resistant to powerful but inhumane discourse, both during World War II and thereafter.

The poetic image of *Übersetzen* (which in German means both translating and crossing waters) marks the end of the novel. Crossing the lake, trans-lating as a path to the self – this is in sharp contrast with the imagery used at the beginning, where the parroting of "vorgegebene Sätze" (pre-determined sentences) (Reichart 2001: 19) caused the heroine's frustration with translating. Looking at the intricate interplay of discourse, power structures and identity building the novel elaborates so profusely, it is ironic that the translation professions should be put in this light. The whole plot revolves around the confrontation with alien discourse and translatorial attempts to reconcile discursive struggles and value conflicts. The on-going process of translating the personal and national past into present identities is what the novel is about.

Looking at *Komm über den See* from the perspective of discourse theory helps to explain just how complex and hurtful this process can be. It is the implicit values and implicit ideologies that discourses carry that make translation so complex and that highlight the translator's responsibility. The fact that different cultures and different sub-cultures and their discourses express different values establishes the link between translation and identity building: Every text, translated or not, is positioned ideologically in society and is thus part of the power play between different social groups. Discourses strengthen our identities or weaken them. Translating therefore always requires the translating individual to take an ideological stance that will inform his or her textual decisions (cf. Prunč 1997: 113f, Prunč 2000: 65f, Resch 2001: 125, Resch 2006: 143ff). These include the whole spectrum from supporting the powerful social identities by choosing the prevailing discourses to opting for discursive strategies that subvert the prevailing power structures. Ruth/Brigitta's decision for discursive resistance pushes her to the limits of her emotional capacities but in the end it leads her to the one person that can help disentangle the complexities of her identities, past and present. For her at least, discursive resistance proved right.

## References

Cooke, M. 2011. *The Lightning Flash. Language, longing and the facts of life*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.

Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. 1997. "Critical Discourse Aanylsis." In *Discourse as Social Interaction. Vol. 2.*, T. van Dijk (ed.), 258–284. London: Sage.

Jäger, S. & Jäger, M. 2010. "Das Netz der Begriffe der KDA." In *Lexikon Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Werkzeugkiste*, S. Jäger & J. Zimmermann in Zusammenarbeit mit der Diskurswerkstatt im DISS (eds.), 6–23. Münster: Unrast-Verlag.

Kress, G. 1989. *Linguistic Processes in Socio-cultural Practice*. Oxford: OUP.

Link, J. 2005. "kultuRRevolution – ein notwendiges Konzept." *DISS-Journal* 14: 17–18.

Link, J. & Link-Heer, U. 1990. "Diskurs/Interdiskurs und Literaturanalyse." *LiLi* 77: 88–99.

Prunč, E. 1997. "Translationskultur. Versuch einer konstruktiven Kritik des translatorischen Handelns." *TexTconText* 11 =NF 1 (2): 99–127.

Prunč, E. 2000. "Vom Translationsbiedermeier zur Cyber-translation." *TexTconText* 14 (1)= NF 4 (1): 3–74.

Reichart, E. 1988/2001. *Komm über den See*. Wien, Frankfurt am Main: Deutike.

Reiß, K. 1981. "Der Übersetzungsvergleich. Formen, Funktionen, Anwendbarkeit." In *Kontrastive Linguistik und Übersetzungswissenschaft*, W. Kühlwein & G. Thome & W. Wilss (eds.), 311–319. München: Fink.

Resch, R. 2001. "Übersetzen als Empowerment. Zum Verhältnis von Text, Diskurs und Macht." In *Übersetzung aus aller Frauen Länder. Beiträge zu Theorie du Praxis weiblicher Realität in der Translation*, S. Messner & M. Wolf (eds.), 119–126. Graz: Leykam.

Resch, R. 2003. *Texte im Kulturtransfer. Aspekte translatorischer Textkompetenz*. University of Vienna: Doctoral Dissertation.

Resch, R. 2006. *Translatorische Textkompetenz. Texte im Kulturtransfer*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.

Robyns, C. 1994. "Translation and discursive identity." In *Translation and the (Re)production of Culture*, C. Robyns (ed.), 57–81. Leuven: CERA Chair of Translation.

Schmid, B. 2008. "A duck in a rabbit's clothing – Integrating intralingual translation." In *Das Entenprinzip. Translation aus neuen Perspektiven*, M. Kaiser-Cooke (ed.), 19–80. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.

Wagner, B. 2009. "Kulturelle Übersetzung. Erkundungen über ein wanderndes Konzept." Available at: http://www.kakanien.ac.at/beitr/postcol/BWagner2.pdf (last accessed 11 September 2012).

Wolf, M. 2006. "Übersetzung als 'Brücke zwischen den Kulturen'? Ein Plädoyer für die Sicht von Übersetzung als Beitrag zur Konstruktion von Kulturen." Available at: http://www.uni-graz.at/kuckuck/ku/index.php? option=com_content&view=article&id=55: leseprobe&catid=34: uebersetzen-ausgabe-106&Itemid=56 (last accessed 11 September 2012).

# The apocalyptical interpreter and the end of Europe

## Alain Fleischer's *Prolongations*

Dörte Andres
University Mainz-Germersheim

The number of literary works in which interpreters feature prominently has increased dramatically over time. In previous centuries, interpreters were mainly mentioned in historical papers and accounts of journeys – only rarely was any reference made to interpreters in literary texts. One of the first works of literature in which an interpreter appears as a literary figure is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Poetry and Truth* (1811) – an autobiography about Goethe's experiences from 1749 to 1775, inter alia about an interpreter living with nine-year-old Goethe and his family. In the mid-19th century, George John Whyte Melville's *The Interpreter* (1856–1858) is published in the American magazine *Littell's Living Age* as a serial novel. Whyte's story centres around the professional career of interpreter Vere Egerton as well as the latter's journey from boyhood to manhood. During the Crimean War, Egerton serves as an interpreter in the Turkish and British army, constantly hoping that his service will allow him to rise in rank and obtain a position better than that of an interpreter. However, his hopes are in vain. In 1893, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle writes the short story *The Greek Interpreter* (1972) – a Sherlock Holmes story about Mr Melas, a Greek living in London. Mr Melas makes a living as a court interpreter and escort interpreter for wealthy business people from the Far and Middle East and becomes entangled in a criminal case in the line of duty. At the beginning of the 20th century, André Maurois publishes four novels in which the author himself features as the main character, the interpreter Aurelle – *Les silences du colonel Bramble* (Maurois 1918), *Le Général Bramble* (Maurois 1920), *Les discours du Docteur O'Grady* (1922) and *Nouveaux discours du Docteur O'Grady* (1950). However, the vast majority of such novels date from 1990 onwards and have experienced an almost "inflationary" surge since the beginning of the 21st century. To name just a few examples, these novels are about interpreters who go into exile, work at the International Criminal Court or for the British Secret Service, or interpret interrogations at the Paris headquarters of the

SS during World War II. As observed in a review of John Le Carré's new thriller *The Mission Song* (2006) in which a professionally trained conference interpreter works for the British Secret Service (cf. Andres 2009), it seems as though the interpreter is emerging as a key figure of modern-day global society (Müller 2006). The publications of Andres (2008), Kurz & Kaindl (2005) and Kaindl & Kurz (2008, 2010) illustrate the great versatility of this key figure. Moreover, interpreters frequently evolve from being secondary characters to becoming main protagonists in literary texts. They become heroes and are endowed with tangible physiological, psychological and social features (cf. Prunč 2005: 153). In the 21st century, authors and film makers "discovered" the interpreter as a figure embodying issues which particularly strike a chord with people at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century: migration, hybrid cultures and hybrid characters, clashing cultures, identification, cultures in-between, identities in-between, the power of language and the nature of communication. Bearing in mind that words such as "communication" and "identity" have been subject to a similarly "inflationary" surge in popularity (cf. Pörksen 1989) since the 1980s and that interpreting is associated with communication and straddling the divide between language and place, it makes sense that the interpreter becomes an interesting character and seems ideally suited for dealing with topics related to identity and communication in literature. Communication plays a crucial role in today's globalised world. International organisations such as the EU or UN draw attention to this communication across different languages and, in doing so, to the interpreter, whose task it is to overcome language barriers and facilitate communication. However, as with all international bodies, the question of these international organisations' efficiency (or lack thereof) continues to arise. In their novels, authors such as Ingeborg Bachmann (1978), Brooke-Rose (1968/1986), Max Davidson (1993), Hermann Kant (1988) and Javier Marías (1996) write about how clichéd and devoid of meaning such international meetings are. Some of these depictions have a humorous intention. They are a parody or satire of international conferences, a deliberate distortion of reality resulting in comedy as well as criticism. Drawing on barely conceivable, but all too real incidents from international conferences, fiction and reality become one, are compounded and conveyed in such an exaggerated manner that the nature of conferences is thoroughly subjected to ridicule. The authors' scathing mockery and harsh criticism are palpable – it is their express intention to stress the flawed nature of international conferences, their apathy, endless bureaucracy and lack of effectiveness. According to the journalist Karasek, this view has become entrenched in people's minds over the centuries and is partly due to the endless red tape associated with the EU institutions in Brussels (cf. Karasek 1996).

But who in literature is the first victim and at the same time the biggest accomplice of such institutions? The simultaneous interpreter. He is portrayed as

a “follower”, a character who does not have a very active role and does not actively participate in their “deeds”, but does not offer any resistance either. If he rebelled, communication would collapse and the gathering would be doomed to fail. But the interpreter, whose profession it is to work with language, cannot escape the clutches of language, language appropriates the interpreter, making him produce words automatically which are not his anyway. He merely “reproduces” what is said, but sustains the (meaningless) conference in doing so. The latter begins to develop its own dynamic, losing track of any kind of goal and becoming an end in itself. The interpreter allows this to happen, providing his services as an observer behind a glass panel.

Literature perpetuates the images of conferences devoid of meaning as well as of the interpreter as a language machine so submerged in languages that he no longer possesses his “own”. These images have a profound impact on the reader, he can hardly escape their power (Dyserinck 1988: 26); they shape his perception of interpreters and interpreting as well as of international conferences. Stereotypes become reality. Stereotypes are manmade, created by people while influencing them at the same time. They are long-lived, tough, rigid and often resistant to corrections. But they do not have to be static. As a result of de-ideologisation and by providing targeted information, a stereotype can change over the course of time. Looking at these stereotypes and images in literary texts through the prism of translation studies helps to foster a new understanding of the interpreting profession. This is exactly what Alain Fleischer sets out to do in *Prolongations* (2008) with his interpreter character Tibor as a metaphorical figure.

Alain Fleischer is the son of a Hungarian father and a half Spanish mother, he is an author, a film director and photographer. He has lived in England, France, Québec, Italy; multilingualism and accents are topics of great importance in his literary works. However, it is especially the horrors of the holocaust that wiped out the vast majority of his Jewish family which have left an indelible mark on him.

*Prolongations* is set in modern-day Kaliningrad. Kaliningrad became a Russian city in 1946, and until the end of World War II, it was a German city by the name of Königsberg. Setting the novel in Kaliningrad/Königsberg certainly was a conscious decision, as the trauma of World War II emerges particularly clearly here. Kaliningrad/Königsberg represents a watershed moment in history, the rupture, destruction and the annihilation of Jewish life. In his novel, the author looks for a connection between Königsberg and Kaliningrad. But there is no bridge, Kaliningrad is all that remains, Königsberg is lost, and with Königsberg, an entire world. In this piece of literature, old men searching for the graves of their friends and relatives on the derelict graveyard are the last witnesses of this German city (cf. Fleischer 2008: 311ff).

It is this city that trained conference interpreter Tibor Schwarz travels to full of enthusiasm to interpret at the *Congrès de l'Europe*. However, it is not stimulating discussions, but idleness and emptiness that await him there – empty conference halls, empty words, empty lecterns. This void needs to be filled – primarily with love affairs with three interpreters at the same time: Stasya, Asther und Wally. Part I, *Temps réglementaire* (regular playing time) – sport metaphors are like a thread running through the entire novel – constitutes the main part of the novel and is devoted to these relationships. They come to an end when one evening, Tibor visits an exhibition at the *Congrès de l'Europe* and discovers that orgies organised for the participants of the congress are taking place on the upper floor of the congress building. With his refusal to participate in them, the atmosphere becomes menacing. He endangers himself and his lover with his refusal, has to flee and choose one of his lovers as he cannot save all of them. A few days after the escape, Wally and Tibor are captured while making love on the lakeside. Tibor is stabbed from behind.

In *Prolongations* (Extra Time), the second, much shorter part of the novel, the reader loses himself in a tangled web of thoughts and events, of past and present. For the last approximately 50 pages of the novel, Tibor is suspended between life and death. His three lovers are his lifeline, sustaining him with their bodies, their eternal intercourse which may not be interrupted or consummated, as this would mean Tibor's death. The plot, or rather non-plot, trails off into nothingness, into an eternal state of "after play", remaining incomplete, the readers are left to make sense of *Prolongations* by themselves.

The protagonist Tibor acts as Fleischer's mouthpiece, seeking on the one hand to come to terms with the past, i.e. the trauma of World War II, while at the same time grappling with the future, the consequences of the war for Europe. For Fleischer, Europe has no future. Correspondingly, his protagonist Tibor Schwarz experiences the Europe Congress as a gathering of old men close to death – the parallels to Brooke-Rose (1968/1986: 416), whose work will be further elucidated below, are unmistakable:

> […] congressiste pensionnaire, en résidence dans la luxueuse maison de repos ou de retraite, en asile médicalisé pour vieillards milliardaires, abandonnés par leur famille, d'où chacun ne sort qu'en limousine, en ambulance ou en corbillard. (Fleischer 2008: 106)

> […] retired congress member, residing in a luxurious sanatorium or retirement home, a home with medical care for infirm billionaires abandoned by their families which you only leave in a limousine, in an ambulance or hearse.[1]

1. Throughout this chapter, quotations from Alain Fleischer's *Prolongations* were translated from French into English by Jillian Enders.

However, this congress is also a gathering of noble porcelain heads (cf. Fleischer 2008: 334) appointed as representatives of their respective countries for life (cf. 2008: 107); they are figureheads, powerless, motionless, lifeless:

> […] l'auditoire étant composé des représentants permanents, le personnel du fameux 'corps diplomatique', decorative comme des potiches en porcelaine et faïence de chaque pays […]. Une collection de vieilles porcelains ébréchées, bibelots inutiles. (Fleischer 2008: 331)
>
> […] the audience consists of each country's permanent representatives, the staff of the famous 'diplomatic corps', decorative like porcelain vases and fine china […]. A collection of old, chipped porcelain figures and useless knick-knacks.

These "chipped" old men are deaf already, stone-deaf, "sourds comme des pots" (Fleischer 2008: 334), so the work of the interpreters literally falls on deaf ears, they have no listeners, because the latter are dosing or amusing themselves with the young assistants at the bar (Fleischer 2008: 110). As a consequence, the interpreters use the channels for private conversations, double entendres and making advances:

> 'Bienvenue parmi nous, Tibor…[…] je profite de ce que tu as les oreilles dans les écouteurs pour te dire ceci…' La voix de ma collègue du hongrois en espagnol se fait susurrante et câline: „Je t'emmène en Espagne quand tu veux!" […] la fille au micro se tourne y vers moi, elle sourit. Dans les écouteurs, une voix cria de résonne soudain: 'Cette salope se place déjà, alors qu'elle n'a meme pas fini de manger son Andalou!' (Fleischer 2008: 111)
>
> 'Welcome, Tibor… […] since you have your headphones on, I just thought I would tell you something…' The voice of my colleague interpreting from Hungarian to Spanish is husky and tender: 'I'll take you to Spain with me whenever you like!' […] the girl at the mike turns towards me and smiles. Suddenly, a snarling voice can be heard through the headphones: 'The bitch is already offering herself again although she isn't even done yet with her Andalusian!'

There are just as few speakers as listeners. Why should there be any? There is nothing to say apart from truisms, and they are basically just as superfluous as the listeners:

> Cependant, il arrive encore, de temps à autre, qu'une allocution ait lieu, et qu'à la surprise générale un orateur se présente à la tribune, à vrai dire plutôt un spectre qu'un être humain en chair et en os, et l'on pourrait croire que l'apparition et le discours d'un vieux géographe venu d'Estonie – un pays voisin – ne doivent convoquer que les interprètes-traducteurs de l'estonien dans les autres langues, tous les autres étant laissés au repos: mais comme il est toujours prévu de possibles questions – et d'éventuelles réponses – et un hypothétique débat à la suite de chaque discours, l'administration du Congrès tient à ce que puissant être toujours

> assurées les traductions dans toutes les langues parlées par les congressistes, et dans tous les sens, lors d'une prise de parole par l'un d'entre eux, et même si la plupart sont absents et que les rares présents restent muets comme des carpes, ayant oubliés ce qu'ils font là. (Fleischer 2008: 34f)
>
> However, occasionally it happens that a speech is given and that, to everyone's surprise, a speaker presents himself on stage, resembling a spectre more than a human being made of flesh and blood, and one might assume that the appearance and address by an old geographer from Estonia – a neighbouring country – would merely require the services of the interpreter-translators working from Estonian into the other languages, giving all the others some respite: but as provisions are always made for possible questions – and answers – as well as for a hypothetical debate following each speech, the organisers of the congress would like translations to be available in all the languages spoken by congress participants and in all directions in case one of the participants should decide to speak, even though most of the participants are absent and the few people present are as mute as fishes and have forgotten why they are there in the first place.

The speeches are ends in themselves, an accumulation of empty words revolving around themselves within the congress building, but at least giving the interpreters the opportunity to practise:

> Toute cette séance, qui devient mon rite d'initiation, a quelque chose d'irréel, rien de ce qui se dit ne me semble pouvoir produire le moindre écho en dehors de l'enceinte du Palais, et nous nous trouvons dans un simple cours d'entraînement d'interprètes-traducteurs qui passent en revue différentes situations et cas d'école. Peut-être le Congrès sur l'Europe n'est-il que cela: une académie supérieure des interprètes-traducteurs où sont embauchés des politiciens en fin de course et des hauts fonctionnaires à la retraite pour fournir les situations de travaux pratiques et des séances de perfectionnement? (Fleischer 2008: 112)
>
> The entire conference, which becomes my initiation rite, seems surreal, nothing of what is said seems to resonate much whatsoever outside of the palace. Instead, we find ourselves in the midst of a basic training programme for interpreter-translators dealing with different situations and case studies. Maybe this is all the Europe Congress is: a higher training institution for interpreter-translators hiring yesterday's politicians and the retired civil servants who provide them with real-life working conditions and training situations?

The readers are confronted with a crazy world in which nothing makes sense: the interpreters do not "serve" the participants of the conference; instead, the participants of the conference serve the interpreters as case studies and for training purposes, the latter thus becoming an international elite through this material of excellence. The participants in the Europe Congress become objects and are degraded and stripped of their meaning in the process. The description of the uselessness and ineffectiveness of international conferences is an expression of the

author's harsh criticism of the powerlessness of Europe, i.e. the European Union. The building in which the Europe Congress takes place is a symbol of the EU's imperfection and failure. The former Soviet palace is known as the ugliest building in the whole of Russia (cf. Fleischer 2008: 96). It was built on the site where the fortress of the Prussian kings stood in former times which had been destroyed during the war. In order for the congress hall to be built, the old rubble was cleared away and an enormous hole was dug to wipe out the traces of the German past. However, 15 years later, construction work was stopped. Apparently, the foundation had been too weak to support the structure and had collapsed because of some very deep underground tunnels belonging to the old Königsberg Palace which had not been discovered beforehand. The German past and present can obviously not be obliterated altogether. As a consequence, the building remained incomplete, unfinished, as unfinished as Europe which could not be successful in regular playing time and as a consequence went into an endless state of extra time or "prolongation".

> […] et lorsque Kaliningrad s'est trouvée enclose dans une nouvelle extension de l'Union européenne – Pologne et Pays baltes –, un nouveau parti de rieurs a vu dans l´édifice une métaphore de l'Europe elle-même: condamnée à l'inachèvement et au délabrement par ses vices de construction rédhibitoires, et par l'inanité de son projet lui-même, éternellement en chantier et depuis toujours en ruine. (Fleischer 2008: 97)
>
> […] and when Kaliningrad found itself surrounded by a new enlargement of the European Union – Poland and the Baltic states – a new party of ridiculers saw the building as a metaphor of Europe itself: doomed to remain unfinished and dilapidated due to fundamental, morally unacceptable flaws in its construction and the utter pointlessness of the project itself, a permanent building site which has been in ruins from the outset.

The criticism towards Europe is massive – nationalism, separatism, individual agendas paralyse a project which is doomed to fail.

> N'est-il pas paradoxal, en effet, que dans cette époque où l'Europe prétend s'unifier, faire tomber les frontières, faciliter la circulation des personnes, mettre en dialogue les cultures, adopter une monnaie unique, et aussi des principes idéologiques et moraux communs, faire naître le sentiment d'une commun aouté historique d'une richesse culturelle sans égale, tant de désirs persistent ou se réveillent, prônant la séparation, la division, le repli, l'enfermement dans les identités singulières, l'exaltation d'une langue ou d'une religion, l'autonomie ou l'indépendance […] De doctes orateurs, tout pénétrés de leur cause, viendront de tous les pays pour discourir, argumenter, répondre aux questions de tous les autres et que nous autres, les interprètes-traducteurs, aurons à traduire dans toutes les langues, pour continuer de nourrir le monstrueux amoncellement des mots. (Fleischer 2008: 409f)

> At a time in which Europe pretends to unite, do away with borders, facilitate free movement of people, promote a dialogue between cultures, adopt a shared currency as well as shared moral and ideological principles, and seeks to awaken the feeling of being a historic community of unparalleled cultural diversity, is it not actually paradoxical that so many desires exist or come into existence calling for separation, division, seclusion, withdrawing into own identities, the idealisation of a language or religion, autonomy or independence […] Educated speakers, completely convinced of their cause, will come from all countries to give long speeches, debate, respond to the questions of all the others that we, the interpreter-translators, will then have to translate into all languages to continue nourishing this monstrous agglomerate of words.

As mentioned previously, the absurdity of international conferences is also described and parodied by Bachmann (1978), Brooke-Rose (1968/1986), Davidson (1993), Kant (1988) and Marías (2003): Conferences are ends in themselves, useless and dreadfully boring. In Javier Mariás's words,

> […] the task of the translator or interpreter of speeches and reports is boring in the extreme, both because of the identical and fundamentally incomprehensible jargon universally used by all parliamentarians, delegates, ministers, politicians, deputies, ambassadors, experts and representatives of all kinds from every nation of the world, and because of the unvaryingly turgid nature of all their speeches, appeals, protests, harangues and reports. (Marías 2003: 47)

Brooke-Rose's take on the situation is similar to that of Marías, also emphasising that speeches are given merely for the sake of giving a speech and that applause is a ritual, a means of self-adulation.

> You exaggerate. Something gets across.
> – Criss-cross.
> – Crease-crasse? God, verr god. The short gentleman with straight black hair suit labelled Laos says god, verr god indeed. The Germans they applause their speakers. The English they applause their speakers. The French they say alone the French make intellectual contribution. Only Laos delegation praise all.
> – And the Japanese. Don't forget the Japanese.
> – They praise, yes mademoiselle, also.
> – Presumably everyone comes for that. They certainly can't come for information since it all gets published anyway and they could simply read it.
> – Information? My dear good girl unless perhaps du ernst German Mädel or my sweet more likely how naïve can you get? After what three, four years on congresses and commissions you should know better than that.
> – Yes, well they might at least make a show of listening. Each speaker waits impatiently for his turn to read an interminable paper that has nothing to do with anything said before, you know, each one more concerned with output than intake.
> (Brooke-Rose 1968/1986: 421f)

According to Brooke-Rose, actually exchanging ideas is neither intended nor desired, on the contrary, this is a hindrance to real communication: "Out of the mouths of babes the Frenchman says with eloquent gestures, la vérité, la justice, l'humanité. The words prevent any true EXCHANGE […]" (Brooke-Rose 1968/1986: 399).

Ingeborg Bachmann shares this point of view. Conferences are a world of lies and hypocrisy. Nothing changes in this world because nobody wants to change anything: "[…] for whenever somebody is born with an adventurous mind and starts something new, you walk in and administrate it to death." (Bachmann 1978: 305)

The language spoken there abounds with truisms to the extent that it is perfectly possible to interpret while inebriated:

> The French delegation is pleased, very pleased, to join in the words of, uh, appreciation which have already been expressed to our Thai hosts … our Thai hosts … our hosts from Thailand. Thailand is a proudly independent country, […] with a tradition, of, uh, unfailing, uh, courtesy to visitors. (Davidson 1990: 39)

Brooke-Rose and Marías even go a step further. They describe interpreting as a completely useless profession, as a dead profession working from dead languages – "this great pressurised serenity and absolute calm she translates with from a dead language that compels no passion no commitment no loyalty to anyone" (Brooke-Rose 1968/1986: 559) – as people who have become talking stones: "But stones do talk. – Statistically, into microphones" (1968/ 1986: 416), i.e. as a profession in which even appearances of and speeches by deceased people are to be interpreted:

> Once I got an urgent phone call in my booth asking me to translate an (unwritten) speech about to be given by a politician who, as I myself knew from the headlines splashed across the front pages of the papers two days before, had been killed in his own country during a coup d'état that had successfully achieved its goal of overthrowing him. (Marías 2003: 49)

The description of the pointlessness of conferences reaches its climax in two works: *The Greek Interpreter* by Max Davidson (1990) and *Die Summe* by Hermann Kant (1988).

Max Davidson provides a parodistic description of how the speaking time allocated to each speaker at an international conference on human rights in Bangkok is reduced because the considerable length of the Thai national anthem was not taken into consideration when drawing up the timeframe for speakers. In addition to this, the interpreters go on strike and there is a power cut so that the eight minutes speaking time allocated to each speaker cannot be maintained. In an ongoing 30 page debate, speaking time is limited more and more until an agreement is reached that each speaker can only be granted 40 seconds. According to the chair of the conference, this is enough for dealing with the topic in question in an adequate way.

> […] forty seconds, gentlemen. If delegates confine their comments to essentials and take their place quickly on the rostrum, we should be able to hold a worthwhile debate in the best parliamentary traditions […]. (Davidson 1990: 145)

In *Die Summe* by Hermann Kant, the Helsinki signatory states convene in Budapest to create a European cultural foundation. However, due to financial constraints, the conference is merely simulated to start with. This simulated conference develops into a forum of dissent among diplomats bound by the political friend-or-foe constellations predetermined by their respective states. The resulting tension dominates the conference, there is no space left for the actual topic at hand.

Like Davidson, Kant also writes about speaking time. *Summe* presumably refers to the sum total of speaking time allocated to each individual participant in the conference. Discrepancies are not permissible, speaking time has to be the same for all, everything has to add up. Numbers games and formalities have priority over the topics and goals of the conference. From the perspective of the representative of the former GDR, the author describes in an ironic way how the participating states – at the time still divided into communist and capitalist states – spend several hours discussing the order of speakers, voting systems or languages in working groups. The sessions of the different working groups are no less chaotic. There are three camps: the two big "blocks", the capitalist and communist states, as well as the non-aligned countries. Each group is to be represented by three states. But by which? Reaching an agreement seems impossible. After discussions that go on for days on end, the participants agree to use a lottery wheel to decide. The lottery drawing is carried out at random and broadcast on Hungarian television. Politics becomes a game of chance (cf. Kant 1988: 163).

*Die Summe – Eine Begebenheit* is another harsh criticism of the idiosyncrasies of international conferences. The conference participants – condescendingly referred to as speech bubbles by the interpreters – produce nothing but hot air and lack even a modicum of seriousness and credibility (cf. Kant 1988: 148).

It is the interpreters, however, who fall prey to these speech bubbles, not only according to Kant and Fleischer, but also in the novels of the other authors mentioned. The derision, the irony and criticism of the authors is targeted at the delegates and the void surrounding them. But the interpreters, no matter how intelligent and capable they may be, cannot resist this void. Fleischer's interpreters are also witnesses and victims of the inertia, feebleness and pointlessness of the congress and ultimately, of Europe. They convey this void, they are mouthpieces without a message, there is no audience, there are no listeners, the interpreters interpret themselves, "nourish" this logorrhea and end up being consumed by boredom and emptiness. Fleischer refers to interpreters as "troupes de réservistes"

(Fleischer 2008: 34), (reservists) on standby, unfulfilled and bored, ready to spring into action on demand, like soldiers in a battle. Except that there is no meaningful duty to perform. To illustrate this, the interpreters bring the meaninglessness of their work to a climax: In the last meeting before the holidays, they let Tibor give a speech in a language that does not exist and, as a consequence, cannot be understood by anyone. Tibor speaks a language he invented himself which resembles Yiddish, however he does not use a single Yiddish word. His artificial language is understood. His invented language has a greater impact and makes more sense than the delegates' "real" languages (Fleischer 2008: 332f).

His speech is followed by a farewell address and speech of thanks by the vice mayor of Kaliningrad in charge of international relations. He speaks Russian. The interpreters have agreed to interpret his speech using animal sounds "les plus variés pour produire le vacarme infernal d'une arche de Noé" (Fleischer 2008: 328) (all kinds of different sounds to imitate the infernal noise of Noah's Arc). They are to be screams of terror and despair evoking the fear of the end. The speech with its interpretation into animal language, together with the conference participants' snoring, grunting, harrumphing and hissing noises, morphs into a huge cacophony (cf. Fleischer 2008: 336). The absurdness of the actions of all those participating in the Europe Congress reflects the absurdity of Europe, Tibor's extra time or "prolongation" expresses helplessness, a standstill – Fleischer's view on European unification: Europe has not scored any goals during regular playing time. The score of the match of good-spirited versus evil-spirited Europe is nil-nil. Europe needs to go into extra time – the outcome is uncertain.

Alain Fleischer's depiction of the interpreter and his impact on conferences has little in common with reality, instead, it is tailored to meet the author's requirements. Fleischer needs the figure of the interpreter to highlight the emptiness of the language of international representatives and, in doing so, the empty nature of a political concept – of a united Europe.

The image of the interpreter as a parrot who only repeats, but does not understand what he interprets, and does not need to understand anything anyway, as nobody expects him to understand in the first place, is widespread. Fleischer's portrayal of the interpreter as a creature uttering animal sounds goes a step further. His interpreters renounce language itself, their only purpose in life according to most of these literary works. His interpreters "degenerate" – as does Europe. A bold metaphor and an apocalyptical scenario which certainly has the desired effect on the reader. However, understandable as it may be from a professional point of view, it would be a great injustice to these literary texts to merely criticise the authors' incorrect descriptions of international conferences and their "false", cliché-ridden depictions of conference interpreting which are in complete

contradiction to professional ethics, as doing so would reduce these texts to a mere rendering of reality. But they are not a rendering of reality, nor are they intended to be. As has been established, the authors pursue their own intentions. For interpreters and the interpreting profession, it is important to learn about the general attitude towards and perception of interpreters in literature, about their characteristics, prejudices, illusions, hopes and fears associated with these characters. Moreover, it is interesting to examine to which extent literature takes up existing perceptions of interpreting and plays an active part in their construction. Exploring the complex interaction between literature and socio-professional reality will continue to challenge the field of translation studies for a long time to come and is certain to offer us many more interesting insights in the future.

## References

### Primary sources

Bachmann, I. 1978. "Simultan." In *Werke I-IV*, C. Koschel & I. von Weidenbaum & C. Münster (eds.), Band II, 284–317. München/Zürich: Piper.

Brooke-Rose, C. 1968/1986. "Between." In *OMNIBUS – Four Novels: Out, Such, Between, Thru*, 391–575. Manchester/New York: Carcanet Press.

Davidson, M. 1990. *The Greek Interpreter*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Davidson, M. 1993. *L'interprète grec*. Traduit par Serge Quadruppani. Paris: Editions Métailié.

Doyle, A. C. 1972. "The Greek Interpreter." In *The complete Sherlock Holmes*, 435–446. New York: Doubleday and Company.

Fleischer, A. 2008. *Prolongations*. Paris: Gallimard.

Goethe, J. W. von. 1811. "Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit". In *Goethe. Sämtliche Werke*, D. Borchmeyer et al. (eds.) (1986). Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag.

Kant, H. 1988. *Die Summe – Eine Begebenheit*. Berlin/Leipzig: Rütten & Loening.

Le Carré, J. 2006. *Geheime Melodie*. Translated from Spanish by Sabine Roth and Regina Rawlinson. Berlin: List.

Marías, J. 1996. *Mein Herz so weiß*. Übersetzung: Elke Wehr. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Marías, J. 2003. *A Heart so White*. Translated from Spanish by Margaret Jull Costa. London: Vintage.

Maurois, A. 1918. *Les silences du Colonel Bramble*. Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset et André Maurois.

Maurois, A. 1920. *Le Général Bramble*. Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset et André Maurois.

Maurois, A. 1950. *Les silences du colonel Bramble, Les discours et nouveaux discours du Docteur O'Grady*. Paris: Editions Bernard Grasset et André Maurois.

Whyte-Melville, G. J. 1856–1858. "The Interpreter. A tale of the War". *The Living A*ge. New York.

## Secondary sources


Andres, D. 2008. *Dolmetscher als literarische Figuren. Von Identitätsverlust, Dilettantismus und Verrat*. München: Meidenbauer.

Andres, D. 2009. "Dolmetscher in fiktionalen Werken – von Verirrung, Verwirrung und Verführung." *Germanistisches Jahrbuch Russland – Das Wort*: 11–24.

Dyserinck, H. 1988. "Komparatistische Imagologie. Zur politischen Tragweite einer europäischen Wissenschaft von der Literatur." In *Europa und das nationale Selbstverständnis. Imagologische Probleme in Literatur, Kunst und Kultur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. (Aachener Beiträge zur Komparatistik; Bd. 8), H. Dyserinck & K. U. Syndram (eds.), 13–38. Bonn: Bouvier.

Kaindl, K. & Kurz, I. (eds.). 2008. *Helfer, Verräter, Gaukler? Das Rollenbild von TranslatorInnen im Spiegel der Literatur*. Wien: LIT-Verlag.

Kaindl, K. & Kurz, I. (eds.). 2010. *Machtlos, selbstlos, meinungslos? Interdisziplinäre Analysen von Übersetzer-Innen und DolmetscherInnen in belletristischen Werken*. Wien: LIT-Verlag.

Karasek, H. 1996. "Kalte Glut der Einflüsterungen." *Der Spiegel* 24: 195–197.

Kurz, I. & Kaindl, K. (eds.). 2005. *Wortklauber, Sinnverdreher, Brückenbauer? DolmetscherInnen und ÜbersetzerInnen als literarische Geschöpfe*. Wien: LIT-Verlag.

Müller, L. 2006. "Keine Reise nach Afrika." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Nr. 253, 2. November 2006: 20.

Pörksen, U. 1989. *Plastikwörter: die Sprache einer internationalen Diktatur*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Prunč, E. 2005. "Zwischen Welten und Werten. Identitätskonstruktionen in Ward Justs The Translator." In *Wortklauber, Sinnverdreher, Brückenbauer? DolmetscherInnen und ÜbersetzerInnen als literarische Geschöpfe*, I. Kurz & K. Kaindl (eds.), 153–163. Wien: LIT-Verlag.

EPISODE IV

# Carrying function into effect

# Willa Muir: The “factional” translator

## How Muir self-fictionalized her translations of Kafka’s work

Michelle Woods
State University of New York, New Paltz

### From Mrs. Muir to Mrs. Muttoe

Wyndham Lewis, in his satire of the 1920s London literary scene, *The Apes of God* (1930), honed in on Willa and Edwin Muir, Franz Kafka’s first English language translators. Horace Zagreus points out the “Keiths” as they are called in the novel, to his acolyte, Daniel Boleyn:

> He is as you see, a very earnest, rather melancholy freckled little being – whose dossier is that, come into civilization from amid the gillies and haggises of Goy or Arran, living in poverty, he fell in love with that massive, elderly Scottish lady next to him – that is his wife. She opened her jaws and swallowed him comfortably. There he was once more inside a woman, as it were – tucked up in her old tummy. In no way embarrassed with this slight additional burden (the object of all her wishes, of masculine gender – but otherwise little more than a sexless foetus) she started off upon the *grand tour*. And there in the remoter capitals of Europe the happy pair remained for some time, in erotic-maternal trance no doubt – the speckled foetus acquiring the german alphabet … (Lewis 1965: 315)

Lewis is snide in all his portraits in the novel, but the memorable fictionalization of Willa Muir swallowing up the emasculated speckled foetus, Edwin Muir, reveals the misogynistic anxiety about the independent, educated, and feminist Willa Muir. It gives some sense of the societal expectations within which she had to work, both as a writer and a translator.

Left unpublished is Muir’s own fictionalization of herself as a translator – a novel, written sometime in the 1930s, entitled *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey*, which looks at the relationship between the domestic and professional lives of Allison Muttoe, a translator and writer whose circumstances mirror Muir’s closely. In fact, some feminist critics have dismissed the novel as unimportant because it is

so factually tied into Muir's life, but is not as informative or accomplished as her actual memoir, *Belonging*, which she published in 1968, after her husband's death. But, as Sherry Simon pointed out, Willa Muir is not very forthcoming in her memoir about her translatorial experiences, despite the fact that for much of the 1920s and 1930s, Muir was occupied with translation in order to earn money for herself and Edwin to write. Muir, Sherry writes, "mentions her translation work only in passing, making few comments about its demands" (Simon 1996: 76). Her memoir is also particularly strategic in reference to translation because it is a portrait of her marriage, a marriage she saw as being at the forefront of a drive toward equality and she presents (with some slippages) their translation work as an endeavor of equals, emblematic of that marriage. In private, however, she claimed to have done most of the translation work herself, but did not believe, in her own words, that the "patriarchy" would accept that she had done it. In this light, the novel is much more revealing than her memoir, portraying her, in the guise of Allison Muttoe, as the one doing the translation work, so that Dick Muttoe, the fictionalized Edwin Muir, can get on with his writing undisturbed at the top of the house, up in the top storey. The suggestiveness of the title, with the homophonic "storey/story", indicates a positioning of "Mrs Muttoe" with and against the official version, or top story, of the Muirs' relationship.

## Translator fictions

Muir's unpublished novel is unusual and important in thinking about "translator fictions" (Thiem 1995: 213) for two reasons: Because of the lack of examples in English language literature of strong translator figures in the modernist novel, especially the translator as a heroine; and, secondly, Muir's fictional portrayal of her factual life, both in the quotidian issues of translation for a woman, and the creative possibilities of the impact of translation on a translator's writing. In thinking about "translator fictions" Jon Thiem compares the paucity of translator figures in modernist fiction with the proliferation of them in postmodern fiction (cf. Thiem 1995: 208), arguing that the postmodern moment – its epigonism and sense of cultural belatedness – found in the translator a suitable figure of unease, with identity and authenticity. The translators, in these fictions, "lack a strong sense of personal identity, and this deficiency seems to be both a precondition and a product of their engaging in translations" (Thiem 1995: 214). These translator figures, in postmodern fiction, often become authors, leading to conflict but "the results are usually unforeseen and calamitous […] with ambiguous, if not positively unhappy, results" (Thiem 1995: 215).

What is striking about Willa Muir's quite autobiographical fictionalization, or *fact*ionalization, of her experiences translating Feuchtwanger and Kafka is her portrait of a female identity, threatened by the binds of patriarchy, that is strengthened via the act of translation. Towards the end of Muir's novel, Alison Muttoe finally begins to imagine her own writing, inspired and freed by her translation of a fictional Kafka. The novel changes in tone, also: Moving from a relatively realistic portrait of the everyday life of a translator, to a modernist appraisal of a femininist imagination at work, directly inspired by Kafka. If we have associated the increasing portrayal of the translator figure with instability, invisibility and a secondary status (seemingly indicative of the postmodern or the post-postmodern moment), Muir's unpublished novel is important in establishing something else at work during the modernist moment in its representation of the translator as a strongly articulated identity that can exist hand-in-hand with creativity. Like other modernist authors who regarded translation as "an expressly generative and literary mode of writing, rather than a principally linguistic operation limited in scope simply to reproducing the 'meaning' of a foreign text" (Yao 2002: 12f), Muir gives us a portrait, in the second half of the book, of the artist as a translator.

The novel provides, initially, a fascinating portrayal of the quotidian and domestic nature of translation as a profession for women, especially at a time when women had not attained a position of professional equality. If Dick Muttoe is on the top storey of the house, Allison is at its "Centre", not only engaged in the translation work that helps him write, but also in the management of the house and the care of their child (the Muirs' had a son, Gavin). In order to have the time to translate and be professional, Allison Muttoe relies on servants – all female – to cook, clean and take care of the house, and the novel's cyclical narrative actually revolves around the search for women that Allison can rely on to give her time to translate. The burden of work on the female translator, in Muir's novel, had to be predicated on, and spread into, other women's labor. "'What I'm actually looking for', she says to her husband, Dick, 'is a wife.'" (Muir *Mrs Muttoe* 13)

## Factionalization

This "undisguised account" (Elphinstone 1997: 410) of "the fairly uneventful life of Alison and Dick over a few months" (Christianson 2007: 143), dismissed as just "thinly disguised documentation" (Allen 1997: 314) of the Muirs' life, is especially revealing of the burden of translation work and whose shoulders – "brawny" ones according to Wyndham Lewis – the burden is laid on. Christianson's critique of the novel being essentially boring because it represents their fairly uneventful life, somewhat misses the point that Muir tries to make in portraying the

quotidian life of a professional woman in the thirties, burdened as it is not only with making money but also with managing a household. Translation is part of that quotidian life; it is for the most part a burden because it is a material necessity. To keep her home intact and her husband writing, she has to do it, even when she does not respect the original work of the writer she's working on, a certain Rheingold (a thinly disguised Leon Feuchtwanger). The Muirs' first translation of a novel, Feuchtwanger's *Jud Süss*, had been a runaway success, because, Willa Muir says in her memoir, "they produced a 'polished rendering' of it" (1968: 125), i.e., domesticated it. When they produced a non-Englished version of his next book, it flopped – Muir is clear in her memoir that they learnt their lesson from that experience; they realized that what their publishers wanted was a "polished rendering" of the original.

What is striking about Muir's fictionalization of the experience of translating Feuchtwanger, is the absence of Edwin in the process. At one point in the novel, they decide to spend their summer in a cottage in Sussex, where Dick will write and Alison will finish the translation, due by mid-September. "'You'll manage it, won't you?' Dick asks her, and thinks to himself: 'We shall need the money by then.'" (Muir *Mrs Muttoe* 108) "'Easily', she answers, 'I'll get on fast with it today.' But Dick says, 'I thought you had a lot of other things to do', to which she replies, 'It just seemed a lot of things; it's really only one thing: closing the house up and leaving it ship-shape.'" (108) Once they're in Sussex, Alison "abandons all pretense" of working on the translation in order to "sweep, make beds, burn refuse in the boiler, and prepare eatable mid-day dinners" (129) as well as "devoting herself" to the servant she hired, Alice, who had arrived at their door as a virtual down-and-out. Dick "shattered the dream by enquiring innocently one day" (132):

> 'How's the translation getting on?'
> After a moment's silence, Mrs. M asked in her turn:
> 'What date is to-day, Dick?'
> 'The fourteenth – no, the fifteenth – no, I believe it's actually the sixteenth.'
> 'Are we in the middle of August already?'
> 'I'm afraid so.'
> 'They want the translation middle of September, didn't you say?'
> Mrs. M's voice sounded woe-begone.
> 'Can't you finish it by then? Shall I give you a hand?'
> 'Oh no, Dick, you've got to finish your own book. It's up to me. I took it on, and I'll do it.'
> 'Don't go pottering round the house so much. Leave Alice to herself, and you'll manage.'
> 'Pottering!' said Mrs. M. 'Pottering, indeed! I'm keeping Alice from pottering; that's what I'm doing.' (132)

Dick's rather anemic offer to give her a hand with the translation is immediately rebuffed by Alison because "It's up to me" as she "took it on" but in fact she is clearly busy and preoccupied with domestic chores and taking care not only of Dick, but also her son, Peter, and the servant, Alice. For Alison – and here Muir has been criticized on a feminist level – the most important thing is to keep the home as a safe haven of "loving-kindness" in contrast to the world outside, where "loving-kindness seemed to be dispersed in a void, atomized, powerless" (242). The rise of fascism and the Spanish civil war are in the background; the home is, for Alison, an alternative choice to this warlike, patriarchal spirit (and she explicitly connects and blames the patriarchy for the horrors of the two world wars). In this, I think, Muir is acutely feminist; she is not idealizing the domestic place of women, but suggesting it as a radical alternative to the society of the Wyndham Lewis's she lives in. But the work women do to create a loving environment is not valued not only because it goes against the patriarchal spirit but also the capitalist one: Translation is more important than looking after her family (to Dick) because it has value in the capitalist scheme of things.

So while Alison realizes that her "pottering" around isn't getting the translation done, it does have some tangible effect on the world:

> There was something to show for it, too: Peter, robust, tanned and more skilful with his fingers, Alice plumping out and looking happy, Bartholomew blissful, Dick and herself restfully contented, like cabbages. (133)

Alison thinks and then remembers:

> But the translation!
> Mrs. M began to count pages. No, the translation results were meagre. ~~Utterly inadequate~~. She wasn't even earning her keep.
> Damn money, said Mrs. M to herself, beginning to translate at high speed.
> 'Damn money', she repeated later to her husband. 'The activities I get paid for don't seem to me nearly so important as those I don't get paid for. This book of Rheingold's I'm translating, for instance, isn't even a good book of its kind. I'm translating it well; I'm putting a polish on it; but that only means putting a gloss on what is essentially cheap wood. It wouldn't be worth doing but for the money.'
> 'I know, darling. All the same, it will sell a good deal more that my book of essays', commented Dick M ruefully.
> That was the problem. The delicacy and clarity of Dick's literary gifts delighted only a small circle of appreciative readers. Cherishing Peter might provide the world later with a brilliant mathematician, but meanwhile it did not clothe and feed him. Cherishing Alice might be good for Alice, but it certainly brought home no bacon. Yet Dick had to be cherished and encouraged to finish his book; Peter must be cherished; Alice should be cherished. (133f)

The problem with all this cherishing, for Alison, is her realization that while she is "a living environment" providing a home of loving-kindness for her family, "beyond me there is no larger, living environment to cherish and encourage me" (240). Alison wants to write, too, but the only time she can think about it is during the night, when her duties as a wife, mother, and translator, are over. She tells Dick her idea about the top storey and the Center, and he encourages her to develop it creatively (which Muir of course is doing in writing the novel itself). When he asks her later whether she finished writing her idea down, she laughs, saying she has barely begun. In the manuscript, Muir has crossed out what follows:

> 'Well, you can carry it on to-morrow, can't you?'
> 'Tomorrow I'm going to sit down to the translation.'
> 'But if this thing has really taken hold of you, why not carry on with it?'
> 'I'll finish it later on', said Alison Muttoe firmly, 'when the translation's done.'
> (152)

Alison is not only the translator of the couple, but in doing it to allow Dick time to write, it prevents her from writing and developing her ideas. Even the sacrosanct nighttime is invaded by the deadline of translation. In one final push, Alison has to finish the Rheingold translation and stays up till 5am:

> She collected on a tray all that was needed for making tea, abstracted a few of Peter's biscuits, supplied herself with cigarettes and matches and carried this equipment into her study. It was a familiar routine, for several times already, in an emergency, she had worked all night long, usually correcting proofs … She had just broken into the last chapter and she was not going to give up now. Sipping tea, nibbling biscuits, reminding herself that this was the very last lap of Rheingold's silly book, she roused her flagging energies and went on writing. The final two paragraphs of the chapter bothered her extremely; she had to revise them three times before she was satisfied. Her head ached a little, her fingers were cramped, she yearned to stretch her limbs. (174f)

She can concentrate on translation – as she mentions she has in the past – at night, because it is the one time she won't be disturbed. Earlier in the novel, as she sits down to translate, she is disturbed in her office by the demands of the household – her son, the servants, the dog, visitors – to the extent that her work is constantly interrupted also by her own worries and thoughts about the domestic realm. It is contrasted with Dick, sequestered in the top storey, ably cut off from daily demands; she can see him mentally cutting himself off even before he physically gets to that top storey.

## From Kafka to Garta

What motivates her to finish the Rheingold translation is not just money, but also the prospect of her next translation job, another writer called Garta. Kafkophiles might recognize the name as the one given by Max Brod to his fictionalization of Kafka in his novel, *Zauberreich der Liebe* [*The Kingdom of Love*]. "'Rheingold's shoddy novel would soon be finished', she thinks, 'then Alison could really enjoy herself translating Garta'" (144f). In contrast to the drudgery of translating Rheingold, the translation of Garta's work feeds into her creativity and connects itself to the ideas she was having about the "top story" of a house, and its "centre" – the top story connected to the patriarchy, capitalism, and the ego; the centre connected to women, loving-kindness, and the id. "'Translating Garta puts me into a queer state of mind', Alison says, 'you know, although I enjoy doing it … That may be partly why I've been feeling a bit nightmarish.'" (252) She adds:

> It was true that Garta's work seemed to come straight out of the region which evoked dreams and nightmares. He showed an uncanny skill in describing the twists and turns of frustrated feelings; merely to read him was like having an anxiety dream by proxy. And every incident in his ~~imagery~~ stories, almost every phrase, carried so many implications that the translation had to be done slowly, with extreme care.
>
> Yes, Garta is making me fanciful, decided Alison Muttoe, opening her jotter. I'm turning into a creature like the Princess in the fable, who couldn't sleep because of a single hard pea under a dozen mattresses. (252f)

In contrast to translating Feuchtwanger for money and as a job, this translation "had to be done slowly, with extreme care" because of all the "implications" of "almost every phase"; Alison is aware of the exegetical interpretation she is making as she translates, and, in doing so, it turns into an implicitly creative act. The uncanniness of Kafka's prose disturbs her into creativity, speaking "out of the region which evoked dreams and nightmares", in other words, the unconscious, or the id, that Muir associates with a particularly female place unrestrained by the material demands of the patriarchy. Invoking the language of socialized femininity, via the fairytale and the "Princess", from the "Princess and the Pea", Muir subverts it, by calling the Princess a "creature", something not quite human. And, while in the fairytale the Princess is outed as a Princess because she can feel the pea underneath the many mattresses (thus showing her innate breeding), the "single hard pea" here is the immanent untranslatability of Kafka's text, the nub that makes that untranslatability a locus of creativity.

Muir's novel closes with a surrealist dream that is clearly influenced by Kafka and, in the novel, by Alison's act of translating Garta. Alison finds herself in a bizarre structure representing the patriarchal and capitalist world, what she calls 'the Money fabric', with humans, including her, stuck to the outside:

> she was clinging to its outer surface like a fly on a window-pane. Her nose was pressed against a hard, glassy substance through which she could see bewildering activities going on in the interior. Small human structures, with windowed top-storeys and jointed arm-cranes, were swarming on Meccano-like legs throught an endless perspective of corridors and offices apparently made of the same transparent, resilient substance against which her nose was pressed. She could distinguish a succession of upper storeys receding above her as far as the eye could see, and three – or was it four? – floors beneath her the building descended into what looked like a vast pit.
> The arena of this pit was covered with a mass of moving humans […]. (267f)

She sees a number of lifts going up and down the "Money fabric", the nearest ones marked, "Goods Ascending", and the other, "Profits Descending" (269). Men grab as many parcels as they can and each wrap them, throw them back into the lift, where they go up to be stamped by other men; a "uniformed official" (269) checks the packages and hands out coins. Women scramble up and down to "thousand a year" or "five hundred a year" levels, depending on the commercial worth of their husbands. Alison drops onto a balcony in the fabric and lands on a street full of women, called "the Social Round" (271). There are no shops but "The buttons of the right-hand lift said Grocer, Butcher, Baker, Dairy, Laundry, and so on, while those of the left-hand lift announced Cook, Housemaid, Cook-general" (272). She presses the button for a Cook, but there are none:

> 'They're sending all the cooks up higher, that's what it is', said one of them. 'We have no luck on this level.'
> 'What level is this?'
> 'This is five-hundred-a-year level, of course', said the female. ' Don't you know where your husband works, or your father?'
> 'I don't think my husband's in the fabric at all', said Alison. 'At least, I hope he isn't.'
> 'The woman's a fool', said a voice. All the women turned their backs on Alison and stalked away. (272)

Alison notices a "trap-door" (272) underneath her and a woman is climbing up to the "five hundred a year" level; Alison decides to go down, where the services are lesser, and asks what's underneath the "one hundred and fifty level" (275) and is accused of wanting to go "slumming" (275). The clear implication of Alison's

dream, of a class system tightly knit into the commercial worth of men, and the definition of women by their husband’s or their father’s worth, also shows her idealistic wish that her “husband’s [not] in the fabric at all”, meaning that his work and he should not be defined by the capitalist patriarchy and by implication, neither should she. The maze of humans and the ‘uniformed official’ brings to mind the opening of, and the Court in Kafka’s *The Trial,* as well as the Hotel Occidental in *Amerika*. Kafka influences Muir’s novel, thus, both textually – Alison’s dream affected by translating Garta in the novel – and meta-textually; Muir writing in a modernist style influenced by Kafka and writing about the act of translating him.

Once again, it needs to be emphasized that, in *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey*, Alison is not helped by Dick when she translates Garta; Dick’s remote presence in the top storey of the house never once picks up a translatorial pen in the novel. “Back at her own front gate”, Alison thinks towards the end of the book, she “saw her home again, and it was not a home; it was an office. Two people called Dick and Alison Muttoe carried on the work of the firm there, in partnership” (247). But it is not the equal partnership Muir so emphasizes nearly thirty years later in her memoir, *Belonging*. The novel, I want to argue, is more factual about the actuality of their translating life, echoing Willa Muir’s claim in her journal in 1953 that:

> the fact remains; I am a better translator that [Edwin] is. The whole current of patriarchal society is set against this fact, however, and sweeps it into oblivion, simply because I did not insist on shouting aloud: ‘Most of this translation, especially Kafka, has been done by ME. Edwin only helped.’ And every time Edwin was referred to as THE translator, I was too proud to say anything; and Edwin himself felt it would be undignified to speak up, I suppose. So that now, especially since my break-down in the middle of the war, I am left without a shred of literary reputation. (Muir *Journals* MS 38466/5/5: 20 August 1953)

Although *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey* was set in their London years, it seems to have been written during a very unhappy time in St. Andrew’s, soon before Willa Muir’s breakdown and long hospitalization. Muir hated the social stratification in the town, and the narrow constraints especially on woman (in stark contrast to the hopefulness of her time as a student there before WWI, when she was one of the first women to be awarded a degree in Classics). Returning to St. Andrew’s in the 1950s on a visit, Muir became physically incapacitated on arrival in what seems to have been a severe psychic reaction to returning there (cf. MS 38466 5/6 26th September 1955). It brought up memories of her breakdown and her decision to “kill what I call my ‘vanity’” i.e. her “ambition to write” to get better; she realized then that “in killing, or trying to kill, my vanity, I had nearly succeeded in killing myself” (MS 38466 5/6 1st October 1955). But, also in her journal, she

writes about the lack of support from Edwin in her creative efforts. *Mrs Muttoe* was never published (it is unclear whether it was even sent off to a publisher), and, when she finished her next novel, *The Usurpers*, an interesting *roman à clef* about the Muirs's time in Prague during the Communist coup in 1948 (which remained unpublished for libel reasons), she had a "bit of black despair and resentment … because Edwin let it lie for days before reading it":

> I know he was tired and busy, but I had wanted him to show enthusiasm and interest; he never said a word about it, not even regretting that he couldn't read it, because his eyes hurt, or he had other work, or what-not. Had he regretted not reading it, had he said: I'm sorry I can't get at it yet, I should have been appeased, for I think I am reasonable. It was his apparent utter indifference that got me down; I could see how little value he attached to the expectations he might have of it, how little real importance he felt it would have. Perhaps he is right, thought I; the book I have been dreaming myself into, with such enthusiasm and delight, is really a very second-rate production: it won't matter to anyone. It made me suicidal for some hours, until I got over it.
>
> Once convinced that you are utterly unimportant, you think suicide doesn't matter. Nothing matters […] The only thing is to depend on myself.
>
> (Muir *Journals* MS 38466/5/5 22 Feb 1952)

Willa Muir's assertions in her memoir that they worked as a team are slightly propagandistic, promoting her ideal of marriage as a place for equals, but she explores the reality of her creative life with Edwin - although it was a very happy marriage on a personal level - as one beset by issues connected to expectations of her gender. Willa Muir was expected to translate to earn money for Edwin to write (he explicitly detested translation, calling it a "secondary art" (Muir & Muir 1966: 93)) and to maintain the home, something that impinged on her translation work and, most clearly, on her writing. "Why are we alive at all?" she asked herself in her journal, "Edwin's poems will live. But of himself only a legend. Of me, only a very distorted legend." (Muir *Journals* MS 38466/5/5, 13 Jan 1951) Willa Muir contributed to that "distorted legend" in her memoir, but perhaps here in the novel and in her journals we get a sense of what her life was like as a translator and a writer. "I want to be acknowledged", she wrote in 1952, and so she should be.

## References


Allen, K. A. 1997. *The Life and Work of Willa Muir, 1890–1955*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of St. Andrews, Scotland.

Christianson, A. 2007. *Moving in Circles: Willa Muir's Writings*. Edinburgh: Word Power Books.

Elphinstone, M. 1997. "Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres." In *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, D. Gifford & D. McMillan (eds.), 400–415. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Lewis, W. 1930/1965. *The Apes of God*. London: Penguin.

Muir, E. & Muir, W. 1966. "Translating from the German." In *On Translation*, R. Brower (ed.), 93–96. New York: Oxford University Press.

Muir, W. 1968. *Belonging*. London: Hogarth Press.

Muir, W. *Mrs Muttoe and the Top Storey*. Willa Muir Archive. St. Andrews University. Unpubl. Manuscript.

Muir, W. *Journals*. Willa Muir Archive. St. Andrews University. Unpubl. Manuscript.

Simon, S. 1996. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. New York: Routledge.

Thiem, J. 1995. "The Translator as Hero in Postmodern Fiction." *Translation and Literature* 4 (2): 207–218.

Yao, S. 2002. *Translation and the Languages of Modernism. Gender, Politics, Language*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

# Translation as a source of humor

## Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is illuminated*/*Alles ist erleuchtet*

Waltraud Kolb
University of Vienna

### Introduction

When Jonathan Safran Foer's book *Everything is illuminated* was published in 2002 it was highly acclaimed by critics. It has since been translated into more than 20 languages. The book was praised for its polyphonic structure and its unconventional treatment of the Holocaust. What mainly accounted for its instant national and international success, though, was the humor that pervades it. In 2005, the book was made into a film, adapted for the screen and directed by Liev Schreiber. The film reviews were not as enthusiastic as those of the book had been in 2002, but, again, the film's strength was primarily attributed to its humor. Much of this humor comes from Foer's playing with the concept of translation, translation ethics and the role of the translator, which makes it worthwhile to discuss the humorous effects in the book and the film from a translation studies perspective. In this chapter, I will therefore take a closer look at the nature of humor and how translation can be turned into a source of literary humor. To do so, I will examine the strategies of translation-related humor as expressed in four versions of *Everything is illuminated*: Foer's original, Schreiber's film version and the translation of book and film into a further language in which Foer's story was also well-received by readers and critics, i.e. the translation into German.

J. S. Foer won a number of awards for *Everything is illuminated*, such as *The Guardian* First Book Award in 2002 at the age of 24. He was compared to writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jeffrey Eugenides and Jonathan Franzen, or to film makers such as Aki Kaurismäki and Woody Allen. All the critics praised the book for its humor. A "spectacular debut – extremely funny, linguistically brilliant" (Collis 2002) is how *The Observer*, for instance, described it; the *Evening Standard* labeled it as "consistently entertaining" and "dazzlingly imaginative" (Maunsell 2002); the *New York Times Book Review* celebrated its "assured, hilarious prose"

for being "so virtuosic, so appealing – and finally, just so much fun" (Prose 2002), while Susan Sontag's verdict in the *Times Literary Supplement* was: "Showy, smart. Made me laugh a lot" (quoted in Foer 2002: I). Most critics attributed the humorous effects of the book mainly to the English spoken by one of the protagonists, a young Ukrainian named Alex who serves as an impromptu interpreter for an American tourist in the Ukraine, a "sublimely funny pidgin English all too obviously picked up from a well-worn thesaurus", as the *New York* magazine put it (Mendelsohn 2002).

The German translation by Dirk van Gunsteren, which came out as *Alles ist erleuchtet* in 2003, was also a critical success and successfully re-created the humor of the original. As one German reviewer said of the book, "It's so funny and clever, it has so much humor in it and so much wisdom coming in small packages that you sometimes wonder how this could have happened to such a young writer." And the reviewer expressly extended his praise to the translator who, he said, had transferred Alex's funny English into "correctly wrong German" (Winkels 2003, my translation). Dirk van Gunsteren is a highly acclaimed literary translator who has translated works by Thomas Pynchon, V. S. Naipaul, Philip Roth, Patricia Highsmith, T. C. Boyle, John Irving, John Grisham, Oliver Sacks, Eric Ambler, and many others.

## Book and film

Turning books into films invariably means leaving things out, selecting and condensing and transferring what is said in so many words in a book into fewer words. At the same time, images and sounds, such as the characters' voices and accents, capture and convey important aspects of the book. In this case, the condensation of the subject matter was extensive. While the book consists of three intertwining parts told from different perspectives and by two different narrators and makes use of multiple literary genres (travel narrative, letters, historical novel), the film is a rather straight-forward account of a road trip following the story line of just one part of the book, taking some material from the second part, but completely ignoring the third. The multi-perspectivity of the book has been widely discussed by literary scholars and critics and, together with its humor, credited with its success. When comparing the book and the film, though, I will not discuss matters of condensation or delve into what has been left out but rather focus on what the two versions have in common and what I am interested in for the purpose of this chapter – the role of translation with a view to the humorous effects of the story.

It will, therefore, suffice here to briefly sketch the story as it is told in the film. It is the account of a trip taken by a young American by the name of Jonathan

Safran Foer, who travels to the Ukraine to find Augustine, a woman who supposedly saved his Jewish grandfather from the Nazis. Jonathan hires a Ukrainian interpreter and a driver for this trip. The interpreter is Alex, a young man about the same age as Jonathan. His father has a travel agency that provides tour guides to Jewish tourists who come to the Ukraine in search of their ancestors; the driver is Alex's grandfather. The three men are a highly incongruous group, and Alex has his hands full, especially as they set out on their journey, acting as a mediator between his anti-Semitic grandfather and Jonathan. They drive through the Ukraine in search of a place called Trachimbrod where Jonathan's grandfather and Augustine supposedly lived. They fail to find Augustine, but they do find Augustine's sister, Lista, who seems to have just been waiting for their arrival. She shows them hundreds of neatly labeled boxes in which she has collected everything that remained of Trachimbrod after the Nazis had shot almost all its inhabitants. The story turns out to be also the story of Alex's grandfather, who knew Augustine and her sister during the war. When the past catches up with him, the grandfather ultimately takes his own life.[1]

The two parts of the book from which the film's material is taken are written from Alex's perspective, in Alex's "hilariously garbled" English (Maunsell 2002), i.e. his account of the trip, and a collection of letters that he writes to Jonathan after Jonathan's return to the United States. In the letters, Alex tells Jonathan about everyday life in the Ukraine and comments on the progress of the project they jointly embarked on (writing this very book); the letters also show how Alex grows from a big-mouthed and naïve young man who adores everything American to a much more mature person at the end of the story. The third part of the book, not included in the film, is told from Jonathan's perspective and re-tells the fictitious history of the shtetl of Trachimbrod from which his family supposedly originates, a boldly imaginative story steeped in elements of magic realism. Liev Schreiber's screen version was predictably criticized for overly reducing and simplifying the material or, as the *Rolling Stone* critic put it, falling "into the traps set by an unadaptable novel" (Travers 2005).

But, as mentioned above, the humorous elements of the film – "a weirdly hilarious comedy" (Ebert 2005) – were generally praised, even by those who found fault with other aspects. The critic of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, for instance, admitted that the film "grows in reflection" and praised Schreiber's "ability to move us from

**1.** The historical Trachimbrod (Trochenbrod) was a Jewish village near the town of Lutsk, in what used to be Poland between the two world wars and is the Ukraine today. The Nazis established a Jewish ghetto in Trachimbrod, then liquidated the ghetto in August and September of 1942. The village was completely destroyed, and very few of its 5,000 inhabitants survived the massacre (cf. Bendavid-Val 2008).

the broad satire of the early scenes to the solemnity of the final ones" (Ebert 2005). Reviewers in English- and in German-speaking countries agreed that what makes the film worthwhile are its "eccentric characters and dark humour" (Bradshaw 2005), "Foer's ironic ideas" (Atkinson 2005) and the "beneficially absurd" dialogues taken directly from the book (Hertach 2005, my translation). The film was the directorial debut of Liev Schreiber, who had previously been known primarily as an actor. Foer dedicated his most recent book, *Tree of Codes*, to Liev Schreiber.

## Strategies of humor

How did Foer achieve those humorous effects, and what strategies did he apply to create this "weirdly hilarious comedy"? How can the character and role of an impromptu translator serve as such a rich source of humor in the book and in the film? In what follows I am not going to examine the role humor plays in the novel as such or the role of the humorous passages in the treatment of the subject of the Holocaust (as Alex writes to Jonathan, humor is "the only truthful way to tell a sad story"; Foer 2002: 53), but I will deal exclusively with the concept of translation as a source of humor.

For the purpose of this chapter, I understand humor in its everyday sense. *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1986), for instance, defines humor as follows:

a. the quality that makes something seem funny, amusing, or ludicrous; comicality;
b. the ability to perceive, appreciate, or express what is funny, amusing, or ludicrous;
c. the expression of this in speech, writing, or action.

As these definitions show, humor in our context may be said to have three dimensions: A person's ability to appreciate or express humor (Foer's humor), the comicality[2] or humorous effect of a text (perceived by the readers), and its sources in the text (the textual strategies).

Foer's humor is manifested on three levels, or, to put it differently, the humorous effects in both book and film arise from three main sources:

1. the constellation of characters,
2. the play with cultural differences and stereotypes, and
3. the play with the concept of translation.

2. Following *Webster's* (1986) definitions of "comic" ("amusing or intended to be amusing; humorous; funny") and "comical" ("causing amusement; humorous; funny; droll") I use these terms interchangeably with "humorous".

Over the past decades, the study of humor has gained ground in a number of related disciplines, such as literary studies, cultural studies, linguistics, and translation studies. In translation studies, humor has most often been dealt with in the context of puns, wordplay, jokes, or proper names, as they tend to be a particular challenge to translation (e.g. Delabastita 1996; Vandaele 2002, 2011; Antonopoulou 2004; Chiaro 2010; Valero-Garcés 2011). Most humor research draws on three broad approaches, i.e. the cognitive/incongruity approach, the social/superiority approach, and the psychoanalytic/release approach, and aims to answer questions such as to the purpose or function of humor in our lives, the elements and ingredients that make something funny, and the processes of how we perceive and experience humor. For release theorists following Spencer (1860) and Freud (1905), laughter invariably involves a release of energy or tension or is a defense mechanism in the face of unpleasant situations. For superiority theorists, humor and laughter typically involve feelings of superiority, aggression, or disparagement (cf. Plato's well-known dictum of "the mixture of pleasure and pain that lies in the malice of amusement", quoted in Smuts 2006: 85), while incongruity theorists focus more on the structure than the content of the humorous stimulus and proceed from the assumption that it is our perception of incongruity or unexpected contradictions that makes us laugh, usually at the point of illumination when our initial bewilderment is being resolved (for detailed surveys see e.g. Attardo 1994, Martin 1998, Smuts 2006, Freud's use of the terms "Verblüffung" and "Erleuchtung" – "bewilderment" and "illumination" in Strachey's 1960 translation – follows the terminology of Heymans 1896).

Looking at humor in *Everything is illuminated*, the cognitive approach seems the most promising, incongruity clearly being the predominant humorous device that is effective on all levels. The constellation of the characters (source 1) is already highly incongruous: Jonathan, the compulsive and overly serious American-Jewish collector and budding writer, who wants to know more about his family's past; Alex, the boisterous and gullible Ukrainian, who adores women, disco dancing and everything American and whose aim in life is to become an accountant and acquire zebra-skin coverings for his car seats; his grumpy old grandfather, clearly anti-Semitic, who insists that he is blind but works as a driver for Jewish tourists and does not go anywhere without his dog, Sammy Davis Jr. Jr. Foer's description or, rather, caricature of the three protagonists relies heavily on cultural stereotyping and much humor derives from the clash of the cultures portrayed (source 2). This includes, for example, the protagonists' appearance and habitual dress: Jonathan wears a black suit and tie, his hair is neatly parted and his eyes are magnified by a pair of huge dark-rimmed glasses, while Alex sports an Adidas tracksuit (a pair of "peerless" blue jeans in the book), gold chains, an earring and a gold tooth, and his grandfather wears a tattered jacket over a sleeveless white

undershirt. Their dietary habits are also incongruous, and the fact that Jonathan is vegetarian turns out to be incomprehensible for his Ukrainian companions and the waitress in the Ukrainian restaurant, and for his dinner Jonathan has to make do with a single potato which at one point happens to "descend" to the floor. While these examples clearly prove incongruity to be an effective humorous device, they also show how humor and cultural stereotyping rely on notions of superiority/inferiority (cf. Vandaele 2002: 156–159). What readers or viewers perceive as humorous, of course, very much depends on their own cultural background and on how much they know about the culture portrayed in the book or film. Most German readers, for example, will not be able to appreciate every single allusion to American, American-Jewish or Ukrainian culture, American readers will derive different degrees or shades of humor from it depending on their own personal backgrounds, and the reaction of Ukrainian readers will again be quite different from that of German or American readers. This, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter, as are the implications of the fact that what we are told about Ukrainian culture in the book and the film is, of course, Ukrainian culture as perceived by an American writer.

The richest source of humor, though, is the way Foer plays with the concept of translation (source 3). He does so on various levels and in a number of ways. On the most basic level, we can say that two thirds of the novel is already a translation in that the two parts of the book told from Alex's perspective and in Alex's "funny English" are translations of unwritten Ukrainian texts (Alex's travel account and his letters to Jonathan). While all the dialogue in Alex's narrative is in English (including conversations between Alex and his grandfather or Lista, for example), the Ukrainian protagonists in the film speak Russian/Ukrainian. From a purely quantitative point of view then the book contains "more" translation than the film. However, the fact that two parts of the book are a translation to begin with is only implicit in the book, while in the film the "translated situation" is more visible and explicit as we see the Ukrainian protagonists speaking another language and Alex translating each sentence for Jonathan. On another level, Foer plays with translation ethics by explicitly describing what Alex does as an impromptu translator. The humor stems again from incongruity: Alex's perception of his role as a translator radically differs from what readers or viewers would normally expect. The following examples will serve to illustrate the textual strategies applied to create

a. Alex's "translated language" and the German version thereof, and
b. Alex's "translator persona".

## Alex's "translated language"

As mentioned above, Alex speaks a kind of English that seems to be "picked up from a well-worn thesaurus." Alex at one point writes to Jonathan, "I fatigued the thesaurus you presented me, as you counseled me to, when my words appeared petite, or not befitting" (Foer 2002: 23). From Alex's letters to Jonathan we learn that Alex's language is something they often discuss with a view to their joint writing of the book:

> I know that you asked me not to alter the mistakes because they sound humorous, and humorous is the only truthful way to tell a sad story, but I think I will alter them. Please do not hate me […] I toiled very hard on this next section. It was the most rigid yet. I attempted to guess some of the things you would have me alter; and I altered them myself. For example I did not utilize the word 'spleen' with such habituality, because I could perceive that it made you on nerves by the sentence in your letter when you said, 'Stop using the word 'spleen'. It's getting on my nerves.' (Foer 2002: 53f)

The writer Francine Prose, for example, commented in the *New York Times Book Review* that "not since Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* has the English language been simultaneously mauled and energized with such brilliance and such brio" (Prose 2002). This mauling and/or energizing mainly happens on the lexical level and the level of collocations and idioms, while Alex's English grammar and syntax are more or less correct, most of his sentences being simple and straightforward.

The following example is taken from a scene early on in the film (Schreiber 2005: 18–23). When Jonathan arrives by train he is met by Alex, who has managed to hire a gypsy band on the fly for his welcome and holds up a sign reading "Jonfen S. Fur". As Jonathan descends from the train, Alex introduces himself as his "humble translator": "I implore you to forgive my speaking of English, Jonfen, as I'm not so premium with it." (In the following examples, the German translation will always be in italics: *"Vergeben Sie mir, dass ich so Ihre Sprache spreche, Jonfen, ich weiß, ich bin nicht so hochwertig darin."*) They proceed to the car where Alex's grandfather is waiting with his dog and when Jonathan is supposed to get into the car, he at first refuses to do so as he has "a phobia" of dogs. Alex manages to reassure him – "don't be distressed" *("seien Sie nicht beängstigt")* – and they drive off. After Jonathan wakes from a short nap in the car, they have the following conversation:

Alex: ‘Were you able to manufacture the Z’s?’
‘Und, konnten Sie ein paar Schnarcher machen?’
Jon.: ‘What?’
‘Was?’
Alex: ‘The Z’s? Were you able to make the Z’s?’
‘Schnarcher? Konnten Sie ein paar Schnarcher machen?’
Jon.: ‘I don’t understand.’
‘Ich verstehe Sie nicht.’
Alex: ‘Repose … Did you repose?’
‘Haben Sie geruht? … Konnten Sie ein bisschen ruhen?’
Jon.: ‘Yeah, I reposed.’
‘Ja, ich habe geruht.’
Alex: ‘Good. Sammy Davis Jr. Jr. is also in repose.’
‘Gut. Sammy Davis Jr. Jr. ist ebenfalls in Ruhe.’

The dubbed German version and the German subtitles are mostly based on Dirk van Gunsteren’s translation of the book even though there is nothing to indicate this in the film’s credits. As the short excerpt above already shows, the translator made use of a number of strategies to create Alex’s “correctly wrong German”. Basically, his strategies are similar to those applied by Foer in the original, such as trying to achieve a humorous or comic effect through not quite appropriate lexical and idiomatic choices. “Premium” and *“hochwertig”* (*“erstklassig”* in the German book version; Foer 2003: 53) in the phrases just quoted are perfectly acceptable words in both languages but are not generally used in the sense of “being good at something.” Similarly, *“geruht/in Ruhe”* and “reposed/in repose” are correct German/English words/phrases, but their use in a conversation of this type appears stilted and they resonate with other uses (*“ich habe geruht”* is a highly unusual way to say *“ich habe mich ausgeruht”*/”I’ve been resting” and is more commonly used in the sense of “deign, condescend”). “Manufacture Z’s” and *“Schnarcher machen”*, on the other hand, are newly created idioms in both languages, the English reminiscent of speech balloons in comic strips.

Another strategy Dirk van Gunsteren frequently relies on is the creation of new German words following German rules of word formation. In the German phrase *“seien Sie nicht beängstigt“*, for example, he makes use of the German prefix *“be-”* that may be used to make a transitive verb out of an intransitive one or to change the direct object of a phrase. There are various German words derived from the stem *„ängstigen“*, such as *“ich bin ver-ängstigt”* (“I am frightened/scared”) or *“ich habe mich ge-ängstigt”* (“I’ve been frightened/scared”), and something may be said to be *„be-ängstigend“* (“frightening/scary”). The word *“be-ängstigt”*, however, is non-existent in German.

In some instances, Foer also resorts to the use of wrong prefixes. For example, when Alex describes his own personal appearance in the book, he explains how he put on "peerless blue jeans to oppress the hero" (Foer 2002: 31) [*"Ich trug meine makellosen Blue Jeans, um den Helden zu übereindrucken."* (Foer 2003: 52)] While the humor of the original lies in the fact that "oppress" has a different meaning, of course, from the one intended by Alex, the humor in the German version again derives from the creation of a non-existent but grammatically acceptable German verb (*"überein-drucken"* does not exist, but e.g. *"überein-stimmen"* / "agree" or *"überein-kommen"*/"come to an agreement" do). At the same time, this sentence also illustrates another strategy that is widely applied by both Foer and his German translator and may be described as lexical or register-incongruity: Just as character-incongruity is a source of humor, incongruity on the textual and lexical level may also produce humorous or comic effects. In our case, there is often a humorous clash of registers as Alex tends to pick his words – such as "peerless"/*"makellos"* above – from the "wrong" register (cf. Venour & Ritchie & Mellish 2011, and Attardo 1994: 230–253, on incongruity and register-based humor).

There is an endless string of lexical mischoices and conflicts on the level of register in the book. In some instances, phrases seem to be literal translations of Russian/Ukrainian phrases (or at least this is what an international non-Russian speaking audience might be led to assume). One example: "When the train finally arrived, both of my legs were needles and nails from being an upright person for such a duration." (Foer 2002: 31) [*"Als der Zug schließlich kam, waren meine beiden Beine voller Nadeln und Nägel, weil sie eine so lange Zeit in aufrechter Haltung gewesen waren."* (Foer 2003: 52)]

Another source of humor is Alex's mistranslation or misunderstanding of some of Jonathan's colloquial expressions, as in the following example in which Alex questions Jonathan about cars in America:

> 'Another question. Do most young people have impressive cars in America? Lotus Esprit V8 Twin Turbos?' 'No, not really. I don't. I have a real piece-of-shit Toyota.' 'It is brown?' 'No, it's an expression.' 'How can your car be an expression?'
> (Foer 2002: 71)

In his letters to Jonathan, Alex also comments on the help he needs with idioms: "Thank you for informing me that it is 'shit a brick,' and 'shitting bricks,' and also 'to come in handy.' It is very useful for me to know the correct idioms." (Foer 2002: 53)

While the film contains only a limited number of Alex's funny words and phrases, of course, Liev Schreiber was able to also make use of the visual and audio channels to convey some of the book's language-based humor. On the audio level, it is mainly Alex's Ukrainian accent that contributes to the humorous effect of what he says. Alex is played by Eugen Huetz, a Ukrainian-born singer and

composer, who emigrated to the US with his parents after the Chernobyl accident at the age 14 and is the frontman of the New York gypsy punk band "Gogol Bordello" (which contributed some of the film's score and is the band Alex hires at the train station). The sign with Jonathan's misspelled name ("Jonfen S. Fur") that Alex carries in the welcome scene illustrates how language-based humor can also be transmitted visually.

Foer's strategy of working with lexical choices instead of, say, having Alex speak truly broken English with grammatical mistakes is a fortunate one in terms of translations into other languages, as it enables translators (into many languages, if not all) to achieve similar humorous effects by employing basically the same textual strategies. We might even say that by making translation the basic ingredient of two parts of the book Foer in fact already inscribed further translations into the text and foreshadowed his translators' strategies. At the same time, as the *Guardian* critic Mark Lawson (2002) also pointed out, Foer requires his readers to engage in a process of translation, too, in that they will start to think about which word or phrase Alex should have used. From the humor perspective, this process of translation may also be seen as a process of illumination in which our initial bewilderment at being faced with Alex's "wrong" lexical choices (the incongruity) is successfully resolved, a process that – looked at from the social perspective – may be said to create superiority (cf. Vandaele 2002: 157).

## Alex's "translator persona"

In the book as well as in the film, there are numerous scenes in which Alex explicitly acts as a translator/interpreter to mediate between Jonathan and his grandfather and, later on, Augustine's sister, Lista. The early scenes in which Alex uses his power as the translator to establish and then maintain some sort of truce between his grandfather and Jonathan, are a particularly rich source of comicality. In the scene described above, when Jonathan meets the grandfather for the first time, instead of translating the grandfather's reaction to Jonathan's dog phobia ("Bullshit, no one is afraid of dogs"), Alex invents something neutral and translates, "Grandfather informs me this is not possible." He chooses not to translate the grandfather's equally offensive comment "The bitch and the Jew will share the back seat" at all.

Interestingly, Alex comments on his strategy on several occasions. The following scene is also part of the film but is quoted from the book to illustrate how Alex reflects on what he does and how he perceives his own role. As mentioned above, the grandfather and Alex speak Russian/Ukrainian in the film, with English subtitles, while in the book Alex's role as a translator is made even more explicit by Jonathan's direct question: "What is he saying?"

> 'I hate Lvov,' Grandfather rotated to tell the hero. 'What's he saying?' the hero asked me. 'He said it will not be long,' I told him, another befitting not-truth. […] I had to translate his [i.e., the grandfather's] anger into useful information for the hero. 'Fuck,' Grandfather said. I said, 'He says if you look at the statues, you can see that some no longer endure. Those are where communist statues used to be.' 'Fucking fuck, fuck!' Grandfather shouted. 'Oh,' I said, 'he wants you to know that that building, that building, and that building are all important.' 'Why?' the hero inquired. 'Fuck!' Grandfather said. 'He cannot remember,' I said.
>
> (Foer 2002: 57f)

On other occasions, Alex chooses to translate what was has been said literally. In particular, he seems to do so towards the end of the book/film when they finally meet Lista, Augustine's sister, and things get more serious. As the grandfather's personal story and his involvement in what happened at Trachimbrod emerges, Alex translates word for word. He clearly seems to think that it is paramount for him to convey "exactly" what has been said. This sometimes results in a comic repetition of phrases as the source text is already a translation, the comicality counterbalancing the tragic nature of what is being said. The following scene describes how the grandfather confesses to Jonathan what he did:

> 'You must inform all of this to him as I inform it to you,' he said, and this surprised me very much, but I did not ask why, or ask anything. I only did as he commanded. Jonathan opened his diary and commenced to write. He wrote every word that was spoken. Here is what he wrote:
> 'Everything I did, I did because I thought it was the correct thing to do.'
> 'Everything he did, he did because he thought it was the correct thing to do,' I translated.
> 'I am not a hero, it is true.'
> 'He is not a hero.'
> 'But I am not a bad person, either.'
> 'But he is not a bad person.'
> 'The woman in the photograph is your grandmother. She is holding your father. The man standing next to me was our best friend, Herschel.'
> 'The woman in the photograph is my grandmother. She is holding my father. The man standing next to Grandfather was his best friend, Herschel.'
> 'Herschel is wearing a skull cap in the photograph because he was a Jew.'
> 'Herschel was a Jew.'
> 'And he was my best friend.'
> 'And he was his best friend.'
> 'And I murdered him.' (Foer 2002: 227f)

As the above examples have shown, Foer plays very creatively and successfully with the most common clichés regarding the role of translators, i.e. the translator as traitor, the translation being nothing like the original, and the translator as

the speaker's echo, the translation being a mere repetition/copy of the original utterance. What he achieves at the same time, though, is to convey that the role of translators is a powerful one and that decisions taken by translators have an ethical dimension. Alex seems to naturally understand that his translation strategy depends on the situation and the aim he hopes to achieve, and he exploits the whole continuum of available strategies. He has no scruples about actively using his power as a gatekeeper to achieve what he sees as being the right thing from an ethical point of view, i.e. to establish and then maintain some sort of truce in emotionally charged situations involving his grandfather and Jonathan early on (which requires him, among other things, to omit his grandfather's anti-Semitic statements), and later on to finally bring the truth to light (which calls for the utmost fidelity of his translation). What is at the heart of the humor and comicality arising from Alex's translator persona is, again, incongruity – incongruity between Alex's behavior as a translator and the reader's traditional expectations of a translator's task and role.

Looking back on their journey Alex writes to Jonathan, "This is my occasion to utter thank you for being so long-suffering and stoical with me on our voyage. You were perhaps accounting upon a translator with more faculties, but I am certain that I did a mediocre job." (Foer 2002: 23)

## Everything is translation

Interestingly, concepts of translation seem to play a major role in all three works of fiction J. S. Foer has published so far. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), written from the perspective of a nine-year-old boy whose father died in the 9/11 attacks, Foer plays with the concept of translation in a broader sense as intermodal translation/mediation of discourse. The boy's grandfather, who refuses to speak, has taken to communicating by written messages, carrying a book in which he has written down frequently used answers or questions that he shows to people instead of talking to them. The words "yes" and "no" are even permanently tattooed on the palms of his hands so that he simply has to show the relevant hand to answer a question.

And Foer's most recent book, *Tree of Codes* (2010), is itself the "translation of a translation." By cutting out words and phrases from the English translation of a 1930s story by the Polish writer Bruno Schulz (2008) in such a way that the remaining parts of the text tell a new story, Foer re-translated the text into his own English version, or, as he phrased it in an interview, he "carved out a new story" (Heller 2010). The process as described by Foer is highly reminiscent of what translators experience:

> Working on this book was extraordinarily difficult. Unlike novel writing, which is the quintessence of freedom, here I had my hands tightly bound. Of course 100 people would have come up with 100 different books using this same process of carving, but every choice I made was dependent on a choice Schulz had made. (Heller 2010)

Foer's re-working of Schulz' text (i.e. its English translation) may well be described as a process of translation itself. To my knowledge, Foer has not commented on the fact that he worked on a translation rather than Schulz's original even though he wrote the foreword to the new 2008 edition of the translation, *The Street of Crocodiles*, translated by Celina Wieniewska, first published in English in 1963.

In his debut novel, *Everything is illuminated*, translation (translated language, translation ethics and a translator-protagonist) is one of the main sources of the book's humor. Foer's translation-related strategies of humor often involve elements of incongruity, be it on the textual and lexical level, or on the level of the protagonist's role as a translator, as does his playful exploitation of cultural stereotypes for character portrayal, another source of the book's humor. As has been shown, incongruity as a humorous device is often closely linked with the creation of superiority. The fact that translated language is the main ingredient of two thirds of the book and its comicality to a great degree stems from hilariously wrong lexical choices clearly works in favor of translations of the book into other languages or genres. Dirk van Gunsteren, Foer's German translator, and Liev Schreiber, the director of the film, successfully took over Foer's humorous devices, thus creating two more "sublimely funny" versions of the story, in full congruity with the original.

## References

### Primary sources

Foer, J. S. 2002. *Everything is illuminated*. London: Penguin.

Foer, J. S. 2003. *Alles ist erleuchtet.* Translated by D. van Gunsteren. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

Foer, J. S. 2005. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Boston: Mariner Books.

Foer, J. S. 2010. *Tree of Codes*. London: Visual Editions.

Schreiber, L. 2005. *Everything Is Illuminated*. (DVD 120 min.) USA: Warner Independent Pictures.

Schulz, B. 2008. *The Street of Crocodiles and Other Stories*. Translated by C. Wieniewska. New York: Penguin.

## Secondary sources

Antonopoulou, E. 2004. "Humor theory and translation research: Proper names in humorous discourse." *Humor* 17 (3): 219–255.

Atkinson, M. 2005. "Everything's Been Understated in Foer Adaptation." *The Village Voice*, 06 September 2005. Available at: http://www.villagevoice.com/2005-09-06/film/everything-s-been-understated-in-foer-adaptation/ (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Attardo, S. 1994. *Linguistic Theories of Humor*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Bendavid-Val, A. 2008. "The town of Trochenbrod: One of a kind in Jewish history." Available at: http://bet-tal.com/index.aspx?id=2411 (last accessed 07 August 2012).

Bradshaw, P. 2005. "Everything is illuminated." *The Guardian*, 25 November 2005. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/movie/108737/everything.is.illuminated (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Chiaro, D. (ed.). 2010. *Translation, Humour and Literature*. London/New York: Continuum.

Collis, C. 2002. "Foer play." *The Observer*, 2 June 2002. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2002/jun/02/fiction.features (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Delabastita, D. (ed.). 1996. *Wordplay and Translation. Essays on Punning and Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Ebert, R. 2005. "Everything is Illuminated." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 23 September 2005. Available at: http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050922/REVIEWS/50919003/1023 (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Freud, S. 1905. *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten*. Wien/Berlin: Deuticke. Also available at: http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/933/1 (last accessed 07 August 2012).

Freud, S. 1960. *Jokes and their relation to the unconscious*. Translated by J. Strachey. New York: Norton.

Heller, S. 2010. "Jonathan Safran Foer's Book as Art Object." *The New York Times*, 24 November 2010. Available at: http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/24/jonathan-safran-foers-book-as-art-object/ (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Hertach, C. 2005. "Alles ist erleuchtet." Available at: http://www.filmspiegel.de/filme/filme.php?id=2941 (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Heymans, G. 1896. "Ästhetische Untersuchungen im Anschluss an die Lipps'sche Theorie des Komischen." *Zeitschrift für Psychologie und Physiologie der Sinnesorgane* 11: 31–43, 333–352. Also available at: http://vlp.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/library/data/lit29981/index_html?pn=1&ws=1.5 (last accessed 07 August 2012).

Lawson, M. 2002. "Guile by the mile." *The Guardian*, 8 June 2002. Available at: http://www.guardian. co.uk/books/2002/jun/08/featuresreviews.guardianreview28 (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Martin, R. A. 1998. "Approaches to the sense of humor: A historical review." In *The Sense of Humor: Explorations of a Personality Characteristic,* W. Ruch (ed.), 15–60. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.

Maunsell, J. B. 2002. "The author takes centre stage." *The Evening Standard*, 27 May 2002. Available at: http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/showbiz/the-author-takes-centre-stage-6308493.html (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Mendelsohn, D. 2002. "Boy of Wonders." *New York*, 22 April 2002. Available at: http://nymag.com/nymetro/arts/books/reviews/5903/ (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Prose, F. 2002. "Back in the totally awesome U.S.S.R." *The New York Times Book Review*, 14 April 2002. Available at: http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B01E4D81E3AF937A25757 C0A9649C8B63 (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Smuts, A. 2006. *Laughing at art: humor, art and morality*. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

Spencer, H. 1860. "The Physiology of Laughter." *Macmillan's Magazine* 1, 395–402. Also available at: http://www.lian.com/HIRANO/academia/laughter.htm (last accessed 07 August 2012).

Travers, P. 2005. "Everything is illuminated." *The Rolling Stone,* 15 September 2005. Available at: http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/everything-is-illuminated-20050915#ixzz1reH4a0Rd (last accessed 27 April 2012).

Valero-Garcés, C. (ed.). 2011. *Dimensions of Humor: Explorations in Linguistics, Literature, Cultural Studies and Translation*. València: University of València.

Vandaele, J. 2002. "(Re-)Constructing Humour: Meanings and Means." *The Translator* 8 (2): 149–172.

Vandaele, J. 2011. "Wordplay in translation." *Handbook of Translation Studies, Volume 2*, Y. Gambier & L. van Doorslaer (eds.), 180–183. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Venour, C. & Ritchie, G. D. & Mellish, C. 2011. "Dimensions of incongruity in register humor." In *The Pragmatics of Humour across Discourse Domains*, M. Dynel (ed.), 125–146. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

*Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*. 1986. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Winkels, H. 2003. "Zauber und Zinnober. Der Amerikaner Jonathan Safran Foer landet einen Geniestreich." *Die Zeit*, 13 March 2003. Available at: http://www.zeit.de/2003/12/L-Foer (last accessed 27 April 2012).

# Neither is a translator, unless they're transauthers

## Confusion and (re-)gendering in feminist fiction / translation*

Daniela Beuren
University of Vienna

Translators of literary works have multiple roles: They are readers and writers. In some cases, they also act as editors and literary agents for source text authors. Here, I am interested in a specific aspect of writing translations. We[1] need to understand what we read in order to construct meaning in the translations we write. Approaching a text, sometimes we are at a loss, as meaning is not evident right away. We experience confusion, so we start asking (ourselves or others) questions and looking for answers, solutions, ways out of confusion. I argue that even though the experience as such may not feel pleasurable, (admitting) confusion is an important part of a translator's competence. It is the state before meaning is (trans-) fixed, nailed down, a moment of liberty and openness.

Over the past decades, gender has been analysed as an area where going by what is deemed to be obvious may be particularly harmful, leading to the exclusion of individuals who do not conform to one of the two dominant gender groups because they cannot, or do not want to be identifiable as (straight) women or men. Queer movements have deliberately caused confusion, challenging and mocking gender boundaries. Ina Schabert (2010) mentions degendering as a strategy for translating gender-indeterminate texts. I argue that from a feminist point of view, re-gendering may be called for.

Luise von Flotow has called gender identity "a stylized, inescapable, social fiction" (2011: 5). In spite of this verdict that reiterates the inevitability of gender, it

* I would like to thank Karin MacHardy, Hillary Keel and Karlheinz Spitzl for their valuable input to this chapter.

1. I have worked as a German/English translator, although not chiefly of literary works, for more than twenty years and feel part of a community of translators.

is precisely fiction which may offer an escape by constructing alternative worlds. In two works of North American feminist fiction I have discovered translators who are confused in various ways and for different reasons: Cassandra Reilly in Barbara Wilson's *Gaudi Afternoon* (1991), who is puzzled by the ever-changing gender composition of her social environment, and Reta Winters in Carol Shields's *Unless* (2002),[2] who is at a loss in her role as mother and finds comfort in her work as author and translator – a transauthor, or, in a re-gendered construction: Transaut*her*.

I will also present interrelations of the two novels with translations studies: Barbara Wilson's novel has been quoted in various works of translation studies (for example, Maier & Massardier-Kenney 1996: 231, Kaindl 2008: 313, Parker 2005), while some of the discourse on writing and translation in Carol Shields's novel is reminiscent of feminist translation studies as pursued in Quebec and Canada.

Lastly, according to my fields of expertise and interest as a translator of English and German I will also point out a few aspects of the German translations of the books about the two fictional translators, first designed in English.

## Neither: A translator

In Barbara Wilson's mystery novel *Gaudí Afternoon*, Cassandra Reilly, translator and amateur detective, receives a call from Frankie, who offers Cassandra a job: She wants to pay her for travelling with her to Barcelona to look for Ben, Frankie's husband, who, according to Frankie, has come out as gay. It turns out that Ben is short for Bernadette and Frankie is Ben's former husband. Their daughter Delilah now has two competing mothers. And these are not the only gender issues in the story. While looking first for Ben, then for Delilah, who has disappeared, Cassandra is working on the translation of a book by a Venezuelan author, in which a daughter is looking for her mother.

Chatting with her friends in a bar, Cassandra faces a playfully voiced gender inquiry: "'My name is Carmen,' Carmen said in English. 'I am woman [sic]. Please, what are you? Woman or man?' 'Neither,' I said in English, then in Spanish.[3] 'I'm a translator.'" (Wilson 1991: 74)

The humorous introduction of the "translator" as a specific gender identity in this quote has already been picked up by translation studies scholars such as Maier

2. For a more detailed discussion of the two books see Beuren (2005, 2010).

3. It would be interesting how she put forward her argument in Spanish, as Spanish grammar calls for a decision between the masculine "traductor" and the feminine "traductora".

& Massardier-Kenney (1996: 231): "Cassandra Reilly's response is not only ingenious but also instructive because it suggests the thoroughly destabilizing effect that translation can have on 'woman' as a secure base."

The word *neither* is, by definition, a negative. Cassandra's statement could mean she sees herself as "something different" from one or the other, which is where it meets with the concept of gender difference. It is also a position of radical subjectivity. Apart from Maier & Massardier-Kenney's interpretation of the quote, I'd like to offer other possible readings. Cassandra may indicate that instead of "doing gender" (West & Zimmermann 1987) she is "doing translation". Or she may see herself as an intermediary between women and men. She could see genders as her working languages.

The world of Cassandra Reilly is one of changing genders, a queer world. She has entered a gender-wonderland, where everything gets "curiouser and curiouser" (Carroll 2012) as the story develops. "[W]hat is less and less clear is more and more queer." (Parker 2005: 119) In her discussion of Cassandra Reilly as an example of a translator in contemporary queer fiction, Emma Parker identifies translation as "a quintessentially queer career" (Parker 2005: 124) and therefore a fitting professional activity for a character like Cassandra Reilly. Queer appears here as "the ultimate non-category category, the non-identity identity" (Weißegger 2011: 167). Not everyone who opposes heteropatriarchy wants to be labelled queer, though. Doubtlessly, an open (non-)category may be more inclusive than traditional gender labels, but some groups and individuals would rather be addressed separately.[4]

The use of the term "queer" in connection with *Gaudí Afternoon* is supported by an interview with Barbara Sjoholm, the writer, teacher, editor and translator who created the Cassandra Reilly mystery series under the penname Barbara Wilson (Lespress 2002). Sjoholm expresses some regret that the film by Susan Seidelman (2001) based on the novel did not turn out to be as queer as the book.[5] Therefore, it may be implied that the author intended her novel to be queer.

---

**4.** I have witnessed this recently on occasion of Frauensommeruniversität in Vienna, an event of lectures and workshops organised by students at the university but not limited to academic circles. The first invitation was addressed to "Frauen*", the asterisk after the German word for women meaning to include … whom? In the ensuing debate, protest was voiced that lesbians had not been mentioned explicitly, nor had inter- and transgender women. As a result of the debate, the final version of the call for papers was addressed to "FrauenLesbenInterTranspersonen" (women, lesbians, inter and transgender persons) (cf. FrauenFrühlingsUni 2012).

**5.** "Die Community mochte ihn sehr – was für ein Jammer, dass er nicht so queer wie der Roman sein konnte!" (Lespress 2002)

On her website, Barbara Sjoholm recommends the film but states that it is "only tangentially connected to the book" (Sjoholm 2012). In the above mentioned interview she explains that Susan Seidelman had been advised against making a lesbian the main figure of her film. Ironically, by the time the film opened, lesbian and gay characters on the screen were already meeting with more acceptance. Sjoholm also mentions that as a straight woman, Susan Seidelman was mainly interested in the mother–daughter–family aspects of the story, which she highlighted in the film.

Parker describes Cassandra's gender identity as "particularly unstable" (Parker 2005: 119). Yet, when Cassandra is called "Señor" by a waiter, and asked whether she was once a woman and became a man, she gets angry and makes her gender identity very clear: "'I'm a woman and I have always been a woman,' I said sharply. 'The only thing I have ever been besides a woman is a Catholic girl with pigtails!'" (Wilson 1991: 73) If this appears to contradict her earlier statement, it shows how answers depend on the questions and the way as well as the context in which they are asked. She objects to the observation that she has a masculine appearance: "I don't look masculine. I look like a middle-aged Irish-American translator with short hair." (Wilson 1991: 39) Here, the motif of the translator as a separate, recognisable gender identity reappears. This might cause readers to ponder just what translators, writers with much less visibility than other authors, actually look like.

Cassandra does not describe her appearance and thus her performance of gender (cf. Makinen 2001: 126) at the beginning of the book, when she introduces herself. The book starts out with the line "My name is Cassandra Reilly and I don't live anywhere" (Wilson 1991: 3). To the protagonist, this aspect of instability of residence, or home, probably matters more than her gender role. Cassandra's ironic take on the activity of translation also echoes this notion of restlessness: "That's what life in the translation business is all about, Carmen. Speed, violence, sex, mystery. Translators come and they go, you can't count on them. You should never count on a translator." (Wilson 1991: 171) Here again, the cliché about the unreliability of translators is echoed. However, in the story Reilly proves to be very dependable, if torn between her double task of translating and investigating. The more involved and successful she is as a detective, the less attentive she becomes to her translation. In the end her manuscript is stolen, and the fiction she has (re-) created disappears.

## Weder noch – eine Übersetzerin?

The German translation of the novel appeared under the title *Ein Nachmittag mit Gaudí* as part of a mystery series (Ariadne Krimi-Reihe), with an afterword by German sociologist and philosopher Frigga Haug, who published on feminism,

and Else Laudan, who translated the novel together with Eva Stäbler and Martina Friedrich. The aim of this multiple authorship may have been to put the German version on the market as quickly as possible after the English one. The book was published immediately after the English version, in 1992.

The "neither"-quote is bound to cause "translation trouble" (Schabert 2010), as gender markers in German have to be applied for the seemingly neutral English "translator". This is the published translation: "'Ich heiße Carmen', sagte Carmen. 'Ich bin eine Frau. Und was sind Sie, bitteschön? Frau oder Mann?' – 'Weder noch', sagte ich auf Englisch, dann auf Spanisch. 'Ich bin eine Übersetzerin.'" (Wilson/ Laudan & Stäbler & Friedrich 1992: 98). Cassandra's statement in German seems like a contradiction in terms, as "Übersetzerin" has a feminine end marker ("-in"), which is intensified by the indefinite feminine article "eine". It is hard not to identify "eine Übersetzerin" as a woman.

To find a more gender-inclusive solution for potentially troublesome passages like this one, there is a practical tool at hand which, however, hadn't been developed in German at the time of the translation *Ein Nachmittag mit Gaudí* (1992). In an inclusive version, Cassandra's statement in German would read "Ich bin Übersetzer_in". The underscore between the masculine and feminine word endings is called Gender Gap (in German). It allows for opening up a space that is "neither" woman or man (cf. s_he 2003). However, the Gender Gap is only clearly visible in writing. The spoken word resembles both the binary form "ÜbersetzerIn" with a capital I, which has been used since the 1980s by writers who want to include both women and men, and the exclusively feminine "Übersetzerin". Therefore a gesture may be added to the spoken Gender Gap: The speaker moves one arm inward in a circular motion (Fischer & Wolf 2009: 4). Evidently, this gesture is only meaningful for those who know its significance. Those who don't will not notice it or only do so when it is repeatedly used. Then they might be confused, unable to grasp what they are observing; which could prompt them to ask questions and find out, making their confusion a constructive element of communication.

In fact, the translator/s used a kind of Gender Gap at one point in the German version of the story, when Cassandra tries to attribute both binary pronouns to Frankie (to refer to Frankie's old identity as a man and at the same time to his new identity as a woman):

> 'sie…er sagte, sie…er würde eine meiner Freundinnen kennen und meine Hilfe brauchen, um ihren…seinen Ex-Ehemann Ben zu finden, und sie würde alle Kosten übernehmen, wenn ich ihn…sie finde. Frankie hat nichts von einem Kind gesagt. Natürlich hat er…sie nicht gesagt, daß sie transsexuell ist.' Ich gab das mit den Pronomen auf. (Wilson/Laudan & Stäbler & Friedrich 1992: 84)

This of course comes from the English version, which has the same punctuation:

> 'she…he knew a friend of mine and wanted my help finding her…his ex-husband, Ben, and she'd pay my expenses and a fee for finding him…her. Frankie didn't say anything about a child. Of course he…she didn't say she was transsexual.' I gave up on the pronouns. (Wilson 1991: 62)

Gender could be called a self-referential construct[6] (Baecker & Kluge 2003: 93). As Baecker explains, such a construct does not generate security or clarity, but rather uncertainty that will inspire the (re)searcher to find other mathematical operations necessary for further inquiry, as there are no answers to questions about the self. In the case of gender, to overcome the oppressive binary of "woman or man", in the Gender Gap there is room for a non-excluded (and inclusive) third, fourth, fifth … gender. The political agenda of inclusiveness may lead one to disregard the notion of gender altogether and consider each individual as their own gender (id)entity/(non-)category, and thus allow/construct as many genders as there are world inhabitants.

The opposite approach to constructing as many genders as possible was voiced by Judith Lorber in her call for a "degendering movement": Doing away with gender altogether (Lorber 2000). Lorber later (in 2005) rephrased her demand, saying that while a world completely without gender is unattainable, a world without gender all the time would be revolutionary (cf. Schabert 2010: 72).

The German passage about Cassandra's masculine appearance reads "Ich sehe nicht männlich aus. Ich sehe aus wie eine irisch-amerikanische Spanisch-Übersetzerin mittleren Alters mit kurzen Haaren". (Wilson/Laudan & Stäbler & Friedrich 1992: 57) Again, the feminine ending "-in" is used. Translators, as and like authors, have the power of gender definition. Despite fluid gender identities that are attributed to her by the scholars quoted above, Cassandra sees herself as a woman, and the translation conforms to that perception. It would certainly be a challenge to preserve gender indeterminacy where applicable in the translation.

In another passage of the German text, a binary strategy is used:

> '*Jeder Autor und jede Autorin* hat ihr eigenes Vokabular, wenn du das raus hast, ist die halbe Arbeit schon getan. […] Glorias Wortschatz ist romantisch […] ich könnte eine Liste mit hundert Wörtern zusammenstellen, und das wäre dann ihr Roman. Immer wieder dieselben Wörter.'
> (Wilson/Laudan & Stäbler & Friedrich 1992: 100, italics mine)

---

**6.** Alexander Kluge: "Es wird ein Satz vom nicht ausgeschlossenen Dritten aufgestellt." Dirk Baecker: "Ja, es geht um das nicht ausgeschlossene Dritte, um Paradoxien, um selbstreferentielle Konstruktionen." (Baecker & Kluge 2003: 93)

> *Every author* has a vocabulary and once you understand that, half your job is done. […] Gloria's vocabulary is romantic […] I could make a list of a hundred words and that would be her novel, the same words over and over.
> (Wilson 1991: 76, italics mine)

Here, the word 'author' is split up into a masculine and feminine variety for a general statement. A more politically correct binary version would have put the feminine before the masculine. For an inclusive version, again the Gender Gap would be called for.

Different from some authors referred to above, including Kaindl (2008: 313), who attributes "emotional unsteadiness"[7] to Cassandra Reilly, the editor and one of the translators of the German translation of the novel clearly distinguish between the heroine of their book, whom they present as a stable, strong and confident person, and her confusing environment. This becomes evident in the afterword to the translation:

> In *Ein Nachmittag mit Gaudí* by Barbara Wilson, supposedly secure facts are subverted in a playful manner; the new, well-travelled heroine Cassandra Reilly moves through a Labyrinth of confusion in a growing chaos of gender roles.
> (Haug & Laudan 1992: 217)

It should be noted that the editors name Barbara Wilson as sole auth_r of the German version. The other three writers who co-auth_red the book are not mentioned. My second example, published ten years later (with fruitful discourse on feminist translation developed in the meantime) demonstrates awareness of the creative role of translators.

## Unless: A transauther or two

Reta Winters, the heroine of Carol Shields's novel *Unless,* is a writer and translator. Her field of translation and that of her own writing are worlds apart. She translates feminist theory and experimental poetry, but categorises her own novels as "light fiction". The protagonist of her current fiction writes for a fashion magazine, therefore Reta Winters views herself as "a woman writer who is writing about a woman writer who is writing" (Shields 2002: 137). This makes Carol Shields "a woman writer who is writing about a woman writer who is writing about a woman writer […]" (Mullan 2003). Reta Winters is a writer also when she translates. As Douglas Robinson argues, "[t]ranslation *is* writing" (2001: 1).

7. All translations mine, unless otherwise mentioned.

> [T]he translator is a writer. S/he does not become *the* writer, s/he becomes *a* writer, one very like the original author, but only because they both write, and in much the same way, drawing on their own experiences of language and the world to formulate effective discourse. (Robinson 2001: 3)

I agree that the translator is a writer, but one with a very specific task at hand. Therefore, the term transauthor, introduced by Santoyo Mediavilla (1990) to give due credit to translators, seems more appropriate.

Ranking her literary achievements, Rita Winters makes a list of all her publications over the 44 years of her life, and on top of the list is a translation, a volume of poems entitled *Isolation*. The French source text was written by Danielle Westerman, Rita's professor of French at the University of Toronto. Winters not only writes the target text, but also an introduction for the English edition. Thus, she makes herself visible, availing herself of one of the practices of feminist translators described by Luise von Flotow (1997: 35):

> In statements, theoretical writings, prefaces and footnotes, translators are introducing and commenting on their work, and offering explanations for it. […] This is all part of a concerted move away from the classical 'invisible' translator, the idea of the translator as some kind of transparent channel whose involvement does not affect the source or the translated texts.

While Reta Winters is not quite convinced of being justified to cite the translation as a work in its (her) own right, Danielle Westerman has no such reservations:

> Dr. Westerman, doing one of her hurrying, over-the-head gestures, insisted that translation, especially of poetry, is a creative act. Writing and translating are convivial, she said, not oppositional, and not at all hierarchical. […] Danielle Westerman […] had urged me to believe that the act of shuffling elegant French into readable and stable English is an aesthetic performance. (Shields 2002: 4)

Remarkably, through the words of one of the protagonists of her novel, Carol Shields confronts readers with a discourse reminding of, and probably alluding to, feminist authors and translators active in Quebec since the 1990s,[8] and makes their ideas about translation accessible to readers of fiction. Reta Winters and Danielle Westerman are "women reading and writing together", who "constitute the horizon of a discursive order in which 'she' is determined as 'subject'

**8.** For example, the women writers and translators publishing, and published in, the magazine Tessera. The founding editors were Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei and Gail Scott. Contributors included Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, Louise Cotnoir, Linda Hutcheon, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Mouré, Marlene Nourbese Philip, France Théoret, Audrey Thomas, Gail Scott, Donna Smyth, Lola Lemire Tostevin, and Aritha van Herk. (Tessera 2012)

or author-function. Auth*e*rity." (Godard 1994: 258) According to Godard, in an author-function "she" should not let herself be neutralised by language. Also, the auther bears resemblance to the Other, the partner in dialogue and writing. Therefore, re-gendering the seemingly neutral word-ending -or, transauther seems to be an even more fitting term when referring to Reta Winters and other (persons who define themselves as) women engaging in the activity of translation.

In the above quote, it is not the transauther who describes translation as a creative act on a level with writing source texts, but rather, the source-text author, an "authority" with high status as a writer and academic, who, in Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, possesses ample symbolic capital. "Dr. Westerman, poet, essayist, feminist survivor, holder of twenty-seven honorary degrees" (Shields 2002: 41) un-lesses the transauther, making her no longer stand back behind *the* author. The creative aspects of translation, especially regarding literary texts, have been examined by translations studies scholars like Loffredo & Perthegella (2006) and Kußmaul (2000). The view of translation as a creative act has been increasingly entering public awareness.

Protagonist Reta Winters describes her activity as rather mechanical and makes fun of all-too high aspirations: "My introduction to Isolation was certainly creative, though, since I had no idea what I was talking about. [...] What on earth did I mean?" (Shields 2002: 4). Her comments on her own work show some disillusionment: "The poems were like little toys with moving parts, full of puns and allusions to early feminism, most of which I let fall into a black hole, I'm sorry to say." (Shields 2002: 68f)

The reception of her translations in the media is also an issue mentioned by Winters. The first volume of the memoirs of Danielle Westerman received a favourable response from critics and readers alike, with the exception of the translation: "The translation itself was slammed in the Toronto Star ('clumsy')." The second volume got quite different comments. "This time no one grumped about my translation. 'Sparkling and full of ease,' the Globe said, and the New York Times went one better and called it 'an achievement'. 'You are my true sister,' said Danielle Westerman at the time of publication. 'Ma vraie sœur.'" (Shields 2002: 6)

There is indeed a very close contact between the two (trans)authers. Danielle Westerman is constructed as the superego of the main protagonist, not only in professional matters:

> [T]he immense, hovering presence of Danielle Westerman with her European-based culture, her thin, distinguished chin, her boxy knuckles and long crimson nails. Would Danielle approve? I scarcely ever budge from my habitual stances or perspectives without causing that stern question to budge against my ear.
> (Shields 2002: 73)

Reta Winters is a close observer of her idol's habitus, especially her appearance. She is apprehensive that she might disappoint her idol, who could reproach her for writing her own fiction (which Westerman views as mere escapism) rather than continuing to work on the translation of Westerman's memoirs. (cf. Shields 2002: 148) Eventually Westerman has to do this translation herself; she sends page by page to the professional, Reta Winters, "for tweaking" (Shields 2002: 212). Danielle Westerman enjoys this new challenge: "Translation is keeping her mind sharp, she says, like doing a crossword puzzle. A daily task to begin and complete." (Shields 2002: 212) Thus, Danielle Westerman also becomes a transauther. For her, transauthering is a recreational activity.

The source text author may echo the target text author, not only the other way round. "She is the other voice in my head, almost always there, sometimes the echo, sometimes the soloist." (Shields 2002: 101) Despite her success, there is still a deep sense of dissatisfaction when Reta Winters compares target text to source text: "My translation does not begin to express what she has accomplished." (Shields 2002: 10)

Winters incorporates the positions of the source text author, they inhabit her, she describes an invasion-like process. "Danielle's hypothesis has moved into my body and occupies more and more space" (Shields 2002: 145). This is consistent with Pamela Banting's argument that "[translation] can only take place via the body" (Banting 1995: xv). From childhood on, bodies and minds learn how to translate experience into insights. Looking back on her childhood, Reta Winters remembers "the role of confusion that made up my bank of assumptions […] Confusion has kept me from staring back at childhood through drifts of longing." (Shields 2002: 101) Languages provide a path of orientation through her confusion.

## Coming and going: Transauth_ring

As to the German translation of the novel, an evident difference is the title: *Die Geschichte der Reta Winters* (Reta Winter's Story, 2006). The novel is presented like a biography, a conventional story with a beginning and an end, a "safe" book. Those who are interested in reading about the lives of (other) women might pick it up. The English title *Unless* leaves more room for speculation and thus might attract more adventurous readers. As the back cover of the German novel explains, it is "the story of a mother who is forced by her daughter to leave behind the life that she knows" ("die Geschichte einer Mutter, die von ihrer Tochter gezwungen wird, ihr bisheriges Leben hinter sich zu lassen", Shields/Längsfeld 2006). This makes Reta Winters seem rather passive.

So as not to make the transauth_r (Margarete Längsfeld, a renowned transauth_r of North American fiction) responsible without knowing the circumstances of the transauth_ring and publishing process, I should add that titles and cover texts are often part of the publishing company's market policy.

Once published, fiction informs real readers about a constructed reality, in this case adding to their knowledge about the field of translation. For both Cassandra Reilly and Reta Winters, transitional identities as transauthers were constructed by the transauth_rs of the novels, Barbara Wilson and Carol Shields. Cassandra Reilly is presented as a woman and/or a translator. Both are essential components of her identity. In the course of the story, translating becomes less interesting than investigating. For Reta Winters, "a woman writer", her own texts become more and more important during the period of her life that is described in the novel. Her relationship to Danielle Westerman matters more to her than her work on the translation of Danielle's writing. Translation is a function of this relationship, and a source of bad conscience on Reta's part until a new arrangement is found. Both transauthers are respectful of the other auth_r, the more famous one, in whose name they write. But in the end, they both leave behind translation: Cassandra Reilly loses the product, her manuscript, and Reta Winters exits the process of translation.

The fictional transauthers created by Barbara Wilson and Carol Shields "come and they go", they resume and abandon transauthering as needed. In a queering sense, this might be a model for overcoming fixed gender categories, and fixed categories of meaning. While we should be clear about giving ourselves credit in our role as writers, confusion is productive during the work process of transauthers, transauthors and transauth_rs. As fictional transauther Danielle Westerman says about translation, confusion keeps our minds sharp, helping us to develop new, original, creative approaches and texts.

## References

### Primary sources

Seidelman, S. 2001. *Gaudí Afternoon* (DVD 88 min.). Spain: Antena 3 Televisión.
Shields, C. 2002. *Unless*. London: Fourth Estate.
Shields, C. 2006. *Die Geschichte der Reta Winters.* Translated by M. Längsfeld. München: Piper.
Wilson, B. 1991. *Gaudí Afternoon.* London: Virago Press.
Wilson, B. 1992. *Ein Nachmittag mit Gaudí.* Translated by E. Laudan & E. Stäbler & M. Friedrich. Hamburg: Argument (Ariadne Krimi).

## Secondary sources

Baecker, D. & Kluge, A. 2003. *Vom Nutzen ungelöster Probleme*. Berlin: Merve.

Banting, P. 1995. *Body, Inc. A Theory of Translation Poetics.* Winnipeg: Turnstone Press.

Beuren, D. 2005. "TranslatorIn ermittelt. Vom Übersetzen und Überführen." In *Wortklauber, Sinnverdreher, Brückenbauer? DolmetscherInnen und ÜbersetzerInnen als literarische Geschöpfe,* I. Kurz & K. Kaindl (eds.), 165–172. Vienna: LIT-Verlag.

Beuren, D. 2010. "Abtrünnige Übersetzerinnen in der Krise: Pat Goodhearts *The Translator*, und Carol Shields' *Unless*." In *Machtlos, selbstlos, meinungslos? Interdisziplinäre Analysen von ÜbersetzerInnen und DolmetscherInnen in belletristischen Werken*, K. Kaindl & I. Kurz, (eds.), 127–135. Vienna etc.: LIT-Verlag,

Carroll, L. 2012. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Chapter Two. Available at http://www.cs.indiana.edu/metastuff/wonder/ch2.html (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Fischer, B. & Wolf, M. 2009. *Leitfaden zum geschlechtergerechten Sprachgebrauch. Zur Verwendung in Lehrveranstaltungen und in wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten*. Available at: http://transvienna.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/fak_ translationswissenschaft/Diplomarbeitenanleitung/Geschlechtergerechtes_ Formulieren_FischerWolf.pdf (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Flotow, L. von. 1997. *Translation and Gender. Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing/Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

Flotow, L. von. 2011. "Preface." In *Translating Women*, L. Flotow (ed.), 1–10. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

FrauenFrühlingsUni. 2012. FrauenSommerUniversität 2012: Feminismen leben. Call for Papers. Available at: http://ffuni.blogsport.de/fsu-2012/call-for-papers/ (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Godard, B. (ed.). 1994. *Collaboration in the Feminine. Writings on Women and Culture from 'Tessera'*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

Haug, F. & Laudan, E. 1992. "Ariadne wird immer unbescheidener…" In *Ein Nachmittag mit Gaudi*, B. Wilson, German translation by E. Laudan & E. Stäbler and M. Friedrich, 217–220. Hamburg: Argument (Ariadne Krimi).

Kaindl. K. 2008. "Zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit: TranslatorInnen im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft, Literatur und sozialer Realität." In *Translationskultur – ein innovatives und produktives Konzept,* L. Schippel (ed.), 307–333. Berlin: Frank & Timme.

Kußmaul, P. 2000. *Kreatives Übersetzen*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.

*Lespress*. 2002. Barbara Wilson im Interview mit Claudia Frickel. Available at: http://www.lespress.de/122002/texte122002/wilson.html (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Loffredo, E. & Perteghella, M. (eds.). 2006. *Translation and Creativity. Perspectives on Creative Writing and Translations Studies.* London/New York: Continuum.

Lorber, J. 2000. "Using Gender to Undo Gender: A Feminist Degendering Movement." *Feminist Theory* 1: 79–95.

Maier, C. S. & Massardier-Kenney, F. 1996. "Gender in/and Literary Translation." In: *Translation Horizons. Beyond the Boundaries of Translation Spectrum.* M. Gaddis Rose (ed.), 225–242. Binghamton: Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York.

Makinen, M. 2001. *Feminist Popular Fiction*. London & New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Mullan, J. 2003. "Writing about a writer writing." *The Guardian*, 5 July. Available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/jul/05/carolshields (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Parker, E. 2005. “Lost in Translation: Gender and the Figure of the Translator in Contemporary Queer Fiction.” In *The Poetics of Transubstantiation: From Theology to Metaphor*. D. Burnham & E. Giaccherini (eds.), 118–25. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Robinson, D. 2001. *Who Translates? Translator Subjectivities Beyond Reason*. Albany: State University of New York.

Santoyo Mediavilla, J.-C. 1990. “Translator, Transauthor.” In *Übersetzungswissenschaft: Ergebnisse und Perspektiven*. R. Arntz & G. Thome (eds.), 91–101. Tübingen: Gunter Narr.

Schabert, I. 2010. “Translation Trouble: Gender Indeterminacy in English Novels and their French Versions.” *Translation and Literature* 19, 72–92.

s_he. 2003. “Performing the Gap – Queere Gestalten und geschlechtliche Aneignung.” *arranca* 28. Available at: http://arranca.org/ausgabe/28/performing-the-gap (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Sjoholm, B. 2012. Writer, editor, teacher, translator. Available at: http://www.barbarasjoholm.com/books/mysteries.html (last accessed 31 October 2012).

*Tessera*. 2012. Tessera, publishing feminist theory and innovative writing by Canadian and Quebec women. Available at: http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/tessera/index (last accessed 31 October 2012).

Weißegger, R. 2011. “Queering Translation: Transcultural Communication and the Site of the ‘You’.” *GJSS* 2011 8: 2, 164–179. Available at: http://gjss.org/images/stories/volumes/8/2/GJSS%20Volume%208% 20Issue%202%20Thriving%20On%20the%20Edge%20of%20Cuts.pdf (last accessed 31 October 2012).

West, C. & Zimmerman, D. H. 1987. “Doing Gender.” *Gender & Society* 1: 125–151.

# Magical mediation

## The role of translation and interpreting in the narrative world of *Harry Potter*

Alice Casarini
University of Bologna, Italy

### Introduction

Scholarly literature on translation and the *Harry Potter* saga generally focuses on the interlinguistic rendition *of* the books and movies of the franchise for the different markets throughout the world. The translation process has obviously played a fundamental role in the creation of author J. K. Rowling's global empire, boasting a net worth around one billion USD (cf. Forbes 2004). The seven volumes of the saga were first published in English between June 1997 and July 2007; since then they have been translated into seventy-three languages (cf. Rowling 2012), including Latin, Ancient and Modern Greek, and separate editions for simplified and traditional Mandarin Chinese, for peninsular and Brazilian Portuguese, and for Catalan and Valencian audiences. Some translations have also been revised to accommodate the saga's increasingly experienced readers, who started to advocate a less domesticated rendition as they grew more and more acquainted with the story. For instance, the Italian edition was updated in 2011 under the supervision of the acclaimed word-game creator Stefano Bartezzaghi, who worked together with the original translators Marina Astrologo and Beatrice Masini and a committee of *Harry Potter* experts to "offer the readers a translation that took into account the evolution of the saga" (Salani Editore 2011) over the years.

Nonetheless, aside from the multiple editions *of* the written and audiovisual texts, translation also plays a crucial role *within* the fictional universe of the series. This chapter will therefore focus on the linguistic features of the *Potterverse,* on the frequent need for mediation between non-magical English and the languages of the wizarding world, and on the actual diegetic role of mediation as a powerful tool to escape from dangerous situations, to complete elaborate tasks, and to foster the characters' process of self-definition. As Lana A. Whited acknowledges, "one of the books' most striking features is Rowling's linguistic inventiveness"

(2002: 10). Rowling's notable wordsmithing efforts created a world in which languages are as carefully shaped and as important as setting descriptions or character profiles: The *Potterverse* is heavily influenced by ancient, magic-laden languages and alphabets such as Latin and Runic script and populated by creatures as different from one another as Giants, Goblins, and Merpeople (or even wizards and "Muggles", the term used to indicate non-magical men and women). While the saga does not feature any full-time, professional translators, operating between languages and cultures becomes a crucial asset to advance in magical education and to survive in the wizarding world. This analysis will thus also explore the different translational approaches of two of the protagonists, Harry Potter himself and his female best friend Hermione Granger. The comparison of their antithetical strategies for interlinguistic and intercultural communication will attempt to provide a new perspective within the ongoing debate on the role of the saga as a perpetuation of traditional patriarchy versus a feminist representation of women's ultimate superiority. We shall thus assess the power of Hermione's conscious encyclopedic conversance as an expert scholar and translator as opposed to Harry's congenital "bilingualism" and the unsolicited external help he constantly receives, proving that Rowling definitely supports Hermione's willpower and hard work over Harry's inherited skills. Nonetheless, the author's approach does not appear as a deliberately feminist representation, but rather as a hymn to brainpower and perseverance, as we shall analyze in the last section.

## The linguistic features of the *Potterverse*: Wizarding talk vs. Muggle English

The seven volumes of the *Harry Potter* adventures appeared at more or less regular intervals over a ten-year span, leading to a total of 3407 pages (UK edition). Such a massive amount of regularly expanded fictional space allowed Rowing to dwell on every detail of her elaborate universe and to thoroughly explore the interaction between the different communities and species that compose the socio-cultural structure of the *Potterverse*. From the very onset of the saga, the author posits a fundamental dichotomy between the world of wizards and that of the so-called Muggles (non-magical people), as described by Jann Lacoss (2002: 67):

> Rowling introduces her readers to a culture that differs markedly from their own. Wizarding society is described in a fashion that entices the audience to want to be a part of it. This society can be seen as a distinct folk group, with a cultural identity paralleling that of a national group.

The opening paragraph from the first book illustrates the clear opposition of the two worlds and instantly earns the readers' loyalty towards the wizarding community:

> Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense. (Rowling 1997: 7)

The depiction of the wizarding world as a separate, self-standing community that is first and foremost "strange and mysterious" is not only achieved through the representation of magical exploits and mythological creatures. Rowling also creates a specific lexicon meant to enhance the tantalizing supernatural aura that envelops the whole *Potterverse,* providing specific phraseology and carefully-crafted neologisms that distinguish wizarding talk from regular English (even though the two languages share the same grammar and basic vocabulary). One of the strategies with which the author achieves this effect entails infusing her stories with frequent references to ancient languages and alphabets often associated with magic, such as Latin, Greek, and Runic script. Ancient Runes do not affect Rowling's actual prose, even though they play a crucial diegetic role in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), as we shall see upon analyzing Hermione's translational feats. Latin, however, literally informs the language of the entire saga through numerous neologisms used to indicate creatures, objects, character names or, most notably, spells and curses. For instance, unpleasant, authoritarian Professor Snape is appropriately named "Severus", from the Latin term meaning "strict, severe," while the beloved Hogwarts headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, owes his first name to the Latin adjective for "white" – a reference to his long, silvery hair and beard, but also to his role as the most powerful antagonist of the Dark Lord, Voldemort (Harry's archenemy).

It is mainly through spells, however, that Rowling has her characters "continue to *use* this *dead language* in their everyday life", as she explains in an interview (Scholastic 2000). Most of the incantations originate from the first-person singular of the corresponding Latin verb: "Incendio" is used to set things on fire, "Protego" generates a powerful defensive counterjinx, and the *Patronus* charm evokes a partially tangible positive energy in the shape of an animal that will protect its conjurer. While some occurrences comply with actual Latin grammar rules (for instance, "patronus" is correctly inflected in the "Expecto Patronum" incantation), Rowling generally uses a sort of Cod Latin that is intentionally imperfect, as she discusses in another interview (quoted in Miccoli 2007: 28):

> My Latin is patchy, to say the least, but that doesn't really matter because old spells are often in cod Latin; a funny mixture of weird languages creeps into spells. That is how I use it. Occasionally you will stumble across something in my Latin that is, almost accidentally, grammatically correct, but that is a rarity. In my defence, the Latin is deliberately odd. Perfect Latin is not a very magical medium, is it?

Indeed, it is not compliance with proper grammar that adds to the magical atmosphere of the *Harry Potter* world: "Latinizing" factors suffice even when unnecessary or incorrect, as is the case with "petrificus totalus", the petrifying spell created by adding the mock-Latin suffix "us" to the words "petra" and "totus" – meaning "stone" and "all". Nonetheless, the actual Latin substrate and the fact that Latin itself is perceived as a materializing tool that translates wishes into concrete manifestations also invites reflections on the magical power of words and on their etymology and morphology, thus increasing the readers' participation in the characters' learning process. As Lacoss illustrates, the acquisition of the wizarding lexicon

> […] helps incorporate the readers of the series into [the] 'in crowd' of those privy to the wizarding world. Readers relate to the terminology of wizardry on two levels: they see the young wizards being integrated into their particular society/adult world, and they themselves are being incorporated vicariously into the world of wizards (wizard 'wannabes'). […] The creation of terms (as opposed to the adoption of already known terms for different purposes) is yet another indicator of a folk group that sets itself apart from the rest of society. By drawing on words and roots from other languages, Rowling gives the reader terms that are meaningful on a higher level. (2002: 71)

Lacoss also notes that the process of wizarding and non-wizarding language acquisition is bilateral: "it is notable that wizarding vocabulary is not widely known in the Muggle world, and vice versa" (2002: 71). On the one hand, wizard talk becomes so unique through the use of mock Latin and specific terminology that it often proves incomprehensible to Muggles or neophytes and requires in-text clarifications. On the other hand, Muggle language can prove just as hard to understand for wizards and witches, especially when it refers to non-magical everyday objects. The role of the mediator is most frequently fulfilled by Hermione, who draws on her vast, self-taught knowledge of both worlds to help her friends acquire language and culture in either direction. The following examples illustrate Hermione's crucial help in the correct assimilation of wizarding notions, as she discusses the difference between shape-shifting creatures or lectures an ill-tempered Ron (the third member of the protagonists' trio) on the correct pronunciation of the Levitation Charm and on the actual names of Muggle artifacts:

*Example 1:*
'An Animagus is a wizard who elects to turn into an animal. A werewolf has no choice in the matter.' (Cuarón 2004: 52)

*Example 2:*
'Wingardium Leviosa!' shouted [Ron], waving his long arms like a windmill.
'You're saying it wrong,' Harry heard Hermione snap. 'It's Winggar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the 'gar' nice and long.'
'You do it, then, if you're so clever,' Ron snarled.
Hermione rolled up the sleeves of her gown, flicked her wand and said, 'Wingardium Leviosa!'
Their feather rose off the desk and hovered about four feet above their heads. (Rowling 1997: 127)

*Example 3:*
'I'll fix it up with Mum and Dad, then I'll call you. I know how to use a fellytone now-'
'A telephone, Ron,' said Hermione. 'Honestly, you should take Muggle Studies next year ...' (Rowling 1999: 463)

These instances highlight several features that make Hermione an ideal translator and interpreter. In spite of the apparent flaunting of her skills, she proves extremely patient in explaining things over and over again, in proofreading her friends' essays, and in generally bridging the two worlds thanks to her encyclopedic knowledge, which she has earned through hard work and her determination to absorb all sorts of information, for one never knows what might turn out useful. The value of her zeal and her self-imparted education shall be explored in the following section, which underlines the fervor and perseverance with which she pursues her goal and the dedication and selflessness with which she acts as a linguistic and cultural broker in countless crucial occasions.

## Gendered approaches to translation in the *Potterverse*

Besides the dichotomy between the wizarding language and Muggle English, the *Harry Potter* universe also comprises *bona fide* "foreign" languages. Not only does Hogwarts host exchange students from France and Bulgaria, but the wizarding world is also inhabited by creatures as diverse as Goblins, Giants, and Merpeople, all equipped with their own languages and cultures. Goblins speak a complicated language that is suitably named Gobbledegook, from the actual English word meaning hard to understand and characterized by circumlocution. These untrustworthy creatures would easily be able to favor inter-species communication, since

they speak English as well, albeit not with native proficiency, yet they prefer to use Gobbledegook as a sort of secret weapon to protect the power originating from their administrative and bureaucratic positions at Gringotts, the wizarding bank (Miccoli 2005: 30). Goblins' ability to induce fear emerges from their use of language as much as from their appearance and their history of successful rebellions against wizards, as illustrated in the following examples:

> *Example 1:*
> Harry saw [Bagman] glance into the mirror over the bar at the goblins, who were all watching him and Harry in silence through their dark, slanting eyes.
> 'Absolute nightmare,' […] 'Their English isn't too good … it's like being back with all the Bulgarians at the Quidditch World Cup … but at least they used sign language another human could recognize. This lot keep gabbling in Gobbledegook … (Rowling 2000: 486)

> *Example 2:*
> 'Goblins don't need protection. Haven't you been listening to what Professor Binns has been telling us about goblin rebellions?'
> 'No,' said Harry and Ron together.
> 'Well, they're quite capable of dealing with wizards,' said Hermione, sipping more of her Butterbeer. 'They're very clever.' (Rowling 2000: 490)

Communication proves just as hard with Giants, who inhabit a remote mountainous region in Northern Europe and frequently end up fighting one another due to forced cohabitation. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), Hagrid, Hogwarts's half-giant gamekeeper, is sent on a mission to persuade Giants to join forces with Dumbledore instead of supporting Voldemort. Hagrid is chosen for his lineage and his knowledge of the Giants' peculiar forms of communication, based on violence as much as on receiving material offerings. Through appropriate interaction strategies he manages to persuade the Gurg, the leader of the Giants, to spare his life and to summon two Giant interpreters to enable communication:

> 'I lies [everlasting fire] down in the snow by Karkus's feet and says, 'A gift to the Gurg of the giants from Albus Dumbledore, who sends his respectful greetings.'
> 'And what did Karkus say?' asked Harry eagerly.
> 'Nothin',' said Hagrid. 'Didn' speak English.'
> 'You're kidding!'
> 'Didn' matter,' said Hagrid imperturbably, […] 'Karkus knew enough to yell fer a couple o' giants who knew our lingo an' they translated fer us.'[1]
> (Rowling 2003: 473)

1. Hagrid's own idiolect is mirrored in the purposedly incorrect spelling of his lines.

Nonetheless, when the Gurg is killed in one of the frequent in-tribe fights, communication falls through and Hagrid is only able to escape through magic. The failure of Hagrid's mission can be seen as a depiction of the difficulty of intercultural communication in a violent, war-like context. Once this environment of fierce brutality is eliminated, bridging the gap with Giants becomes much easier, as is the case with Hagrid's half-brother Grawp, whom Hagrid brings back from his mission and to whom he tries to teach manners and bits of English. Although Grawp never actually learns to speak or control his huge body mass properly, he does develop a sort of brotherly allegiance to Hagrid, aiding him in the final battle against Voldemort.

Hagrid's determination is not based on a full-fledged ideology of inter-species communication as much as on his unconditional love for non-conventional and potentially dangerous beings (which earns him a position as Care of Magical Creatures teacher, but also puts his regular-sized friends in danger on countless occasions). Once again, it is Hermione who rationalizes his approach and identifies patience and perseverance as the key factors in teaching and learning how to communicate with others, as well as in self-training. Not only does she manage to find a way to interact with Grawp and to help Bulgarian exchange student Viktor Krum improve his English, she also works her way up in the wizarding world by relentlessly studying all the notions she has not had a chance to absorb in her previous Muggle *milieu*, as well as reassessing non-magical notions from a different perspective:

> 'What's all that, Hermione?' Harry asked, pointing at not one, but three, bulging bags in the chair next to her.
> […] 'Those are my books for Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, Study of Ancient Runes, Muggle Studies –'
> 'What are you doing Muggle Studies for?' said Ron, rolling his eyes at Harry. 'You're Muggle-born! Your mum and dad are Muggles! You already know all about Muggles!'
> 'But it'll be fascinating to study them from the wizarding point of view,' said Hermione earnestly.
> 'Are you planning to eat or sleep at all this year, Hermione?' asked Harry, while Ron sniggered. (Rowling 1999: 65)

Hermione's approach to learning and mediating between languages and cultures is depicted with traditional feminine traits such as devotion, accuracy, tolerance, and an initially unyielding compliance with established rules. On the other hand, Harry's style is extremely different; although he is a brave, talented, and resourceful wizard, he lacks Hermione's perseverance, her precision, and her studiousness and tends to perform poorly in subjects that require the memorization of

large amounts of theoretical or historical data. He is capable of extraordinary feats involving practical magic or lateral thinking, but when it comes to approaching different languages, he is largely dependent on outside help or on inherited abilities of which he is initially unaware. For instance, in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) he only succeeds in the prestigious Triwizard Tournament through external advice. While he manages to complete the first quest thanks to his flying skills, he is then unable to decipher the second clue, a mysterious golden egg containing a message in Mermish, the language spoken by the disquieting Merpeople found in Hogwarts' Great Lake. When heard underwater, Mermish sounds like regular English; above water, however, it produces a nasty screeching sound that proves unbearable and unintelligible to human ears. In spite of his being "the Chosen One", Harry only manages to solve the puzzle with the help of his fellow Hogwarts champion Cedric Diggory and the ghost of Moaning Myrtle, a deceased student who haunts bathrooms and is thus familiar with underwater dynamics.

Many more of Harry's achievements are only possible through outside help or inherited objects, such as his late father's invisibility cloak or Fred and George Weasley's Marauder's Map, which indicates the real-time position of anyone within the Hogwarts bounds. Harry's interpreting accomplishments are perhaps the most evident manifestation of the preponderance of outside factors over his own agency. Aside from his externally-guided attempt at understanding Mermish, Harry is famous for being a "Parselmouth", a speaker of the language of snakes ("Parseltongue"). The books depict this ability as a form of xenoglossia, the putative paranormal phenomenon in which a person is able to speak a language they supposedly could not have acquired by natural means. Thus Harry communicates with a snake without even realizing it:

> Harry wasn't sure what made him do it. He wasn't even aware of deciding to do it. […] He shouted stupidly at the snake, 'Leave him!' And miraculously – inexplicably – the snake slumped to the floor. He knew the snake wouldn't attach anyone now, though how he knew it, he couldn't have explained.
>
> (Rowling 1998: 211)

When Ron and Hermione tell him that speaking to snakes is a typical sign of dark magic, Harry claims he thought he had been speaking regular English:

> 'I heard you speaking Parseltongue', said Ron, 'snake language. You could have been saying anything. No wonder Justin panicked, it sounded like you were egging the snake on or something. It was creepy, you know.'
> Harry gaped at him.
> 'I spoke a different language? But – I didn't realise – how can I speak a language without knowing I can speak it?' (Rowling 1998: 212)

It is later revealed that Voldemort inadvertently transferred his Parselmouth skills to Harry on the night he tried to kill him; but aside from the burden of being "the boy who lived" and suffering from tremendous fits when his scar burns, Harry also takes much advantage of the Parselmouth skills he has inherited without lifting a finger.

While he is the "official" hero of the saga and his actions always lead to the triumph of the forces of good, a closer analysis reveals that in many circumstances sheer luck and external help are the actual factors that save him and his world. Hermione, on the other hand, is fully in control of her skills, which she has earned entirely by herself, starting from scratch; she obviously benefits from cooperation or advice as well, but throughout the saga she struggles to become as self-sufficient as possible. Her approach to translation and intercultural communication can thus be considered as a symbol of her entire outlook on life, for which she never ceases to store potentially useful information and which she always faces with logical discernment and a scientific method based on verifiable references, on thinking ahead, and on determination. She excels at time management, employing her organization skills to plan her friends' schedules as well as her own, and even manages to bend time itself through the use of a Time-Turner, a rotating hourglass that allows its bearer to rewind hours and maximize productivity (a tool that most translators would undoubtedly treasure). Hermione is thus clearly unafraid of hard work, which she perceives as the only way to pursue her education and complete the quests she encounters; moreover, she consciously balances her studies of magic with the exploration of the Muggle world, knowing that mastering either is not enough without the other component. Rather than trusting chance or luck, she prefers to rely on her unwavering logical skills, which are crystallized in the following dialogue from the seventh movie:

> Harry: 'You are brilliant, Hermione! Truly!'
> Hermione: 'Actually, I'm highly logical, which allows me to look past extraneous detail and perceive clearly that which others overlook.'
> (Yates 2010: 75)

Thank to this attitude, Hermione always knows what type of information to look for when facing a specific task, which is a crucial skill for translators as well, and which she matches with the tireless construction of her own mental database: As there are no Internet or terminology management tools in the *Harry Potter* universe, she spends as much time in the library as she can, absorb all kinds of information to which she can refer in times of need. The following examples highlight her hardworking nature and her utmost belief in libraries:

> *Example 1:*
> Harry looked at the cluttered table, at the long Arithmancy essay […] and at the Rune translation Hermione was now poring over.
> 'How are you going to get through all this stuff?', Harry asked her.
> 'Oh, well – you know – working hard,' said Hermione. (Rowling 1999: 271)
>
> *Example 2:*
> [Harry: ] 'But why's she got to go to the library?'
> 'Because that's what Hermione does,' said Ron, shrugging, 'When in doubt, go to the library.' (Rowling 1998: 275)
>
> *Example 3:*
> Harry found Ron at the back of the library, measuring his History of Magic homework. […] 'I don't believe it, I'm still eight inches short […] and Hermione's done four feet seven inches and her writing's tiny.'
> 'Where is she?' asked Harry […]. 'Somewhere over there,' said Ron, pointing along the shelves, 'looking for another book. I think she's trying to read the whole library before Christmas.' (Rowling 1998: 161)

Hermione's faith in libraries transcends her school-related activities and pervades her entire life, so much that she even decides to bring her reference material with her on a perilous journey that does not seem to have anything to do with Rune translation:

> 'Oh, of course,' said Ron, clapping a hand to his forehead. 'I forgot we'll be hunting down Voldemort in a mobile library.'
> 'Ha ha,' said Hermione, looking down on Spellman's Syllabary. I wonder… will we need to translate runes? It's possible… I think we'd better take it, to be safe.'
> (Rowling 2007: 110)

In spite of their frequent mockery, Harry and Ron are extremely grateful to Hermione and recognize that they would be completely lost without her all-encompassing knowledge and her ability to think ahead. The following passages highlight the extent to which she is able to help the boys not only with schoolwork, but also by filling a bottomless bag of her own design with anything they might need when they are forced to live on the run in the final book:

> *Example 1:*
> Harry, Ron and Hermione sat together next to a window. Hermione was checking Harry and Ron's Charms homework for them. She would never let them copy ('How will you learn?'), but by asking her to read it through, they got the right answers anyway. (Rowling 1997: 198)

*Example 2:*
Their final exam, History of Magic, was not to take place until that afternoon. Harry […] [sat reading] through some of the three-and-a-half-feet-high stack of notes that Hermione had lent him. (Rowling 2003: 798)

*Example 3a:*
[Hermione] dropped her small beaded bag, which made a loud thump quite disproportionate to its size. […] (2007: 162)

*Example 3b:*
'Undetectable Extension Charm. […] I managed to fit everything we need in here.' She gave the fragile-looking bag a little shake and it echoed like a cargo hold as a number of heavy objects rolled around inside it. 'Oh, damn, that'll be the books,' she said, peering into it, 'and I had them all stacked by subject. […] I've had the essentials packed for days, you know, in case we needed to make a quick getaway. […]
'You're amazing, you are,' said Ron. (Rowling 2007: 183)

Hermione herself shows extreme confidence in her own knowledge and is not afraid to correct Harry and Ron and to try to persuade them to follow her learning creed, the validity of which is invariably proved by the higher effectiveness of the information she is able to provide. The following two examples illustrate how her studiousness allows the trio to unravel the mystery of the Philosopher's Stone in the eponymous book and how her ability to quote her beloved book *Hogwarts: A History* by heart manages to invalidate Harry's own reasoning:

*Example 1:*
'Nicolas Flamel', she whispered dramatically, 'is the only known maker of the Philosopher's Stone!'
This didn't have quite the effect she'd expected.
'The what?' said Harry and Ron.
'Oh, honestly, don't you two read? (Rowling 1997: 237)

*Example 2:*
'I want to know how she heard me talking to Viktor! […]
'Maybe she had you bugged', said Harry.
'Bugged?' said Ron blankly. 'What… put fleas on her or something?' Harry started explaining about hidden microphones and recording equipment.
Ron was fascinated, but Hermione interrupted them. 'Aren't you two ever going to read *Hogwarts: A History*?' 'What's the point?' said Ron. 'You know it off by heart, we can just ask you.'
'All those substitutes for magic Muggles use – electricity, and computers and radar, and all those things – they all go haywire around Hogwarts, there's too much magic in the air.' (Rowling 2000: 495)

Even when Harry actually possesses crucial information of which Hermione is unaware, it is only the girl's logic that pieces the details together and eventually manages to save the day. The following scene from the final book shows how Harry proves unable to gauge the importance of a fundamental detail he had known all along:

> 'Harry, could you help me with something?'; [she] held out The Tales of Beedle the Bard.
> 'Look at that symbol,' she said, pointing to the top of a page. Above what Harry assumed was the title of the story (being unable to read runes, he could not be sure), there was a picture of what looked like a triangular eye, its pupil crossed with a vertical line.
> 'I never took Ancient Runes, Hermione.'
> 'I know that, but it isn't a rune and it's not in the syllabary, either. All along I thought it was a picture of an eye, but I don't think it is! It's been inked in, look, somebody's drawn it there, it isn't really part of the book. Think, have you ever seen it before?'
> 'No … no, wait a moment.' Harry looked closer. 'Isn't it the same symbol Luna's dad was wearing round his neck?'
> 'Well, that's what I thought too!'
> 'Then it's Grindelwald's mark.'
> She stared at him, open-mouthed.
> 'What?'
> 'Krum told me …' (Rowling 2007: 351)

Once again, Harry inadvertently acquires a vital piece of information thanks to external help, but it is Hermione who correctly employs this revelation to give a new meaning to the runic book she has inherited from Dumbledore, which she has been perusing and translating meticulously to figure out the clues left by the late headmaster. *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* is a collection of wizarding fairy tales in which, significantly, the main characters "are all witches who take their fates into their own hands, rather than taking a prolonged nap or waiting for someone to return a lost shoe" (*The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, p. ix). And while perhaps it is less evident in the common perception of the saga, Hermione's agency is eventually far better rewarded by Rowling than Harry's own achievements. In the real, tangible book of the *Tales* (which Rowling actually wrote), Hermione is listed as the official translator from the Ancient Runes. She thus takes a metaleptic leap into the real world, becoming an actual person, while Harry may outshine her in terms of prominence, but is still confined within paper and movie reels.

## Conclusion

The empowering, literally life-infusing effect of translation fits perfectly in Rowling's attempt to portray a world in which language is the ultimate form of magic. One of the reasons behind the success of the *Harry Potter* saga is precisely its focus on language itself. As previously discussed, the presence of different languages and cultures introduces issues of diversity and interlinguistic dialogue, promoting an analysis of the factors that may foster or trump intercultural communication. Throughout the saga several characters engage in attempts to interact with speakers of different languages, yet the two approaches adopted by Harry and Hermione carry a particularly significant value, in that they express Rowling's perspective on translation and might shed a new light on her long-debated position regarding the relationship between gender and agency. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the numerous and often mutually exclusive feminist readings of the *Harry Potter* saga, Krunoslav Mikulan's overview (2009: 288f) offers a framework for Rowling's predilection of Hermione's pro-active *modus operandi* over Harry's approach:

> In accordance with the vast differences between different feminist theories, various literary critics apply differing sets of criteria to J. K. Rowling's novels. While some critics, for example, try to prove the explicit sexist base of the Harry Potter series, others attempt to investigate how the female characters cope with the dangers of marginalization and find the strength to resist them. It would appear that at least four different theses can be discerned when examining the Harry Potter novels:
> 1. They are sexist novels.
> 2. They are feminist novels.
> 3. They are boys' novels.
> 4. They are novels in which girls can find their ideals.

The novels do contain aspects that could support any of these theories; for instance, Terri Doughty underlines Rowling's wide use of "standard boy's school story elements" such as male comradeship, male heroism, and competitive sports, in line with "the continued appeal of a certain brand of masculine fantasy of empowerment for boy readers" (2002: 243–257). The publisher's original plan was indeed aimed at a male target audience, in that Rowling was asked to use initials to sign her books, lest boys should be deterred by her clearly feminine first name, Joanne. Conversely, the novels also provide a plethora of instances of female self-assertion, many of which revolve around Hermione, whom Rowling admittedly based on her own personality. While it is highly likely that "Rowling did not consciously write these texts as feminist, that is, to advocate for or promote equality

or empowerment for females", as Eliza T. Dresang (2002: 220) argues, it is also reasonable to presume that she transferred her own pro-active, logophiliac attitude onto Hermione, endowing her with the ability to use knowledge and language as both weapons and means of self-definition. However, these characteristics are not shared by the (few) other prominent female characters: For instance, Ron's sister Ginny possesses many of Harry's traits, such as his bravery and his Quidditch skills, while Ravenclaw student Luna Lovegood is perceptive and kind-hearted, but also has a tendency to behave eccentrically or drift away to her own dream world. Similarly, the student body also comprises female characters that would never be compatible with a feminist ideology, such as shy, overemotional Cho Chang, who does little more than give Harry his first kiss, and shallow, pathetic Lavender Brown, with her irritating saccharine obsession with Ron. On the other hand, even if Hogwarts is indeed constructed as a patriarchal institution and men tend to outnumber women in most scenes, male characters are also represented in a variety of ways, often using irony to underline their flaws, as is evident in the portrayal of Ron's arachnophobia or fellow Gryffindor Seamus Finnegan's proneness to causing explosions as he attempts to brew potions.

The ambiguity of Rowling's representation of gender roles reinforces the idea that her books do not have an open sexist agenda. Mikulan (2009: 297) suggests that

> it would appear that the author does not intend to promote sexual equality, nor does she attempt to perpetuate permanently established norms and customs. Through constant ironical provocation of each sex she seems to be attempting to highlight the apparent differences without openly pleading either cause.

It could thus be argued that Rowling supports a different representation of the ultimate champion, and that her depiction of Hermione is not a symbol of female assertion as much as it is proof that brainpower, perseverance, and the ability to think ahead are invaluable means of empowerment that allow anyone to break through the stereotypes in which they have been pigeonholed, whether they are based on gender or other characteristics. Hermione is undoubtedly "a particularly potent role model for […] studiously-minded young girls", as Henry Jenkins (2006: 175) observes, but she can also be seen as a super-gender paradigm of industriousness and willpower – a model that does not necessarily aim at promoting a downright feminist approach insomuch at dispelling the apparent idea of male predominance in the Potter universe and at fostering pro-active self-definition regardless of conventions. And Hermione is the utmost example of self-determination, in that mastering language and knowledge does not only give her power (which equals a job and a steady income for real-world translators), but actually defines her personality and literally breathes life into her.

## References

### Primary sources

Cuarón, A. 2004. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (DVD 141 min.). USA: Warner Bros.
Rowling, J. K. 1997. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 1998. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 1999. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 2000. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 2003. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 2005. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 2007. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury.
Rowling, J. K. 2008. *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. London: Bloomsbury.
Yates, D. 2010. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* (DVD 146 min.). USA: Warner Bros.

### Secondary sources

Doughty, T. 2002. "Locating Harry Potter in the "Boys' Book" Market." In *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, L. A. Whited (ed.), 243–257. Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press.

Dresang, E. T. 2002. "Hermione Granger and the Heritage of Gender." In *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, L. A. Whited (ed.), 211–242. Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press.

*Forbes*. 2004. "The World's Richest People: J. K. Rowling and the Billion-Dollar Empire." (J. Watson & T. Kellner). Available at: http://www.forbes.com/2004/02/26/cx_jw_0226rowlingbill04.html (last accessed 29 April 2012).

Jenkins, H. 2006. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press.

Lacoss, J. 2002. "Of Magicals and Muggles: Reversals and Revulsions at Hogwarts." In *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, L. A. Whited (ed.), 67–88. Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press.

Miccoli, L. 2005. *La Creazione dei Neologismi nella Serie di* Harry Potter *di J. K. Rowling e nella Traduzione Italiana. Analisi Contrastiva tra le due Lingue*. University of Bologna: Disseration.

Miccoli, L. 2007. *Studio Comparato in Inglese, Italiano, Spagnolo e Catalano dei Termini 'Magici' in* Harry Potter And The Half-Blood Prince *(J. K. Rowling, 2005)*. University of Bologna: Disseration.

Mikulan, K. 2009. "Harry Potter through the Focus of Feminist Literary Theory: Examples of (Un)Founded Criticism." *The Journal of International Social Research* 2 (9): 288–298. Available at: http://www.sosyalarastirmalar.com/cilt2/sayi9pdf/mikulan_krunoslav.pdf (last accessed 29 April 2012).

Rowling, J. K. 2012. J. K. Rowling's Website. Available at: http://www.jkrowling.com/en_GB/#/harry-potter/the-books (last accessed 29 April 2012).

*Salani Editore*. 2011. Arriva in libreria *Harry Potter e la pietra filosofale* per la prima volta in edizione tascabile in una nuova traduzione e con una nuova copertina. Available at: http://www.harrypotteritalia.net/immagini/Harry%20Potter%20comunicato%20stampa%202.pdf (last accessed 29 April 2012).

*Scholastic*. 2000. Interview with J. K. Rowling (October 6th, 2000). Available at: http://www.mugglenet.com/books/scholchat2.shtml (last accessed 29 April 2012).

Whited, L. E. 2002. "Introduction." In *The Ivory Tower and Harry Potter: Perspectives on a Literary Phenomenon*, L. A. Whited (ed.), 1–12. Columbia/London: University of Missouri Press.

# Future imperfect

## Translation and translators in science-fiction novels and films

Monika Wozniak
"Sapienza" University of Rome

### Introduction: *Plausible* future for translators

All the translators featured in works of fiction are fictional, but somehow, in science-fiction they seem just a bit more fictional than in other genres. This can be easily explained by the fact that unlike most other genres, science-fiction does not depict a reality based on a mimetic imitation of our true world, but instead deals with imaginary content such as future settings, futuristic science and technology, space travel, aliens, and paranormal abilities. Therefore there are no direct empirical models and practices at the disposal of the writers to be used as a point of reference when modelling the fictional world. Similarly, the readers have no possibility of comparing the imaginary reality of a novel or a film with their extra-textual experience. Nonetheless, differently from such kind of narrative as fantasy, fairy-tales or fantastic literature, one of the most important premises of science-fiction is to create a more or less *plausible* vision of the future, based on *rational* presumptions and hypotheses about the shape of possible worlds and societies. The name of the genre itself implies (of course not always truthfully) that it is a kind of writing that offers a believable prophecy of the future stemming from "scientific" premises. In other words, science fiction offers a plausible vision of a potential world based on the rational analysis of our present situation. As a result, it comes as a fascinating combination of an inevitable, if indirect, reflection of current beliefs, consciousness and state of science on the one hand, and the projection of the fears or hopes for the future in a given social and historical moment on the other. It may be supposed, then, that the issue of translation and the image of

translators as seen in science-fiction works will cast light on the present perception of interlinguistic communication problems as well as reveal general expectations as to how this question will be dealt with in the future.[1]

## Translation today: Two trends

At present, there are two equally important, if somehow opposite trends in translation, that seem to dominate the scene. The first is research for a machine translator. This is not a new idea: As early as the seventeenth century René Descartes introduced the notion of all languages using one symbol. However, it was not until the twentieth century that first attempts to actually create such a tool were made, first in the 1930s, when Petr Smirnov-Troyanski and George Artsouni independently issued patents for mechanical dictionaries, and later in 1954, when a successful experiment at Georgetown University involving fully automatic translation of over sixty Russian sentences into English created high expectations and hopes that the translating machine would become a reality (cf. Hutchins 1995).

Even if it soon turned out that achieving this goal was not as easy as it first seemed, the technological progress made over the last fifty years has been impressive. Although so far "the absence of any intellectual breakthroughs to produce indisputably high quality fully automatic MT is […] clear, a fact that has led some to say it is impossible" (Wilks 2009: 1), the custom of using computer programs for everyday needs or in the field of technical and commercial translation is already a universally accepted practice. Moreover, the rapid development of translation software systems has resulted in increasing pressure to persuade authors to "write for translation", that is in the most simple and schematic way possible, in order to make the work of an automatic translator easier. Powerful economic and practical reasons favour research into more and more reliable automatic translators. The

1. Fascinating as this topic may seem, it has received, so far, surprisingly little attention in the scholarship. The most exhaustive study and indispensable point of reference still remains Meyers's book on *Aliens and linguists,* published over 30 years ago (1980). Meyers discusses all kinds of linguistic features which the science-fiction genre deals with, among them the problem of translation and the plausibility of an automatic translator. Brian Mossop in his lengthy and well-researched paper "The Image of Translation in Science Fiction & Astronomy" (1996) tackles mainly the barriers in extraterrestrial communication, while Michael Cronin dedicates one chapter of his *Translation goes to the movies* (2009) to a thorough analysis of C3PO's figure in the *Star Wars* movies. Occasional remarks on communication and translation issues that may be found in science-fiction compendia or monographies such as for M. Bould's *The Routledge Companion to Science-Fiction* (2009) or J. Johnson-Smith's *American Science-Fiction TV* (2005), do not develop into an in-depth analysis.

American military's experimental research agency, DARPA (2012a, b), has recently been granted massive funding to develop RATS (*Robust Automatic Translation of Speech*) and BOLT (*Broad Operational Language Translation*) software, in order to create a technology for military purposes that will allow to translation of face-to-face conversations in real time, as well as accurately decipher intelligence and communications data in voice, video, and print. It is no wonder that many professional translators feel not as much excited as worried or even threatened by the development of these new products. Internet forums are full of discussions and rather gloomy prophecies about the future role of the translator.

Then again, ever since the so-called cultural turn in translation studies there has been a substantial re-evaluation and recognition of the translator's role. Step by step with the growing understanding of the complex and multilayered process of translation, the concept of translator has changed from someone who passively conveys the sense of a message from one language to the other into a cultural mediator, who takes an active part in the communication process and whose responsibility goes far beyond a simple linguistic transfer. Even if European Union documents for statistical classification of economic activities still classify translation and interpretation together with "secretarial activities" (Katan 2004: 2), numerous studies on the crucial importance of translation in the context of power relations, politics, conflict, ideologies, and cross-cultural communication have induced scholars to insist that "it should be possible for the humble […] general interpreter or translator to take a more high profile role in actively promoting understanding across languages and cultures" (Katan 2004: 23).

## Translation tomorrow

### Translation on Earth

Given the moment of transition regarding the functionality and status of translation that is evidently taking place today, it is interesting to ask what the views on the future of these issues expressed in works of science-fiction are. In fact, the particular status of this genre gives it a unique opportunity to estimate the evolution of the languages on Earth and the subsequent changes in communication in the upcoming decades or even centuries. Unfortunately, it is an opportunity explored very rarely. In his monograph *Aliens and Linguists. Language study and science fiction,* the most important study on linguistic topics in science-fiction to date, Walter E. Meyers has noticed, not without malice, that "in general the treatment of linguistic change in science fiction is like the sky on a hazy night: a few bright spots seen through an obfuscating fog" (Meyers 1980: 18). The majority

of science-fiction writers simply assume that English will turn into the common language of all the people on Earth: Not only that it will become the general *lingua franca*, but that it will somewhat supplant all the other languages and achieve what humanity lost after Babel, mainly universal linguistic uniformity. However, apparently this idea does not derive from a deep philosophical or scientific reflection, but rather from the practical reasons, lack of knowledge about how languages change, and an involuntary linguistic chauvinism stemming from the status of science-fiction as an extremely anglicized genre. In the movies, traces of the erstwhile intercultural diversity of our globe are sometimes hinted at by giving the characters different accents, for example Chekov's Russian accent in the original *Star Trek* Series (cf. Roddenberry 1966–69/2009). On rare occasions there is some concession made towards the influence of other languages, typically Russian, on the future form of English, even if it is usually limited to borrowing of words. The most known example of such a strategy is probably the slang *Nadsat* invented by Anthony Burgess in *A Clockwork Orange* (1962).

The theme of communication problems is tackled more frequently by writers from non English-speaking countries, noticeably in the novels of Polish author Stanisław Lem, who made it into a central topic of his entire body of work. In the novel *Return from the Stars* (1961/1980) he describes the situation of an astronaut who comes back from a space mission, that for him lasted ten years, while on Earth more than a century had passed. What he faces is typical culture shock (described by Lem well before it became a fashionable argument of studies). Even the simplest conversation with a girl becomes a kind of frustrating riddle:

> 'Listen, what is this Cavut?'
> 'The Cavuta?' She corrected me. 'It's… a sort of school, plasting; nothing great in itself, but sometimes one can get into the reals.'
> 'Wait … then what exactly do you do?'
> 'Plast. You don't know what that is?'
> 'No.'
> 'How can I explain? To put it simply, one makes dresses, clothing in general – everything …'
> 'Tailoring?'
> 'What does that mean?'
> 'Do you sew things?'
> 'I don't understand.' (Lem 1961/1980: 30f[2])

2. Although the issue of communication barriers seems to be central in all Lem's works, his early novels, such as *Return from the Stars,* quoted above, present no particular difficulties in translation. This is not the case of his later books, notoriously problematic to translate because of their philosophical and highly ironic style: Fortunately, most of them are available in English in excellent translations by Michael Kandel.

Yet even in Lem's novels there is a tacit implication that *one* single language will in some way replace the multilingual world of today. The eventuality that in the future there will be still a need for translation or for intercultural meditation is clearly not contemplated. Interestingly enough, it does not seem to bother anyone, even if nowadays linguistic globalization is often perceived as an impoverishment of the world's cultural heritage. It is all forgotten in the name of the vision of a world in which everybody will able to communicate directly with everybody.

## Interplanetary communication

However, even if on Earth the services of a translator are not required any more, a great deal of works of science fiction face communication issues on a rather larger, literally galactic, scale. Provided that one of the fundamental topics of science fiction is the exploration of space and the contact with new, extraterrestrial civilizations, the question whether it will be possible to engage in effective communication with them cannot be avoided. Logically, there are two possible answers to these questions, both present in science-fiction: Yes, it will be possible or no, it will not be possible.

### *Spoken Galactic Basic and its advantages*

The optimistic version is far more popular, especially in cinematography, and it is quite easy to understand the reasons for this preference. With no communication there is no plot advancement, with no plot advancement there is no story and with no story the audience will get bored. It is hardly an exaggeration, therefore, to argue that in the majority of science-fiction works the issue of translation is not considered so much as an interesting linguistic or philosophical problem, but as a kind of nuisance that must be somehow dealt with efficiently and rapidly in order to preserve the plausibility of the imaginary world. The creativity of the proposed solutions as to how overcome communication problems with extraterrestrials is quite impressive if not always based on a scientific foundation, and ranges from highly unrealistic to outright stupid. The most candid strategy is to disregard the question altogether and make everybody in the galaxy speak a kind of "Pancosmic" or "Spoken Galactic Basic" that coincidentally is identical to spoken English. An approach slightly more subtle is to endow the aliens (far less frequently Earthlings) with super powerful language learning capacities or to introduce some painless and rapid means of achieving the fluency in a new idiom (hypnosis, sleep-learning, and chemicals are offered as more plausible methods, while "subcerebral techniques" or mysterious "heuretics" comprise the more magical, Meyers 1980: 116). Another much beloved method of science-fiction writers is telepathy. Its handiness has been recognized as early as in H. G. Wells's *Men*

*like Gods* (1923), whose protagonist declared with a blatant naivety: "it is really convenient for us that there should be this method of transmission. For otherwise, I do not see how we could have avoided weeks of linguistic bother [...] before we could have got to anything like our present understanding" (1923: 30). Unfortunately, on closer inspection the idea of flawless telepathic communication with alien races reveals all of its fallibility.

> Writers who invoke telepathy forget that even if there does exist a universal 'language of thought' that operates below the level of consciousness, and even if thought could be projected through space, we can only become aware of thought in some particular language or other semiotic system. So if the receiver of a telepathic message does not know the language of the sender, translation work has to be performed at some point in the transmission process. (Mossop 1996: 2f)

*Magic tools*

In those science fiction worlds in which communication between many extraterrestrial races occurs on a regular basis and for the sake of a minimum of plausibility it is no more possible to avoid the problem of translation, the answer is almost always proposed as some kind of machine translation. Usually it is a sort of technological device, such as the universal translator, made famous above all by the *Star Trek* series (cf. Berman & Braga 2005), but even "organic" solutions, such as special microbes which colonize the host's brain stem and translate anything spoken to him/her/it, passing along the translated information to the host's brain (the TV series *Farscape,* 1999–2003 (cf. Henson & O'Bannon 2011)) and the famous Babel fish from Douglas Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1978/2008) work, in truth, in a similar way. Recent technological developments have given an aura of "scientific" credibility to the great variety of automatic translators that proliferate in future worlds, but there is no denying that most of these devices belong to the realm of pure fantasy. Walter E. Meyers, who dedicated a whole chapter of his book to the Automatic Translator, analyzed in detail two possible types of such tools: The first one is a machine that translates from one known language to another and the other is a device capable of accepting any extraterrestrial language as input and translate it into a known language. Given the current advancement of research on machine-aided translation, it is indeed plausible that in the future there will appear software sophisticated enough to render even complex messages in a different language without human assistance. Therefore, such inventions as the automatic translator used by the medics of Sector General in James White's *Sector General* series (1962–1999) are, all considered, acceptable possibilities (cf. White 2003). It is, however, the other kind of translator (Meyers calls it a "magic decoder") that plays a fundamental role in science-fiction. Alas, the jump from

"known-to-known" to "unknown-to-known" translation is not as simple as many science-fiction authors would like to make believe. It has been pointed out, first of all by Kingsley Amis in his influential *New Maps of Hell,* that

> [t]he idea of a translation machine [...] usually introduced by phases like 'He set up the translation machine', [...[ [is] a direct affront to common sense, for such a machine would clearly be foiled even by an utterance in Portuguese unless it had been 'taught' Portuguese to start with. (Amis 1960: 21)

The logical impossibility of creating a device that would somehow "guess", without any available data, the meanings of an alien language and translate them within seconds into a perfect English, has been explained over and over again, and the "magical decoder" has become a kind of joke even in the genre itself (indeed, Adams's Babel fish was originally conceived as a parody of a universal translator). Nonetheless it is a device far too convenient to be given up, and for all the critics and derisions the popularity of marvellous tools such as "META box – the priceless translator that allowed Sam to detect and decipher the signal and the messages he had been receiving" (Fichmann 1990: 120) shows no signs of decline.

The concrete needs of the narrative determine the automatic translator's appeal and will alone suffice to grant it a long and prosperous existence, but they are not the only reasons for its indisputable appeal.

> These gizmos of consecutive translation are not just narrative conveniences. They reflect the assumption that (verbalized) languages are all reducible to basic stratum, a pure code capable of infinite varieties of incarnation with no loss of essential information, on the principle that all minds must share certain universal principles transcending biological and cultural difference. If a universal translator exists, all linguistic beings must be able to understand each other. These assumptions inevitably hide the ethnocentric worldviews of national languages, where they are represented unreflectively as the natural ones shared by text and reader. (Csicsery-Ronay 2008: 35)

In other words, the idea of the automatic translator reflects the view that language is a mere tool reducible to a semiotic code and that communication problems have a technological solution. Thus, as Mossop correctly points out, most science-fiction authors confuse translation (rendering the global message of a text) with language decipherment (decoding the meaning of the units of the language in which the text is written) (Mossop 1996: 6) and generally seem to be blissfully unaware that contact with extraterrestrials could, and probably would, involve not only all extralinguistic complications that happen even in every interlingual and intercultural exchange on Earth, but also a great number of almost unimaginable additional hindrances and barriers.

*Aliens most alien*

It is interesting, in fact, that while science-fiction as a genre is often deeply pessimistic and likely deals with dystopian and apocalyptic visions of the future, alien encounter stories in general contrast sharply with these gloomy visions (Meyers 1980: 100). Very few writers favour a pessimistic take on the probabilities of our successful communication with extraterrestrials. The most remarkable analysis of insurmountable difficulties arising out of contacts with aliens are most likely to be found in the novels of Stanisław Lem, such as *Eden* (1959/1989), *His master's voice* (1968/1983), *Fiasco* (1987) and, of course, *Solaris* (1961), probably the most notorious fictionalization of this attitude in the history of science-fiction. *Solaris* is a story of repeated and failed attempts to establish communication between a group of human astronauts and the alien, which is in this case the whole planet, a kind of sentient ocean. Lem mercilessly ridicules the anthropocentric presumption of scientific attitudes, evident in most science-fiction, that draw the universe in the image of humanity. Any attempt to understand the motivation of the sentient ocean covering the eponymous alien world "is blocked by our own anthropomorphism" (Lem 2003: 140), which has shaped even "the most abstract achievements of science, the most advanced theories and victories of mathematics" (Lem 2003: 178). If one attempts to transpose the alien "into any human language, the values and meanings involved lose all substance; they cannot be brought intact through the barrier" (Lem 2003: 180), therefore "there neither was, nor could be, any question of 'contact' between mankind and any nonhuman civilization" (Lem 2003: 178).

Lem's novel has been highly valued by the critics, who indicate that *Solaris* "not only fuses a fully novelistic concreteness of presentation with the most ambitious and radical epistemological interrogations; it also formally doubles its own themes of cognition and otherness in the interpretative problems it sets for the reader" (Freedman 2000: 110). However, not surprisingly, since such radically dystopian visions of future communication with extraterrestrials are not very attractive from a narrative point of view (it takes an author as talented as Lem to pull it off) even those stories that deal with linguistic difficulties in contact with extraterrestrial races usually offer a positive solution in the end.

## Translator – An endangered species

There is, nonetheless, one tendency that unites all the science-fiction stories about contact with alien civilizations: Even if dystopian visions about future interplanetary contact usually offer a more in-depth analysis of the nature of possible communication problems than the utopian ones, they are just as unwilling to introduce a professional translator as a character.

## No job openings for translators

It is really remarkable that in the crew of the spaceships that boldly go to explore new worlds and civilizations there never seems to be place for linguists of any sort and when first contact with a newly discovered race occurs, the responsibility of handling it is usually performed by some other specialist. Such is the situation in "Darmok" (cf. Kolbe 1991), one of the most celebrated episodes of the series *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), often quoted as a clever exploration of cultural differences leading to the impossibility of mutual understanding between the interlocutors. The crew of the *Enterprise* encounters an alien species called Children of Tama, with whom a successful contact has never been established, in spite of repeated efforts over the arc of hundred years. And indeed, it soon turns out that the otherwise infallible universal translator is not in this case sufficient to guarantee effective communication. The first attempt at conversation results in a complete failure, as captain Picard and his crew listen but are completely baffled by the Tamarian captain's opening words:

> Dathon (on viewscreen): Rai and Jiri at Lungha. Rai of Lowani. Lowani under two moons. Jiri of Ubaya. Ubaya of crossed roads at Lungha, her sky grey. Rai and Jiri at Lungha.
> Picard: Counsellor?
> Troi: I'm sensing nothing but good intentions from them, Captain.
> Picard: Mister Data?
> Data: The Tamarian seems to be stating the proper names of individuals and locations.
> Picard: Yes, but what does it all mean? (Kolbe 1991)

However, Picard's attempt at a friendly offer is also not comprehensible to Children of Tama and arouses hilarity among the Tamarian crew:

> Captain, would you be prepared to consider the creation of a mutual non-aggression pact between our two peoples, possibly leading to a trade agreement and cultural exchange? Does this sound like a reasonable course of action to you? (Kolbe 1991)

Picard is then transported from the bridge of his ship, apparently kidnapped, to the planet El-Adrel where he is together with the Tamarian Captain, Dathon. There they will be forced to unite in the fight against an alien beast and gradually Picard will come to understand that the Tamarians's speech is based on a system of metaphors drawn from their mythology. In the meantime the Enterprise's crew is also studying the language in an attempt to understand its logic. The crew-men picked for this task are the android Data and counsellor Deanna Troi (a

psychoanalyst in disguise) with some help from Doctor Beverly Crusher, because evidently among hundreds of people on board the spaceship it is not possible to find even a single linguist. It is not surprising, therefore, that they try to resolve the matter in a purely instrumental fashion and although eventually are able to figure out that Tamarians communicate through narrative imagery, they are not able to take the next step and connect metaphors with meaning. In contrast, captain Picard appears to be highly gifted for interplanetary cultural mediation, and on his return to the Enterprise is able to use the Tamarian way of speaking with impressive fluency, thus preventing an impending war:

> Tamarian (on viewscreen): Zinda! His face black, his eyes red.
> Picard: Temarc! The river Temarc in winter.
> Tamarian: Darmok?
> Picard: And Jalad. At Tanagra. Darmok and Jalad on the ocean.
> Tamarian: Sokath, his eyes open!
> Picard: The beast at Tanagra. Uzani, his army. Shaka when the walls fell.
> Tamarian: Picard and Dathon at El-Adrel. Mirab, with sails unfurled.
> Picard: Temba, his arms open.
> Tamarian: Temba at rest.
> Picard: Thank you. (Kolbe 1991)

While it is encouraging to know that future captains of the Starfleet will display such an amazing range of different talents, it is still a mystery why on a spaceship wandering through galaxy a barber and a bartender should be considered more indispensable crew members than any kind of linguist or communication expert. Similarly, in James White's *Sector General* series, when the automatic translator is destroyed during military operations, it is the Chief Medical Officer who has to invent a way of communication between medics and patients originating from all parts of our galaxy (cf. White 2003). In Carl Sagan's *Contact* (1985) astronomers and engineers are naturally more suited to deal with an alien message than any language expert. In James Cameron's recent *Avatar* (2009) a team of scientists from Earth is working on a program of communication with the native population of planet Pandora, called Na'vi. The scientific specialization of the team's members are not well explained (except for the head of the Avatar program, Dr. Grace Augustin, who is apparently a botanist) and although they all eventually learn the Na'vi language, it appears to be just an additional skill to their main tasks of study. Even Stanisław Lem, his fascination for the cognitive problems of communication with alien races notwithstanding, leaves it to mathematicians, cybernetics or

engineers to deal with sentient oceans and other forms of extraterrestrial intelligence, although he does introduce an ironical concept of "futurolinguistics" in *The Futurological Congress* (1971/1985).

## Experts in dead languages

Linguists or philologists do in fact materialize occasionally in science-fiction. Sometimes, for example in the novels of Suzette Elgin (herself a linguist), they are even recurrent figures. What is curious is that they tend to be experts in ancient languages. Dr Edward Morbius from Fred M. Wilcox's famous *Forbidden Planet* (1956/2006) is an archaeologist. In the interesting novel by Ellen Larson, *The Measure of the Universe* (2002), when an alien archaeologist comes to Earth for a scientific project, a professor of palaeography is called to help, while in the TV series from the 1970s, *Space 1999* (cf. Anderson & Anderson 1975–77/2012), once a mysterious inscription on a remote planet is discovered, among the staff of the Moonbase Alpha there is conveniently a specialist in ancient languages who discovers that the engraving is written neither more nor less but in Sanskrit! One can only suppose that this insistence on expertise in ancient languages as a recommendation for being the right person to decipher alien languages stems from the firm belief that in the time in which the events of science-future works take place, all the linguistic and communication problems on Earth will be resolved and made obsolete, hence the only field of interest left to the philologist will be languages long dead.

## Enter the translatress

But if linguists do not abound in science-fiction works, (trained) translators are almost as dead as the dodo. Still, there are some exceptions. Suzette Elgin's dystopian trilogy *Native Tongue* (1984, 1987, 1993), based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that languages have power to structure human (and non-human) perceptions in significant ways and can be used deliberately to bring social change, offers a vision of the future world in which a translator is a key figure: Earth's welfare depends on commercial trade with alien worlds and in order to communicate with them a genetically related dynasty of Linguists has developed. The men run the translation business while the women, reduced to a state of semi-slavery and deprived of all constitutional rights, do the translation. Each newborn female child is placed with an alien so as to learn its language as her native tongue. However, as one reviewer observed "the true aliens in *Native Tongue* are men" (Sales 2012)

and the novel's main topic is women's struggle for freedom through the creation of a new secret "female" language called Láadan. The protagonist, Nazareth, a phenomenal translator and linguist, is above all an unhappy woman tried by the injustice of the social system she is forced to be part of. Translation issues come as secondary to linguistic ones, while the latter are functional to the central topic of the power dynamics between men and women. As a result "*Native Tongue* is about female oppression as much as it is about the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, and it may be easier to read if you naturally identify with the nice oppressed women rather than the horrible rough oppressors" (Walton 2011).

*Extraterrestrial Malinches*

Females are also more likely to take roles of occasional translators in works of science-fiction, especially in movies, following the long tradition of Malinche and Pocahontas. It is seems that science-fiction never tires of replicating again and again the colonial plotline in which a male hero arrives in a new alien world, meets an indigenous woman who will fall in love with him and help him through initial difficulties so he can ultimately become a hero who may even save her world. The latest incarnation of the extraterrestrial Pocahontas comes in the form of Neytiri from *Avatar* (cf. Cameron 2009), a native princess who saves the colonizer (Jack Sully) from tribal imprisonment and then teaches him the Na'vi language and way of life as well as their respect for nature, so that ultimately he can fulfill his destiny to resuscitate the hero-gone-native myth. Typically, other than by being blue, ten-feet-tall and living on another planet, Na'vi people do not differ in any substantial way from indigenous populations once met by white invaders on Earth. Nor is their language more difficult to learn. As Jack Sully puts it "the language is a bitch, but I figure it's like field-stripping a weapon. Repetition" (Cameron 2009). Therefore, although the creators of the film had gone to some length in order to create a believable and suitably alien-sounding speech for the extraterrestrials, it appears no more complicated to be learnt than any of the languages or dialects on Earth, and once mastered it allows fluent communication between humans and nonhumans without further complications.

*The last human translator*

About the only human professional translator to ever appear in science-fiction films, and again a female, is Hoshi Sato from the latest *Star Trek* series, *Enterprise* (2001–2005) (cf. Berman & Braga 2005). In this prequel to the other parts of the saga, set in the 2150s, the universal translator has not yet been invented and a human interpreter is still indispensable as far as first contact with new alien races is concerned. Hoshi is a linguistic genius; she has mastered 38 human languages and seemingly is able to learn any new alien idiom in less than two days. She

is also a kind person and a nice girl to look at but other than that she displays very few qualities that one would expect from a trained Starfleet member. She is shy, insecure, prone to fearful fits (initially she is even afraid of standing near the spaceship's engine) and generally not adept at any tasks other than linguistic. Furthermore, the process of translation, as shown in *Enterprise,* is yet again seen as a purely technical process of deciphering and decoding alien messages. Hoshi's talents consist therefore mainly in having a very good ear for difficult sounds as well as an uncanny ability to construct speech algorithms of alien languages and then program the computer to translate them. In truth she is as close to a machine translator as a human being may be. It is not surprising, therefore, that eventually it turns out that it was she who invented the universal translator, thus rendering her own profession obsolete.

## A robot in a shining armor

Indeed, the only professional translator of a certain notoriety in science-fiction is not a human being, but a robot, the memorable C-3PO featured in *Star Wars* (cf. Lucas 2011). C-3PO is a professional translator, he has got a distinct personality and he is often vital to the development of the plot. It must be noticed, however, that for all his amazing abilities, his inferior status with respect to human beings is never doubted by anyone, least of all by himself. C-3PO is always obsequious and submissive, he never forgets to use respectful form "sir" when addressing the humans and takes for granted his position as a servant of "master Luke". He is also often treated with contempt by the humans, even by the "good guys" who do not hesitate to turn him off when they feel annoyed by his talking. As rightly pointed out by Michael Cronin, who dedicated a full chapter of analysis to C-3PO in his book *Translation goes to the movies,* "he may be remarkably intelligent but he remains a tool, an object to be plugged into another machine to do the bidding of his human masters" (Cronin 2009: 110). What's more, he is a comical, almost ridiculous figure: His roughly human form, his movements, his antiquated and ceremonial speech, and even the music associated with him inspire laughter and serve to neutralize and diminish his importance. Besides, it must be noticed, that although he is fluent in over six million forms of communication, his tasks in all six films of the saga rarely involve interpreting conversation between living creatures. Rather, he makes himself useful by talking to other machines. He speaks the "binary language of moisture evaporators", he can communicate directly with the hyperdrive of Han Solo's computer or, for that fact, with almost every other mechanical device (in *Return of the Jedi* (episode VI) he talks with the robot intercom at the entrance to the residence of Jabba (cf. Lucas 1983/2011)) and, above

all, he changes R2-D2's mechanical sounds into intelligible messages. Of all the six films of the *Star Wars* saga only in *Return of the Jedi* does he have the chance to act as a true interpreter, first in the residence of Jabba the Hutt, then in the dealings with the amiable but primitive Ewoks. The dynamics of the first contact with the latter is in fact very revealing as for the importance and status of C-3PO as interpreter. When the Ewoks capture the protagonists, they assume that the droid is a kind of divinity and they are even more convinced of his divine nature on discovering that he is able to speak their tongue. However, in spite of their adoration, C-3PO is not able to persuade Ewoks to give up their plan to serve up his companions at a celebration banquet in his honour. For all his formidable language skills he is unable to put them to effective use in order to resolve the situation and in the end it is up to Luke Skywalker to save the day, by using his Jedi powers and by instructing the interpreter in what to say to the fluffy Ewoks.

Ultimately, the vision of the translation and of the translator in *Star Wars* does not differ essentially from the general view on this topic that permeates the genre, and is based on the belief that language is no more than a code, a simple instrument of exchanging information and can be, therefore, mastered via a mechanical device. Logically, the translator is also being downgraded to the position of a simple tool and devoid of the power that in theory bestows on them the capacity of mediation between two different cultures.

## Conclusions

The image of translation and translators which emerges from the overwhelming majority of science-fiction work has undoubtedly more in common with "fiction" than with "science". Although solutions such as the Universal Translator draw their plausibility from current developments in research on machine translation, the idea of an omniscient computer translator appears to be grounded on the wishful thinking rather than on rational premises. Nonetheless, even though science-fiction does not present us with convincing answers as to communication problems like those we have to cope with in our time, it still makes for a fascinating topic of study. The way the science-fiction authors consider translation or rather the way they try to avoid taking it into consideration, tells us probably more about the present then about the future. Some linguists and ethnologists may worry about endangered languages and launch programs for their preservation and revitalization, but science-fiction authors tell us clearly and loudly that in the common opinion the variety of languages on Earth is seen an outdated nuisance, one to be sacrificed without regrets in order to achieve the dream of universal communication accessible to everyone. It may be argued, of course, that the

prospect of using the same language worldwide is motivated by the current state of things and the ongoing process of the extinction of languages (it is estimated that about half of the world's 6000 to 7000 languages will disappear in the next century, Grenoble & Whaley 2006: 1) and anyway, new poly- pluri- and translinguistic trends question the very concept of languages as countable items. However, the transition from a reduction of languages spoken to the presumption that in few decades or even centuries humanity will return to pre (or post)-Babel monoglossia is at best as hazardous presumption as the leap from known-to-known machine translations to the "magic decoder" of unknown alien idioms. Rather, it seems yet another product of wishful thinking born from the dream of abolishing barriers in communication.

Works of science-fiction also make it painfully clear how deeply rooted in the general perception is the distrust and aversion towards the figure of translator. In the future, professional translators are *persona non grata* to the extent that even in situations which would logically require their presence, their tasks are usually delegated to other people. On the rare occasions in which the character of the translator is contemplated, the authors of science-fiction take pains to stress their inferior status, presenting them as weak, funny or female. That image of the woman translator in the science-fiction is, as a matter of fact, essentially conservative and perpetuates the opinion that "all translations are reputed females, delivered at second hand" expressed in 1603 by John Florio (quoted in Nocera & Persico & Portale 2003: 220). The association between the inferior status of women and the subservient status of translation appears clearly in *Avatar* (cf. Cameron 2009),[3] where the female, albeit smart and brave, has only a role of a interpreter and cultural mediator and when the time of action arrives, she needs to be guided by the male hero. It is very interesting that when in *Avatar* Jack Sully makes his great war speech, encouraging all the Na'vi to join the battle against human aggressors, he does not ask Neytiri to translate for him, although she is present there, but chooses the new chief Tsu'tey as his interpreter. The gender implication is quite clear: Heroic deeds are the domain of men and therefore should be entrusted exclusively to the voice of the male.

The other solution, that is to say, the choice of an android and generally a machine translator, is no less denigrating of the status of the translator. As Michael Cronin said, "the entrusting of the task of translation to a robot, albeit formidably intelligent, conveys the message that translation is fundamentally a mindless task of semantic transfer which could be performed by a competent machine" (Cronin 2009: 114) Therefore, if we were to see science-fiction as an

3. But also in the most recent cinematographic adaptation of H. G. Wells's *Time Machine*, 2002 (cf. Wells 2002/ 2010).

expression of *vox populi,* we should admit that all the efforts to give more visibility and recognition to the role of the translator as an intercultural, and potentially interplanetary mediator have (so far) fallen flat as far as the wider audience is concerned. One can only hope that the bleak fate prophesised to translators by works of science-fiction will not prove true, as have so many other prognoses and predictions concerning the future.

## References

### Primary sources

Adams, D. 1978/2008. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy.* The Complete BBC Radio Series. (CD). USA: BBC Audiobooks America.

Anderson, G. & Anderson, S. 1975–77/2012. *Space 1999.* The Complete Megaset. (DVD 2496 min.). UK: A&E Home Video.

Berman, R. & Braga, B. 2005. *Star Trek: Enterprise.* The Complete Series. (DVD 4223 min.). USA: Paramount.

Burgess, A. 1962. *A Clockwork Orange.* New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Cameron, J. 2009. *Avatar*. Transcript. Available at: http://www.imsdb.com/scripts/Avatar.html (last accessed 20 May 2012).

Henson, B. & O'Bannon, R. S. 1999–2003/2011. *Farscape.* The Complete Series. (DVD 4086 min.). Australia: A&E Entertainment.

Kolbe, W. 1991. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. *Darmok.* Season 5, Episode 2. Transcript. Available at: http://www.chakoteya.net/NextGen/202.htm (last accessed 20 May 2012).

Elgin, S. 1984. *Native tongue.* New York: Daw.

Elgin, S. 1987. *Judas rose.* New York: Daw.

Elgin, S. 1994. *Earthsong.* New York: Daw.

Larson, E. 2002. *The Measure of the Universe.* New York: Saga SF.

Lem, S. 1959/1989. *Eden.* Translated by M. E. Heine. San Diego/London/New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Lem, S. 1968/1983. *His master's voice.* Translated by M. Kandel. San Diego/London/New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Lem, S. 1971/1985. *The Futurological Congress. From the Memoirs of Ijon Tichy.* Translated by N. N. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Lem, S. 1980. *Return from the Stars.* Translated by B. Marszal & F. Simpson. London: Secker & Warburg.

Lem, S. 1987. *Fiasco.* Translated by M. Kandel. San Diego/London/New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Lem, S. 2003. *Solaris.* Translated by J. Kilmartin & S. Cox. London: Faber and Faber.

Lucas, G. 1977–2005/2011. *Star Wars.* The Complete Saga. Episodes I-VI. (DVD 793 min.). USA: 20th Century Fox.

Roddenberry, G. 1966–69/2009. *Star Trek.* The Complete Original Series. Seasons 1–3. (DVD 4.120 min.). USA: Paramount.

Sagan, C. 1985. *Contact.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Wells, H. G. 1923. *Men like Gods.* Available at: http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200221.txt (last accessed 20 May 2012).
Wells, S. 2002/2010. *Time Machine.* (DVD 103 min.). USA: DreamWorks Warner Bros.
White, J. 2003. *General Practice: A Sector General Omnibus.* New York: Orb Books.
Wilcox. F. M. 1956/2006. *Forbidden Planet.* (DVD 98 min.). USA: Warner Home Video.

## Secondary sources

Amis, K. 1960. *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science-Fiction*. New York: Harcourt & Brace.
Cronin, M. 2009. *Translation goes to the Movies*. New York: Routledge.
Csicsery-Ronay, I. 2008. *The Seven Beauties of Science-Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
DARPA – Defense Advanced Research Project Agency. 2012a. Robust Automatic Transcription of Speech (RATS) (United States Department of Defense). Available at: http://www.darpa.mil/Our_Work/I2O/Programs/Robust_Automatic_Transcription_of_Speech_%28RATS%29.aspx (last accessed 18 December 2012).
DARPA – Defense Advanced Research Project Agency. 2012b. Broad Operational Language Translation (BOLT) (United States Department of Defense). Available at: http://www.darpa.mil/Our_Work/I2O/Programs/Broad_Operational_Language_Translation_%28BOLT%29.aspx (last accessed 18 December 2012).
Fichman, F. 1990. *SETI*. New York: Penguin Books.
Freedman, C. H. 2000. *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
Grenoble, L. A. & Whaley, L. J. 2006. *Saving languages. An introduction to language revitalisation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Hutchins, W. J. 1995. "Machine Translation: a Brief History." In: *Concise history of the language sciences: from the Sumerians to the cognitivists*, E. F. K. Koerner & R. E. Asher (eds.), 431–445. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
Katan, D. 2004. *Translating Cultures. An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
Meyers, E. W. 1980. *Aliens and Linguists. Language Study and Science-Fiction*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
Mossop, B. 1996. "The Image of Translation in Science Fiction & Astronomy." *The Translator* 2 (1): 1–26.
Nocera, C. & Persico, G. & Portale, R. 2003. *Rites of Passages*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.
Sales, I. 2012. "*Native Tongue*, Suzette Haden Elgin." Available at: http://sfmistressworks.wordpress.com/2012/ 03/13/native-tongue-suzette-haden-elgin/ (last accessed 20 May 2012).
Walton, J. 2011. "Linguistics, Aliens, Dystopia: Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue.*" Available at: http://www.tor.com/blogs/2011/07/linguistics-aliens-dystopia-suzette-haden-elgins-native-tongue (last accessed 20 May 2012).
Wilks, Y. 2009. *Machine Translation. Its scope and limits*. New York: Springer.

# Fiction as a catalyst

## Some afterthoughts

Karlheinz Spitzl

Les frontières sont là pour être franchises.

### Connecting flights

Now as our transfictional journey is turning to an end, let's sum up, reflect, and look for further destinations. For this, it makes sense to look at the continuum of translation and interpreting studies from a wider perspective. The post-post movement has left academia *(us!)* with more air to breathe. Thinking of play (in addition to purpose), chance (in addition to design), or performance (in addition to œuvre) has opened space to manoeuvre. With a focus on absence (rather than presence), questions (rather than answers), and decentring (rather than refutation), it has put up resistance against a uniform(ized) way of thinking. Seen from this angle, *post-post* is first of all about limits (not ends) … and what's beyond (cf. Appignanesi & Garrat 2007, Palmer 2007, Powell 2007).[1]

Within today's academic playground, there are multiple ways of knowing and critical understanding, *including* art, music, film, poetry, dance, drama, painting … Approaching phenomena through these dimensions has visibly inspired scientific thinking in recent years. Just think, for example, of Augusto Boal's (1979) *Teatro do Oprimido* in interpreter training (cf. Kadrić 2011, Bahadır 2008), Faustin Linyekula's choreographies in the documentation of war and conflict (cf.

**1.** "[T]he only sound universal principle to maintain is exactly that of the refusal of any absolute universal." (Arrojo 1997: 22).

Gimplinger 2007), or the function of pictures and stories in psychotherapy (cf. Burns 2004, Reddemann 2001). So this volume is in good company.

Aesthetics and art carry emotion. They are able to appeal to our feelings – to move us – and to stir our imagination. For this reason, they can add to a more complex and comprehensive understanding of our lives and actions. Fiction[2], as a reality that we create, is a mode of art. It is something we use in our everyday life. It is a symbolization (translation) of our very being. Or, together with Oatley & Mar & Djikic (2012: 235): Fiction is "a set of s[t]imulations of selves in [our] social world."

The power of fiction as an academic topic is nothing new. We might think of Vaihinger's (1911/1924) 'as-if' constructions or Adler's (1911/2007: 132) early theory of individual psychology. But the importance of literary and cinematographic fiction for a wide variety of domains – including the arts, social science, medicine, technology, or economics – seems to be a particular sign of our post-post times.

## Vaulting the turnstile

Fiction and nonfiction (i.e., science?, the hard facts?, our social world?) share common ground: They are both artefacts and appear in form of narratives (although often in very different shape and style) (cf. Lyotard 1979, Bal 1999: 10). As they flow into each other in constant motion, their separation would remain an academic task (cf. Bourdieu 1984: 126). Instead, this volume has focused on (i) which particular translation and interpreting phenomena are present in works of fiction, (ii) in what way they are plotted, and (iii) how they relate to our social life.

Fiction is the world how we imagine it. *Tel quel?* This is where usually science kicks in. But even in scientific practice we actually "can never 'tell it like it is'" (Cooke 2012: 115). In order to share our knowledge, we have to make a step back, "de-familiarize", and give room for the other to come in. This ideational space has to be filled with our imagination. If we say 'blue', what kind of 'blue' is it exactly that we see? And if we hit, in the most improbable of cases, exactly the same (?!) colour, what would that individually mean to us in that particular moment (due to our biographies)? Thus, fiction – and in our particular case, transfiction as an aestheticized imagination of translatorial action – is, first of all, a tool for creating common ground (cf. Cooke 2012: 115ff).

The articles of this volume have shown that fictional translators and interpreters frequently act in a matrix of (highly) asymmetric and (often) conflicting

2. From Latin *fingere* < > to form, to shape.

contexts where pragmatic and moral dilemmas have to be solved. The authors have explored how the main characters live translation and interpreting with the totality of their body and mind; be it in extreme or even existential situations, or during more quotidian affairs. But even in the latter case: There has always been something at stake. In this regard, it is fiction that can openly speak out on manipulation or emotional involvement and even explicitly point to *erasure* and *creation* as inextricable acts of interpreting and translation. Nonfiction, however, needs to appear innocent in order to convince[3].

Mainstream scientific thinking tends to dissolve life into data. This often leads to the dehumanization of theories and concepts, and to locating our 'being' *vis-à-vis* instead of *in* the world. Fictionalization, as creative action[4], can effectively counter such a drift. Arrojo (2011: 17) sees fiction as a "a privileged site in which our imagery finds the necessary freedom to express even our most hidden obsessions and aspirations". As translation is, first and foremost, not about signs, symbols or things, but about us and our relation to each other (cf. Cooke 2011), transfiction can "help us address the motivations and interests defining the ways in which we relate to ourselves, to one another and to otherness in general". Translation needs an addressable other and issues related to it are therefore "inseparable from those that constitute such relationships" (Arrojo 2011: 17).

In an act of touching (not taking), fiction evokes rather than denotes.[5] For this reason, it is a particular useful resource in the exploration of feelings that arise in translated or interpreted interaction. Emotions, such as audacity, passion, desire, empathy, be/longing, shame, anger, fear, anxiety … or subconscious acts, such as transference and counter-transference, can all have agency with regard to performance and outcome (meaning). This volume has shown that the experience of translation or interpreting can even be nightmarish …

Opening the ficcionario is not about neglecting the materialities of our social world. Even if fictional works have nothing in common with 'reality'[6], they still can have a strong impact on it. Best-sellers or blockbusters blur the distinction between art and life (cf. Bourdieu 1984: 126). Such disseminational power is hard to compete with. Our professional standing (role, image) and translatorial action are thus co-determined by fictions that have entered popular thinking (i.e., our clients' attitudes and assumptions). Apart from that, translation and interpreting

3. See Nietzsche's (1996: 336) „knowledge as will to power".

4. "Créer c'est résister, résister c'est créer." (Hessel 2010: 13)

5. See also Fairclough's (2003: 8) notion of discursively 'construing' – not 'constructing' – our social world.

6. The notion of 'fiction of reality' is another story and shall be told another time.

studies is in itself based on a variety of fictional assumptions, such as the circuit diagrams of modeling communication (industrial metaphor), the practice of back-translation in court, or the basic assumption of equidistance in asymmetric settings. Fiction, however, does not need to compare to the yardstick of science[7]. As its realm reaches towards the infinite, 'going transfictional', time and again, leads us to vaulting our scientific barriers.

## Boarding

Fiction, as a complementary vital resource[8], can catalyze the pulsation and vibration of translation and interpreting teaching, practice and study. Fictionalization is about variation in the open-ended continuum of art, science and life. As this volume has shown, there is no need to be afraid of an undisciplined encounter of approaches and methods, of *bricolage* (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966: 19ff), and multimodal eclecticism. And, after all, fiction is something beautiful.[9]

This volume is just another 'note' put in the cracks of our academic structure (cf. Foer 2010: 139), adding to those thoughts that have been left there before …, and searching for a "fusion of horizons" (Gadamer 1960: 289). Now, having reached the end of this transfictional journey, let's wrap it up here. Boarding call. … The ending mirrors the beginning:

> Translation is movement. Translation is e/motion.

## References

Adler, A. 2007. *Persönlichkeit und neurotische Entwicklung. Frühe Schriften (1904–1912).* Hg. von A. Bruder-Bezzel. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Appignanesi, R. & Garratt, C. 2007. *Introducing Postmodernism. A Graphic Guide to Cutting-Edge Thinking.* Cambridge (MA): Totem Books.

Arrojo, R. 1997. "Asymmetrical Relations of Power and the Ethics of Translation." *TEXTconTEXT* 11: 5–24.

---

7. But, according to Tom Clancy (1997), put in contrast to 'reality', "fiction [at least] has to make sense".

8. … another side of the looking glass (cf. Carroll 1871/1993). (Or removing the latter altogher?)

9. "C'est véritablement utile puisque c'est joli." (Saint-Exupéry 1943) This thought was given to the author by Michèle Cooke. *Quel beau cadeau!*

Arrojo, R. 2011. "The Power of Literature as Theory and the Exemplarity of Latin American Fiction for a Reflection on Translation." Abstract. In *Transfiction: 1st International Conference on Fictional Translators and Interpreters in Literature and Film*. Conference Booklet. Kaindl, K. & Spitzl, K, 17. University of Vienna: Unpublished.

Bahadır, Ş. 2008. Das Theater des Dolmetschens: Beobachten, Teilnehmen, Proben, Darstellen, Verändern. *Curare* 31 (2+3): 176–86.

Bal, M. 1999. *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History.* Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.

Boal, A. 1979. *Theatre of the Oppressed.* Translated by C. A. & M. O. Leal Mc Bride. London: Pluto Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1984. *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste.* Translated by R. Nice. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Burns, G. 2004. *101 Healing Stories for Kids and Teens: Using Metaphors in Therapy.* Hoboken (NJ): Wiley & Sons.

Carroll, L. 1871/1993. *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass.* Ware: Wordsworth.

Cooke, M. 2011. *The Lightning Flash. Language, longing and the facts of life. (Translations Happens Series).* Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Bern [u. a.]: Peter Lang.

Cooke, M. 2012. "Ode to Joy: Why Science Needs Poetry." In *Tell It Like It Is? Science, society and the ivory tower. (Translation Happens Series),* 105–126. Frankfurt am Main/Berlin/Bern [u. a.]: Peter Lang.

Clancy, T. 1997. "What is the difference between reality and fiction? Fiction has to make sense." In *Reader's Digest Quotable Quotes.* Edited by D. Deford, page unknown. Pleasantville (NY): Reader's Digest.

Fairclough, N. 2003. *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research.* London/New York: Routledge.

Foer, J. S. 2010. *Tree of Codes.* London: Visual Editions.

Gadamer, H. G. 1960. *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik.* Tübingen: Mohr.

Gimplinger, M. 2007. *'… and if it had no name?' – nicht vergessen, nicht gewöhnen; performative Ästhtetik einer zeitgenössischen Choreographie.* Universität Wien: Diplomarbeit.

Hessel, S. 2010. *Indignez-vous!* Available at: http://www.millebabords.org/IMG/pdf/INDIGNEZ_VOUS.pdf (last accessed 28 February 2013).

Kadrić, Mira. 2011. *Dialog als Prinzip. Für eine emanzipatorische Praxis und Didaktik des Dolmetschens.* Tübingen: Narr.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966. *The Savage Mind.* Translated by N. N. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lyotard, J. F. 1979. *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir.* Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

Nietzsche, F. 1885/1996. *Der Wille zur Macht. Versuch einer Umwertung aller Werte.* Hg. von P. Gast. Stuttgart: Kröner.

Oatley, K. & Mar, R. A., & Djikic, M. 2012. "The psychology of fiction: Present and future. " *In Cognitive literary studies: Current themes and new directions.* Jaen, I. & Simon, J. (eds.), 235–249. Austin: Univ. of Texas Press.

Palmer, D. D. 2007. *Structuralism and Post-Structuralism for Beginners.* Danbury (CT): Beginners.

Powell, J. 2007. *Postmodernism for Beginners. Illustrated by Joe Lee.* Danbury (CT): Beginners.

Reddemann, L. 2001. *Imagination als heilsame Kraft. Zur Behandlung von Traumafolgen mit ressourcen orientierten Verfahren.* Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Saint-Exupéry, A. de. 1943. *Le petit prince.* Available at: http://www.ebooksgratuits.com/html/st_exupery_le_petit_prince.html (last accessed 28 February 2013).

Vaihinger, H. 1911/1924: *The Philosophy of 'As If': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*. Translated by C. K. Ogden. New York: Barnes and Noble.

# Name index


**A**
Aboulela, L. 116
Akunin, B. 158
Al Khemir, S. 114–115
Almesto, P. de 7
Anderson, G. 355
Anderson, S. 355
Andrade, O. de 37–39, 43, 48

**B**
Bâ, A. H. 103, 105–112
Bachmann, I. 17, 272, 278–279
Baillargeon, P. 179–180
Benigni, R. 212, 214
Berman, R. 350, 356
Bernard, H. 178–179
Bianciardi, L. 129–137
Bocci, L. 17
Borges, J. L. 8, 11–13, 17, 39–48, 66, 122
Braga, B. 350, 356
Brod, M. 293
Brooke-Rose, C. 274, 278–279
Brossard, N. 17, 184–187
Burgess, A. 305, 348
Butor, M. 4

**C**
Cameron, J. 354, 356, 359
Campos, A. de 38–39, 43, 48
Carroll, L. 317, 366
Castillo, D. del 6
Cervantes, M. 7, 44–48
Coppola, S. 215
Cuarón, A. 333

**D**
Davidson, M. 272, 278–280
Doyle, A. C. 8, 207–208, 271
Duden, A. 87, 92–96, 99–100
Dunant, S. 17

**E**
Elgin, S. 355
Élie, R. 180, 183

**F**
Fahmy, M. 221
Fellini, F. 129, 134
Feuchtwanger, L. 289–290, 293
Fleischer, A. 31, 271, 273–277, 280–281
Foer, J. S. 8, 31–32, 114, 116, 170–171, 248, 251–258, 299–311, 366
Friel, B. 9, 247–248
Fuentes, C. 7, 116

**G**
Gélat, J. 29, 114, 116–122
Godard, B. 322–323
González Iñárritu, A. 17
Goscinny 211
Glass, S. 116, 122–123
Grafigny, F. 30, 191, 193–194, 197–199

**H**
Hari, D. 221
Hasak-Lowy, T. 69–71, 75, 77–85, 116
Henson, B. 350

**J**
Janković, T. 30, 221, 223–230
Jones, S. 115

**K**
Kant, H. 272, 278–280
Kim, S. 3, 208–209
Kolbe, W. 353–354
Kosminsky, P. 51–58, 62–63, 65–66
Kourouma, A. 105, 110
Kwok, J. 16–17

**L**
Le Carré, J. 115, 272
Lem, S. 348–349, 352, 354
Lessac, M. 31, 234–238
Lizzani, C. 134
Lorrain, L. 182
Lucas, G. 357

**M**
Maillet, A. 182–183
Malouf, D. 17
Marías, J. 210, 272, 278–279
Marinina, A. 158
Masekela, H. 31, 234–238
Maurois, A. 271
Menon, S. 60
Michaels, A. 247–250, 254–255, 257–258
Möhring, U. 17
Monro, A. 60
Montesquieu, C. L. S. de 189–199
Mora, T. 16
Muir, W. 31, 287–296

**O**
O'Bannon, R. S. 350
Orcel, M. 115
Ozick, C. 116

**P**
Pelevin, V. 158–159
Pétrin, L. 181–182
Ponce, N. 116
Poulin, J. 183–184, 186

**R**
Reichart, E. 31, 261–266, 268–269

Roddenberry, G. 348
Rowling, J. K. 32, 329–336, 338–342

**S**
Sachs, L. 17
Sagan, C. 354
Santi, F. 135–138
Schreiber, L. 8, 299, 301–302, 305, 307, 311
Schulz, B. 310–311
Scott, G. 185–186, 322
Seidelman, S. 8, 317–318
Shakespeare, W. 7, 19, 164
Shields, C. 316, 321–325
Somoza, C. 17

**T**
Tawada, Y. 87–100
Troyes, C. de 6

**U**
Uderzo 211
Ulitskaia/Ulitskaya, L. 29, 115–116, 123, 146–153, 155, 158–161, 163, 165–170, 173, 221

**V**
Vance, J. 5
Vargas Llosa, M. 115–116
Voltaire 190–195, 198–199

**W**
Wells, H. G. 349, 359
White, G. 350, 354
Whyte Melville, G. 271
Wilcox, F. M. 355
Wilson, B. 8, 316–321, 325

**Y**
Yates, D. 337

**Z**
Zassenhaus, H. 5

# Subject index


**A**

abuse 80–83
acting 236–237, 242
action 32, 61, 107, 114, 138, 142, 151–152, 182, 199, 220, 263–264, 281, 364–365
advocacy 208, 216
aesthetics 12–13, 17, 19, 64, 66, 95, 141, 187, 191–192, 322, 364
agency 28, 30–31, 75, 104, 128, 158, 162, 180, 185, 223, 226, 336, 340–341
alienation 52, 70, 79, 90, 94–95, 98–99, 133, 210, 263, 268–269, 345, 349–359
ambiguity 110, 134, 197, 243, 342
anarchism 129, 131, 134–135
antropofagia 38, 49
art 363–367
artefacts 364
asymmetry 39, 107, 366
Aufgabe 72, 78, 85, 100
authorship 30, 47, 121, 184, 190–191, 199, 319
authority 19, 57, 80, 104, 116, 153, 161, 185, 226, 261, 323

autobiography 5, 8–9, 15, 26, 111, 221–223, 230–231, 271
automatic 217, 346–347, 350–351, 354, 361
avatar 354, 356, 359–360

**B**

belles-infidèles 118
biography 4, 31, 135, 160, 162–163, 249, 324, 364
body 28, 79–80, 97, 103, 130, 186, 324
bricolage 366
broker 30, 104, 208, 217, 333

**C**

cannibalism 38–39, 43, 45
capital 70, 79, 82–83, 104–105, 127, 133–134, 178, 319, 323
censorship 30, 145, 190, 192, 195–196, 244
cheating 73, 208
cliché 14, 17, 44, 48, 116, 272, 281, 309, 318
collaboration 104, 110, 112, 227, 326
comicality 7, 32, 44, 252–253, 302, 308–311, 357
conference interpreting 281
conflict 9, 45–46, 52–53, 59–61, 77, 104, 109, 131, 142, 144–146, 153, 197, 221, 223–231, 234–235, 267–268, 288, 307, 347, 363
cooperation 104, 337
cosmodernism 3, 25
cracks 2, 175, 366

**D**

Dasein 52
death of the author 114–115, 117, 164
decadence 129
deconstruction 11–12, 17, 49, 74, 83, 190, 199, 239, 245
degendering 315, 320, 326
dehumanization 132, 250, 365
desire 15, 42, 44, 55, 74–75, 103, 108, 146, 168, 170, 179, 186, 239, 278, 365
didactics 13
difference 3, 5, 7, 9, 32, 41–43, 45, 70, 72, 86, 88, 90–91, 98–99, 107, 135, 150, 170, 186, 209, 223, 226, 240, 302, 317, 324, 332, 341–342, 351, 353
dilemma 38, 48, 179, 181, 209, 365
discourse 51, 57, 73–74, 85, 143–144, 153, 169, 173, 184, 189–190, 193, 195–196, 198, 248, 261, 263–270, 316, 321
disillusionment 29, 114, 117, 130, 323
dislocation 2, 43, 158
distribution 127–128, 201, 264, 266
domestication 28, 37–38, 40, 56, 60, 92, 95, 267–268, 290, 329
Doppelgänger 117, 122
dystopia 172, 352, 355, 361

**E**

eclecticism 51, 165, 366
effeminate 116, 120
emotion 9, 32, 57, 64, 110, 115, 157, 208–209, 215, 222–223, 226, 235–240, 262, 267, 310, 321, 364
empowerment 22, 30, 270, 341–342
enlightenment 142, 191, 196–197
equidistance 366
essence 43, 51–52, 54, 59–61, 65, 73, 97, 109
ethics 16, 30, 37, 45, 64, 66, 75, 114, 118, 148, 151, 191, 206, 209, 211, 227–230, 282, 299, 304, 310–311
extraterrestrial 346, 349–350, 352, 355–356

**F**

feminine 116, 172, 316, 319–321, 326, 335, 341
fidelity 13, 16, 30, 45, 48, 118, 191, 205–206, 208, 216, 310

fluidity 2–3, 18–19, 75, 110, 137, 158–159, 170–171, 320
foreignness 16, 55, 60, 87–88, 90–91, 94–100, 142
foreignising 13
fragmentation 2, 72, 74, 77, 96, 99, 164

G
gay 4, 168–171, 173, 175, 316, 318
gender 28, 31–32, 94, 171, 173, 225, 266–267, 287, 296–297, 315–321, 325–327, 341–343, 359
globalisation/globalization 2–3, 17, 23, 25, 31, 69, 72, 86, 127, 139, 142, 158–159, 272, 349
griot 106

H
harmony 74, 115, 164
hegemony 76, 83, 170, 192, 243
heteropatriarchy 317
hierarchy 30, 37–39, 43–44, 157, 162, 254, 322
homosexuality 167–170, 173
Holocaust 31, 150, 158, 160, 162, 221, 249–250, 255, 257, 259, 273, 299, 302
humour 7, 28, 32, 181, 302, 312–313
hybridity 29, 38, 81, 88, 114, 116, 158, 160, 168, 170–172, 228, 266, 272

I
identity 3, 8, 12–14, 32, 37–39, 43, 75, 81–83, 88–89, 110, 115–117, 122, 132, 145, 150, 154, 158–159, 162, 169–172, 180, 182, 186, 222, 228–229, 238, 258, 262–263, 267–269, 272, 277–278, 288–289, 315–320, 325, 330
idealisation 166, 173, 278, 291, 295
ideology 2, 19, 22, 30, 54, 56, 61, 65, 81–82, 141–143, 145–146, 151–153, 160, 163, 165, 179, 191, 229, 237, 243–244, 263, 265–266, 268–269, 278, 335, 342, 347
imagination 98, 101, 127, 129, 190, 212, 289, 364, 367
impartiality 30, 48, 196, 206, 230, 244
in-betweenness 3, 9, 11, 29, 88, 145, 150, 153, 228, 272
innocence 30, 47, 122, 148, 169, 212, 365
intellectual 37, 127, 129–133, 135–136, 145, 147, 149, 152–153, 168, 278, 346
incongruity 32, 301, 303–304, 307–308, 310–311, 313
infidelity 13, 48, 118, 144, 184, 205, 216
innerfictional 197, 199
intelligentsia 145–146, 152–153, 155, 165–166
interests 39, 43, 106, 206, 252, 262, 268, 365
intertextuality 7, 13, 87, 92, 117, 168, 195, 197, 199
interventionism 30, 32, 165–166, 185, 226, 228–229, 230, 241
intuition 120, 147, 266
invisibility 9, 13, 45–46, 94, 137–138, 157, 217, 219, 221, 226, 229, 240, 322, 336

K
Kosovo 221, 223–224, 227–229, 231

L
Latin America 12, 25, 37, 48, 122–123
legitimacy 29, 148, 153, 199, 229
liquid 2, 22, 29, 88, 100, 137–138, 171
literalness 97–99
loyalty 53, 206, 110, 279, 331

M
machine 10–11, 32, 120, 132, 183, 273, 346, 350–351, 357–359, 361
male 32, 76, 115–116, 171, 210, 225, 266, 341–342, 356, 359
manipulation 1, 22, 30, 58, 83, 147, 192, 210–212, 216, 227, 249, 266, 365
marginalization 2, 75–76, 138, 168, 249, 268, 341
masculine 119, 172, 287, 316, 318–321, 341
maudit 29, 133
mediator 7, 71, 82, 128, 153, 191, 217, 225, 227, 229, 237, 249–251, 255, 257–258, 301, 332, 347, 359–360
memory 40, 47, 49, 63, 84, 106, 221–223, 230, 244, 247, 252, 256–258
metafiction 159, 198–199, 248, 251
middleman 79, 82–83
misinterpretation 211–212, 216
misreading 30, 170–172
mistrust 145
motivation 41–41, 196, 229, 352, 359
multilingualism 6, 13, 22–24, 26, 62, 94, 123, 157–158, 161, 170, 174, 201, 217, 231, 259, 273, 349

N
narratological 18
neutrality 56, 83, 209, 215, 221, 225–230, 240, 257, 308, 319, 323

O
obscure 75–76, 78, 107, 143, 166
originality 29, 117, 180, 199, 248
otherness 43, 49, 78–79, 266–268, 352, 365

P
paratext 159, 189, 198–199
parody 114, 116, 118, 122, 158, 187, 192, 195, 197, 272, 351
parrot 217, 281
penetration 1, 59, 70, 128
periphery 26, 39, 49, 56, 67, 114, 117, 121, 192, 229
pharmakon 83
plausibility 11, 40, 48, 145, 226, 345–346, 349–350, 358
pluralism 160, 162, 166, 168, 170, 173
post(-)colonialism 2, 4, 14, 25, 37–38, 158, 231, 267

post-modernism 5, 19, 28–30, 170, 175
post-Soviet 22, 142, 144, 152–153, 159–160, 163, 168–173
post-structuralism 112–115, 117, 121, 367
power 16, 28, 30–32, 37, 42–43, 46–48, 57, 60, 62, 65–66, 73, 80, 82–83, 103–107, 109, 142, 153–154, 184, 208, 211, 216–217, 228, 263–266, 268–269, 272–273, 279, 308, 310, 320, 332, 334, 347, 355–356, 358, 364–365
precariousness 19, 29–30, 127, 135–138, 229, 264
propaganda 143, 224, 296
pseudotranslation 7, 10, 30, 189–195, 197–199, 201
psychoanalysis 28, 46, 51, 54, 67, 174, 240, 244, 259

**Q**

Québec 24, 177, 179, 181–183, 185–187, 273
queer 30, 143, 171, 174, 293, 315, 317, 327

**R**

rationality 157
reconciliation 31, 78, 81–83, 85, 233–234, 236, 245
refusal 165–166, 265, 274, 363
remembering 223, 231, 247–248, 250, 253–254, 257–258
resistance 28, 86, 104, 110, 163, 167, 227, 261–262, 265–269, 273, 363
re-gendering 315–316, 323
re-writing 120, 169, 258
Russian culture 142, 146, 153, 158, 164, 169–170, 173

**S**

self-destruction 133, 235
semiocapital 127
split personality 116–117
stereotype 13–14, 17, 171, 273, 302, 311, 342
struggle 28, 30, 60, 104, 132, 135, 235, 237, 243, 267, 356
subjectivity 13, 16, 57, 73, 159, 171–172, 233–234, 237–244, 317
superiority 57, 164, 249, 268, 303–304, 308, 311, 330

**T**

telepathy 349–350
testimony 25, 48, 51, 62, 64, 212, 229–230, 238, 249–250, 254–257, 259
transauther 315–316, 321, 323–325
translation
  as metaphor 1–2, 11, 13, 16, 28, 37–38, 180, 253, 267–268
  as motif 5, 9, 18, 90, 248, 258, 318
  as symbol 4, 17, 337, 364
  as symptom 164, 170
  cultural 2, 14, 81, 88
  fictitious 7, 13, 17, 199
translingual 3, 14, 26, 37, 88–89, 101
transparent 88, 96, 113, 117, 122, 294, 322
trauma 31, 244, 250, 255–258, 273–274
trust 41, 109, 143, 210, 226

**Ü**

überleben 72, 267

**U**

untrustworthy 94, 333

**V**

vessel 73–74, 84, 96, 239
violence 29, 31, 43, 54–55, 81, 104, 160, 191, 224, 229, 244, 318, 334
virile 116, 119–120
visibility 9, 13, 46–47, 56, 66, 70, 318, 360

**W**

Weltrisikogesellschaft 138
willful 212, 216
witnessing 247–258
worker 127, 129, 132–133, 135–138, 144, 153

**X**

xenoglossia 336