

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

# Perspectives on Literature and Translation

Creation, Circulation, Reception

Edited by  
Brian Nelson and Brigid Maher



“With a focus on the nature and the cultural significance of literary translation, this fascinating collection of essays incisively analyzes the creation, circulation and reception of translated texts. Contributions from both practitioners and scholars here offer a range of perspectives and case studies that explore how writing and translation intersect, how and why texts are disseminated across linguistic and other borders, and what forms of gate-keeping control access to the marketplace. Like translation itself, this volume helpfully opens up new vistas on texts and literary systems.”

—*Valerie Henitiuk, director, British Centre for Literary Translation.*

“This work is at the cutting edge of literary translation research. Two aspects are particularly appealing. One is hearing the translator’s reflexive voice speaking about his/her creative processes. The other is the way that it explores ‘world literature’ and international literary flows, via case studies that draw fascinating conclusions beyond their time, text and place.”

—*Francis R. Jones, Newcastle University, UK.*

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# Perspectives on Literature and Translation

This volume explores the relationship between literature and translation from three perspectives: the creative dimensions of the translation process; the way texts circulate between languages; and the way texts are received in translation by new audiences. The distinctiveness of the volume lies in the fact that it considers these fundamental aspects of literary translation together and in terms of their interconnections. Contributors examine a wide variety of texts, including world classics, poetry, genre fiction, transnational literature, and life writing from around the world. Both theoretical and empirical issues are covered, with some contributors approaching the topic as practitioners of literary translation, and others writing from within the academy.

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# **Perspectives on Literature and Translation**

Creation, Circulation, Reception

**Edited by Brian Nelson and  
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# Introduction

*Brian Nelson and Brigid Maher*

The essays in this volume explore the topic of literature and translation from three broad perspectives: the creativity involved in the act of translation, the circulation and transmission of texts across languages and the reception of texts in translation by new audiences in new contexts. Of course, creation, circulation and reception are by no means mutually exclusive aspects of translation, and the various essays deal in one way or another with all three, as they explore the complex processes that characterise the transfer of texts between languages. Viewing literary translation not in terms of loss or infidelity, but as an enriching and productive process, the authors shed light on the nature of literature itself. Whether their focus is theoretical or empirical, they share a common concern with the ways in which translation facilitates the creation and circulation of literature in a global context.

Some contributors approach the topic as practitioners of literary translation, while others write from within the academy. This mix reflects the way the discipline of Translation Studies has, over recent years, developed into a more sophisticated acceptance of a theoretical discourse, one that, rather than attempting to dictate practice, evolves out of practice. The binary opposition of source oriented versus target oriented, for example, which dominated so much of Translation Studies discourse twenty years ago—though these were never helpful concepts to working translators—is increasingly outdated in a world of intense and accelerating globalisation, and it means less and less to those writing about translation today. What is “foreign” and what is “familiar” when a translator is a second- or third-generation Korean or Vietnamese who has spent his/her childhood between Korea or Vietnam and the US or Australia and is translating his/her grandmother’s book? What is “foreignised” and what is “domesticated” when a translator is considering how to translate a Hindi text for an English-speaking audience in India, an English-speaking audience in Britain, an English-speaking audience in Australia, or all three? There is now a much stronger sense of the translator as creative artist (see, for example, Bassnett and Bush 2006; Loffredo and Perteghella 2006; Grossman 2010), which the essays in our volume reflect.

## CREATION

*A translator reads with maniacal attention to nuance and cultural implication, conscious of all the books that stand behind this one; then he sets out to rewrite this impossibly complex thing in his own language, re-elaborating everything, changing everything in order that it remain the same, or as close as possible to his experience of the original. In every sentence the most loyal respect must combine with the most resourceful inventiveness. Imagine shifting the Tower of Pisa into downtown Manhattan and convincing everyone it's in the right place; that's the scale of the task.*

—Tim Parks, *Observer*, 25 April 2010

Part 1 of the book is devoted to the twin processes of writing and translating, through a reflection on writing as translation and on the writerly role of the translator. Translators are engaged in much the same activity as their authors; they are, indeed, writers themselves. Consider what, exactly, translators do. As Catherine Porter, former president of the American Modern Language Association, has written:

[A] translator has to make a whole array of judgments. [. . .] In what contexts—literary, rhetorical, social, historical, political, economic, religious, cultural—was the source text embedded, and what adjustments will have to be made to transmit those contexts or produce comparable ones in the translation? Where does the source text fall on a continuum that might be characterized in shorthand terms as running between a poem and a laundry list? [. . .] To what extent and in what ways is the source text innovative or deviant in its own cultural context, and how can these innovative or deviant aspects be represented in the target text? What aims and effects can be attributed to the original, and what aims and effects is the translation intended to serve, what effects to produce? What was the nature of the original audience, and how can the anticipated new audience be characterized? What range of voices, registers, and subject positions can be identified in the source text, and what adaptations will be required to render these in the target language? Once these initial determinations are made—subject to revision and refinement as the translation progresses—the translator can begin to engage with the text itself: word by word, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence. (Porter 2013, 62)

Given the great complexity of the task of the translator, there is a great deal to be learned from insights into the interpretive and decision-making process of practising translators. The choices made by the translator are the result of careful analysis, informed by varying degrees of intuitive understanding, of the work being translated. Literary translation is anything but a mechanical task. It is, to begin with, an act of interpretation. Specifically,

it may be regarded as both a form of close reading (applied literary criticism) and a form of writing (an art and a craft). The most crucial element of a translator's work is finding a voice for the text being translated. Every translation of a text is a *performance* of that text as reflected in the selection and sequence of words on a page. Literary translation is a highly complex activity, involving a multiplicity of exact choices about voice, tone, register, rhythm, syntax, echoes, sounds, connotations and denotations, the colour and texture of words—all those factors that make up “style” and reflect its marriage with semantic content. In that sense, literary translation is a form of close reading of a text in its totality. Furthermore, in the case of translations of so-called “classics”, it is the result of scholarly reappropriation and recontextualisation. People sometimes think of translation as a kind of subservience, imagining that the translator subjugates his or her own creativity to the demands of the original text. They wouldn't think that way about an actor or a musician; nor should they about a translator. The activity of the writer and that of the translator are indivisible.

In the opening essay, translator Julie Rose explores questions of style, emotional register, context and resonance in translation. She investigates what it means, both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, to “hear the voice” of an author and to recreate this voice in another language. Through a comparison of the different voices of Hugo to be found in a number of translations of *Les Misérables*, including her own, she questions notions of the visibility or invisibility of the translator and explores instead a different metaphor, that of translation as performance, which can provide new insights into the presence of a translator in his or her work. The inevitable subjectivity of literary translation is the focus of Peter Bush's contribution. He reflects upon his agency as a translator by examining his own and two other translations of Mercè Rodoreda's novel *La Plaça del Diamant*. In search of a critical theory of the art of literary translation, Bush emphasises the importance of the translator's emotional as well as literary involvement in the translation process. Bill Johnston, too, focuses on the translator's work, reflecting on the way theory can inform practice. He examines his own decisions and strategies in translating Wiesław Myśliwski's *Stone upon Stone*, particularly as regards colloquial and dialectal language, and outlines the techniques he used for selecting the kinds of target-oriented meanings or “remainder” that were or were not desirable in the translation.

Any translation is an interpretation, and it is the interpretive power of the translation process that is the focus of Luke Fischer's essay on Rilke. He argues that the translator, constantly moving back and forth between two languages, reaches a depth of understanding of a poem that goes beyond that of regular readers and critics. As a translator himself, Fischer is well placed to “translate” the experience that the act of interlingual translation brings to bear on reading. Readers of poetry in translation can have access to numerous versions of a work, each presenting a new and different reading of the source text, giving it multiple lives in its new context. Luigi Gussago,



in his essay on the novelist, critic and translator Cesare De Marchi, looks at the role of the author-translator. In one of his writings, De Marchi warns against a familiarising style of translation, which he sees as potentially stifling the creation of original literary works in the target language. Instead, he advocates a translation style that eschews emotional identification with the characters in favour of the transmission of a literary emotion. Gussago investigates how De Marchi, in his translations of Schnitzler's novellas, seeks to put into practice a kind of "unfriendly" translation, challenging readers with unexpected or unfamiliar grammatical and lexical choices in order to recreate what he sees as the source text's "literary emotion" through a constructive, thought-provoking estrangement from the text.

## CIRCULATION

*Translation asserts the possibility of a coherent, unified experience of literature in the world's multiplicity of languages.*

—Edith Grossman, *Why Translation Matters*, 17

Edith Grossman, in her incisive little book *Why Translation Matters*, shows how the very notion of literature would be inconceivable without translation, citing Goethe's belief that without outside influences national literatures rapidly stagnate (Grossman 2010, 22). Milan Kundera, in his personal essay on the novel, "The Curtain," first published in French in 2007, argues similarly that there are two contexts in which works of art can be understood: the "small" context of the nation and the "large" context of the world, encompassing the supranational history of art forms themselves. Provincialism is the inability to imagine one's national culture in the large context, and Kundera thinks it has done great damage to our understanding of literary history.

[If] we consider just the history of the novel, it was to Rabelais that Lawrence Sterne was reacting, it was Sterne who set off Diderot, it was from Cervantes that Fielding drew constant inspiration, it was against Fielding that Stendhal measured himself, it was Flaubert's tradition living on in Joyce, it was through his reflection on Joyce that Hermann Broch developed his own poetics of the novel, and it was Kafka who showed García Márquez the possibility of departing from tradition to "write another way." [. . .] [G]eographic distance sets the observer back from the local context and allows him to embrace the *large context* of world literature, the only approach that can bring out a novel's *aesthetic value*—that is to say: the previously unseen aspects of existence that this particular novel has managed to make clear; the novelty of form it has found. (Kundera 2007, 35–36)

The entire history of literature, we might therefore argue, is informed by a process of transmission—a process which is inseparable from an appreciation

of translation. Susan Sontag was right to remind us, in her essay on literary translation, “The World as India”, that translation is “the circulatory system of the world’s literatures” (2007, 177). Literature, in its broadest sense, is sustained by translation; and, as Susan Bassnett has observed, there is something “curiously schizophrenic” about recognising the central role of translation in shaping literature while downgrading it to a second-class literary activity (Bassnett 2006–2007). The case for translation as the lifeblood of literature is made in a particularly compelling way by Sontag in her essay, the essential argument of which is that a proper consideration of the art of translation is a claim for the value of literature itself:

My sense of what literature can be, my reverence for the practice of literature as a vocation, and my identification of the writer with the exercise of freedom—all these constituent elements of my sensibility are inconceivable without the books I read in translation from an early age. Literature was mental travel: travel into the past and to other countries. (Literature was the vehicle that could take you *anywhere*.) And literature was criticism of one’s own reality, in the light of a better standard. (Sontag 2007, 179)

The cultural significance of translation could not be stated more clearly. Translation signifies encounters with otherness, bringing the “foreign” closer.

Translation understood as a cultural activity has been central to the interpenetration of the global and the local throughout history. But this interpenetration has accelerated dramatically over the last twenty years, thanks among other things to the revolution in communications, and it has led to what we know as “globalisation”. The revolution in communications has coincided with massive movements of peoples around the globe, with wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the civilisational confrontation between Islam and Christianity and the rise of Asia. Globalisation has brought about an ever greater consciousness not simply of cultural difference but of the world as one in space and time.

For universities, engagement with the globalised contemporary world implies the development of programs and models of inquiry designed to increase awareness of the diverse cultures and languages of the planet, and of globalisation itself. This was the central theme of Sandra Bermann’s Presidential Address to the 2009 American Comparative Literature Association (Bermann 2009). Translation Studies as a distinct disciplinary field has grown exponentially with the advance of globalisation. Translation, by its very nature, is transnational; it embodies intercultural exchange. And in the cognate field of literary studies a global approach has been reflected in an upsurge of interest in paradigms of “world literature”. A particularly influential critic in this regard is David Damrosch, whose approach to world literature is predominantly relational (Damrosch 2003, 2009). The study of world literature, for Damrosch, concentrates on following the movement

of works as they travel between contexts, eras and languages. World literature is defined by the translatability inscribed into the act of translation. Thus conceived, it is a kind of writing that *gains* in translation. In the context of the study of literature in segregated national containers, with their emphasis on national cultural roots, translation necessarily appears as loss; but in the context of world literature translation appears as gain in the sense that it is the means by which texts transcend their culture of origin, acquiring new depths of meaning and horizons of interpretation as they enter new contexts. Translation clearly has a vital role to play in the propagation of world literature. “The study of world literature,” Damrosch writes, “should embrace translation far more actively than it has usually done to date” (2003, 289). The translator, traditionally characterised as a traitor, is now transformed into a kind of hero, a central figure in the world republic of letters.

The essays in part 2 examine the role translation plays in the dissemination of texts, cultures and ideologies across linguistic and cultural borders. They pay particular attention to the question of “world literature” and the globalisation of culture. Anthony Pym deploys the concept of “inculturation” to capture the way translation can be used to spread an ideology and modify the receiving ideological system. In contrast to the traditional concept of translation as an exchange between two strong cultures, inculturation describes situations in which one culture is absorbed into another and can be illuminating if applied to literary history and the way some literary systems have achieved degrees of globalisation. Pym applies the model of inculturation to the translation practices associated with the spread of French aesthetics in Latin American and Australian literary production. He detects the international spread of a hegemonic European system where translation has very little impact, and questions the notion of the participative “republic of letters” idealised by Pascale Casanova. He finds that initially the dominant central system was unaffected by translations, but later, as literary modernism sought out the exotic, postcolonial translations into central languages resulted in a significant revitalisation of the literary system itself. Sean Cotter’s essay explores the case of Romanian writer and translator Lucian Blaga for what it can tell us about the study of translation more broadly and about the importance of translation in nation building. Cotter shows how Blaga’s translation practice was shaped by personal cultural interactions, particularly with the work of Rainer Maria Rilke, and argues that Blaga’s work can be seen as evidence for the circulation of national imaginary forms within Europe. The global circulation of literature is further explored by Mridula Chakraborty, who looks at the Nobel Prize-winning Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore in relation to the recent rise of “world literature” in university courses and critical discourse about literature (especially comparative literature). She asks how best to teach world literature in an age when the legacy of the nation-state remains strong and geographical and intellectual borders are less porous than is often imagined.

The writings of Tagore, a great proponent of world literature and a critic of nationalism, provide a fresh perspective on the debate.

The role of translation and its agents in the recognition of an important figure in twentieth-century world literature is the topic of Felix Siddell's case study of Italian writer Dino Buzzati's international fortunes. Through the publication of translations and critical studies, French translators and publishers played a key role in promoting research into Buzzati's work not only in France but also in Italy and elsewhere, ultimately affirming his position as a European writer of considerable significance. Brigid Maher's study looks at the circulation of translations and pseudotranslations of genre fiction, specifically crime fiction written by Anglophone authors but set in Italy. Acts of translation and instances of linguistic difference are flaunted in such texts, which offer their audiences a chance to "travel" to another culture in a reading journey mediated by a cultural guide who is at once writer and "translator". The commercial success of this subgenre eclipses that of translated Italian crime writing, yet parallels can be discerned between the work of such bicultural writers and the position of translators as cultural mediators, facilitating textual exchange.

## RECEPTION

*The books we find beautiful are written in a kind of foreign language.*

—Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, 361 (our translation)

Just as there could be no literature without writers and translators, there could be no literature without readers. Texts do not exist in isolation but are shaped by the reading processes they undergo as audiences create a meaningful experience out of the act of reading. In the case of translated literature, where there is a certain cultural distance between the circumstances of a text's creation and those of its reception, this dynamic is particularly complex. In her study of the reception of Spanish American fiction in West Germany, Meg Brown (1994) finds both intrinsic and extrinsic factors to be central to the way a "new" literature is read through translation. While the appeal of a translated work's setting, content, themes and characters will always be important, the study of reception must also take into account the effects of such external factors as critical reception, the awarding of major prizes, the prominent presence of a given author or national literature at international trade fairs and a receiving culture's exposure to a nuanced view of a region's political and cultural life.

Reading is not always, and not only, a private act; indeed, as digital communication becomes more and more a feature of our lives, the scope for online and transnational review and discussion of literature is expanding. However, even in an age in which sharing one's opinions with a wide international audience is arguably easier than ever before, some readers have greater authority and power to shape the reception of translated writing

than others. The essays in part 3 of this volume explore different facets of the reading process, particularly as it is performed by those gatekeepers with most influence over the choice of the texts we read in translation and how we read them. These figures include reviewers, critics, academics and prize committees, whose influence contributes to the reception of national, transnational and world literatures in the international literary marketplace.

All areas of paratextual analysis, examining such aspects as cover images and marketing campaigns, as well as textual features like notes and introductions, help shed light on how the agents involved in translation—translators themselves, but also editors and publishers—characterise their audience and assess their needs and expectations in order to ensure that the foreign is at once appealing and accessible. Likewise, critics, both in the academy and in the media (print and electronic), are often in the front line when a new text or writer enters a literary landscape through translation, and the study of the role they play in foreshadowing ways of reading and interpreting a text is important to our understanding of global literary flows.

The expansion of knowledge brought about by translation is beneficial not only to the receiving culture but also to the culture that produced the original text. For this reason, translation is seen today as one of the tools of cultural diplomacy and intercultural understanding, with government policy makers and cultural institutions investing energy and resources into more systematic programs for the dissemination and promotion of national literature in translation, often in collaboration with the publishing industry. As Vron Ware points out, when we read literature from other cultures, learning more about both the other and ourselves, we would do well to temper our idealism with a critical awareness of the goals and agendas of those determining the availability of translated literature and to develop “the ability to navigate in cultural channels shaped by ideology, militarisation, markets and social forces” (2011, 73). Book festivals and trade fairs become sites for the exchange of cultural products that are recognised not only for their aesthetic value but also for their potential worth in the global marketplace. The endorsement implicit in the award of a major literary prize provides another kind of cultural capital and may increase a work’s chances of being translated, particularly if it combines with commercial success (Pickford 2011).

The contributions in part 3 of this volume examine such areas of extra-textual influence and effect. Loredana Polezzi traces the changing reception and interpretation of Italian-American writer Pietro di Donato’s *Christ in Concrete* in the United States and in Italy. Over time, processes of translation and interpretation have fed into each other so that at different points in its history, the text has been variously interpreted as a working-class novel, as a testimony to the harsh conditions endured by migrants in early twentieth-century America or as a portrait of the specific history of Italian migration to the US. Such readings reflect different models of identity and literature based on notions of national, international or transnational literature, and their analysis illuminates the role translation plays in the definition of categories

such as American, Italian, Italian-American, or world literature. The migration and mobility of literary products is also the topic of Rita Wilson's essay, which analyses the dissemination of Australian literature in translation. The export of Australian work can be seen as both a form of cultural diplomacy and as an important tool in the transmission of a "national" cultural identity. She explores how the titles selected for translation into Italian, together with the paratexts that accompany the translations, contribute to shaping the image of Australia and its culture for an Italian-speaking readership. Recent trends in the number and type of literary texts translated suggest that some modest progress is being made in the dissemination of a more nuanced image of Australian culture in Italy, demonstrating the potential of translation to advance cultural exchange.

Literary prizes are often an important factor in the selection of texts for translation. This is the topic of Sally-Ann Spencer's study, which examines the German Book Prize as a mechanism for influencing the consumption of German-language literature across multiple national and linguistic fields. In the global literary marketplace the question of translation and the international outreach of literature is central. In the context of the effort to create a local and an international readership for German-language books, the flow of translation into English is considered particularly important. Esther Allen, in the collection's concluding essay, asks how the translation process, with the inevitable change in readership it entails, affects the textual apparatus of annotated editions. Focusing on the intellectual work of the footnote, she considers the footnoted translation for what it can reveal about the act of translation itself and about pervasive notions of authorship and authority.

The essays collected here are testament to the value of examining the processes of translation and literary circulation from a variety of perspectives, ranging from case studies investigating the international fortunes of a particular text or author, to investigations of the position of a particular genre or national literature in a new receiving system. What the contributions to this volume all show is the central position of translation in today's international literary landscape. As mediators between languages and literary systems, translators are key players in the cultural exchange that characterises our increasingly globalised society. Translation opens up different vistas on texts and engenders multiple afterlives beyond the source language and culture, not only giving target language readers access to new literature but also providing new insights into the source text: the sending culture is interpreted in innovative ways, while the receiving culture is transformed and enriched. Through these processes of circulation and exchange, a renewed importance is attached to world literature. Leaving behind some of the hegemonic associations of the past, the essays in this collection call for an opening up of world literature to a transnational space in which literary texts both incorporate and enable translation. This sense of participating in an international and transnational literary conversation is the unifying feature of this collection.

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## Part I

# Creation: Literature and Translation in the Looking Glass



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# 1 The Art of Hearing the Voice

*Julie Rose*

Can a lingering uneasiness with the status of translation be why translators sometimes sound so defensive, still, when they insist on the faithfulness of their work, or why the “translation police” (the term was used by Alastair Reid in 1981 of those dusty letter-writing figures he thought were dying out but that are more than ever with us, largely thanks to the Internet) allow themselves to be so acridly aggressive, pouncing on every new translation—of the classics in particular—doing word counts, quibbling about commas? Do we still basically see translators as plagiarists (Leys 2011a) or hacks—who, paradoxically, have no right to deviate from the text they’re *meant to be copying*? Not so long ago people used to venture quite timidly the suggestion that translators were actually writers, as though expecting to be howled down by the defenders of the exclusive province of writing and the “author function”. (The term is Foucault’s; its effects in regulating translation as a cultural construct are summarised elegantly by Theo Hermans [2010].) You would think the spotlight being trained on translation these days would finally dispel such quaint creative hierarchies and confirm that translators are, indeed, writers in their own right, entitled as such to use their writerly flair when rewriting someone else’s work—not as the metatextual icing on the cake, but as the nature of the job.

But this fact of creating something from something—and not something from nothing, as the original act of creation has been conceived, at least from the Renaissance (Grossman 2010)—still presents conceptual problems bound up with the incontrovertible truth that subtends them: the translation will never be the original, not one word of it. In coming to grips with that truth, translators often still piously insist they are mere keepers of the flame, thereby acting a bit like Poe’s purloined letter, hiding in plain sight: while translators might disappear as a flagged presence in the translation, and might well need to do so to produce the best work, the work they write—as translators rewriting someone else’s work—remains entirely theirs, written in their words and no one else’s.

It is actually writing at a more “sophisticated” level than the original writing in the sense that it is a reworking of the original at a level of reflection only made available by the original. This is not the same as saying a

translation is necessarily “better” than the original on which it depends, the way Baudelaire’s translation of Poe’s *Murders in the Rue Morgue* is—we can’t all be Baudelaires. But it is generally more deliberate. The best will be marvels in their own right, worthy of Jorge Luis Borges’s accolade: “the original is faithful to the translation”, cited by Marion Halligan in her melancholy story about a translator betrayed (Halligan 2005). Borges, who finally made peace with his English translator, Norman Thomas di Giovanni, after making the man’s life hell, went on, though possibly still tongue in cheek: “The translator’s work is more subtle, more civilized than that of the writer: the translator clearly comes after the writer. Translation is a more advanced stage of writing” (quoted in Goldblatt 2002). A translator’s focus will be on the language. Ideas, plots, characters are all givens. It would be a “wilful passing off” of the kind the law describes as plagiarism and copyright infringement (as per Leys 2011a) except that fraud doesn’t come into it: we all agree this is a special and legitimate instance of “copying”. The issue is only how convincing a translation is, for it will always be original in its own right: the actual original, in the words of William Weaver, is “only the starting point” (Weaver 1989, 117).

All of this makes translating a unique category of writing, one that takes place in the elastic space between two cultural spheres, where language and culture are always being quizzed and stretched. I see this as a double gain: translators have a foot in two distinct camps (the polyglots in three or more) and are always gleefully hopping between them. But that’s a metaphor. The notion of what translators are up to is so knotty that we seem doomed to resort to metaphors and analogies, with their attendant limitations. In earlier times, pictorial metaphors were preferred, with translations compared to the earnest copies of paintings disciples made in an artist’s workshop, the emphasis being on exactness (and derivation) (Hermans 2010). These days, we seem to prefer the world of sound, with many metaphors involving music and the notion of an immersive soundscape that has to be recreated the way a pianist or conductor interprets a score. Other translators enlist other arts. The exquisite polyglot Peter Constantine, who started out in life as a ballet dancer, once said he thought translation was like dancing, and the metaphor works for both a balletic pas de deux and ballroom, with the translator in the traditional female role, following the lead—something that requires a high degree of responsiveness and pliancy to do well (thereby actually subverting the meek little handmaiden metaphor translators have been dogged by in the traditional, deeply sexist, creative hierarchies) (Hermans 2010).

Wrestling often springs to my mind. I can feel like I’m wrestling the writer to the ground in a (mostly) friendly match, a bit like Jacob wrestling the angel, minus the angst. What Jacob came up against was himself, as do I. By the end of the match, I know what makes my opponent tick and can put everything back together again. But it’s a collaborative contest of every instant, proceeding word by word, phrase by phrase, sentence by sentence as I go along. There’s a lot of ingenuity and cunning here, and intense

pleasure, however tentative or incomplete, at the end of the “stoush”. For if there are those who think nothing is really translatable, I’m not one of them. You have to make the work yours, put your stamp on it—what veteran Richard Howard calls *frappe*, the French term used in minting coins (with the implied notion that it rings true, sounds right, is authentic). This is the only way you can convincingly recreate the text and produce on the new reader anything like the emotional and aesthetic impact of the original on its first readers, which is surely the ultimate aim of any translation (Grossman 2010).

This is the opposite of arrogance. The great thing is to make someone else’s voice sing. But you are dealing with a puzzle, to use another analogy: the task is to put the pieces together “correctly”, getting a fit that’s “right” by respecting the shape and colour of each piece and the overall pattern. (Victor Hugo even thought of each vowel as having a colour and was happy to name them.) Intuition and sensual response are bolstered by a quite rigorous science involving linguistic and cultural investigation and precision in reproduction. But the success of that reproduction is elusive, for a translation is always a work in progress: you can always improve it, even if, in reality, few translators get to make corrections to their work once it goes to print; but even when this happens, the process is never over. Most translators, I’d imagine, feel like William Weaver and don’t reread their published work for fear of all the changes they’d like to make and can’t.

A translation is also never definitive the way most original works are, standing immutable for all time. Nor is it definitive in the sense that any one translation manages to exhaust all the possibilities. The number of potential translations is, in theory, limitless. The canon will go on being translated (and revised as a canon) as language and readerly sensibilities evolve. Retranslating the classics may well be, as I often think, the most vital project in publishing.

This instability fuels the most popular metaphor for translating—as acting, a metaphor attributed to Ralph Manheim, the American translator who launched his long career with a translation of *Mein Kampf* (“Somebody’s got to do it”). Manheim is recorded as saying, a tad Anglo-centrally, that the translator is “an actor who speaks as the author would if the author could speak English” (Grossman 2010, 83). But most modern translators, myself among them, doubtless reinvent that metaphor for themselves in this age of the dominance of the performing arts (just as I’ve reinvented, here, many ideas already expressed, and far more potently, by Theo Hermans). The metaphor of “hearing the voice” and reproducing it in a sustained performance still holds, I think, as shorthand for the creative process—and intense experience—of catching the original that translating involves. That process-experience is intellectual, every bit as much as intuitive, to echo Diderot’s famous paradox. (Diderot thought that actors successfully produced emotion by closely observing human behaviour and minutely reconstructing the gestures observed.) But however we characterise its capture, what we’re

really talking about when we talk about voice is *style*. What a good translation does is catch the rhythms, cadences, tones and vocabulary that define a writer's style; "having a good ear" means marshalling intellectual, intuitive and sensual responses in a re-embodiment of what we "hear".

Style is tricky. We think of it as inimitably particular: Stendhal, Chateaubriand—neither sound alike or like anyone else. Yet particularity is not always easily defined. A translator with "a good ear" will not only "hear" the particular "voice" of the original, but will imitate it consistently and in a way that won't sound like mere pastiche. The only way any translator can do this, of course, is by producing his or her own style—"voice"—with its very own energies and timbres. For me there's a golden rule here, which is that the more distinct that second "voice"—the style that the reader, who needs the translation, receives—the more intensely and successfully I, who don't need the translation, have managed to "hear" the original. It means digging down deep and then dredging up an answering "voice" from out of the depths. This is the paradox of translation, since the more completely I've made the work mine, the less visible to you I will be. I'm there all the time, but you won't notice me. A translator's glory lies in his or her own disappearance, but in this little magic show, that's an illusion, for every word you read is mine. It is a double act, after all.

That collaborative double act (with the living and the dead, the great and the good and the merely pleasurable) is the joy of the job. And every job is different. Though small compared to those of that older generation of translators, my own body of work has spanned centuries, schools, genres. The style spectrum has stretched from the taut classicism of Racine, where formal strictures barely contain the riotous passions lurking just beneath the surface, to the elegantly wild exuberance of Victor Hugo, who hated Racine and is about as far from him as you can get.

In the five years since my translation of *Les Misérables* was published, I've translated many things including a dozen full-length works. Three of the latter were novels; seven critical or philosophical essays, notably by France's foremost theorist of the modern moment, Paul Virilio; one an anthology of interviews (with filmmakers I had to impersonate in their own language since the film critic, Michel Ciment, had originally conducted many of the interviews in English before transcribing them into French and then throwing away the tapes); and one a memoir. The "vocal range" has far exceeded anything a single writer, no matter how prolific, could produce.

With André Gorz's *Letter to D.*, the memoir, the challenge was to steer the same tense course Gorz steers in recounting his fifty-eight years of marriage to his by then failing wife, written all-of-a-piece in a spurt of defiance against the louder and louder ticking of the clock. (A year after the book came out in France, the couple committed suicide together.) Translating it involved struggling to hold the formality and emotional urgency together with as much poise as Gorz effortlessly produces. I could have said "as French effortlessly produces" because French allows you to deliver emotion

with a kind of compactness that isn't available in conversational English. To be readable in English—that is, to be as fluid as this intellectual's conversational French—it wasn't possible to be doggedly literal in the sense of religiously following syntax and formulation. I had to exercise the translator's robust liberty to depart from the text wherever necessary—in order to remain faithful to it. We are, of course, talking about very small degrees here. This is not the place for the great departures of adaptation freighted with commentary.

Adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing: translating might involve musical maths—on a modest scale, with additions kept to a minimum, according to the requirements of intelligibility and intention, subtractions even more so—but the chopping up of syntax and multiplying of sentences is sometimes essential, particularly in theoretical discourse, where preserving a “foreign” syntactical structure can make the text unreadable. Lydia Davis has a nice suggestion on this score. She sees the translation as a whole as a kind of sum: “The translation is like a problem in math—using different numbers, the answer must be the same, different numbers must add up to the same answer. If you can't reproduce a pun here, maybe you can create one over here. If your description in this passage is less lyrical than the original, maybe in another passage it can be more so” (Davis 2011, 78).

I'm not sure whether my version of *Les Misérables* can be said to *add up* exactly to the original (how would you do the “math” for so mammoth a sum?), but that's the hope. I felt the need only rarely to add, for obvious reasons, but never to subtract. I add the odd word at certain intense moments where what Hugo has written *no longer* seems “enough”—no longer adds up. In the beautifully written section on the Battle of Waterloo, for instance, when Napoleon refers to his nemesis, the Duke of Wellington, as *ce petit anglais*, I couldn't stop *my* Napoleon from adding a noun that turned “anglais” into an adjective: “that little British git”. Call me a jaded modern Australian, but for me “that little Englishman” didn't quite get the withering contempt with which the mere descriptive “anglais”, coloured by the “petit”, was charged in the original. We are coarser in our invective in the twenty-first century, we need stronger terms for insults to have the same effect; “git” struck me as the perfect note, neither anachronistic (“git” is timeless) nor out of character. It's something I can imagine Napoleon wishing he *had* said.

At other times, I don't so much add words as intensify the tone, which is adding colour (and so, weight). For instance, in the scene where the evil Thénardier (alias Fabantou, alias Jondrette) ambushes Jean Valjean (alias Monsieur Leblanc), Thénardier unravels. Intending first to rob the man who took Cosette away from him all those years ago, thereby depriving him of income and cheap labour, Thénardier whips himself into a frenzy of class hatred and decides to kill him. This is a truly menacing scene, just as Vargas Llosa describes it in his lovely study, *The Temptation of the Impossible* (2007). The Patron-Minette thugs are all there, ready and raring. Jean

Valjean's life is on the line. Thénardier's verbal assault is violent. My Thénardier's invective is even uglier and more colloquial than Hugo's. We're down among "the dregs", after all—and we've seen a lot more of the dregs in literature than Hugo's first audience had. Waiting for his victim to show, Thénardier bemoans the cold in the Gorbeau rathole he rents:

"Do you know", the father went on, "it's as cold as a nun's nasty in this dump of a place! If this bastard doesn't show up!" (620)

"Savez-vous", reprit le père, "qu'il fait un froid de chien dans ce galetas du diable? Si cet homme ne venait pas!" (767)

The temperature rises from there. By the time he's decided to slit Jean Valjean's throat, Thénardier has boiled over. At the end of a sensational rant, he sums up the situation:

"Silly old goat! Go on, I've got you by the short and curlies now. I was licking your arse this morning! But I'm going to be chomping on your heart tonight!" (653)

"Ganache! Va, je te tiens. Je te lèche les pattes ce matin! Je te rongerai le cœur ce soir!" (811)

I didn't really need to add "by the short and curlies" when "I've got you" would have done, and "licking your arse" is much stronger than "licking your paws"; but turning the vulgarity up a notch or two still seems to me to work. Thénardier needs to sound unmoored. He's now dangerous. His expression is accordingly wild, utterly uncivilised. We can lay it on a little for a modern audience accustomed to much more hardcore material. Thénardier must not sound mild.

Most of the time, though, I was at pains to be quite literal, adding nothing and taking nothing away—and that turned out to be more daring, since what Hugo is doing in *Les Misérables* is already astonishingly bold.

You might not pick that up from earlier translations. Translators of Hugo traditionally never add, they subtract—massively, cavalierly, unjustifiably, in the case of the more modern of the two best-known English translations, which I read while doing the first two of a regulation three drafts. The experience became a dual one of dazzlement (at Hugo's brilliance) and disbelief (at what really did look like censorship and not merely translatorly "poetic licence").

There are only five previous English translations of *Les Misérables* that I know of (though only two that I *know*), which is telling for a book so popular that it was widely translated the moment it first came out (in Brussels and Paris in 1862) and translated into many languages since, including Chinese and Korean. English versions of Hugo's *confrère* Flaubert abound (twenty

or more versions of *Madame Bovary* alone), but mine is only the sixth major version of *Les Misérables* in 150 years. That is surprising for such a magnificent book. There is the length: it's around 1,500 pages long; tackling it is not for the fainthearted. There is also the cost: the length means it's costly to print. Publishers need to figure out a way of publishing it without losing money. (I couldn't figure out a way of translating it without losing money.)

I wouldn't normally look at previous translations at all, the point of a new translation being to be new. There normally wouldn't be any to look at, since I mostly translate books fresh off the press. Retranslating something changes the equation, particularly when it has such cultural heft: can the thing simply be redone, or must it be conspicuously bettered? Noting the limitations of the two translations I read set up a kind of healthy competition: "I can do better than that!" Maybe that's still being unduly influenced by "foreign" rhythms and eccentricities, but I felt as if I was collaborating with Hugo against the competition, for all the right reasons: it quickly became clear that this was a restoration project.

I'd never read any translations of *Les Misérables* before in my life, and I'd never read the original either. This turned out to be lucky, because one of the things that kept me going, on the first draft, was the need to know what happens. Vague notions picked up from the musical and film versions bear scant relation. I "raced" towards the finishing line on that first draft, revelling in what turns out to be a gripping page-turner of a thriller, a sort of detective story, embedded in a much larger work about everything—all driven by an energy that never flags.

It was also lucky because everything was fresh, my reactions spontaneous, with no creative options closed by familiarity (either with the Hugo or commentary on it). The first draft, as always, was about the rhythm. I think rhythm is the most important thing in writing. It's the reason we like reading something; it's the reason we're prepared to stick at something so long. Hugo's rhythm is truly life affirming. What I tried to do was catch the energy in a way that feels authentic.

This wasn't always easy. I often sat at the desk, bowed, feeling as if *le grand Victor* himself was perched on my shoulders; but I plunged on, the way you plunge on with any compelling read, flinging bunches of synonyms as I went, each separated from two, three, four, five or more others by a hasty forward slash, leaving the subtleties of sense and significance to be mulled over later, when I knew what I was dealing with and could winkle out *le mot juste* from its rivals. You become an expert as you go along—not before.

I'd also never have had the courage to tackle it if I'd had any real sense of its size before I started. Courage counts. It took three years and three drafts to bring the translation to completion. It also took the major distractions of other work (three books, all aptly by Virilio, who is a great fan of Hugo). And it took long daily walks with my very energetic dog, as I found I couldn't go on without regular breaks from the blazing intensity of Hugo's



prose. (*Dogs*: If all writers should have dogs, this is surely even truer for those doglike—dogged?—creatures, translators.)

That prose, which Rimbaud once described as “pure poetry”, was a shock. It is dazzling, “oceanic” (not for nothing was Hugo nicknamed *l’homme-océan*). There are great waves of sparkling prose that wash over the narrative, ripples and flecks of foam and great sucking undertows that drag you into the depths. Far from faded, stale, overblown—the things I’d feared—I found it to be amazingly fresh, sharp, even modern in its often staccato thrust and idiomatic expressiveness. Here, choosing a passage at random, is Hugo’s semi-abstract riff on Jean Valjean’s sense of abandonment when he first gets out of jail:

Man overboard!

Who cares! The ship does not stop. The wind is blowing and that particular doom-laden ship has a course to keep. On it sails. [. . .]

There are no men anymore. Where is God?

He calls and calls. Anyone! Anyone! He goes on calling. Nothing on the horizon. Nothing in the sky. (80–81)

Un homme à la mer!

Qu’importe! le navire ne s’arrête pas. Le vent souffle, ce sombre navire-là a une route qu’il est forcé de continuer. Il passe. [. . .]

Il n’y a plus d’hommes. Où est Dieu?

Il appelle. Quelqu’un! quelqu’un! Il appelle toujours. Rien à l’horizon. Rien au ciel. (100–102)

Or Hugo on the nuns at the convent Jean Valjean later escapes to with little Cosette, looking for refuge a second time:

These nuns are not lighthearted, rosy, fresh girls the way the daughters of other orders often are. They are pale and serious. Between 1825 and 1830, three of them went mad. (404)

Ces religieuses ne sont point gaies, roses et fraîches comme le sont souvent les filles des autres ordres. Elles sont pâles et graves. De 1825 à 1830, trois sont devenues folles. (505)

Clean, spare sentences like those sit at one end of Hugo’s stylistic spectrum, which sifts through all social and linguistic registers and shifts from brisk to torrential to languidly elegant and even quiet. Those endless tonal and discursive shifts, all handled with virtuoso ease, the prescience of his insights, often tossed off quietly in aphorisms that haven’t dated—the brilliance and, at times, sheer bizarreness are downright tonic.

The novel has been described as one long prose poem, and as an epic, “perhaps the last and only genuine epic of modern times” (Leys 2011b, 60). If a

modern epic can embrace the process of standing the old-world class-based notion of epic heroism on its head, then Hugo's contemporary and friend, the poet Lamartine, was right: *Les Misérables* is *l'épopée de la canaille*, an epic for lowlives. The novel embraces everyone, though—men and women of the church, royals and royalists, patricians of all stripes, bourgeois, lawyers, politicians, generals and commanders, student radicals, police, shopkeepers, as well as the panoply of the little people, prostitutes, street kids, thugs and struggling craftsmen and women: everyone is represented in the book, accurately. For no one “hears” the widely divergent “voices” his society produced or catches them as precisely as Hugo does.

This is apparent at every turn, first and foremost in the voice of the narrator, who is Hugo (he says he's Hugo, anyway) and who ranges from lyrical to passionately polemical and humane to satirical. The section on 1817 (and consolidation of the royalist “restoration”) is a case in point. What fun Hugo had! He's sometimes taken to task for historical “inaccuracies” here, but that misses the point entirely. The inaccuracies are intentional. This is Hugo playing with history and settling scores with malicious wit.

That wit, malicious or good humoured, drives much of the portraiture and the dialogue, including those long pieces that can read a bit like soliloquies in a play. I'm thinking of the drunken rant that “the original world-weary student” Thomolmyès, “a wasted high roller of thirty” (105), delivers as he and his pals prepare to ditch Fantine and the girls, who are done so beautifully, trilling and twittering away and undercutting the “great joke” by their critical indifference (except, of course, for innocent Fantine). Then there are all the old Royalist Gillenormand's cranky rants, which cover the territory from lubricious to heartbreaking. The huge section on the Friends of the ABC features some wonderful oratory, undercut constantly by the nonbelievers in the group; as a study of student politics, it's never been bettered. And so on. We'd have to list everything, including Jean Valjean's long night of the soul and Javert's suicide, which is one of the most moving things in the book. But I happen to think Javert is a great and nuanced invention, a victim of lovelessness for whom the dawning of compassion is a catastrophe, caught as he is, too, in the heartless machinery of the law . . .

You could see the whole book as a kind of fantastic nineteenth-century machine, where wheels of different sizes and speeds turn endlessly within other wheels, much as Hugo depicts society at one point in the novel. There is the machinery of society, the machinery of grinding poverty, the machinery of the law and the prison system, the machinery of revolt. But there's nothing mechanistic about Hugo's vision. *Les Misérables* is a richly imagined wonder. Its spirit and excitement and depth, and the glorious use of all the possibilities of language, are the work of a writer whose skills we can only stand back and wonder at. It's profoundly moving and often funny to boot, humour and generosity going hand in glove and Hugo having both in spades. It produces an ecstasy of reading that dazzles and an overall sense of enjoying a kind of three-dimensional theatrical experience. (Vargas Llosa is

particularly good on the book's theatricality.) As they say, you don't emerge from reading it the same person. It *incites*.

*Les Misérables* is unquestionably Hugo's greatest masterpiece. It is a novel so rich, written with such empathy and panache, that hundreds of thousands of people around the world couldn't wait to get their hands on it. In Brussels alone, in the two weeks after the first edition came out, eleven pirated editions were printed (Hovasse 1994, 98). It remains the most successful book ever published in France, an instant and enduring bestseller and proof of the fact that a great book can also be a popular one. Nobody in that first widely diverse audience seems to have had any trouble getting through it. Tolstoy got himself a copy and was as overwhelmed as the Belgian typesetters, who kept stopping work setting it to sob over the galleys. He claimed it drove him to write *War and Peace*.

Yet both the translators I read saw fit to clean it up. The first translation was done by Hugo's contemporary and friend, Charles Wilbur, and it also came out in 1862 (Hugo handed Wilbur chunks as he went along). The second was done over a hundred years later by Norman Denny as a commission for the Folio Society; it was published in 1976 and has been reprinted ever since in the Penguin Classics list.

Hugo didn't much like the Wilbur (he understood English by then, even if he refused to speak it). It drove him to declare that translation was censorship. But to be fair, Wilbur was turning out his version in 1862, in London, at the heart of Victorian England. Maybe he couldn't help but be prim, for it is primness that causes him to edit out the odd word or phrase or override Hugo's robust prose with euphemism. Otherwise, Wilbur follows Hugo closely and elegantly, even if the prose is a little tarnished now by time.

Denny, on the other hand, hoes into Hugo's text with a vengeance, propelled not by primness (though that, too, incredibly, in at least one instance where it matters), but by a mission. That mission is to cut Hugo down to size in the interests of readability, and he meets it with brio: his version is pleasurably fluent. But such readability comes at great cost. The defiantly censorious Denny "subtracts" for all he's worth—words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, whole swathes of Hugo are gone; details are deleted or reduced, syntax is ironed out, mixed metaphors unmixed or axed; the characteristic Hugolian blend of pungent physicality (often adhering in the verbs) and abstraction (usually in the nouns) is eliminated. Two of the major disquisitions, the ones on the convent and on slang, are removed from their place in the text and stuck at the back of the book as appendices. Much of Hugo's best writing is thereby metaphorically trashed. Denny is a gifted translator, but he misreads the book by conflating it with the narrative proper—the story of Jean Valjean and co.—instead of embracing it precisely as a book about "everything": the story of Jean Valjean and co. *and* the story of the age.

Hugo's great originality is to weave the larger story of the age in disquisition and detail around and through his plot without detracting from

it or diminishing its emotional impact, binding the whole thing together in one compelling whole. This is one of the things that now makes it feel so modern, so ahead of its time, which could explain why contemporaries from Flaubert to Georges Sand seem to have had no idea what he was up to in it. Yet Hugo gives us the key to reading the whole book—the book *as a whole*—on the very first page, when he gives us material (gossip) about his saintly ex-rake of a bishop that “has no bearing whatsoever on the tale we have to tell—not even on the background” because “it may well serve some purpose, if only in the interests of precision in all things”. Precision in all things is what he gives us, revelling as he does (and we with him) in the inexhaustibility of the useless.

Roland Barthes, writing about nineteenth-century realism in Balzac and Flaubert, defines the role of realistic details. They are there, he says, just to say “we exist, we are real”—as part of a bid to represent the fabric of the new mercantile world. Of course, in Hugo, they may also be called on to do more than just be, they may also be asked to speak, but often being is enough. For every human action, personal or collective, has a context, and Hugo is forever going off on expeditions to explore that context. His haul is encyclopaedic. It includes factual realities from church history and practice; botany, gardening and agriculture; the hospitality industry; transport, including horse-drawn vehicles of all kinds as well as the railway; architecture, urban development and the history of the landscape, streets and monuments of Paris; trades and crafts of all kinds, from printing to all the different kinds of lace making, jet-bead production and piece work; military history, warfare and weaponry; jurisprudence and legal procedure, police procedure and the history of incarceration from the galleys to the prisons of Paris; shipbuilding, naval architecture and navigation; geology and geography; the engineering and history of the Paris sewer; and large tranches of history, especially of the Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars and the Battle of Waterloo . . . all of it interesting in itself and for the words that are its specialist language, its argot.

I loved the thoroughness with which Hugo goes into things. What time and space he could take to write about whatever he liked. How wonderfully he indulges himself—and we can too. I read widely to follow him on his expeditions and come up with the correct terms and still feel a small sense of triumph at having found on Google the “knuckle-duster pistol” that is the ultimate refinement of the gangster Montparnasse’s vicious perversity. In Denny this is just “a pistol”, just as the “guipure lace” Cosette is married in (at the crescendo of her triumph) is reduced to mere “lace”. There is the love of words and things for themselves at work here, but Hugo is also offering his readers concrete details we can believe in, so that the abstract, emotional things follow on. That’s what makes the equality between things—digression and plot; details and events—so radical: everything is equally valuable, everything is on an even footing. This operates for things and the words that designate them, and it operates for the characters that utter them. And that’s

why cleaning up Hugo's act feels unacceptably "unfaithful": it imposes a hierarchy. Hugo is absolutely opposed to hierarchies of any kind, either of language or of character and social status. That is his great boldness.

This is clear in shorthand in his use of two little words that speak volumes on this score. They are the two words that most ruffled bourgeois feathers of the day, even though their impact then can't be reproduced today. Or can it?

The first is the expletive "Shit!" uttered by the humble officer, Cambronne, in the middle of the beautiful "digression" on the Battle of Waterloo, when it looks like he and his men are about to be wiped out; the second is the interrogative uttered by Hugo's most endearing child, Gavroche, as the story moves towards the battle of the barricades: "Keksekça?" in French. Cambronne's "Shit!" occurs at a pivotal moment. For Hugo, Waterloo itself is the pivotal moment in the history of Europe in his century. It was so important to him that he visited the battlefield twice in 1861 and actually *finished writing the novel there* (Robb 1997, 374–375). Hugo's Waterloo is a demonstration, writ large, of how history—collective, individual, there's no distinction—turns on a hair. "If it hadn't rained during the night of June 17–18, the future of Europe would have been different" (261). Fantine hands her beloved baby girl Cosette over to the evil Thénardiens because that "ambulatory colossus", Mother Thénardier, is sitting down, singing, not standing, when she happens by: "Whether a person sits or stands, fate hangs by threads like these" (127). That wonderful scene takes place outside the Thénardiens' dingy inn, *Au Sergent de Waterloo*, a name that serves Thénardier fraudulently as a badge of honour, when in fact he was only at Waterloo to rob the corpses (and complicate the plot). It's not for nothing, thematically or aesthetically, that Waterloo heads the story of Cosette.

But there's more. The great battle is not lost or won by generals, or by their commanders, not even by Napoleon, who'd conquered all of Europe. Great men don't make history, the little people do. In fact, says Hugo, "a little-known officer" won the battle—for France; and he won it with one very humble word: "Shit!" That one little four-letter word, *le misérable des mots* as Hugo later described it in defending its use, guides not only Hugo's tragicomic reading of history, but the spirit of his whole great book (and, thereby, the spirit of my translation). Here's the immediate build-up:

The combatants were surrounded by what seemed like teeming ghosts, the silhouettes of men on horseback, the black outlines of their cannons, the white sky seen through wheels and gun carriages; the colossal death's head that heroes always see in the depths of the fog of war was closing in on them and looked at them. They could hear in the crepuscular gloom that cannons were being loaded, wicks were being lit and gleamed like the eyes of tigers in the night, making a circle around their heads; all the shot-firers of the English batteries approached the cannons, and then, deeply moved, holding the moment of reckoning hanging over those men, an English general—Colville according to some, Maitland

according to others—cried out to them: “Brave Frenchmen, give yourselves up!” Cambronne replied: “Shit!” (284)

Note the elegance and poise of that half paragraph, with its perfectly placed pause, making the “Shit!” positively explode. Charles Wilbur left the French “Merde!”, didn’t translate it, much to Hugo’s dismay. But neither does Denny. Even if, as I suspect, Denny was going for irony, this really is not the moment to leave a word untranslated. I leave a lot of French in, where it’s a matter of anchoring the story in a specific time and place, for example when someone is eating “a fromage blanc”: this is France and nowhere else. But slang and idiom need to be translated to do the work they’re required to do.

Hugo’s commentary on Cambronne’s triumph places his own work in the tradition of Aeschylus—the tradition of *the demotic sublime*. This is crucial to both history and style—his writing of history in a double sense—

to drown the European coalition in one syllable, to offer kings the lavatories already familiar to the Caesars, to make the last of words the first by fusing it with the lightning of France, to insolently bring Waterloo to a close with a Mardi Gras, round off Leonidas with Rabelais, sum up the victory in one supreme word that cannot be uttered, to lose ground but keep history, after all the carnage to have the last laugh—this is huge.

It is an insult to the thunderbolt. It is to attain the greatness of Aeschylus. (287)

noyer dans deux syllabes la coalition européenne, offrir aux rois ces latrines déjà connues des césars, faire du dernier des mots le premier en y mêlant l’éclair de la France, clore insolemment Waterloo par le mardi gras, compléter Léonidas par Rabelais, résumer cette victoire dans une parole suprême impossible à prononcer, perdre le terrain et garder l’histoire, après ce carnage avoir pour soi les rieurs, c’est immense.

C’est l’insulte à la foudre. Cela atteint la grandeur eschlyenne. (356–357)

The Biblical reference is key. Making “the last of words the first” defines Hugo’s project. It’s why slang is so crucial throughout the book—and so revolutionary. For if the Revolution liberated the thinking of man and the citizen, surely it must also liberate his speech. Hugo doesn’t beat around the bush: “Shit!” is his answer.

But Hugo didn’t stop there. He put “shit” to work dazzlingly in the section on the sewers of Paris. Shit is what the sewer deals in; as a product of the human body, it could be used to feed humanity, he argues in the polemical introduction to “Leviathan’s Bowels”; as a product of the social body, it is the great social leveller. The sewer is the mirror Hugo holds up to society; it is at once a major, final *rite de passage* in the plot and a metaphor for an equality quite different from the one the student insurgents have by then

died for in the blaze of gunshot and cannonballs that is the answer to their borrowed oratory.

The sewer is the conscience of the city. Everything converges there [. . .] Down there, the bottom of a bottle avows drunkenness, the handle of a basket tells of domesticity; there, the apple core that once gave itself literary opinions goes back to being an apple core; the head on the five-franc piece frankly turns to verdigris, Caiaphas's spit meets Falstaff's vomit, the gold louis from the gambling den bumps into the nail with the suicide's bit of rope still hanging off it, a livid fetus rolls by wrapped in the sequins that danced at the last Mardi Gras at the Opéra, a judge's wig that has judged men grovels next to a bit of rot that was once Maggie's skirt. This is more than fraternity, it is being on intimate terms. All that was once carefully made up is now smeared and laid on with a trowel. The last veil is ripped off. A sewer is a cynic. It tells all. (1034)

L'égout, c'est la conscience de la ville. Tout y converge [. . .] Là, un cul de bouteille avoue l'ivrognerie, une anse de panier raconte la domesticité; là, le trognon de pomme qui a eu des opinions littéraires redevient le trognon de pomme; l'effigie du gros sou se vert-de-grise franchement, le crachat de Caïphe rencontre le vomissement de Falstaff, le louis d'or qui sort du tripot heurte le clou d'où pend le bout de corde du suicide, un fœtus livide roule enveloppé dans des paillettes qui ont dansé le Mardi gras dernier à l'Opéra, une toque qui a jugé les hommes se vautre près d'une pourriture qui a été la jupe de Margoton; c'est plus que de la fraternité, c'est du tutoiement. Tout ce qui se fardait se barbouille. Le dernier voile est arraché. Un égout est un cynique. Il dit tout. (1286–1287)

That other little word, the interrogative “Keksekça?”, is made up. It's Hugo's shorthand for “Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?”—“What is that?” Hugo puts it in the mouth of Paris's boy and Hugo's favourite, Gavroche. We need to remember how impressive this word was, too, at the time. As an exhibition catalogue (*Victor Hugo: L'Homme-océan*) points out, it wasn't until Queneau's invention of Zazie, “the blue-jean Gavroche”, in *Zazie dans le métro*, that anything like it occurs again in French literature. “Wozat?” felt too short. Gavroche's fury at being cheated, when he wants to offer the best fluffy white bread to the two little strays he's picked up (not knowing they're his brothers, trafficked by their appalling parents, the Thénardiens), required something heavier. I plumped for “Whathahellsat?”, though now, it seems to me, “Whathelzat?” would be better.

There are other such words, and they're all given to Gavroche: whadovit, reckonnairs, allyaftado. Much of the wittiest slang, too, is given to Gavroche and defines his special swagger. He plays a vital role in the novel, both through his speech, which is a seamless blend of the demotic and the polished; and through the small, private revolution he somehow achieves—one we don't even see happening: we only hear its beginning in the heart-rending

wailing Jean Valjean hears when he comes to rescue Cosette: that's Gavroche as an unwanted baby boy crying, alone, in the dark. When we see him again later, the revolution is complete: he is as far from the Thénardiens, *père et mère*, as it is possible to be.

Gavroche is a truly gorgeous creature, so clever, so funny, so loving. When we see him in the scene with the bread, he's got no shoes and hardly any clothes, in a freezing Paris winter. Yet the generosity and the linguistic command never waver. He gives the waifs a lesson in etiquette *and* slang:

“Let's stay calm, little nippers. Here is enough supper for three.”

And he pulled a sou out of one of his pockets. Without giving the two little boys time to be impressed, he pushed them both ahead of him into the baker's shop and slapped his sou on the counter, shouting: “Garçon! Five centimes' worth of bread.”

The baker, who was the master in person, took a loaf of bread and a knife.

“Cut it into three, garçon!” Gavroche went on, adding with dignity: “There are three of us.”

And seeing that the baker, after carefully eyeing the three diners, had grabbed an unbleached loaf, he stuck his finger right up his nose with a snort as imperious as if he had a pinch of Frederick the Great's snuff at the end of it, and he flung this indignant yell right in the baker's face: “Whathahellsat?”

[. . .] The baker understood perfectly and replied: “Why, it's bread! Very good second-class bread.”

“You mean rock-hard black dodger,” Gavroche retorted, calmly and coldly contemptuous. “White bread, garçon! Fluffy white bread! It's my treat.”

The baker could not help smiling, and as he cut the white loaf, he studied them in a compassionate way that riled Gavroche.

“Hey, baker's boy!” he shouted. “What are you giving us the once-over for like that?”

Placed end to end, the three of them would not have come to more than six feet.

When the bread was cut, the baker put the sou away and Gavroche said to the two little boys: “Tuck in.”

The little boys looked at him, speechless. Gavroche chortled: “Oh, silly me, it's true they don't know yet, they're too little!”

And he translated: “Eat.” (780–781)

– Calmons-nous, les momignards. Voici de quoi souper pour trois.

Et il tira de ses poches un sou. Sans laisser aux deux petits le temps de s'ébahir, il les poussa tous deux devant lui dans la boutique du boulanger, et mit son sou sur le comptoir en criant:

– Garçon! cinq centimes de pain.

Le boulanger, qui était le maître en personne, prit un pain et un couteau.



- En trois morceaux, garçon! reprit Gavroche; et il ajouta avec dignité:
- Nous sommes trois.

Et voyant que le boulanger, après avoir examiné les trois soupeurs, avait pris un pain bis, il plongeait profondément son doigt dans son nez avec une aspiration aussi impérieuse que s'il eût eu au bout du pouce la prise de tabac du grand Frédéric, et jeta au boulanger en plein visage cette apostrophe indignée:

- Keksekça?

[. . .] Le boulanger comprit parfaitement et répondit:

- Eh mais! c'est du pain, du très bon pain de deuxième qualité.
- Vous voulez dire du lardon brutal, reprit Gavroche, calme et froidement dédaigneux. Du pain blanc, garçon! du lardon savonné! je régale.
- Le boulanger ne put s'empêcher de sourire, et tout en coupant le pain blanc, il les considérait d'une façon compatissante qui choqua Gavroche.
- Ah ça, mitron! dit-il, qu'est-ce que vous avez donc à nous toiser comme ça?

Mis tous trois bout à bout, ils auraient à peine fait une toise.

Quand le pain fut coupé, le boulanger encaissa le sou, et Gavroche dit aux deux enfants:

- Morfilez.

Les petits garçons le regardèrent interdits. Gavroche se mit à rire:

- Ah! tiens, c'est vrai, ça ne sait pas encore, c'est si petit!

Et il reprit:

- Mangez. (968–969)

Soon afterwards, in one of the finest scenes in the book, he takes the boys to the neglected model elephant Napoleon once put up at Bastille and that Gavroche, the homeless street kid, has made his “home” (“O, the unforeseen usefulness of the useless!”, 787). The lesson in slang continues: words for home, rats, wicks and burning the house down. They are part and parcel of Gavroche's realistic generosity, and they pour out of him gaily as he paints pictures for them of the fun they'll all have together, at the Glacière with Turnip, or teasing the washerwomen down by the Seine, or at the Opéra, which is “most select” (790).

I would argue that Gavroche is one of the most important characters in the novel. He achieves, on a small scale, the heroic transformation that Jean Valjean (nobly) struggles with throughout the narrative and that Hugo projects as the true revolution—in contrast to the one Enjolras and co. (nobly) envisage. His command of language and life is given great authority and, if nothing else supported my choice of a highly vernacular translation, that would be enough.

But Hugo is quite insistent on the importance of the vernacular. We see this as a polemic when he dissects, say, the highfalutin slang of the courts and legal debate, and in the longer disquisition on slang that is a mini-masterwork in itself. But mostly we see it in action, embodied in the

many voices he delivers us, as they are spoken by his actors on his stage—including, very movingly, the most inarticulate, such as little Cosette at the Thénardiens', dumb with fear and hardly daring to believe the doll—"the lady"—might now be hers, given to her by this stranger, or Champmathieu defending himself at his trial, unable to grasp the process . . . I responded with my own vernacular, Australian or otherwise. Idiom and slang are tricky, as we all know. Nothing is as rooted in time and place and as difficult to export. What I strove for most of the time were universals, the kind of slang we could imagine French people of all the different social echelons speaking in France in the early nineteenth century. But sometimes the right words, for me, were Australian, the idiom of an earlier Australia that I hoped wouldn't sound anachronistic: my father's words, very often, for he was a man from the bush with the gift of the gab and a marvellous vocabulary all his own. I didn't mind if those words sounded strange to an un-Australian audience: we need to be transported to a time and place not our own, so let certain words sound foreign. What's more, I've been reading British and American slang all my life and loving it. But this choice was ultimately about energy and exuberance and honesty.

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## 2 Memory, War and Translation

### Mercè Rodoreda's *In Diamond Square*

*Peter Bush*

Wars leave their scars on those who experience and survive them. The destruction created by war lives on for decades in the minds and relationships of family and friends in the society where they coexist with all manner of memories and aftermaths—even with the enemy, in the case of a civil war. In the context of Catalan society exile became necessary for many writers who faced imprisonment or execution during the dictatorship of General Franco, the oppression of its culture and language being the general fate for Catalonia. I wish to analyse in this essay how Mercè Rodoreda distils the experience of the civil war in Barcelona through the retrospective narrative of a working-class woman's stream of consciousness in the 1950s, how three different literary translators came to translate her novel and how two scholarly critics, in reviewing the translations, articulate the translators' achievement. Translators and academic scholars are important gatekeepers, especially when ushering the literature of a “minority” culture into the space of world literature. The priority for the translators of Rodoreda seems to be tracking down a publisher and extending the potential readership. The academics' priority is to position themselves in a debate with their peers in terms of the weaknesses of the translations. As the creator of the third translation I wish to argue that the choices made in the three translations offer the reader an experience of the novel that is more comprehensive than the scholarly articles anchored in narrow theoretical prescriptions. Description of my own memories of the aftermath of war illuminates what became a driving force powering my translation: a rewriting based on an inclusive experience of reading, where the historical self cannot be absent from a creative activity that assumes equal amounts of scholarly, linguistic and literary insight.

The Catalan writer Mercè Rodoreda, an exile from the Franco dictatorship, wrote *La plaça del Diamant* (*In Diamond Square*) in Geneva from February to September in 1960. It was only the second novel she had written since *Aloma*, which won the Premi Crexells in 1937, a year after the start of the Spanish Civil War. She had worked as a secretary for the Institució de Lletres Catalanes, a body set up in 1937 to promote Catalan literature in the wake of the revolutionary struggles in Barcelona, but fled to the French border in January 1939, as Fascist troops approached Barcelona, in the

processions of refugees that included Antonio Machado and his family and Carles Riba, Catalan poet and translator of Homer. With her partner, Armand Obiols (the pseudonym of Joan Prats, to whom she dedicated *In Diamond Square*), she went first to Toulouse, then to a château fitted out as a youth hostel in Roissy-en-Brie, then to a *chambre de bonne* in Paris. Obiols had no papers and was compelled to quarry stone while Rodoreda had to put up with accusations that she was a “loose woman” from morally minded members of the exiled artistic community—she had been a lover of many, including, for a short while in 1929, Andreu Nin, the translator and reluctant leader of the May uprising in Barcelona in 1937, killed by the Stalinist GPU for being a “Trotskyite-fascist”. Rodoreda’s father was killed in a Fascist bombing raid on Barcelona. When she went into exile, she left her first husband—a maternal uncle who sexually abused her before their marriage—for which there had to be special dispensation from the pope, given their consanguinity. The novelist was no stranger to the turmoils of family and war.

*La plaça del Diamant* was published in Spain by novelist Joan Sales in 1962. The square of the title is in the district of Gràcia in Barcelona: a district of packed housing and narrow streets, of workshops and artisans, famed to this day for its political radicalism and exuberant fiestas. Gràcia housed a vibrant proletarian culture with republican clubs and Athenaeum, but it was also home to rich textile merchants, who lived in the grand High Street, and a well-established Romany community, who lived in the cramped streets bordering the Eixample. The novel’s heroine, Natàlia, meets her first husband, Quimet, at a dance in the square, and he soon renames her *Colometa* (Pidgey)—the title Rodoreda first gave to her novel. Quimet is a furniture maker and owner of a small workshop where he employs one apprentice. Natàlia works behind the counter in one of the many cake shops in Gràcia. She is also the narrator, now reviewing her life and the events subsequent to the dance some thirty years later. The first years of marriage, which started with “a week of wedding nights”, are dominated by the pigeons Quimet decides to breed in their small attic flat and terrace—his nicknaming was a statement of intent—in the hope of making enough money to sell up and start a small farm. It is his wife who cleans, feeds and manages them and their two young children as well as housecleaning each morning for a well-to-do family. The period (the early 1930s) is unpropitious, with the economy in recession. The Second Republic is elected in April 1931, and street fighting and war are on the horizon. Quimet and his clerk of the works friend, Cintet, join the anarchist patrols in 1936, burning churches and kidnapping, if not killing, priests and bourgeois citizens. After the Fascist insurrection on 18 July 1936, they are sent to the front in Aragón.

Meanwhile, overwhelmed by the stench and the drudgery generated by the pigeons, Colometa shakes their eggs to abort the yolks, initiates the annihilation of the pigeon colony, and concentrates on survival strategies with her two children. She conflates her individual revolt and the wider

revolution: “And while I was waging my big revolution against the pigeons, what was brewing came, that they said would be a two-day wonder” (110). Her fictional autobiography extends to Franco’s victory, the years of hunger of the 1940s, a second marriage to a grocer unable “to do it” because of war wounds (Quimet being a war casualty who never made it back) and finally the marriage of her daughter to a local bar owner in a Barcelona beginning to emerge from grey poverty in the late 1950s. The narrative merges an intensely emotional chronicle of the interaction between family life and historical circumstance in the stream-of-consciousness states of mind these generate in Pidgey as she tangles with everything from sex to starvation. Her Catalan is colloquial yet studded with literary references, hallucinatory flights of imagination, dreams and detailed descriptions of the physical locations she inhabits: a working-class woman from an urban community with strong political and cultural traditions.

The vicissitudes of literature from so-called minority languages seeking translation in the English-speaking world are well illustrated by material concerning the first two translations in the Mercè Rodoreda Foundation archive at the Institut d’Estudis Catalans in Barcelona. I write “so-called” because there are 50 per cent more potential readers of Catalan than there are, say, of Norwegian and because, when it is a matter of translation into English, all other languages belong to the minority realm—from French to Chinese. As Rodoreda’s publisher, Diana Athill, at André Deutsch, noted in a letter to fledgling academic Catalan specialist Alan Yates on 3 May 1967, it was difficult to sell novels originally written in English and, with very few exceptions, libraries were the only purchasers: “And if novels are hard, translations are harder, particularly if the author’s name is unknown in this country”. She justified the small initial print run of 2,000 by explaining that it was generally felt a translation was likely to be “highbrow”, which would scare off readers who liked bestsellers.<sup>1</sup>

A publishing world that was not scouring the world for exciting fiction written in other languages was reliant—as it often is today—on enthusiastic readers of other literatures who coincidentally became literary translators. One such was Eda O’Shiel, a lecturer in the German Department at Manchester University, married to Albert Sagarra, a Catalan in the Faculty of Technology. On a Christmas holiday to Barcelona in 1964, O’Shiel read *La plaça del Diamant*, was enthused and set out to find a London publisher. She had seen in Rodoreda’s prologue the name of Jaume Garriga Agelet, a friend of the novelist who was in turn a friend of her father-in-law. Agelet sent O’Shiel Rodoreda’s address, and a meeting was soon agreed upon that same Christmas after O’Shiel wrote that Collins and Hutchinson might be interested and that she had had previous contact with those publishers (1 Jan 1965). O’Shiel was a fluent Catalan speaker with some experience of translation, and the novelist agreed to allow the project to go ahead (Rodoreda to Joan Sales, 7 Feb 1965). She finished the translation at the end of August and sent it to Collins, who liked the novel but rejected

it because it was a subject “outside the tradition of their house”. Collins had suggested putting it in the hands of the Curtis Brown Literary Agency. At the beginning of December, André Deutsch agreed to publish O’Shiel’s translation, and O’Shiel proceeded as a kind of unofficial representative of Rodoreda: “I went to London to see the agent and am now sorting out the final details of the contract. A major problem is that they don’t see it as a commercially viable work as it might only appeal to a minority interested in the Peninsula.” O’Shiel then quoted from a letter from her agent at Curtis Brown concerning the style of the translation: “I think anyone reading the *Plaça del Diamant* in your translation will be struck by the strangeness of the language. This, I should imagine, comes from your wish to stay as close to the original as possible. I think this is a very good thing, but British readers are terribly pedestrian, anything a bit difficult creates moans and complaints.” She continued that both she, as translator, and her agent, were worried by the title. *Diamond Square* would not give any information or awake any feeling in an English reader: would Rodoreda like to suggest an alternative, perhaps *La dona dels coloms* or *The Pigeon Woman*?

At the beginning of November, Rodoreda forwarded to Joan Sales a letter from Diana Athill enquiring about the status of O’Shiel Sagarra’s relationship with her. In a postscript to Sales, Rodoreda complained bitterly about handing the novel over, to be translated, to someone “we might say was out of control”: “I will never do it again. It has taken so long to publish *La plaça* in English, but they could have done it earlier using the French or Spanish versions . . .” In her May 1967 letter to Alan Yates, Diana Athill recognised that she would never have got onto *La plaça del Diamant* “if Mrs Sagarra hadn’t liked it enough to translate it on spec”. In the event, the novel was published by André Deutsch and received very positive reviews. Sales were such that a second edition was soon published. However, friction between translator and writer worsened when O’Shiel sent Athill a negative report on Rodoreda’s next novel, *El carrer de les Camèlies* (1965).

Eda O’Shiel Sagarra’s translation (Rodoreda 1967) is immediately striking because of the parallels the Irish translator obviously felt between the civil war in Spain and an earlier civil war in Ireland. O’Shiel translates *militians*, the militia that Quimet and Cintet join—the patrols of the anarchist FAI—as “Irregulars”. The Irregulars was the name given to the faction of the IRA that opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921. The Irregulars were seen as rebels against the Free State and as such became engaged in a civil war within a war of liberation. Her rendering of *escamots* (the anarchist FAI patrols that set fire to churches and killed employers and the wealthy) is in like vein. She translates it as “shock troops”, words used to describe the most militant IRA factions during the civil war. Though her agent and editor make no comment on this historical parallel, literary readers of the André Deutsch list might have felt that Yeats’s lines from *The Tower* (1928) caught the jaunty, boisterous attitudes of the Catalan anarchists:

An affable Irregular,  
A heavily-built Falstaffian man,  
Comes cracking jokes of civil war  
As though to die by gunshot were  
The finest play under the sun.  
(Yeats 1964, 117)

The Irishness of the translation is reinforced in the style of the dialogues and narrative where O'Shiel successfully invokes the colloquial rhythms of Irish English:

I'm killed (9)  
no puc més (155)

She's a deep one (40)  
Es enganyadora (183)

I'd like to have hair like hers, so I would (104)  
Els seus cabells, voldria (238)  
And he'd be grand there (139)  
Que allà estaria molt bé (268)

The luck the day I set eyes on him (187)  
quina sort, el dia que el vaig topar! (310)

O'Shiel adds an extra awkward breathlessness to Pidgery's narrative by frequently maintaining the adjectives after the noun, as can be very usual in Catalan but not so in English:

patent leather shoes, very hot (13)  
sabates de charol, molt calentes (158)

little cries, a bit hoarse (13)  
un crit petit, una mica engollat (158)  
(O'Shiel 2008)

Eda O'Shiel Sagarra went on to have an extremely successful academic career and has recently retired as pro-chancellor of Trinity College, Dublin.

Eight years later an American translator, David Rosenthal, resumed the battle to find a publisher for Rodoreda. He translated the collection *La meva Cristina i altres contes* on spec and wrote to the author asking for the translation rights and telling her that the Feminist Press was interested (8 Jan 1975). Thirteen months later he informed her that he had placed the book with a small press, Mulch, and included their standard contract "with a few changes". Mulch was a small publisher of poetry about to launch a new



Iberian list. It is clear that Rosenthal was part of the press as he confesses: “As we are poor, we can’t pay advances, but on the other hand we do try to distribute the book, get reviews, find as many readers as possible” (17 Mar 1976). He had been in contact with Joan Sales, as he also wanted to translate *La plaça del Diamant* and *El carrer de les Camélie*s. His project would be part of the first coherent presentation of Catalan culture in the US. It was not a one-off like O’Shiel’s translation.

Rosenthal related how he loved teaching and studying Catalan literature and that he had been translating the literature for three years and hadn’t received a cent. He wasn’t a charitable organisation and would prefer to be paid but did what he did in order to spread Catalan culture (23 Apr 1976). The translator clearly thought his novelist should display equal generosity. In October 1979 the indefatigable translator and promoter of Catalan literature had found a publisher in New York, Taplinger. He was negotiating the contract between publisher and author and had to rely on Rodoreda’s goodwill in sorting out the contract with the agent she now had in New York, Bobbie Siegel.

David Rosenthal had become the champion of Catalan literature in the US and a colourful figure on the literary scene in Barcelona. His translations ranged from contemporary fiction to the great Catalan Renaissance classic, *Tirant lo blanc*. He lunched and dined with Joan Sales and his wife, Núria, and other literary figures. He wrote critical articles for *Avui*, the Catalan nationalist newspaper, and was fond of controversy. In a letter dated 12 July 1980, Sales commented on one such controversy, in which Rosenthal claimed that there had been few translations of *La plaça del Diamant* and they were all bad. Sales joked that he was unlikely to be sufficiently polyglot to judge most of the translations, in such languages as Japanese and Hungarian, and that it would have been idiotic for him as Rodoreda’s agent to refuse permission to the Hungarians or Japanese simply because they were intending to translate via the English or French versions. Sales concluded that Rosenthal might be a prickly character with a decidedly way-out appearance and ways but that Catalans should be grateful to him because he had been doing wonderful things for Catalan literature. Rosenthal died of pancreatic cancer in 1992 at the age of forty-seven at the height of his creativity and promotion of Catalan culture.

The most important innovation in David Rosenthal’s translation, *The Time of the Doves* (1986), is his preference for “dove” over “pigeon” that is introduced into the text from the first mention of the heroine’s nickname:

He called me Colometa, his little dove (18)  
Colometa (156)

Rosenthal often spells things out in this way. He also introduces American colloquialisms to give the narrative a conversational touch:

I'd done all kinds of dumb things (20)  
havia fet molts desbarats (158)

He's a smart guy (33)  
Manetes (170)

We were a crew, the clean-up crew (122)  
Érem una colla, la colla de la neteja (254)

The dialogues are not uniformly American English, and sometimes the register seems supercilious or flat mid-Atlantic, as when Pidgley's father tells her:

Have him come for dinner Sunday (33)  
Fes-lo venir a dinar, diumenge (171)

Or when Quimet complains to his mother about the lack of salt in his lunch:

It's too bland today (34)  
avui l'ha fet dolç (172)

Rosenthal doesn't translate proper names but half translates street names as in "Provença Street" (116). The main change in his translation is the deletion of chapter divisions and the introduction of conventional punctuation to the speech within the stream of consciousness, which in Catalan simply runs on in the narrative after a comma. Without access to the editing process we can't say whether these changes are the work of the translator, his editor, or both. They seem contradictory. The removal of chapter divisions underlines the stream of consciousness and the conventional punctuation undermines it. The absence of chapter divisions in fact belabours the narrative. They are necessary breathing spaces for the reader.

Thirty years after the publication of David Rosenthal's translation, I received an e-mail from Donna Coonan, the commissioning editor at Virago, apologising for contacting me "out of the blue", asking if I would be interested in retranslating Rodoreda's novel and concluding, "If this is a book you'd like to translate, and I really hope it is, I'd love to hear from you" (2 March 2011). As a freelance literary translator, I reckon that about 40 per cent of my commissions come from ideas I throw at publishers, and this title was part of my "wish list". In this case, however, the publisher took the initiative.

Reading and rereading a novel in order to translate it into another language is clearly no ordinary reading: it is a professional form of reading in constant interaction with a process of drafting and redrafting. However, it remains an individual reading that retains the excitement and emotion that make translators want to pursue a narrative as nonprofessional readers or

listeners or viewers. The “critical distancing” of the reading subject from the text that academic training encourages hasn’t erased, at least as far as I am concerned, that more elemental relationship with fiction that depends on a high level of spontaneity. Individuals read differently, engage at different levels with different narratives at different times of the day, night, week or month . . . Suspension of disbelief can operate almost automatically with the first paragraphs or images of serial fiction or renowned classics, though personal prejudices and inclinations play a role, as do questions of social class, culture and morality. Academic “critical distance” can bring an almost puritanical repression of the subjective, of what the reader actually feels when reading this text or reacting to those images, the memories they evoke, the physical reactions they provoke. These inevitably vary from text to text and individual to individual, but that variety exists even though it remains invisible in most literary academic discourse and Translation Studies scholarship. The standard Translation Studies readers by Lawrence Venuti (2000) and Mona Baker (2010) include no writing on this vital subjective aspect of literary translation, though it has been articulated by many practitioners (Bush 1997, 2006; Felstiner 1980, 1995; Levine 1991). It is true that Theo Hermans (2010) has written about the “voice” of the translator, in an essay included in Baker’s collection, but it is a voice in the abstract and, as such, in denial of the actual historical agency of individual translators. The scholar may wish to establish some original generalising “truth” by his writing about a literary work and will labour to do so usually within a well-defined genealogy of scholarship. His “truth” may even then assume the appearance of unchallengeable scientific assertion, almost a statement of self-evident fact, as in Venuti’s declarations about the “prevalence of fluent strategies [. . .] that [. . .] produce the illusion of transparency”, which can only be countered by experimentalism, “innovative translating [. . .] to create a discursive heterogeneity which is defamiliarizing, but intelligible to different constituencies in the translating culture” (Venuti 2000, 341). The literary translator, on the other hand, has to grapple with a range of styles, experiences, scholarship and research, not in order to write academic discourse (which flees “discursive heterogeneity” like the plague) but to interpret and re-create literary styles at all their different levels of artistic originality. A literary translation *is* a complex work of scholarship, the outcome of which is a work of art rather than a scholarly article or book. Recognition of the necessary individual emotional and imaginative aspect to rewriting is not some wilful narcissism on the part of the translator but part of the establishing of a critical relationship with that part of the self that is active in the act of literary translation and with the self’s repertoire of dialects and languages. Literary translators writing about their practice would hardly be “scientific” if they left out of their accounts the mess and the magma, the struggle to capture polysemy and ambiguity, say, which is much more than the allocation of the odd “foreignising” word or the elaboration of a clever, or not so clever, idea, as we shall see.

Subjectivity is a key ingredient in the reinterpretation that infuses the writing of the translation, the choice of words and their rhythm. When I first read *La plaça del Diamant*, I couldn't put it down. I read it in six hours because I wanted to find out what happened to the heroine: though readers from Diane Athill onwards have noted the difficulties of the narrative, the storyline of a woman in wartime remains gripping. Before starting to translate, I was thinking of English writing about the working classes in the 1930s or before, D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, Orwell's *Road to Wigan Pier* and Walter Greenwood's *Love on the Dole*, and the social realism of the 1950s and 1960s, Alan Sillitoe's short stories, his *Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, and Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey*. All these writers, with the exception of Orwell, reclaim the literary value of orality, the expressive cadences and accents of various nonstandard *dialects* of English and reject previous caricature and stereotypes of the fourth estate. Rodoreda, on the other hand, reclaims the literary value of a Catalan *language* that had been repressed over the centuries and was being suppressed by the Francoist dictatorship and does that through the narrative of a woman at the end of the 1950s surveying the events in her life from 1930, a narrative that is shot through with language and images that she has acquired over the years, "ghosted", as it were, by a Rodoreda who was from a different social class and *barri* but had herself experienced the horrors of war and civil war. It is understated politically, and that can be understood both in terms of the woman's character and the fact the novel was to be published in a Fascist dictatorship. In my related reading and research I was more in search of an adequate "structure of feeling" for the translation, to adapt Raymond Williams's well-known term—the right emotional, social, as well as linguistic ambience for the protagonist's stream of consciousness and the characters swimming therein.

I hadn't read the previous translations (or the scholarly critiques of them) as I prefer to be on my last draft before taking that step. However, I was familiar with the titles, and they were already a challenge because I didn't like either. I preferred O'Shiel's *The Pigeon Girl* to Rosenthal's *The Time of the Doves*: it reflects part of the reality of the protagonist, though it totally identifies her with the pigeons and her changes of name from baptismal Natàlia to the nickname her first husband-to-be gives her—Colometa or Pidghey—to her final metamorphosis into the Madam Natàlia she becomes with her second marriage to the war-wounded grocer and slight ascension on the social scale. I felt the second title was sentimental and inaccurate. Although dove can also mean pigeon, both in the UK and the US, pigeons are usually pigeons—birds that inhabit wild cities, towns and woods in their hundreds of thousands and are also bred for racing by pigeon fanciers throughout Spain, where until quite recently they were very commonly eaten—while doves are pure white, exist in much smaller numbers, usually in captivity, and have long been symbols of purity and peace, a symbolism reinforced by Picasso and pacifists. In Catalan, *colom* can mean both, but in

the novel they are clearly pigeons. David Rosenthal makes the change in the text and the title and brings an unwitting air of unreality to the novel—how come all these doves all of a sudden in Barcelona?—and a sentimental touch to the relative peace established towards the end of the novel. I raised these issues with my first Virago editor shortly after signing the contract when I saw Virago was already advertising the novel as *The Time of the Doves*. She saw the logic of my arguments for *Diamond Square*: physical location, the various ironies, the poverty and the gem, the hard decisions the heroine takes yet the spontaneity of her reactions . . . My second editor saw the logic, too, though she pointed out that the marketing department thought it seemed too “English” a title and that any change of title would have to be agreed with the Rodoreda estate. She also pointed out that *Diamond Square* evoked nothing of Barcelona for English readers—echoing Diana Athill’s comment from the 1960s. As I read and reread, and wrote and rewrote, I sent her a number of suggestions shaped by the interpretive horizons I was opening up. In the end, the Rodoreda estate insisted on retaining *Diamond Square*, and *In Diamond Square* was born.

I decided to read Vasily Grossman’s *Life and Fate*, translated by Robert Chandler, and their descriptions of the siege of Stalingrad, the struggle to eat and survive and the particular suffering and resilience of women, alone or with children, their men at the front, and it made me reflect on its title—of such general implications—and spin off a series of possible titles that were neither geographically nor historically specific, all related to the concept of *A Woman at War*, the central theme transcending any Catalan connections. As I drafted, that theme was the general focus for my interpretive choice of words for the protagonist’s self-characterisation within the autobiographical narrative: this is a novel that belongs to world literature because war is global and the essential traumas of war are similar, whatever the local context and differences. The heroine’s reactions are intense, mirroring what Rodoreda refers to in her prologue as the state of seeing “the world through the eyes of a child, in a constant state of wonder” and the “fact that she feels at a loss in the midst of the world”, the latter sense of loss being “the only thing in common with me”. Her heroine, after all, experiences life as a working-class girl and woman, and that Rodoreda was not, though her literary achievement is, precisely, to have created a female working-class voice in all its complexity. The difficulties in reading her narrative don’t stem from any Joycean modernism in the Catalan but from a prose that reflects a consciousness attempting to describe rooms, houses, characters the heroine finds exotic and alien.

As a result of this translator’s developing parallel stream of consciousness I decided to translate the characters’ names, which in Catalan are highly suggestive in terms of class: without translation the most important remain opaque, if not vaguely exotic. The carpenter is Quimet: Quim, the common abbreviation of the first name Joaquim, is given a diminutive twist, the “-et” denoting friendliness, intimacy and camaraderie. Quim, in English, has the

added distraction for readers of being an archaic sexual term. I chose “Joe”. The name of Joe’s closest friend, Cintet, has gone through a similar transformation: Cint, the common abbreviation of Jacint, in itself rather nineteenth century and stiff in flavour, has received the diminutive treatment. I went for “Ernie”. Joe’s other close friend, Mateu, Matthew, is a slightly more petty bourgeois character, hence no diminutive in either language, and the biblical reference. The other key first names are those of the heroine. She is baptised Natàlia, a name that can remain as Natalia in English, vaguely Russian, vaguely Romantic or novelettish, a name that speaks of a mother who has high hopes for her daughter, a novelist thinking of Tolstoy and even anarchist Gràcia culture that warmed to Tolstoy because of his anti-feudal ideas on land ownership. Early on, Joe tells her that from now on she will be “Colometa”, or “Little Pigeon”, and this is before she knows that their life together will be dominated by pigeon breeding. For her, it denotes tender affection; for Joe, tenderness also, but possibly with an eye on a future pigeon loft; for the English reader, the Catalan suggests nothing but a slightly romantic liquid sound that will be vocalised wrongly. I chose “Pidghey”, a word that immediately releases numerous reactions, both positive and negative, from the “pidghey” used in Pokémon adventure stories to the “pidghey” that evokes the “flying dustbin”, scourge of Ken Livingstone and gentrified London, and definitively a class apart.

The woman-in-wartime focus, particularly under the influence of the reading of Grossman/Chandler, led to an inner debate on Rodoreda’s novel as world literature. This brought to the surface a parallel story that had been present all the time, but concealed, a highly personal connection that simultaneously, given the bellicose nature of the last century and this, must be as universal an experience as women and men can suffer and one that is the anchor to Pidghey’s narrative: the stoic struggle by women on the home front and the long tentacles of the aftermath of war. In short, my father, a provincial print worker, volunteered in 1939 for the Royal Army Medical Corps, as he told me, “when I saw the Spanish Republic fall”, but no doubt he was encouraged by his trainers at the St John Ambulance Brigade and by a youngster’s desire for adventure and excitement. This led him to France, where he was posted missing after Dunkirk—images of the French fleeing, a lifetime’s nightmares of body parts strewn over a château floor in Rouen—a brief five-week remission in Leeds before being dispatched to the Middle East, where he served for four years in a desert hospital. My mother raised their two daughters for six years, and they didn’t recognise the returning soldier late in 1945.

The re-encounter was even more of a bitter fruit when I was born in March 1946. Subsequently, my sisters left home, and as a child at primary school and grammar school I would listen, day in day out, to my mother’s tales of her life in prewar and war times in a Lincolnshire that was for her “a foreign land”. She had escaped working as a maid for an uncle to move to a rural backwater where her husband’s family saw her as an intruder with airs

above her station. She had left Sheffield to pick strawberries and tomatoes or sort bulbs, depending on the season, abandoning a tenement home in Pond Street at the heart of the cutlery city. She recalled Sheffield's socialist cycling clubs, visits to the opera, dancing the Charleston with flapper friends and the tensions in the streets where gangs fought and coal cellars were replenished for free by miners her carpenter father helped out during strikes.

Women and families throughout the world experienced and experience such dislocations, whether "dad" returns or not, whether it's the Ebro, Tobruk, Kandara or Haiphong. Absences of three or six years or "killed on active service" provide stories for strong, articulate, working-class women to tell until they die. That was the core of Rodoreda's originality in her novel, beyond the local valencies that Catalans find and English-language readers appreciate, and that was the spirit the translation should capture and in the course of so doing give the Catalan fiction its third afterlife in English, in the way that Grossman/Chandler speak for the suffering brought by war in their representation of conflict in Russia: the sense of the world in literature that only translation can bring.

The Virago edition includes at my suggestion Mercè Rodoreda's prologue—the previous English translations don't—where she articulates what she wanted to achieve as a Catalan novelist publishing under a dictatorship and then translated into over thirty languages: to take Barcelona's Diamond Square, what Pidgey and Catalans suffered on level terms of imagination, not as mendicant victims, into the canonical realms of world literature. She criticised the late Baltasar Porcel's view that Pidgey is "a simple soul":

I believe that Pidgey is more intelligent than Madame Bovary or Anna Karenina and nobody has ever dreamed of calling them simple souls. Perhaps that is because they were rich, wore silk and had servants.

Out of a class-driven nation, civil war and dictatorship Rodoreda created the classic novel of the "servant" class and war, and she did so by imprinting on her stream of memories Pidgey's fascination with the things she sees and her desire to describe them in words, *whatever* her mood or stage in life. In her prologue, she notes how narrators had been interested in "things" long before Robbe-Grillet and the *nouveau roman*.

When I had finished my sixth draft and sent the translation to my editor, I finally looked at the previous translations and scholarly articles written about them, knowing that I would still be fine-tuning the translation over subsequent edits to the final proofs and preparing to write this essay.

I came to two scholarly articles written as critiques of the first two translations. The first, by Helena Miguélez-Carballeira (2003), had a provocative title: "Language and Characterisation in Mercè Rodoreda's *La plaça del Diamant*: Towards a Third Translation". The article leans towards O'Shiel's translation in terms of its rhythm and has a feminist focus. Even so,

Miguélez-Carballeira makes no reference to the Irishness of O'Shiel's voice (she refers to her "British translation" as opposed to the "American translation") or to the fact that the narrative is retrospective, by a mature woman who may have lacked higher education but was a product of Gràcia with its urban artisan and working-class culture and had gained further education through hard experience. O'Shiel's lexical choices often raise "the character's narrative position above that of an educationally naïve woman" (Miguélez-Carballeira 2003, 103). This brings us back with a vengeance to Porcel's view of Pidgey as a "simple soul": she is a "prototype of guilelessness or endurance", her narrative is "escriptura parlada" or "conversational, unmediated speech" (104). Though Miguélez-Carballeira is at pains to describe the process of Pidgey's maturation ("writing towards self-knowledge"), she wrongly stigmatises her as a "silenced, dominated character who eventually gains access to action through dialogical construction" (108). When Pidgey and Joe first meet, she is not silenced or dominated: she is doing well in her terms and is excited by his approach, and if she gives up her current boyfriend, it is because she finds Joe more appealing. This critic also oversimplifies when she characterises the translation as "foreignizing", adopting Venuti's binary opposition, because it includes the odd footnote and doesn't erase some of the cultural references as Rosenthal's does. O'Shiel's strategies are more complex, as we have noted, in terms of the Irishness and translation of adjectives.

Miguélez-Carballeira's criticism of Rosenthal's translation is accurate inasmuch as he "translates into exact terms what Pidgey struggles to express, rather than portray her actual struggle" (117). However, her wish to make the novel a "feminist" text leads her to two conclusions that are questionable. Pidgey's detailed descriptions of her physical environment are influenced as much by class as by gender. I also think that her oblique references to war are not a result of her "woman's lack of understanding of war" (119). They are more like understatements: she is constantly confronted with the war and the need to react to it. There are clear theoretical limitations on Miguélez-Carballeira's perceptions of both the novel and its translations in their struggle to express Natalia's complex stream of consciousness, and yet she urges a third translator to follow the insights of recent scholarship! Natalia is described as "a working-class woman with a limited command of language, often barely articulate" (120), yet the whole novel is Pidgey's retrospective narrative. The patronisingly assumed superiority of an academic's or a theorist's interpretations over a translator's—not to mention the marginalising of the narrator—is inevitably bolstered by discussion of "errors" in both translations.

Two years later Dominic Keown, a Catalan scholar at Cambridge University, published an even more savage critique of Rosenthal's translation in the academic journal *Modern Language Review*. His title, "No Time for the Doves? Intrusion and Redrafting in the English Translation of *La plaça del Diamant*", only half indicates where Keown wants to take his



readers. The article combines a negative view of the translation—though he is “not primarily concerned with the listing of mistranslations”, he will do so with exclamation marks in brackets to underline the translator’s sins—with a sardonic contempt for translation itself, “a notoriously parlous activity” (2005, 659). His own yardstick for evaluation prioritises a narrow nationalist approach to Catalan literature itself that Rodoreda never espoused (we have seen her references to Tolstoy and Flaubert) but that is prevalent in the more conservative quarters of the Catalan literary establishment. The novel’s “down-trodden protagonist and her tortured attempts at survival” (659) thus become symbolic of suffering experienced “collectively by a nation whose existence was similarly compromised so savagely by the exclusive uniformity of Franco’s Spain” (659). What about the oppression of working women, anarchists, socialists and republicans that was uniform across Spain, Portugal, Italy and Germany under a variety of jackboots?

With remarkable sleight of hand, the literary quality of Rodoreda’s Catalan prose becomes “a defence against Franco’s dictatorship” (660) in its *purity*. While it is certainly true that Rodoreda’s writing is a supreme literary development of Catalan, it is so in the context of a democratising theme that is symbolic of suffering and struggle across Europe by “ordinary” people. Keown belittles that theme on behalf of a narrow conception of Catalan nationalism: “the point is crucial as, despite its proletarian ethos, linguistic purity and correctness are a major feature of the original and, as such, should be privileged in turn in the target language” (659)—a difficult challenge given that writers of English are not obsessed by “purity” and have created a tradition where every variety can be given literary form. The Cambridge scholar is taking his lead from critic and ideologue Josep Miquel Sobrer, who had praised Rodoreda for never abandoning “grammatical norms while creating a discourse that is realistic for the reader . . . an imitation of popular speech without ever having resort to commonplace misuse and errors in language however usual they may be in the street” (660). Such thinkers would hate to see a Catalan James Kelman emerge.

The wilful desire to efface the social context of the novel and the vigorous characterisation of what he believes to be close to “the heart of the native population” in its collective interpretation pushes Keown into a series of somersaulting contradictions and outrageous affirmations in an apparent desire to seem even-handed in his critique of the translation. He praises Rosenthal for having Pidgley address her employer as “ma’am”, which he judges to be a choice that captures “the naturalness and fluency of the original to an extent that the more inhibited and uncertain formula in Britain could not” (665). However, it is Keown who has the inhibitions, not “British” English, or indeed Rosenthal’s American English, which he deems occasionally more “common or streetwise” than the “demotic yet primly *innocent* tone of the narrative” (665, my emphasis). And it is not simply the narrative that is too common because he goes on to criticise

vulgarity that is more readily coarse than we would expect from our “*prim and proper* protagonist” (666, my emphasis). Of course, there can be as many readings as readers, but Keown is an academic scholar and cannot ignore the many passages that are far from puritanical, such as when the narrator describes her first encounters with Joe at a dance or in the Parc Güell, with eager excitement, or her “week of wedding nights” with Joe, in a delicate manner that also conveys her enjoyment—the sensual description of his body, calqued on a passage by the Renaissance Catalan classic writer Bernard Metge—or the way she is exhilarated by her friend Julie’s account of her torrid night in a requisitioned mansion with her soldier lover, wishing she could enjoy something similar, or the evident sexual chemistry in the air during her conversations with Matthew or even the tender way she relates her nights with her war-wounded and hence sexually disabled second husband, in particular the touching way she caresses the nether part of his body when she comes back from her nocturnal excursion along the streets of Gràcia after scouring her name—PIDGEY—with a sexually symbolic knife on the wall of the building where she had lived with Joe, her children and their pigeons. With this act she publicly commemorates that part of her life and bids farewell to it in order to embrace her life as Madam Natalia. It is true that she runs shy of recounting the events in her sexual life to her prurient friend Mrs Enriqueta, but that is a mark of strength of character, hardly of primness. A reader of any of the translations will have a closer, less partial experience of *La plaça del Diamant* than the reader of these scholarly articles. Any translation errors are minor in comparison to the valid reinterpretations the respective translators have brought to English readers.

The critical practice in the translations grapples forcefully with every aspect of the text. They both received excellent reviews and sold beyond a first edition. Indeed, David Rosenthal’s translation is still in print with Graywolf (Saint Paul, Minnesota, 1993). Keown engages in more somersaults as, on the one hand, he claims that Rosenthal “utterly dissipates the rhythmic intensity of the asyndetic chiasmus in the original” and loses “the intense zeugmatic description of the fishmonger” (669). After such a donnish blast, pompous and power wielding in its intentions, Keown’s conclusion is bathetic in its absolute meaninglessness: “Finally, we are left with the impression, purely and simply, that an elementary and straightforward rendering of *La plaça del Diamant* might well have proved less problematic and more impactful, allowing the narrative voice to resonate as engagingly in the target version as it does in the original” (672). How can the translation of a complex literary work ever be “elementary and straightforward”? Is Pidgey’s highly original and combative narrative voice now reduced to being blandly engaging in what Keown denotes as its prim puritanism? Academic scholars should be more alert to the interpretive, *scholarly* moves and creativity of literary translators and less *de haut en bas* in their attitudes and their institutions.

## NOTE

1. All correspondence quoted here is held at the Mercè Rodoreda Archive at the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, Barcelona. My thanks to the archivists for providing such hospitable access to Rodoreda's papers. All translations of the correspondence are my own.

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### 3 Szymek from the Village and Joe from Missouri

#### Problems of Voice in Translating Wiesław Myśliwski's *Stone upon Stone*

*Bill Johnston*

This essay arose as a form of *praxis*, in Paulo Freire's (1972) sense of mindful reflection on professional practice. After completing the work of translating Polish writer Wiesław Myśliwski's 1984 novel *Kamień na kamieniu* (*Stone upon Stone*), I found myself curious about the kinds of small- and large-scale dilemmas and decisions that had led to the text taking the shape it did. What follows, then, is not an account of the process itself so much as a post factum discussion. I'd call it an analysis, except that analysis involves breaking things down, while what I'm trying to do here is precisely the opposite—taking a large number of small instances and seeing what they add up to.

*Stone upon Stone* is a magnificent novel. At 534 pages, it is also a sizeable one; it took the author ten years to complete. It tells the story—or perhaps better, stories—of Szymek Pietruszka, a farmer living in an unidentified Polish village. Its nonlinear narrative, organized in roughly thematic ways into a series of nine chapters with titles such as “Brothers”, “The Land”, “Weeping” and “Hallelujah”, comprises interwoven episodes that, taken together, tell Szymek's life story. He is born around 1920 (no dates are mentioned in the novel), and the stories he tells take us through his childhood in prewar Poland, his experiences as a unit commander in the Resistance during the war and his postwar life up to about the 1960s—in other words, the first two decades of communist rule.

*Stone upon Stone* is often seen as belonging to the *nurt chłopski* or peasant tradition in Polish literature. Yet this is no ordinary “peasant novel” (if there even is such a thing). The crucial element in the book is *voice*—primarily the voice of Pietruszka himself. The text is overwhelmingly and unwaveringly *oral* in nature; it reads like a vast theatrical monologue. Even the voices of other characters come through in this way, for there is relatively little dialogue, and instead, a small number of key characters—the chairman of the district administration, the village priest, the woman who runs the local grocery store—are given monologues of their own. The principal translation problem, then, was how to create an English-language voice for Szymek. This challenge went far beyond the innumerable local questions of how to translate particular words, phrases or concepts. It is the creation of Szymek's voice in English that I will focus on here.

Many attempts at rendering peasant speech in translation have been less than successful. A notable example in English is Michael H. Dziewicki's 1938 translation of Nobel Prize-winning Polish author Władysław Reymont's 1909 novel *Chłopi* (*The Peasants*). Here's a glimpse of Dziewicki's rendering:

The cart had got as far as the fence, when Vitek showed himself among the apple-trees.

"I had forgotten . . . Vitek! Prrru, prrru! Vitek, I say! you will take the kine to the meadow . . . And tend them well, or you'll get such a flogging as you won't forget."

"Oh, you may kiss—" the lad cried audaciously, and vanished on the other side of the barn.

"None of your impudence. If I get down, you'll see!" (Reymont 1938, 42)

I don't wish to dwell on the shortcomings of Dziewicki's translation—it's only too easy to criticise older translations, and that's not my intention here. The issues should be apparent from this extract. Rather than dwelling on what *not* to do, I'm more interested in describing what *can* be done, and specifically on what I in fact did do in striving to give Szymek an appropriate voice. In my discussion I'm going to make use of the notion of "remainder", a concept that Lawrence Venuti (2004) borrows from Jean-Jacques Lecercle (1990). It seems to me that the Dziewicki translation contains rather too much of particular kinds of remainder for it to function effectively in English. The rest of this essay will concern my own efforts to exclude as much undesirable remainder as possible from the translation and to retain as much control as I could over what remainder remained.

As Venuti points out, any translation from a foreign text, especially a literary one, involves "the release of a domestic remainder" (2004, 485). He goes on:

The foreign text is rewritten in domestic dialects and discourses, registers and styles, and this results in the production of textual effects that signify only in the history of the receiving language and culture. The translator may produce these effects to communicate the foreign text, trying to invent domestic analogues for foreign forms and themes. But the result will always go beyond any communication [i.e., of the original content and style] to release target-oriented possibilities of meaning. (Venuti 2004, 485)

In this chapter, I will use the notion of remainder to structure my reflections on the process of rendering *Stone upon Stone* into English.

As mentioned earlier, given the profoundly oral nature of the text, it is language that is the crucial ingredient in the Polish, and the same needed to be true of the English translation. In other words, what is important here

are not the events and stories conveyed, but the voice in which they are told. (My instinctive feeling in this regard was confirmed in conversation with the author.) And it is here that one of Myśliwski's greatest achievements can be seen. He created, for the purpose of the book, a Polish which, though it is recognisably "country Polish", is equally recognisably *not* the dialect of any particular region. In fact the author worked hard to create a kind of pan-peasant Polish that identifies the characters—and hence, because it is rendered in a first-person narrative, the book itself—as anchored in a very specific *class* or social milieu, but not a specific place. In other words, it is located in class space, not geographical space. In fact, the latter analogue—the refusal to locate the village of the novel geographically, or even to name it—works powerfully to support the former.

It is important to point out that Szymek's voice is also highly individual. He is known for his facility with words. Many of the jobs he takes on—as barber, as the clerk responsible for civil weddings in the district administration—involve the telling of stories or the making of speeches, and we learn that he excels at such things. His voice, as well as being a peasant voice, is equally distinctively his own. His language is pithy, expressive, filled with humour and aphoristic wisdom. His is a voice that captivates the reader. He is, as the expression goes, a good talker. Dialect, though, presents its own problems in translation. Even if the village *were* located in geographic space, the problems of translating dialect are only too familiar to translators. In his *Literary Translation: A Practical Guide*, Clifford Landers's advice about translating dialect is like *Punch* magazine's famous advice to persons about to marry: Don't. Landers explains: "[D]ialect is always tied, geographically and culturally, to a milieu that does not exist in the target-language setting. Substitution of an 'equivalent' dialect is foredoomed to failure" (2001, 117).

For the reasons outlined here, it seemed vital to find a language for the book—which is to say, a voice for Szymek—that clearly marked it in terms of class, and also in terms of what linguist Michael Halliday (Halliday and Hasan 1989) has called *mode*—in this case, the orality of the language—without locating it in any particular variety of English. Of course, as always with translations the proof of the pudding is in the eating. And like many translators, I'd rather leave to other readers the evaluation of whether, or to what extent, the final form of the translation succeeds in its encounter with the issues outlined here. What I can do here is mention a few of the moments where I felt I had hit upon the kind of language—of voice—that I was looking for. Indeed, much as an actor often begins to build his or her representation of a character through a single telling gesture, cadence or prop, so I believe the translator can use certain linguistic felicities as a point of entry in constructing the voice of a writer or a book, and that is what happened in the present case. For my own purposes, for instance, I first truly heard Szymek's voice in English when, at the beginning of chapter 2 (already fifty-five pages into the novel), he says: "There was a road ran through our

village.” This simple structure, missing the relative pronoun “that” which standard grammar requires, to my mind captured the voice I was imagining. I began to build the voice from this and a few other moments like it. These included sentences like: “Pudgy little guy, always sweating up a storm”; “Let him at least learn tailoring, because what could he do here at home”; for the direct speech of another character, “hand to God I’ve not smoked these fifty years”; and expressions such as “till kingdom come”, “time was”, “make no mistake”. Let me emphasise here that what is felicitous about these phrases is not that they are especially accurate renditions of the particular Polish phrase (though that is naturally important too), but that they capture the voice (or voices) I was looking for. From that point on, the translation process involved a series of decisions about inclusions and exclusions. I’ll look first at what I tried to keep out, then at what I tried to keep in.

The danger of undesirable remainder begins with the very word *peasant*. In Polish, *chłop* is no longer used to refer to a social class, but the word itself is still in current usage; it can be applied, without undue prejudice, to mean simply a person who lives and works in the country. It is also used to mean something like “guy”, with an additional connotation of someone strong and muscular. It lacks the direct linguistic association that the English *peasant* has with a lack of culture or sophistication. In previous novels, I’ve often translated *chłop* as “farmer”, “country person”, “villager” or the like. I continued this practice in *Stone upon Stone*. While this obviously detracted from the text in certain ways, it seemed clear to me that in this particular case the supposed ideal of a one-to-one equivalence was totally impossible to attain and that the use of *peasant*, the most historically accurate option for *chłop*, would seriously misrepresent the original text in its English translation.<sup>1</sup>

In discussing with my editor at Archipelago, Jill Schoolman, some of the words and expressions I used in the first draft of the book that I shared with her—including some elements of language that had served as points of entry into building Szymek’s voice in English—it emerged that some of these sounded too “uneducated”. This was another remainder I did not wish to include. Szymek is not a great fan of reading (at one point he says he could never see the point of reading: “You read and read, and in the end it all went into the ground with you anyway”), but he is both literate and intelligent, as well as being what many an elementary teacher might describe as “highly verbal”, with immense reserves of self-expression. It was important not to make him sound like a village bumpkin. For this reason, we decided against expressions such as “there was two of us” or “there’s going to be hangings”, “the table that its legs fell off”, and other similar turns of phrase.

The other huge issue to face in such a translation is the US–British divide, a crevasse that as an Englishman working in America I personally straddle on a daily basis. At the very outset of the process I decided that I could only be true to one side at a time. Since I live and publish in the United States, and my main readership is likely to be here, Szymek had to sound American, not

British. For this reason, some of what an American friend of mine calls my “colourful expressions” had to go. The word *lads*, so perfect for the Polish *chłopaki* in being able to refer both to boys and young men, was not going to work; it needed to be removed. The same applied to certain (as it transpired) un-American turns of phrase such as “I’d be stood there” or “have a sit” and certain idioms like “to give someone what-for”, “get your own back” (meaning to take revenge) or “it’ll make no odds”. This too—British English—was an unacceptable remainder for an (imagined) American audience. Indeed, it was over this issue that Jill Schoolman jokingly created the character of Joe from Missouri, a Midwestern American reader who occasionally shrugged in incomprehension at certain Britishisms he encountered in the text. Jill and I agreed that if Joe from Missouri couldn’t understand it, it probably had to be excluded.

Of course, it needs to be pointed out that the “Americanness” of a text can only be invisible to an American audience—it’s a literary sleight of hand that only works in a given geographical and linguistic context. To other English-speaking readers, it will be the American expressions (*hollered, gotten, cusswords*) that stand out. Thus, even if this translation is considered successful, its success can only ever be local in place and time.

Yet the concept of “American English”, while immediately comprehensible to a Brit like myself, is in fact a very imprecise term. Although, as suggested earlier, to a British reader the text will seem clearly American, I wanted to keep it clean of particularly jarring or egregious forms that, not merely *being* American, actively call attention to themselves. For this reason there are no *ain’t*s in the book. *Gonna* and *wanna* appear only in the quoted speech of other characters, never in the narrator’s voice. I struggled with the word *because*. My first temptation was to use *’cus* or *’cuz*, but this too seemed to draw attention to itself. In direct speech, of which there’s a great deal in the book, especially the long monologues in voices other than the narrator’s, I eventually allowed myself *cause*, with no apostrophe—the apostrophe is a marker of eye dialect, something I wanted to avoid at all cost, since it always contains a reference to (and preference for) the “correct” standard form, whereas it was crucial that Szymek’s language be allowed to exist in its own right.<sup>2</sup> In this regard I took my lead from numerous authors I admire, including Cormac McCarthy, who gives us nonstandard speech as it comes (or more precisely, as he invents it) and lets it be itself, with non-apostrophised spellings like *somethin*, *ast* (for “asked”) or *Tain’t* (for “It ain’t”), to take a few random examples from his novel *Outer Dark* (1993).

The exclusion of British English, of eye dialect and of language perceived as uneducated are part of the attempts to limit the remainder present in the translation (an attempt, let us remember, that is only ever partial, though no less valuable and necessary for that). For similar reasons, rather like numerous translators of *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon literature, I strove to keep the number of Latinate words to a minimum, always preferring a word of Germanic origin where there was a viable choice, since a similar



preference has been widely attested by linguists in spoken English discourse. Another thing missing, by the way, are semi-colons. Very early on in the translation process I decided that the semi-colon, that most written of punctuation marks, didn't belong in Szymek's monologue. Part of my reason was to prevent the text from *looking* like written language—a further example of literary sleight of hand. Another reason for this decision was self-discipline—used as I am to translating wordy, self-consciously literate authors like Witold Gombrowicz and Jerzy Pilch, who revel in the written word, composing intricately constructed sentences in which semi-colons are an essential device regulating the cadences of the prose, I decided as I began work on *Stone upon Stone* that denying myself that option would serve as a constant reminder of what I was translating. I found this a very productive restriction and continued the practice throughout the book.

So much, then, for what *isn't* in the translation. What *is* in it? Well, I write this paragraph and the following ones in all humility, as a nonnative speaker and writer of American English; this was my attempt to imitate the rhythms of what might imprecisely be termed standard spoken American English as I perceive them and as they might be used to give Szymek from the village his English-language voice.

I have a colleague who told me she prepared for the translation of a late-nineteenth-century Polish novel by reading the works of Thomas Hardy. I believe this kind of preparation is dangerous since it runs the risk of introducing too much of the wrong kind of specific, identifiable remainder into a translated text (quite aside from the fact that I'd never want to even attempt to translate a nineteenth-century novel into nineteenth-century English). I also believe strongly that though there will always be a remainder, it is much more interesting and effective if this remainder is hard to pin down, like a sound whose source you cannot identify. I say more about this in the following. In thinking about Myśliwski's text, though in fact I found it impossible to bring to mind any English-language writer who might offer the danger of a model, there were conscious or unconscious general echoes in my mind of the kind of voice I was looking for. The profound orality of the language put me in mind of that great tradition in twentieth-century American writing of informal, accessible, spoken-sounding narration that I see (in a very simplistic manner) as leading from the likes of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway narrating *The Great Gatsby*, through J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*, to many contemporary writers. (A complementary tradition of deeply poetic and "difficult" authorial language might be seen to lead from William Faulkner to Cormac McCarthy and beyond.) In broad terms, it was this spoken, informal quality I was after, though with a much earthier feel that almost puts me in mind of Seamus Heaney and how he writes about writing. (It might be worth mentioning that one of the greatest joys of translation is precisely *imagining* a voice that doesn't yet exist in English and must be created from scratch, using bits and pieces of what one already has, plus whatever else the Muses pass along to one.)

Throughout the text, then, I employed stylistic features that mark the text as spoken rather than written language in English, without carrying any association with a particular region, class or language variety. Elision is used extensively, of course (*I've, he'll, they'd*, etc.). I also had to learn to write run-on sentences, something that James Joyce was fine with but most of us have conscientiously eschewed in formal writing. This was a hard prejudice to overcome, but after a while it felt wonderfully liberating, and I came to feel comfortable adding it to my stylistic repertoire. I also included other commonly attested features of spoken English, including the omission of initial pronouns (“Turned out I was right”; “Always works for me”) and initial modals (“You forgotten?”); various forms of fronting (“Mikus, he had his boy climb up in a tree”); widely used nonstandard forms of speech (“there was this sort of bindweed twirled across the top”); using *their* with a singular unknown antecedent (“Whoever he spares will have to walk on their own two feet”); use of *this* in place of the indefinite article (“Then all of a sudden there’s this banging noise”); omission of articles (“sky’s blue as a cornflower”); idiomatic expressions that I felt were sufficiently widely used not to be perceived as being attached to any particular variety (“not for all the tea in China”; “I’ll have your guts for garters!”; “You’re no spring chicken yourself”; “like there was no tomorrow”); other locutions that would be considered imprecise in written language (“they said on the radio”; “Some of them had hats that you didn’t even know what to call them”; “he’d push him aside and be all angry”). With all these features and more, the goal was to keep in some of the remainder—colloquial spoken English—but to exclude unwanted associations with *particular* English-language classes, regions, registers and so on.

As emphasised earlier, I was at pains *not* to imitate any particular style or dialect of English and so mostly restricted the kinds of language I drew on to spoken constructions that are very widely found across the United States, and often beyond. At the same time, I did want to deliberately set the text off-kilter at times to convey a sense of otherness that I hoped would be difficult if not impossible to locate specifically in linguistic space. (Such an effect is of course intensified by the foreignising element surely present in any translated text, and especially one set in a mid-twentieth-century Polish farming village, by definition remote in cultural space and time from any potential twenty-first-century American reader.) I introduced a couple of small linguistic elements borrowed from different places. I employed an expression used by my Geordie grandfather in north-east England to refer to something in a high place—he would say it was “up aheight”, and that phrase found its way into the translation. Also, I have spent a lot of time around Lakota Indians, and they have a particular way of using the word *here* as a contrastive link; this too I borrowed: “they said that the parents were Christians and that Jesus himself was christened, and here there’s a propeller instead of a Lord Jesus on the tomb”. I toyed with one or two other verbal quirks, like deliberately not inverting modal and pronoun after

*nor*—“nor I didn’t want to” rather than “nor did I want to”—but this drew too much attention to itself, so I abandoned it.

To give a flavour of the kind of voice I was looking for, here’s a short passage from chapter 5 about a new woman who has come to work at the district administration where Szymek is employed. This, more or less, is the voice I had imagined for Szymek Pietruszka in English:

Though on the other hand, why should I have trusted her. I didn’t even know her, and there’s always a bit of truth in gossip. Maybe she just knew how to cover her tracks. She wouldn’t have been the first one to set her sights on the chairman. He was the chairman, after all, and he could always make life difficult for you if you weren’t careful. What else could they have seen in him? Pudgy little guy, always sweating up a storm. But he knew how to turn on the charm. When he’d do his rounds of the offices in the morning he’d always have a nice word for each of them, smile at one, kiss the hand of another, stroke another one’s hair like a father. And he wore this big ring with a red stone, supposedly it was a keepsake from his father, he’d flash it in front of every girl. Except that when someone came from the county administration he’d slip it off and hide it in his drawer. Some people said it wasn’t anything to do with his father, that Maślanka had been a hog trader during the war and done well for himself. Whatever the truth was, after a guy like Rożek, whose every second word was “fuck,” because with him what was in his head was on his tongue, the new fellow was almost like a squire. So she could have been one of those that gave in to temptation. (Myśliwski 2010, 251–252)

The Polish original reads as follows:

Choć z drugiej strony czemu miałbym jej wierzyć. Nie znałem jej przecież, a w ludzkich plotkach zawsze jest coś prawdy. Może się tylko tak potrafi maskować. A za przewodniczącym niejedna się w gminie uganiała, w końcu to przewodniczący i zawsze mógł zaszkodzić. Bo cóż by innego w nim widziały? Nieduży, grubawy, a jeszcze wciąż się poccił. Ale przymilny to on umiał być. Z rana, kiedy obchodził pokoje, każdej coś miłego powiedział, do tej się uśmiechnął, tę w rękę pocałował, tę pogłaskał po włosach jak ojciec. Jeszcze nosił wielki pierścień z czerwonym okiem na palcu, niby pamiątka po ojcu, to każdej tym pierścieniem pod oczy błyskał. Tylko że kiedy przyjeżdżał ktoś z powiatu, zdejmował ten pierścień z palca i chował go do biurka. Mówili niektórzy, że to nie żadna pamiątka po ojcu, tylko świński w czasie wojny handlował i majątku się dorobił. Wszystko jedno, jak było, ale po takim Rożku, u którego co drugie słowo było kurwa, bo co miał w głowie, to i w mowie, ten prawie za dziedzica mógł być. To mogła się i ona na niego skusić. (Myśliwski 2008, 249)

Of course, how Joe from Missouri actually reads Szymek from the village cannot be predicted, least of all by the translator. It is illuminating, however, to conceptualise the translation process in retrospect around the notion of remainder and to reflect on what was deliberately omitted and what deliberately added, as well as to speculate on what remainder the translation has, often unwittingly, retained.

## NOTES

1. An even more problematic failure in this regard was the Polish word *ziemia*, which is crucial to the novel yet simply cannot be rendered using a single term throughout the book. I translated it variously, depending on context, as “land”, “earth”, “ground”, “soil” and “dirt”. My only hope is that these words taken together—particularly the ones with greater semantic overlap like “earth”, “ground” and “land”—would together create for the English-language reader a semantic network that at a subconscious level would draw connections between the related terms. It is of course impossible to say whether such a hope is reasonable, let alone successful.
2. For more on the politics of displaying spoken language in written form, see Ochs (1979).

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# 4 Understanding through Translation

## Rilke's *New Poems*

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For Lutz Näfelt

... translation is a kind of writing, just as all writing, however original, involves processes that are a kind of translation.

— Michael Hamburger (1989, 70)

### TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION

Rilke is one of the most popular poets in English translation. My own interest in his poetry developed through reading translations before I acquired fluency in German. I was struck by the remarkable way in which his images blend inner and outer experience—the way in which Rilkean *phanopoeia* affirms an intimate relationship between the visible and the invisible, immanence and transcendence.<sup>1</sup> Michael Hamburger characterises this aspect of Rilke's imagery as follows:

One of Rilke's most constant metaphorical resorts—and one that brings us up against his central preoccupation [. . .] with perception and the transformation of perception into a would-be religious “service” to the thing perceived—is his attribution of will, purpose or activity to outward phenomena not usually credited with those attributes. His most striking metaphors [. . .] rest on the interchangeability or reciprocity of subjective and objective processes. (Hamburger 1979, 238)

After beginning to read Rilke in German I was astonished by two central features of his poetry, of which I previously had little awareness: the strict verse forms in which the majority of his poems are written (the sonnet being his most cherished form); and the meticulous *melopoeic* composition of his poems. This experience entailed a significant revision in my understanding of Rilke. Not only was Rilke a master of the *phanopoeic* possibilities of poetry, he was also a formal poet with an impeccable ear.

Rilke was an avid translator and a diligent student of foreign languages (see Dieterle 2004). Over the course of his life he not only translated works from fifty-six authors and eight different languages, he also wrote a substantial amount of original poetry in languages other than German (primarily French, but also Russian). His engagement with foreign languages contrasts strongly with many contemporary Anglophone poets. Not only is Rilke one of the most widely read poets in translation, he is also a major influence on Anglophone poets who possess little knowledge of German. In her review of William Gass's book on Rilke and translation (Gass 1999), Marjorie Perloff recounts this telling anecdote:

At a recent poetry festival, a highly respected American poet, when asked about her influences, spoke movingly about her special attachment to Rilke. Afterwards, I asked her if she could read Rilke in German. She said no. I then asked her what translation she was using. She couldn't quite remember. "Have you ever wanted to take time off to learn a little German so that you might have a sense of Rilke's sound and rhythm?" I asked. She merely shrugged, as if to say that such study would be too much of a chore for a successful mid-career poet like herself. (Perloff 2001, 504)

The purpose of these reflections is not to reprimand contemporary poets who make no effort to learn foreign languages, but to indicate that *translation is interpretation* and the *reception of literature in translation is the reception of an interpretation of foreign literature*. All interpretations offer limited perspectives in contrast to the inexhaustibility of the original text; a translation is special in that it interprets the source poem through the composition of a new poem in the target language.

In contrast to the limited perspective of translations, the translator occupies an exceptionally privileged position. The translator is not only a mediator and interpreter of "world literature", the *process* of translation also enables the deepest appreciation of the original text. It facilitates a distinctive mode of understanding that takes place *between two languages* and uniquely combines the skills of the scholar, the writer and the comparative linguist. The mental oscillation between languages relativises the grammatical structures of the source and target languages and thus transcends the single linguistic horizon of a normal reader of the source text. The search for equivalent meanings in the target language facilitates a deeper awareness of the specific cultural, historical and synchronic connotations of expressions in the source language. J. M. Coetzee makes the pertinent point that "translating the text becomes part of the process of finding—and making its meaning; translating turns out to be only a more intense and more demanding form of what we do whenever we read" (1999). Furthermore, in attempting to *create* a new poem in the target language which reproduces the meaning (in the broadest sense) of the source poem, the translator becomes acutely aware of the *dynamic totality* of the source poem.

Both translators and poets know that a poem involves a dynamic balance of countless elements. The alteration of a single word can shift this balance. The alteration of phonemes, for instance, can make a specific constellation of words resonate through assonance, consonance and rhymes. A seemingly local change thus affects the entire poem like a raindrop sending out ripples across a pond's surface. In a description of one of Cézanne's portraits, Rilke brilliantly depicts the way in which every daub of colour interacts and dynamically maintains the painting's equilibrium. He encapsulates this insight in the statement, "it's as if every place were aware of all the other places" (1985, 80). The translator has an analogous experience in relation to the source poem, but with "place" substituted by "moment". The dynamic interaction of every moment of the poem—its *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia* (Pound 1929)—produces a *total effect* that constitutes its unique integrity. The confrontation with this totality is simultaneously the experience of the *impossibility* of reproducing the same totality in the target language. A brief consideration of phonemic differences suffices to illustrate this impossibility. While in translating a news report the aesthetic qualities of phonemes are irrelevant, in translating a poem they are of utmost significance. A translation of a French poem into German is *never* going to really *sound* French. Solely at the level of *melopoeia* perfect translation is impossible, let alone the way in which *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia* and *logopoeia* mutually determine one another. Even if the translator reproduces a rhyme scheme and strives to render a similar complexity of assonance and alliteration, the specific combination of phonemes will differ in the target language. The translator is in a similar situation to a painter who is asked to produce a copy of a famous painting but with a different palette. Nevertheless, the translator can attempt to create a totality that approximates the values of the original poem within the cultural, historical and linguistic context of the target language.

Each decision of the translator entails sacrifices (see Lefevere 1975). If the source poem is in formal verse, the translator may choose an equivalent form in the target language. This decision will generally involve a loss in semantic precision and an alteration of images in order to maintain the rhyme and meter. Cultural-historical considerations also inform the translator's decisions. Does the fact that many of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* are written in the sonnet form mean that the translator should produce a rhyming sonnet in English? These poems were published in 1907 and 1908, shortly before the advent of free verse in English poetry. Since Rilke's time free verse has become the dominant form of poetry, and our ears have changed. Is a strict formal translation, then, an accurate rendering of Rilke for the contemporary Anglophone reader?

My aim in this essay is to *translate the experience of translating*. More specifically, I will examine both the difficulties and joys of translating Rilke's German into English, with special attention to his *Neue Gedichte* (*New Poems*, 1907) and *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* (*New Poems: The Other*

Part, 1908), which include some of his most celebrated poems, among them “Der Panther” (“The Panther”) and “Archaischer Torso Apollos” (“Archaic Torso of Apollo”). I will proceed by comparing various translations (including my own) of Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte* and discuss illuminating difficulties, uncertainties and interpretive decisions faced by translators.<sup>2</sup>

## TRANSLATING THE *NEUE GEDICHTE*

What is relinquished in translation relates to what the translator regards as the most distinctive characteristics of the source text. Since the present theme is Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte*, before proceeding to the comparison of divergent translations it is important to outline key characteristics of this collection.

The *Neue Gedichte* and *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil*, which form a single collection, were published in 1907 and 1908 respectively. Since 1902 (after leaving the artists’ colony in Worpswede, Germany) Paris had been Rilke’s main place of residence, and his keen interest in contemporary visual art exercised a major influence on his poetry. He initially moved to Paris in order to write a commissioned monograph on Rodin, and his deep admiration of Rodin’s works shaped his poetic ideals (see Rilke 1996, vol. 4, 401–513). After attending the Cézanne retrospective at the Salon d’Automne from 6–22 October 1907 on an almost daily basis (Rilke 1996, vol. 4, 594–636), Rilke’s appreciation of Cézanne gradually began to eclipse Rodin (see Rilke and Rodin 2001). A third major influence on the poetics of the *Neue Gedichte* was Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal* (see the following).

These three figures determined Rilke’s poetry in intimately connected ways. The engagement with visual art encouraged him to become a more attentive observer of the world and to *translate perceptual experience* (into his poetry) in an analogous manner to visual artists (Fischer 2007). In a letter of 1926 Rilke recounts that he wrote the first (and most famous) of the *Neue Gedichte*, “Der Panther”, after following Rodin’s advice to work like a painter or sculptor by copying nature (1950, 517). While Cézanne did not significantly influence the first volume of the *Neue Gedichte*, a major reason for Rilke’s appreciation of Cézanne lay in the fact that the French painter realised an ideal that closely related to his poetic aspirations. One of these aspirations was the development of a kind of *objectivity*, what Rilke calls a “sachliches Sagen” (“objective saying”), in contrast to a sentimental description of experience (1996, vol. 4, 624). Cézanne’s paintings and Baudelaire’s poem “Une Charogne” (“A Carcass”), which unflinchingly describes a rotting carcass, were exemplars in this regard.

The most distinctive genre of poetry in the *Neue Gedichte* is known as the *Dinggedicht*—the “thing-poem” (see Müller 2004). Rilke’s “thing-poems” generally involve the vivid depiction of a perceived object or process, in a way that resembles the visuality of painting and sculpture.



Descriptive language, simile and metaphor play an important role in imaginatively evoking the perceived world (*phanopoeia*). Syntax, lineation and other *logopoeic* aspects also serve in the evocation of perceptions. Thus, the enjambment of lines between verses in “Römische Fontäne” (“Roman Fountain”) mimics the movement of water from one basin into another. The second sentence (and first proper sentence) of “Der Turm” (“The Tower”) runs through three verses and numerous relative clauses (and ends with a colon), thereby imitating the winding movement and constricted experience of climbing a narrow tower. Assonance and alliteration (*melo-poeia*) synaesthetically evoke perceptual qualities, and the tight verse forms suggest an almost sculptural sense of self-containment. Rilke’s preference for the sonnet and variations of this form (Baudelaire was one major influence here; see Ryan 1972, 55–65) serves his concentrated depictions, and its turns (*volta*) are masterfully manipulated in the evocation of epiphanies (see, for instance, the end of “Die Gazelle” [“The Gazelle”]). Furthermore, there are numerous ekphrastic poems in the collection, “Archaischer Torso Apollos” (“Archaic Torso of Apollo”) being only the most famous, and even poems not directly concerned with art works resemble ekphrastic poems, such as “Selbst-Bildnis” (“Self-Portrait”). In short, at the level of both content and form, many of the *Neue Gedichte* translate characteristics closely associated with the visual arts (though *temporal movement* plays a more significant role).

In July 1907 (a month after closely observing gazelles in the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris; see Fischer 2007) Rilke composed the sonnet “Die Gazelle” (“The Gazelle”), whose subtitle is the name of the species, *Gazella Dorcas*. As this poem thematises the difficulty of translating the appearance of the gazelle into language, it is an appropriate example with which to begin a closer analysis of translation. The first quatrain reads as follows:

Verzauberte: wie kann der Einklang zweier  
 erwählter Worte je den Reim erreichen,  
 der in dir kommt und geht, wie auf ein Zeichen.  
 Aus deiner Stirne steigen Laub und Leier . . .  
 (Rilke 1996, vol. 1, 469–470)

Enchanted one: how can the consonance of two  
 chosen words ever attain the rhyme,  
 that in you comes and goes, as if to a sign.  
 Out of your brow rise leaf and lyre . . .  
 (trans. Fischer and Näfelt, in Rilke 2007, 176)

While this quatrain explores the seeming impossibility of translating the gazelle into language, the present concern is the difficulty of translating Rilke’s exquisitely crafted German sonnet into English. The translator’s first challenge is the opening word, “Verzauberte”.

It is far easier to invent words in German than in English. Any verb can be substantivised through adding a neuter article (“das” or “ein”) and capitalising its infinitive form. Thus “übersetzen” (to translate) becomes “das Übersetzen” (the translating). Not only verbs, but also adjectives can easily be transformed into nouns. If I want to refer to a male who is lost I can simply take the adjective, “verloren”, precede it by a masculine article, capitalise the first letter and add the correct inflection, which generates the noun “der Verlorene” (“the lost [male]”). Similarly, “blind” becomes “der Blinde” (“the blind [man]”)—the title of a poem in the *Neue Gedichte*. This facility to create adjectival nouns enables a precision in German that is difficult to reproduce in English. The sense of an adjectival noun is entirely determined by the specific attribution of the adjective, whereas the addition of a separate noun in English introduces further connotations.

“Die Gazelle” begins with the adjectival noun, “Verzauberte”, derived from “verzaubert”, meaning “enchanted”. A “literal” translation of “Verzauberte” would be “Enchanted”, but in English this reads as an adjective rather than as a noun (let alone a feminine noun). The closest approximation of “Verzauberte” is probably “Enchanted one” as the subsequent noun indicates nothing more than numerical identity. However, “Enchanted being” or “Enchanted thing”, due to the generality of the nouns, would also be close approximations. My choice (with Lutz Näfelt) of “Enchanted one” is the same as Edward Snow’s. Stephen Cohn’s translation as “Enchanted animal” (Rilke 1992, 63) is apt and perhaps reads more fluently in English; however, as the poem unfolds, the gazelle appears more godlike than animal (Fischer 2007). While this difficulty in translating “Die Gazelle” is relatively minor, Rilke sometimes lists a series of substantives derived from adjectives, participles and verbs; if every substantive were translated with the addition of “one”, “thing” or “being”, the language would become cumbersome. For instance, Rilke’s poem “Die Erwachsene” (“The Grown-up [Woman]”) contains these lines in reference to a woman’s childhood: “Und sie ertrug es; trug bis obenhin/das Fliegende [the flying-thing(s)], Entfliehende [escaping-thing(s)], Entfernte [distanced-thing(s)],/das Ungeheure [the monstrous-thing(s)], das noch Unerlernte [the still unlearned-thing(s)] . . .” (1996, vol. 1, 477). Snow, who generally keeps quite close to the semantics of the originals, aptly renders this passage: “And she bore it; bore high overhead/the flying, the fleeting, the far receding,/the prodigious, the as yet unlearned . . .” (Rilke 2001, 85).

The second challenge for the translator of “Die Gazelle” is the word “Einklang”. The first likely option is “harmony”, which is chosen by Stephen Mitchell (Rilke 1982, 27) and Edward Snow (Rilke 2001, 65). While “harmony” is in many ways apt, after further reflection it sounds more abstract than Rilke’s usage of “Einklang”. Rilke was deeply interested in etymology (and archaic words) and often consulted the Grimm Wörterbuch (the German equivalent of the *Oxford English Dictionary*). The Grimm Wörterbuch informs the reader that “Ein-klang” could either be derived from “one-sound” or “in-sound” (the prefix “ein” in German can carry

either of these meanings). In the poem, “Einklang” refers to the sonority of poetic language, of “two chosen words”; this most obviously implies rhyme but also alludes to assonance and alliteration. Why does “harmony” sound more abstract than “Einklang”? The *Oxford English Dictionary* relates that the root of “harmony” is in the Greek *ἁρμονία* related to *ἁρμόζειν* which means “to fit together” or “to arrange”. Instead of harmony, Lutz Näfelt and I struck upon “consonance”. “Consonance” is derived from *sonāre*—to sound—and the prefix “con” is ultimately derived from the Latin “cum”, meaning “with” or “together”. Thus the word can be unpacked as meaning “with-sound” or “together-sounding”, which is very close to the German “Einklang” or “one-sound”. Moreover, “consonance” clearly relates to the English word “sound”, thus making the meaning more concrete than many Latinate words whose etymology is less apparent. The word also refers specifically to the “correspondence of sounds in words or syllables” (OED) and includes the musical sense, the opposite of “dissonance”. Another motivation for “consonance” is that it produces a *melopoeic* effect between “can” and “consonance” which is similar to “kann” and “Einklang”. More recently, however, it occurred to me that “consonance” is also used in the sense of the consonantal equivalent of assonance. This meaning is a bit more restricted than the sense of “Einklang” in “Die Gazelle”, which seems to allude primarily to rhyme (usually a combination of vowels and consonants). Thus the translator questions the choice and reconsiders “harmony”. However, through exploring this maze of possibilities the translator uncovers mutually illuminating parallels between German and English, which the critic and the general reader are less likely to discover.

While this translation does not maintain the meter and rhyme of the original, it captures other internal consonances that are equally important to Rilke’s poem (and his poetry in general; see Woods 1996, 198ff). In addition to the aforementioned features, it matches the significant assonance on the phoneme, “ei” (pronounced like “I” in German)—“zweier”, “Reim”, “Erreichen”, “steigen”, and “Leier”—through the near rhymes and assonance of “rhyme”, “sign”, “rise” and “lyre”. “Leaf” and “lyre” also reproduce the alliteration of “Laub” and “Leier”. Furthermore, the translation accurately renders the semantics of the source poem, the greatest diversion being the choice of “leaf” for *melopoeic* and etymological reasons (it is cognate with “Laub”), whereas “foliage” is a closer literal equivalent to “Laub”.

In light of the importance of form for Rilke, I encounter doubt that a stricter formal translation may be more adequate. I turn to J.B. Leishman as he was one of the earliest and most prolific translators of Rilke and prioritised formal structure. On this topic he writes:

While keeping as close as possible to the sense of the original . . . I have tried to preserve Rilke’s metres, rhythms, rhyme-schemes and syntax . . . I am inclined to think that the innermost secret of his poetry is to be found . . . in its syntax and rhythms . . . There is a continual outstretching

and ingrasping, reflected in the contest between the metrical pattern and the rhythmical or sentence pattern, and it is this that gives to so many of his poems their characteristically dramatic tension . . . (Leishman 1964, 21)

Here is Leishman's translation of the first quatrain of Rilke's most famous poem from the *Neue Gedichte*, "Der Panther".

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe  
so müd geworden, dass er nichts mehr hält.  
Ihm ist als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe  
und hinter tausend Stäbe keine Welt.

(Rilke 1996, vol. 1, 469)

His gaze, going past those bars, has got so misted  
with tiredness, it can take in nothing more.  
He feels as though a thousand bars existed,  
and no more world beyond them than before.

(trans. Leishman; see Rilke 1960, 178)

Leishman keeps close to Rilke's strict iambic pentameter although he diverges slightly with "going past" (first line) and "it can" (second line). He manages to reproduce the alternation between feminine and masculine rhymes and, like Rilke, finds full rhymes rather than near rhymes. However, all the rhymes in Rilke's quatrain emphasise the vowel sound "e" (as in "bed")—"Stäbe", "Gäbe", "hält", "Welt". The vowel "e" evokes a tone of hardship and pain which is lost in Leishman's rhymes ("misted", "existed", "more", "before"), although he manages to approximate the consonance of "st" in the German (pronounced "sht"). Moreover, even without reference to the German, "than before" seems like a fill-in to fit the rhyme and does not match Rilke's impeccable diction and syntax (while Rilke repeats "Stäbe" and "tausend Stäbe" ["thousand bars"], these repetitions emphasise the panther's sense of confinement). In addition, the German does not refer to the panther's gaze as "misted". Thus Leishman's commitment to form does not ensure the reproduction of Rilke's *tone* and necessitates additional material that is semantically redundant.

Leishman speaks of the remarkable relationship between Rilke's "poetry and that of common speech . . . . There is here a most subtle interplay between nature and artifice, formality and informality . . . . Colloquial expressions are transfigured by the extreme precision and elegance of the verse forms in which they appear, and wonderfully 'natural' speech-rhythms compel these strict verse forms to behave in a manner of which we might have supposed them to be incapable" (Leishman 1964, 22). Robert Bly similarly describes the synthesis of elevated diction and colloquial idiom in Rilke's verse but rightly criticises Leishman for translating Rilke into a dated and elevated

style that lacks the sensuous concreteness of Rilke's poetry (1982, 79–80).<sup>3</sup> Leishman's translation of the first quatrain of "Der Blinde" ("The Blind Man") offers a typical example of this problem.

Sieh, er geht und unterbricht die Stadt,  
die nicht ist auf seiner dunkeln Stelle,  
wie ein dunkler Sprung durch eine helle  
Tasse geht. Und wie auf einem Blatt . . .  
(Rilke 1996, vol. 1, 541)

Look, his progress interrupts the scene,  
absent from his dark perambulation,  
like a dark crack's interpenetration  
of a bright cup. And, as on a screen . . .  
(trans. Leishman; see Rilke 1960, 185)

Rilke's language is highly concrete, visual and simple. "Look, he goes [walks] and interrupts the city/that does not exist [is not] in his dark position [or place],/the way [like] a dark crack runs [goes] through a bright/cup . . ." offers a fairly literal translation of the first sentence. However, even the Latinate word "position" has a slightly more abstract ring to it than the German "Stelle". In order to produce a metrical and rhyming translation, and in keeping with his predisposition for sophisticated diction, Leishman renders a highly Latinate translation with words like "progress" for "geht" ("goes") and the addition of "perambulation", which rhymes with "interpenetration". This Latinate and abstract diction leads to a loss of the imagistic immediacy of Rilke's poem.

German generally has a more concrete feel than English, which directly relates to its proportionately smaller Latinate vocabulary. "Refrigerator" is "Kühlschrank" ("cool-cupboard"), "curtain" is "Vorhang" ("before-hang"), "to interrupt" is "unterbrechen" ("under-to break"). Even more abstract German words, such as "Tatsache" ("fact"), "begrifflich" ("conceptual") and "anschaulich" ("demonstrative"), have a concrete quality. "Tatsache" is "done-thing" or "done-matter", while "begrifflich" relates to "greifen" ("to grasp") and "anschaulich" relates to "anschauen" ("to look at"). German also contains many Latinate words, which are central to academic literature, but it generally has a more concrete character than English (or French). Of course, if one knows Latin one can also find concrete meanings in abstract English words; "conceptual", for instance, is derived from *concupere* ("to conceive"). Nevertheless, these meanings are veiled, and it is easy to hear the difference between Anglo-Saxon (Germanic) and Latinate vocabulary in English by comparing respective synonyms. Compare "to see" with "to perceive", "understanding" with "cognition", "beginning" with "inception", "walking" with "perambulation". In short, if the translator is to capture the sensuous immediacy of Rilke's German it is important to privilege Anglo-Saxon over Latinate vocabulary. However, this rule of thumb should not be taken so far as to sound childish, and the distinctive qualities of

the source poem must be taken into account. Leishman *recognises* two registers in Rilke's language, but *in practice* he privileges the upper and abstract register at the expense of the sensuous immediacy of Rilke's diction.

In contrast to Leishman, Bly does not follow Rilke's formal strictness and believes that it is no longer possible to write fresh English in the upper register; therefore, the writer must draw almost entirely on colloquial idiom. One of his "eight stages of translation" involves translating Rilke into specifically *American* idiom (1982, 75–80; cf. Heep 1996, 164–179). This latter view is in principle problematic as Rilke's German is distinctively literary, and when the Prague-born poet, who felt more at home in France than in any German-speaking nation, utilises colloquial expressions, they are not characteristic of a particular nationality. Here is Bly's rendering of "Der Panther":

### The Panther

*In the Jardin des Plantes, Paris*

From seeing the bars, his seeing is so exhausted  
that it no longer holds anything anymore.  
To him the world is bars, a hundred thousand  
bars, and behind the bars, nothing.

The lithe swinging of that rhythmical easy stride  
which circles down to the tiniest hub  
is like a dance of energy around a point  
in which a great will stands stunned and numb.

Only at times the curtains of the pupil rise  
without a sound . . . then a shape enters,  
slips through the tightened silence of the shoulders,  
reaches the heart, and dies.

(trans. Bly; see Rilke 1981, 139)

Many of the shortcomings of Bly's translation have been previously discussed by critics (see Heep 1996, 153ff). I will mention only a few of them. Bly makes little effort to reproduce the formal characteristics of the poem. He does not stick to the pentameter, nor does he approximate an iambic foot. In principle, this is not a problem because it allows a translator to stick closer to the semantics and images of the source poem; however, Bly does not take this opportunity. The repetition of "seeing" in the first line is semantically redundant and does not occur in the German. The dynamic character of "Vorübergehn der Stäbe" ("passing of the bars") is missing. Rilke states a "thousand bars" ("tausend Stäbe") whereas Bly has a "hundred thousand bars". In the third line Bly adds "the world is bars" whereas in Rilke's poem there is *no world behind* the bars. There is no equivalent to Bly's "rhythmical", "easy" and "swinging" in the first line of the second verse in "Der Panther". Bly uses the synonyms "stunned" and "numb" whereas Rilke uses the single word "betäubt". These repetitions and imprecisions contribute a sense of semantic and rhythmic slackness, which contrasts with Rilke's

tightly structured poem. Perhaps this quality of Bly's translation gives it a more accessible and American feel (Heep 1996, 168ff).

While I admire Bly's work as a poet and translator, this translation of "Der Panther" is hard to justify. It illustrates some of the problems of "fluent" translation (Venuti 1995). Literary translation performs a central task in intercultural mediation. It aims to bridge two literary cultures, but in a way that is inevitably one-sided because it is in the language of the target culture. However, a translator can seek to introduce foreign qualities—such as the formal and elevated aspects of Rilke's language—into the target language (while being context sensitive to the target culture). Furthermore, foreignness is a central characteristic of great art and poetry, which is why many outstanding artists are not adequately appreciated by their contemporaries. "Foreignising translation" can enrich a language in a similar way to genuine avant-garde or original poetry by pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in order to extend the expressive range of a language (Steiner 1975, 339ff). Fluent translation, by contrast, resembles an immigrant who is assimilated into a new culture and in the process loses all connection to her former culture.

After privately reflecting on the antithesis between Bly's and Leishman's approaches, I attempted a formal translation of "Der Panther" in order to test in practice the possibility of a semantically and formally accurate rendering of "Der Panther".

### Der Panther

#### *Im Jardin des Plantes, Paris*

Sein Blick ist vom vorübergehn der Stäbe  
so müd geworden, daß er nichts mehr hält.  
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe  
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.

Der weiche Gang geschmeidig starker Schritte,  
der sich im allerkleinsten Kreise dreht,  
ist wie ein Tanz von Kraft um eine Mitte,  
in der betäubt ein großer Wille steht.

Nur manchmal schiebt der Vorhang der Pupille  
sich lautlos auf—. Dann geht ein Bild hinein,  
geht durch der Glieder angespannte Stille—  
und hört im Herzen auf zu sein.

(Rilke 1996, 469)

### The Panther

#### *In the Jardin des Plantes, Paris*

His gaze has grown so tired from the bars'  
incessant passing, it can't retain a thing.  
To him it seems there are a thousand bars  
and behind the thousand bars is nothing.

The soft gait of his steps, robust and limber,  
turning in the very smallest circle,  
is like a dance of strength around a centre  
in which, benumbed, there stands a giant will.

Occasionally the pupils' curtain rises  
without a sound—. An image then goes in,  
goes through the tensed-up stillness of his members—  
and in the heart ceases to exist.

(trans. Luke Fischer)

This translation retains the pentameter (although Rilke's final line deviates from the pentameter—see the following). It only slightly diverges in four places from the iambic foot—the second line, the fourth line, the sixth line and the final line—and two of these diversions are intentional compensations for other lost effects. The first syllable of the second line, “*turning*”, is accented in order to reproduce the emphasis on the end rhyme “*dreht*” (“turns”) in Rilke's poem. The switch to the trochaic foot in the final line on “ceases” renders an analogous effect to Rilke's shortening of the meter to tetrameter in his final line. The close approximation to the rhythm of “*Der Panther*” kinaesthetically suggests the panther's repetitive pacing. My rhyme scheme follows Rilke's although I have had to substitute some near rhymes for Rilke's full rhymes (will/circle; members/rises; in/exist). Rilke's poem regularly alternates between feminine and masculine rhymes, which I only managed to render in the final verse. Semantically this translation is mostly accurate. There are minor deviations such as “occasionally” for Rilke's “only sometimes” (“*nur manchmal*”) and the addition of “incessantly” in the second line. The one significant semantic deviation is “nothing” for Rilke's “no world” (“*keine Welt*”). This alteration *does* lose an important aspect of the German. “*Welt*” (“world”) is a central Rilkean concept, and in this context it pertinently suggests the panther's loss of its “*Umwelt*” or natural environment. Had I chosen to relinquish the rhyme, the semantics (as well as other effects) could have been rendered more accurately. However, my choice of “nothing” and “thing” in the fourth and second lines respectively was informed by the significance of “thing” or *Ding* for Rilke's *Neue Gedichte*.

The purpose of this translation is to illustrate the possibility of a stricter formal and semantic equivalent of the source poem than Bly's translation (without the shortcomings of Leishman's diction). If a translation deviates from the formal demands of the original, it should achieve greater semantic accuracy. During the period in which he wrote the *Neue Gedichte*, Rilke wrote his novel, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910). Although the protagonist, Malte, is not entirely autobiographical, when he states “*Er war ein Dichter und haßte das Ungefähre*” [“He was a poet and hated the approximate”], he is certainly speaking for the author of the



*Neue Gedichte* (Rilke 1996, vol. 4, 572). Rilke's aversion to inaccuracy is reflected in his mastery of poetic forms as well as his precise diction in which every word carries its weight. If the translator relinquishes the formal stringency, which is perhaps appropriate after a hundred years of free verse, the exactness of Rilke's poetry should be rendered with scrupulous diction (and a greater effort should be made to produce an equivalent *tone*). It is worthwhile to mention Edward Snow's translations of the *Neue Gedichte* (Rilke 2001) and Stephen Mitchell's translation of "Der Panther" (Rilke 1982, 25). While Snow's translations are informal, they are semantically more accurate than the majority of translations. Mitchell's translation of "Der Panther" diverges a little more from the rhythm than my translation, but it approximates Rilke's rhymes (mostly with near rhymes) and reads well as an English poem. It is semantically fairly accurate except for his slight over-interpretation of Rilke's "Tanz von Kraft" (dance of strength or energy) with "ritual dance" (Rilke 1982, 25). Rilke's poem *may* be implying a ritual dance, but this is left open. Translators are always susceptible to the temptation of over-interpretation and of smoothing out difficulties in the original. However, if the target poem aims to translate rather than to create a version or an imitation, the ambiguities in the original should be rendered and the effort of interpretation be appropriately left to the reader.

The last five lines of "Buddha in der Glorie" ("Buddha in Glory")—the final poem in *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil* (*New Poems: The Other Part*)—raises interesting problems.

Und von außen hilft ihm ein Gestrahle,  
denn ganz oben werden deine Sonnen  
voll und glühend umgedreht.  
Doch in dir ist schon begonnen,  
was die Sonnen übersteht.  
(Rilke 1996, vol. 1, 586)

And from without a radiance assists him  
for high above your suns are turned,  
whole and glowing, in their orbits.  
Yet in you has already begun  
what endures beyond the suns.  
(trans. Fischer and Näfelt, in Rilke 2012)

... high above your fiery suns are turned  
within their courses—all is turned around  
while silently within yourself is born  
what will exceed and will outlast the suns.<sup>4</sup>  
(trans. Cohn; see Rilke 1992, 277)

“Buddha in Glory” concludes the entire collection of *New Poems* and is one of three poems that were inspired by a statue in Rodin’s garden in Meudon. Thus, it is a kind of ekphrastic poem like the opening poem of *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil*, “Archaischer Torso Apollos” (“Archaic Torso of Apollo”). However, it is far more than a description of an art work. It contains no depiction of the sculpture’s sensuous appearance (unlike “Archaic Torso of Apollo”) and portrays the Buddha as having attained a self-contained consciousness that embraces the whole universe.

In the transition from the second quatrain to the final quatrain (quoted earlier) Rilke makes a typical shift of perspective from the third person to the second person. The first major difficulty relates to the fact that in German there is sometimes no graphic difference between adverbs and adjectives. A literal translation of “werden deine Sonnen/voll und glühend umgedreht” would read as “your suns are/full[y] and glowing[ly] turned around”. While the primary sense is adverbial, the adjectival connotations are important. The lines refer to the “fullness” and “glowingness” of the suns as they are revolved (another peculiarity is that the suns do not revolve but *are* revolved). A perceptive reader of Rilke’s *Neue Gedichte* also knows that the word “voll” (“full”) occurs in numerous contexts and generally indicates a plenitude or superabundance of being (see “L’Ange du Méridien”, “Die Erwachsene”, “Die Rosenschale”, “Das Kind”). This single key word thus weaves a thread between various poems and exemplifies an important motif in the collection. In my first attempts at translating the *Neue Gedichte* I had the ambition to translate every occurrence of “voll” with “full” in order to weave the same thread into the English text. Such encapsulating details are inevitably lost in translation, and these losses can only be supplemented by a commentary. In the present case “full” suns does not ring well; however, “whole” has a similar sound to “voll” (pronounced “foll”) and evokes a related sense of plenitude and completion. Moreover, “whole and glowing” not only sounds like “voll und glühend”, but its insertion between commas in the middle of the phrase also enables it to suggest adjectival and adverbial connotations concomitantly. While the final verse of our translation does not follow Rilke’s rhyme scheme, it captures similar patterns of internal rhymes, assonance and alliteration, and in part with the same phonemes—“Yet in you” resembles “Doch in dir”, the near rhyme of “begun” and “suns” resembles “begonnen” and “Sonnen”.

Stephen Cohn paraphrases “voll und glühend” with “fiery” and thus avoids the difficulty. He thereby produces a euphonic phrase, “high above your fiery suns are turned/within their courses”, but forfeits more subtle dimensions of meaning. In its verbosity, the remainder of Cohn’s translation does not match Rilke’s verbal economy. He would have generated a more adequate terseness had he omitted “all is turned around” (this does not appear in the German) as well as “will exceed and”.

Cohn’s complete translation of both parts of the *Neue Gedichte*, which is a formidable achievement he shares with Leishman and Snow, is the

recommended translation of the Poetry Book Society and has been praised for its naturalness in English (see Rilke 1992). However, the diffuseness of his language illustrates similar problems to Bly's rendering of "Der Panther". The German words for poetry and poem, "Dichtung" and "Gedicht", both containing "dicht" ("dense"), are aptly suggestive. If Rieu is right in stating that "translation is the best which comes nearest to creating in its audience the same impression as was made by the original on its contemporaries" (1953, 555), then a contemporary translation of Rilke need not be strictly formal. However, its diction should resemble Rilke's precision and economy, and its form should possess the combination of tightness and elasticity that is characteristic of Rilke's verse.

These reflections and comparisons have sought to communicate the interlingual experience and some of the illuminating difficulties of translating Rilke into English. Strictly formal translations of Rilke's *Neue Gedichte* generally sacrifice important content, and while they give a better sense of the overall shape and rhythm of the poem, they will not necessarily render a poem's *tone* as this depends largely on the *aesthetic quality of specific phonemes and their relations* and not on rhyme *schemes*. There is no exclusively adequate way to translate Rilke, and contrary to Leishman, I regard Rilke's images and semantic precision (in the *Neue Gedichte*) as equally significant as, or more significant than (in a contemporary context), his handling of verse forms. Moreover, a large reason for Rilke's effectiveness in the English-speaking world is connected to the choice of translators to relinquish the formal stringency of his verse (while remaining truer to his meaning and images). However, a freer translation of form should be combined with a greater fidelity to content, an achievement of aesthetic integrity (totality) as an English poem and a sense of the foreignness of the original rather than complete "fluency". It is a peculiarity of great art that it bears the stamp of its time while at the same time transcending its time. Rilke has no shortage of translators, and these ensure that his *New Poems*, first published in 1907 and 1908, are continuously made *new*, in a way that is impossible for the German originals. The reader without German is fortunate to be able to consult a wide variety of English translations and is advised to read Leishman's and Snow's translations side by side if an adequate sense of Rilke's form *and* content is sought. Perhaps the highest achievement of translation, however, is to convince the reader of the value of learning the source language so as to facilitate an encounter with the poems' ultimate untranslatability.

## NOTES

1. The terms *phanopoeia*, *logopoeia* and *melopoeia* are derived from Ezra Pound (1929) and refer to poetic images, diction and meaning and the "music" of poetic language respectively.
2. Most of my translations were co-translated with Lutz Näfelt.

3. It should be kept in mind, though, that Leishman translated Rilke earlier in the twentieth century.
4. I have omitted Cohn's translation of the last line of the second stanza as his syntax does not make sense without citing more of his translation.

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## 5 Cesare De Marchi and the Author-Translator Dilemma

*Luigi Gussago*

Cesare De Marchi's career as a writer has been devoted equally to literature and translation.<sup>1</sup> His first published work, the short story collection *L'ora di memoria* (*Memory Time*; 1981), was soon followed by the Italian version of Theodor Fontane's novel *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1997; *Trials and Tribulations*), a title whose German alliterations De Marchi renders with the Italian *Amori, errori* (1982; *Loves, Errors*). Significantly, most of his works of fiction overlap with translations, a few of them still unpublished, from German, French and Latin, along with critical introductions to the translated authors.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I explore the interplay between De Marchi's creative writing and translation, focusing especially on his Italian version of eleven short stories and novellas by the Austrian author and playwright Arthur Schnitzler (Schnitzler 2006).

Given the number and significance of these translations, it might be inferred that they enjoy equal consideration from the author. However, De Marchi maintains a sceptical attitude towards the art of translation, which he sees as wielding a bad influence on creative writing. In a general essay on the novel (2007) he criticises the way many Italian authors derive their own style and phrasing ("periodare") from foreign texts translated into their native language. He defines it as "lingua d'accatto", a sort of second-hand, scavenger's language, based on paraphrase and more concerned with content than expressiveness. Objecting to a simplistic view of translation as a means of cultural dialogue, he argues that a translation may not fit in with the historical moment, or it may not prove as effective as one would expect (156). Of course, he allows some exceptions: a positive instance of a fruitful interchange between translation and target culture is, he suggests, Mme de Staël's article championing the value of translation in Italy (1816); her exhortation encouraged the development of a national narrative within the framework of European romanticism. Nevertheless, the rendition of a groundbreaking foreign text occasionally inhibits the receiving literature; if the translation fails to convey the complexity of the original, writers in the target culture may then favour simplified, ready-made patterns in their own writing.<sup>3</sup> This kind of translation could become dangerous both for the reader and the writer because it concentrates on the subject matter of the

text and overlooks the significance of the “raw verbal material” (“*materia prima verbale*”, 158) which is the basis of storytelling.

Yet if so many translations are unreliable and inadequate with respect to the original text, why is De Marchi still translating, and somehow questioning his own role as a language intermediary? A possible answer lies in the writer’s own poetics and, consequently, in the purpose of language in his fiction. De Marchi makes the following distinction between genuine literary emotion and identification:

The most serious and, from a literary point of view, the deadliest consequence of identification where the reading process is concerned is that the reader distances himself from the words to become immersed in the images and feelings that he can grasp; then, in a spontaneous as much as arbitrary way, he rejects some characters from the process of identification: the mad, the stupid, the minor characters cannot possibly attract him, just as most of the villains can’t; in short, identification literature is also decidedly selective: David Copperfield yes, Uriah Heep no; Emma yes, Charles Bovary no. (My translation)

La conseguenza più grave, e letterariamente mortale, dell’atteggiamento identificativo sul processo di lettura è che così facendo il lettore si allontana dalle parole per immergersi nelle immagini e nei sentimenti che ne estraе; egli inoltre, in modo non meno spontaneo che arbitrario, esclude dall’identificazione certi personaggi: i pazzi, gli stupidi, le comparse non possono ragionevolmente attrarlo, e in gran parte neppure i malvagi; insomma la letteratura identificativa è anche decisamente selettiva: David Copperfield sì, Uriah Heep no; Emma sì, Charles Bovary no. (De Marchi 2007, 136)

Readers prefer writers who immerse them in their world, providing them with a pretext for identifying with one character or the other. However, De Marchi contends that one may empathise with Werther, participate in his extremes of exaltation and disillusionment about life, but when it comes to committing the extreme act of suicide, one does not—or should not—hesitate to take a reasonable distance and “dump” him! Similarly, most of Schnitzler’s characters are obsessed with suicide, or end up killed in duels; therefore, in terms of identification, too much sympathy would put the lives of many readers and their unknowing neighbours at serious risk! To De Marchi, this emotional affinity spoils the real intent of the novel as a “movement of words”, and since the act of writing is a type of aesthetic gesture, it is useful to compare his concept of literary emotion with Mikhail Bakhtin’s approach to the object of art as it is seen by the artist. According to the Russian theorist, the process of identification permeates the artist’s sensibility, but this can only be a transitional stage in the accomplishment of the aesthetic goal: artists may allow for ethical identification with a character to

begin with, but they then have to relocate themselves at a standpoint outside the characters (1990, 25).

In De Marchi's own words, narrative is the "illusion of an illusion": it should not reflect reality with the precision of a mirror image, nor should it build up complicity with the audience; it has to guide the reader towards appreciation of the process by which a "go-between" teller selects threads of reality and weaves them into the personal, unique fabric of a text (2007, 141). As will be clarified later, the same degree of mediation without identification becomes a desirable quality in a translator.

This perspective on literary emotion as fascination within, and not without, language can also be related to what Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky identify as two opposite concepts of the world arrived at through verbal experience (1977, 233):

(A)	(B)
The world is matter.	The world is a horse.
[Description]	[Identification]

The first example (A) is a definition of the world resulting from a description of its components. Here words can only capture one detail of a complex reality, leaving other opportunities open for discovery. Describing something means finding the most appropriate sets of synonyms, yet keeping in mind that none of them can be exactly equivalent to each other or provide an exhaustive representation of reality. The second example (B), taken from a typically mythological text, the *Upanishads*, implies a metaphoric identification between word and reality as a whole, where no mention is made of the elements that compose this whole. It is a case of homonymy because it is possible to establish a direct correspondence between the world and the term "horse": Lotman and Uspensky define this equivalence as "language of proper names" (234). This attitude is common not only with religious texts—for example, the biblical identification of God with the *logos* in the Gospel of John (1: 1–3)—and it is not limited to metaphors, but it involves all types of communication. As a result, words are treated like labels for objects; objects themselves are generalised to their name categories and language becomes considerably impoverished: there is no object without a corresponding word, and the opportunity to describe some objects that exceed experience is potentially inadmissible.

According to the two semioticians, "understanding is linked in one case [A] with *translation* in the broad sense of the word, and in the other case [B] with recognition and *identification*" (1977, 234, my emphasis). Upon closer examination, their notion of "identification" bears some similarities to that of De Marchi, while translation in a broad sense is closely related to what he identifies as "literary emotion". Identification and description often coexist within a culture, or one of them occasionally prevails over the other. On a smaller scale, the same combinations happen within the narrative text,



hence a crucial point is to explore how these two aspects interact in De Marchi's fictional writing. In a recent novel, *La furia del mondo* (2006), the two sensibilities are expressed at different moments in the coming of age of Abel, the protagonist. First, the child claims to dominate the world by means of language, so that words help him unveil the nature of things: "names made things clear; nothing escaped them, everything had a name, and as long as it did not have one, it was not really itself" (22).<sup>4</sup> The child still believes in the equation of word and factual reality (B): objects without a name are not real objects. In a subsequent passage, Abel, by now a young man, has realised how far language can describe (A) and yet not come to grips with reality: after reading Dante, he perceives the "dismay at being unable to touch the ground of the words he was reading, as if each of them was made of more vast and unfamiliar stuff, where only the tip was emerging, while the great body was still submerged" (318).<sup>5</sup> In short, Abel's *Bildung* results in the conquest of more responsive language awareness.

At the same time, how is descriptive consciousness reflected in the work of De Marchi as a translator? Even without looking at the original short stories first, his versions represent a challenge to the reader. The Russian linguist Peeter Torop talks about "homologating" and "estranged" translations, indicating how the former usually neutralise cultural differences with respect to the original, while the latter, visibly ignoring the reader, are more centred on rendering the cultural specificity of the source (2010, 64). In general, De Marchi's translations prioritise estrangement, not only with regard to classical German-language authors such as Grillparzer, Schiller or Schnitzler, but also to contemporary writers like the Swiss novelist Martin Suter.<sup>6</sup> Torop argues that there should be no evaluation criteria of a translation, its only requirement is the adherence to a "dominant", a persuasive idea sustaining the text, either in terms of content or expression.<sup>7</sup> In the preface to his Italian translation of Schnitzler, De Marchi states quite clearly the kind of dominant he considers prevalent: There is no certainty ("Non esiste sicurezza"; see Schnitzler 2006, p. 5).

Of course, electing uncertainty as the leading idea of a translation may appear contradictory, but it proceeds from a logical assumption: to De Marchi, any effort to make the target language sound more explicit, or too precise and referential, will spoil the spirit of the original. The world described in Schnitzler's stories starts and ends exclusively within the text, and the two major reasons for ambiguity in his narrative are, for De Marchi, the sense of social and individual failure on the part of the Austrian middle class at the turn of the nineteenth century and Schnitzler's sceptical, anti-Freudian evocation of the unpredictable, dark side of the subconscious (or half-conscious). Uncertainty pervades both the intimate and the social sphere in Schnitzler's writings, and De Marchi conveys this through a translation strategy that avoids the easiest or most appealing lexical choices. Thus the use of unfamiliar expressions is dictated more by a fascination with the unusual synonym than by an attempt to find a more accurate or simplifying term: this contributes to

a sense of estrangement in the reader that could resemble the estrangement a German reader is likely to perceive with regard to the original.

The examples that follow, from Schnitzler's *Novelle*, demonstrate the quality of De Marchi's "unfriendliness".<sup>8</sup>

- **Use of archaisms**, which do not necessarily translate a corresponding German archaic term. For example, *a bell'agio* ("recht behaglich": at ease); *innanzi* ("vor": opposite); *Ché* ("Ich sollte . . .": so that); *sopore* ("Schlummer": slumber); *uggia* ("Langeweile": boredom); *disparire* ("verschwinden": disappear); *olezzare* ("duften": smell); *odo* ("Ich höre . . .": I hear); *a che pro* ("wozu": what for); *vieppiù* ("immer" + comparative: more and more . . .), *chiarità* ("Klarheit": clarity), *torno torno* ("um": around), etc. The insertion of old-fashioned, obsolete expressions not only aims to preserve the linguistic flavour of Schnitzler's own age (early 1900), but is also quite evident in De Marchi's own prose texts, regardless of their more or less contemporary settings.<sup>9</sup>
- **Etymological expressions**: Sometimes De Marchi selects a word in Italian which more clearly resonates with its original Latin etymology, or imitates the German term of the original—a sort of loan translation—even though these options may sound awkward:
  - German "kindisch" (childish) is translated with *puerile*, from the Latin word *puer*, child (*infantile*, which also derives from Latin, would have appeared more ordinary);
  - *cesura* (from Latin *caedere*: to cut) translates "Abschnitt": chapter, episode. "Abschnitt" is semantically related to *cesura* because it recalls the verb "schneiden": to cut;
  - *rammentato* (literally: remembered) ambiguously renders the German participle "gedacht", which simply means thought (*pensato*). *Rammentato* seems to re-state the semantic relation between "gedacht" and "Gedächtnis": memory, recollection;
  - *sentimento* translates "Empfindung": sensation. In current Italian, the word *sentimento* is more frequently associated with the idea of feeling ("Gefühl"), but in archaic Italian it meant a more physical, sensuous perception;
  - *dolente* from Latin *dolens*: painful, translates "schmerzlich";
  - *constava*, translating the verb "bestand aus": consisted of. Here De Marchi seems to reconnect with the German stem "-stehen", meaning to stay, Italian *stare*.
- **Reader-unfriendly expressions**, terms and idioms that usually translate the German original literally: *peggio che morta* ("schlimmer als tot"). In Italian, the most familiar idiom would be *morta e sepolta*: dead and buried, although De Marchi explains that the unusual German expression in the original—the most common one would be "tod und begraben"—finds a close equivalent in the slightly outdated *peggio che morta*, a derogatory phrase used mainly to describe unfaithful women

(from e-mail communication, 10 April 2012); *estrinseco* (“äußerlich”, rather than the more typical *esterno*: external); *stracco* (“müde”, rather than *stanco*: tired); *lesto* (“rasch”, cf. *veloce*: quick); *per qualche poco* (“eine Weile”, cf. *per un po’*: for a while); *affezione* (“Innigkeit”, cf. *intimità*: intimacy); *punto e polverino sopra* (“Punktum und Streusand d’rauf”, cf. *punto e a capo*: full stop, new paragraph).

- **Symmetrical syntax.** Defining a good translation, De Marchi (2007, 148) maintains that the textual rhythm of the original can be transferred into another language by trying to respect its syntactic order, as in this example:

Lange schwarze Schatten (1) | **warfen** (2) | die Bäume (3) | längs der Straße (4). (Schnitzler 1961, 271)

Lunghe ombre nere (1) | **cadevano** (2) | dagli alberi (3) | lungo la strada (4). (Schnitzler 2006, 50)

By translating “warfen” (threw) with the word *cadevano* (fell), De Marchi changes the meaning slightly but maintains exactly the same syntax as the original. Of course, this is only possible when the main verb is not in a compound tense (such as the *Perfekt* or the *passato prossimo*), otherwise both languages have a set of limited, often conflicting syntactic options. Here, however, direct speech in both languages allows for a more varied word order, and De Marchi succeeds in maintaining the syntax of the original, especially in some crucial lines of dialogue. For instance in “La canzone nuova” (“Das neue Lied”: The new song), one of the characters insinuates to Karl, the protagonist, that his presence at the singing debut of his former fiancée, Marie, will be quite significant to her:

Ah, es kommen heut mehrere, (1) | die sie kennen . . . (2) | natürlich nicht so gut wie Sie, (3) | Herr von Breiteneder (4) (Schnitzler 1961, 624)

Ah, oggi ne verranno parecchi (1) | di quelli che la conoscono. . . (2) | certo non bene come Lei, (3) | signor von Breiteneder (4) (Schnitzler 2006, 157)<sup>10</sup>

This mildly sarcastic remark, highlighted by a somewhat uncommon syntax, alludes to the unresolved relationship between von Breiteneder and Marie, and it will also prove prophetic when the reader discovers the young singer’s fate: after the last desperate attempt to win back her former lover, she commits suicide.

- **Contextual use of the tenses:** Schnitzler’s use of the German past tense is deliberately ambiguous because it does not exactly circumscribe actions within a well-defined time frame. In fact, the *Präteritum* (simple past) allows for at least three possible translations into Italian: the past historic

(*passato remoto*), the present perfect (*passato prossimo*) or the past perfect (*trapassato prossimo* or *remoto*). The choice of the most appropriate option results from the projection of the text's dominant into the translation.<sup>11</sup> A few options are therefore viable in the *Novelle*.

In "Fiori" ("Blumen": Flowers), for instance, the *passato remoto* is the tense De Marchi uses exclusively to render both the German *Präteritum* and the *Perfekt* (present perfect) in recalling meaningful episodes relating to memories of the dead lover. In other circumstances in the narrative, where the recollection is more precise but less significant, the translator feels free to use other Italian tenses.

In a passage from "L'estranea" ("Die Fremde": The Stranger), when the *Präteritum* expresses a series of repeated actions, De Marchi does not translate them with the customary Italian *imperfetto*, but with the past historic: the reason behind this choice is in the interpretation of these actions, which to the character appear as habits, while they could be the outcome of his disturbed imagination. For instance, the protagonist's brief conjugal life is recounted as a list of single moments in the past (an already historic past), as if suggesting that it belongs to his fantasies rather than to an objective state of mind: "Si affacciarono a finestre aperte . . . E parlarono . . . passeggiarono . . . indugiarono . . ." (115; they leaned out of open windows . . . And they talked . . . strolled . . . hesitated . . .). The clash between fantasy and reality is then presented through a sudden change in tenses, for repeated actions, from the past historic to the imperfect: "Qualche volta, però, ella lo lasciava solo . . ." (115; "sometimes, though, she left him alone . . .").

Furthermore, in the previously mentioned "La canzone nuova", Karl's memories, expressed exclusively by the German *Präteritum*, are rendered by De Marchi with the past perfect (*trapassato prossimo*), to point out that the events escalating towards Marie's suicide, which had been momentarily erased from the protagonist's consciousness, ultimately rise to the surface, magnifying Karl's sense of desolation about his ex-lover's tragic end. In this case, the past perfect does not indicate an objectively remote past event—it took place only a few hours earlier—but it underlines an unpleasant memory that the protagonist had been subjectively trying to remove.

- **Analytical translation of position verbs:** In German, position verbs ("stehen": stand, "sitzen": sit, "liegen": lie) are more widely used than in Italian, therefore they are frequently translated with common expressions such as *c'è*, *si trova*, *sta*, etc. De Marchi, however, chooses to render position verbs more analytically whenever the exact location of a character or object suggests a deeper narrative-symbolic presence: for example, *posa* ("liegt"), *compare* or *resta lì* ("steht") or *è qui* ("sitzt").
- **Disambiguation:** In "Fiori" De Marchi avoids translating "Seele" with the more familiar word *anima* (soul), even when it would sound appropriate; he prefers *mente* (mind), a much more neutral term which,

however, compensates for the lack of a direct German translant for *mente* (“we laugh and cry and invite our minds to join them [grins of pleasure and grief]”, 33).<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, he translates “Seele” as soul when referring to symbolic objects (“as if their [the flowers’] silent souls could start whimpering”, 35). Translating “Seele” with *anima* (soul) referring to flowers seems of course the best option: flowers are not supposed to have a mind (*mente*), but perhaps they have a soul (or people like to believe they have one).

- **Use of footnotes:** In “Il sottotenente Gustl” (“Leutnant Gustl”: Lieutenant Gustl), De Marchi adds a note explaining that the word “mélange [. . .]” is still used nowadays in Austria for *café latte*” (76), and later he explains how “Melange mit Haut” means “café latte with skin”, the cream on top of the milk (82). If we consider how unpopular footnotes are among publishers nowadays, this extra information about a word which represents no serious translation hurdle is unusual, though culturally instructive. In the same story, De Marchi adds a footnote identifying the composer the protagonist is listening to as Mendelssohn (61); the irony of an anti-Semitic character listening to a Jewish convert composer is pointed out in De Marchi’s introduction (20). The violation of the translator’s tacit rule of refraining from providing footnotes unless there is a real problem of untranslatability<sup>13</sup> is another example of how De Marchi delights in demystifying the role of the translator, playing with ambiguity and disambiguation.

In “Geronimo il cieco e suo fratello” (“Der blinde Geronimo und sein Bruder”: The Blind Geronimo and His Brother) De Marchi uses a footnote to draw the reader’s attention to two different editions of the story: that of 1905, generally considered the standard edition, and that of 1914, edited by Schnitzler, where the overall impact of the author’s omniscience has been noticeably reduced (107). As he explains in his introduction, De Marchi opted to translate the 1914 version since he found the earlier version philologically inconsistent with his own idea of the dominant (15).

This variety of examples is certainly of no help in identifying the requirements of a perfect or near-perfect translation, nor is the definition of perfection univocal. Many scholars have debated the question of quality in translation: Torop contends that any translation is at the same time conservation, change and increase in elements of meaning compared with the original (2010, 27); for Lotman a translation necessarily creates further meanings that diverge from the source: it is a one-way process, so that a back-translation would not restore the previous text (2001, 13–15). At the same time, Jakobson and Lotman agree on the idea, formulated by Vygotsky (1986), of an intermediate, preverbal language that forms in the speaker’s/author’s mind before starting communication. Bruno Osimo defines it as “the language that expresses thought” and, more technically, “the intermediate translating metalanguage between the verbal text (of the original) and

the (translated) verbal text” (in Torop 2010, x, my translation). An ideal translation is a process whereby the translator is supposed to investigate and reconstruct the author’s inner speech, his inner logic, in order to convert it into another language. In fact, the author’s original text is itself a translation from the convolutions of his/her own mind onto the page. In brief, the ideal translator has to retrace the writer’s steps, from the text to the author’s inner speech, in order to comprehend the reasons behind the text. By way of paradox, if the writer’s inner speech were accessible, translations would look like mirror reproductions of the original; but this is mere speculation, since many other elements, including the translator’s own mental language, will inevitably affect the final product.

In this sense De Marchi is not only aware of the limits of a translation; he also proposes to divorce the primal inspiration of the author from that of the translator. Translation has to start and finish within the language that produced the text, in the verbal raw material: there should be no empathy, no misleading identification of any kind between writer and translator. This does not mean that translators are free to ignore the author’s biography, poetics, and so forth, but at the same time they have to distance themselves from all this information and get involved exclusively in the game of narrative language. In his own very original way, De Marchi addresses the author-translator dilemma by favouring description over identification in language, trying to be as unfriendly as possible to his readers—unfriendly does not necessarily mean boring, but demanding it surely is—so as to prevent them from adopting a limiting emotional approach to the text and to enhance their literary emotions, their perception of the beauty within the narrative “periodare”, in literary invention as well as in translation.

## NOTES

1. De Marchi was born in Genoa in 1949. After graduating in philosophy, he lived in Milan until 1995, when he moved to Germany. He was, from 2003 to 2012, the director of the Dante Alighieri Society in Stuttgart.
2. Among the German-speaking writers: Franz Grillparzer (1991), Friedrich Schiller (1993), Thomas Mann (1994), Martin Suter (a first novel in 1999, reprinted in 2011; a second one in 2010), Johannes von Tepl (2001), Franz Kafka (2002) and Arthur Schnitzler (2006); among the francophone: the Cardinal de Retz (1990) and Honoré de Balzac (2004); finally, a translation from the dog-Latin of the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* (2004). For a complete bibliography of these translations, see the official Web site [www.cesaredemarchi.com](http://www.cesaredemarchi.com).
3. De Marchi does not specify any examples of this bad interference of translations, he simply quotes a paragraph from a version of Lope de Vega’s *Las fortunas de Diana* (1621). Here, the tendency to simplify seventeenth-century prose writing and to captivate the modern reader’s attention inevitably spoils most linguistic features of the original, even when they could have been easily preserved—for example, with the help of implicit secondary clauses, or through a more respectful syntax (De Marchi 2007, 144–148).

4. “i nomi facevano chiaro; niente sfuggiva ad essi, ogni cosa aveva un nome, e finché non l’aveva non era davvero sé stessa.”
5. “sgomento di non toccare il fondo delle parole che leggeva, come se ognuna di queste avesse una sostanza più ampia e sconosciuta, della quale lui vedeva solo affiorare la cima senza il grande corpo sommerso.”
6. It is worth pointing out that Suter’s original novel is titled *Small World* (1997). Instead of keeping the English title as a sort of lingua franca between German and Italian, the publishers opted for the Italian saying “Com’è piccolo il mondo!” (What a small world!; see Suter 1999), whereas De Marchi would have preferred the original title in English (e-mail communication, 25 July 2011).
7. The concept of the dominant was first formulated by Roman Jakobson in 1935: “The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure” (1987, 41).
8. I use italics for Italian words and expressions from De Marchi’s translation (Schnitzler 2006), as well as explanatory synonyms or phrases, clarifying when they are not part of the translation. The source (Schnitzler 1961) and a few related German words appear in inverted commas.
9. A similar tendency to a more stratified language, rejecting the empty, monotonous style of bourgeois literature, can be traced back to Carlo Emilio Gadda’s heteroglossia.
10. “Ah, many people will be coming today, who know her . . . of course not as well as you, Mr. von Breiteneder.”
11. De Marchi explains the complications implicit in translating tenses from German into Italian: “German tenses do not always indicate precisely to the reader the time gap, which the Italian language reproduces much more flexibly, shifting from past historic to past perfect (however, I followed the use of tenses of the original whenever I suspected that the temporal haziness was a deliberate, not an accidental effect).” “[N]on sempre i tempi verbali tedeschi segnalano prontamente al lettore lo stacco temporale, che l’italiano invece riproduce con maggior flessibilità muovendosi fra passato remoto e trapassato prossimo (e tuttavia traducendo ho seguito l’uso dei tempi dell’originale nei casi in cui sospettavo che la nebulosità temporale fosse effetto voluto e non accidentale).” (Schnitzler 2006, 10)
12. As De Marchi aptly explains, the German language has no word corresponding to *mente*, therefore it allows for two surrogate terms to counterbalance this extra meaning: “Seele” and “Geist” (e-mail communication, 23 July 2011).
13. Eco calls footnotes an “*ultima ratio*” and a “defeat” for the translator (2003, 95). Bruno Osimo discusses Eco’s view and the question of the translator’s notes in his online *Translation Course* (2008).

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## Part II

# Circulation: Texts and Their Transmission

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## 6 Inculturation as Elephant

### On Translation and the Spread of Literary Modernity

*Anthony Pym*

“Isn’t it strange to identify foreign as in Latin, and foreign as in other-worldly?” So asks Claire Mathieu in an online discussion on translations of the Catholic liturgy.<sup>1</sup> She was reacting to a short text (Pym 2011) in which I tried to make contemporary translation theory speak to American Catholics, some of whom are regularly up in arms at the relatively literalist Vatican doctrine of *Liturgiam authenticam* (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2001). This part of the discussion concerned my knee-jerk use of the term “foreign”, corresponding to my unthinking assumption that translation necessarily works on a text that is from somewhere else. Mathieu comments: “I am struck by the repeated use of the word ‘foreign’: ‘explain the foreign’ . . . ‘bring the reader into the foreign textual world’”. Strange, indeed. Why should she be so struck? First, I deduce, because the Latin language is not wholly foreign to regular users of the Catholic liturgy in the United States, where Latin phrases are bandied about within the English and many users of the texts are assumed to have a grasp of the basics. And second, as Mathieu notes in her aforementioned question, the relative distance of that Latin, as a language that is not wholly home yet not altogether foreign, actively functions in the liturgy, through borrowing and syntactic calque, to create a sense of the “other-worldly”, a higher place, the sacred, a status to which both individual and congregation might aspire. This is indeed a strange identification: the partly foreign language, normally held in a geolinguistically horizontal relation and/or as a relation across time, works here as a higher place, in a spiritually vertical relation. The function of the foreign is not the unease of the traveller or the *unheimlich* that alienates in a negative way—rather, here, it provides occasion for aspiration.

This exchange has been worrying me. In so much of my work on translation over the past thirty-five years or so, I have assumed that texts come from a foreign place and that translators work on that foreignness, which can be highlighted or eclipsed. Yet here, in this case, I must admit that Latin is somehow the home language of the Catholic liturgy: *Liturgiam authenticam* stipulates that all translations must be from the established Latin text and done as literally as possible. No matter how poorly understood or how frequently translated, Latin remains somehow present to mark the place of

this particular culture. It is not an entirely foreign language. So translation, under these circumstances, need not be from an entirely foreign place.

In this essay I want to take that problem and map it back onto some of the research I have carried out over the past few decades. For a while I studied the way literary modernity spread out across the globe, particularly in the 1890s, from a nominal fountainhead in Paris. So was French the foreign language that generated thousands of translations? Not at all, now that I look at it: French was somehow the privileged language of that particular modernity; it was the language that provided the intercalated phrases, the one that signalled belonging to a particular literary moment; no matter how badly understood, French was not entirely foreign—it was the language that was supposed to be aspired to and possibly learnt, well or badly. One could say much the same these days about the use of English in any kind of science: we might translate from it, but it is not exactly a language foreign to science—it is the language that signals the place of an international culture of science. In terms of these examples, Latin, French and English, as not wholly foreign languages, cannot simply be treated as “foreign languages” in discussions of translation. That much I should have known without any debate over the liturgy. Subsequent reflections have nevertheless brought me to something even more troubling, potentially, for the traditional study of translation.

When the Catholic Church now justifies its conservative and relatively literalist translation practices, it does so by referring to the concept of “inculturation”. This is the term authorised by Pope John Paul II to describe “the incarnation of the Gospel in autonomous cultures and at the same time the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church” (1985, 21). Inculturation thus involves, ideally, a double movement rather than a simple one-way translation: “Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community” (1990, 52). The concept has framed Vatican translation policies for the past two decades, with remarkably declining respect for the position or voice of any cultural other: for inculturation, translation is used, very clearly, to spread and modify just the one ideological system, which should be brought as close to the Latin as possible.

For much of the time I have been doing Translation Studies, the problems start from a source text here, a target text there and a translator doing something between them. The concept of inculturation, however, suggests that we thus fail to see a good number of things, and not just the languages that encroach across all spaces. For example, we have somehow trained ourselves not to ask *what* is being translated. In the research I have done (so as not to throw stones at anyone else), I have more keenly kept track of *what languages* have been translated to and from, just as others have sought to judge the health or hegemony of cultures in terms of the *percentages of translations* on the shelves of any surviving bookshops. We ask a thousand questions about *what strategies* translators employ, what their *work habits* are, what *interventions* they have made, as if the matter itself, the ideational import of

the text, were somehow neutral or irrelevant to the geometries of cultures and languages. This is despite the message coming from activist translators and interpreters (for example, Boéri and Maier 2010): the messages of official culture get translated across borders, creating one kind of globalisation; those of unofficial culture must find alternative translators if an alternative globalisation is to resist. From that perspective, what matters is indeed *what* gets translated. By extension, in more than a few cases, the matter to be translated surely invites and then embodies an act of inculturation—what is being moved is not just a text, a message, an idea, but an incipient extension of a whole culture, which itself is perhaps being transformed through the same acts of translation. If I had looked earlier at the *what* of translation, I might have come up with some better terms to describe what is going on.

So I posit here, as a working hypothesis, that the model of inculturation can be applied to the translational spread of large-scale ideological cultures like Christianity. Inculturation could potentially explain things about Buddhism, Islam, modernity, scientific method, liberal humanist universities, the European Union and information technology, for example. The list is very incomplete and scarcely thought through; the project might be vast. The process also concerns the position and identities of individuals, precisely at the moment when they go beyond the boundaries of a cultural system and aspire to enter another, as if to a higher realm, particularly when the aspired-to culture is embodied in a not wholly foreign language. I thus also posit, from the perspective of such individuals, that some modes of translation enhance such aspiration. So I must look not only at what is translated, but also at *how* it is translated, or not translated, and how the mode of translation might interact with that quite specific sense of aspiration.

And so to two case studies from literary history.

## SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE INTO ENGLISH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In order to write an entry for the *Oxford History of Literary Translation into English*, John Style and I compiled a list of literary translations that were done into English from Spanish and Portuguese in the nineteenth century. That was not an enormous task: previous lists of work from Spanish were available, as was a very solid survey of translations of Camões. Based on those sources, our own working corpus comprised first translations of books and plays from Portuguese and Spanish (excluding re-editions, publications in journals, pamphlets and odd handfuls of poems published in wider-ranging anthologies). The total of entries was 186, so we had a very manageable corpus of translations.

One of the first things you can do with that kind of corpus is map the translation flow over time. Figure 6.1 shows the result: not much at the beginning of the century, a lot at the end and something happening around

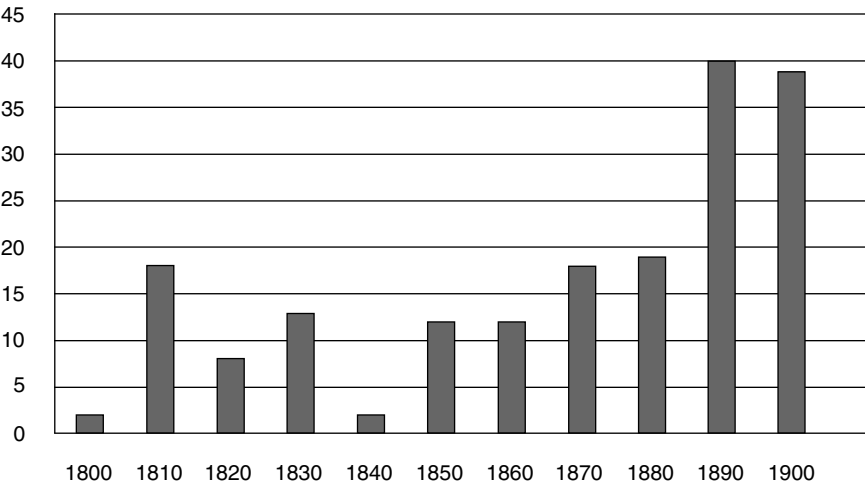


Figure 6.1 Translations of books and plays from Spanish and Portuguese to English, by decade

1810 and 1830. A reasonable piece of translation history should be able to explain at least that pattern.

The numbers can take us a little further. If we collect the dates for the first publications of the works translated, we can measure the “translation delay”—that is, the number of years it took for the translation to be done (here counting from the start texts, not from intermediary translations or retranslations). The mean delays for each decade are shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Mean translation delays by decade

Decade	Number of Translations	Delay, in Years
1790	3	194
1800	18	198
1810	9	210
1820	14	177
1830	3	282
1840	11	236
1850	13	196
1860	14	146
1870	20	278
1880	40	202
1890	41	47

We can now say that the age of the source texts was remarkably consistent—and remarkably old—for most of the period except the end. And that is about all that the numbers can tell us (which is one reason why none of the numbers actually got into the *Oxford History*).

So what was happening here? Can it be described as any kind of inculturation?

The first rise in translations follows the Peninsular Wars, which marked sustained British intervention in Portugal and Spain from 1808.<sup>2</sup> The Iberian Peninsula became a place that a few present and future translators would visit: Byron spent time there in 1809; Southey engaged Wordsworth and his circle in the cause of supporting the wars; Longfellow was there in the 1820s. The very positive values projected on Portuguese and Spanish cultures were, however, very much those of a bygone heroic age. We find Southey vowing to “hold up the war as a crusade on the part of us and the Spaniards (I love and vindicate the crusades)” (Letter to Grosvenor C. Bedford, 17 November 1808, in Southey 1849–1850, vol. 3, 187). In a further letter on the Peninsular Wars we read:

This is something like the days of old as we poets and romancers represent them—something like the best part of chivalry: old honours, old generosity, old heroism are reviving, and the cancer of that nation [France] is stopped, I believe and fully trust, now and forever. (16 August 1808, in Southey 1849–1850, vol. 3, 162)

Not surprisingly, the translations that responded in some way to the wars were mostly of medieval or sixteenth-century texts, selected and mixed with considerable literary liberty. The overall delay of just under two hundred years puts us at around the time of Camões, Cervantes and Calderón, who are indeed the authors who dominate the corpus. The more distant medieval texts were rendered sporadically throughout the century, often as *exercises de style*. For example, there were seven versions of the anonymous epic *El Cid*, although the most popular remained Southey’s *Chronicle of the Cid*, compiled from various sources and running through editions in 1808 (reviewed by Walter Scott in 1809), 1846, 1883 and 1894. The texts were generally rendered into English with abundant archaisms, presumably in order to project a noble other from the past. Such features might indicate an operation of *translatio imperii*, whereby the cultural virtues of the Portuguese and Spanish empires should now be inherited by the British. To translate from the Iberian past would be to take over the mantle of empire, with all the noble trappings that age thus implied.

Of course, that is too convenient an explanation. The literary relations between Spanish, Portuguese and English were often indirect. At the beginning of the century, the central language for European translation flows was mostly French. Many of the English texts reaching Portuguese and Spanish came via French, with the mediation only diminishing as exiled Iberian groups established



themselves in Britain and, later, as English studies developed in the peninsula. On the other hand, comparison with the Van Bragt catalogue of translations into French (1995) shows little evidence of significant French mediation in the reverse direction. Although two early English versions of *Os Lusíadas* did indeed appear after French publications, the trace of such mediation has been effaced in the translations; some drama translations in *The Theatrical Recorder* of 1805 and 1806 were probably via French; an 1847 Portuguese *History of Ceylon* certainly reached English through French; but there appears to be little else. That is, although the movement *from* English into Portuguese and Spanish had strong French mediation, the reverse movement did not.

This strangely asymmetric French connection was of some significance as a negative node. The simple point is that the Peninsular Wars were against Napoleon, and the cultural engagement of English letters with things Iberian was basically in search of an anti-French cultural alliance. This kind of cooperation could scarcely be based on awareness of the current state of Iberian economics, politics or military strength—the peninsula was in considerable disarray for most of the nineteenth century, and the more cosmopolitan Iberian intellectuals were getting their culture through Paris anyway. It was far easier, in such circumstances, to seek the heroism of the past, and to translate from there, carefully skirting around the role of Spain as an unreliable partner and traditional enemy (Inquisition, Armada and all). A *translatio imperii* there may have been, and it may even have entailed some degree of aspiration, as Romantic heroism sought distant models for military engagement with Islam (*El Cid*) and the conquest of India (*Os Lusíadas*). And that very basic Romantic aspiration remained in place for a long time—translation cultures easily outlive the literary movements they were based on—breathing life into translation projects that might otherwise seem anachronistic.<sup>3</sup> That said, if there was any kind of prolonged inculturation, it must be seen as an ultimately failed attempt to form a European culture able to stand as an alternative to the French present.

The piece of our corpus that remains—the forty or so translations at the end of the century—is comprised mostly of naturalist novels, responding to an entirely different cultural dynamic. Remarkably, texts less than fifty years old were only consistently translated from the 1880s onwards. The rise of international naturalism in the 1880s, fundamentally inspired by the likes of Zola and Huysmans, was a literary culture that tended to take its inspiration and scandals from Paris, which simultaneously channelled the Scandinavian theatre and Russian novels. That configuration allowed Iberian cultures a fresh narrative voice with which to speak about their contemporary realities. For the writers, one of the appeals was the aspiration to science, and hence a rationalist improvement of society. For publishers, the appeal had more to do with the production of mass literature, the circulating libraries and the market value of the scandalous and the exotic.

This change marked a radical shift not only in the age, content and form of the works translated but also in the cultural identity of the translators. As the British and East Coast American publishing houses became the driving force behind the importation of literature, translators lost much of

their independence and personal input, assuming an industrial status well removed from the gentlemanly work of previous generations. There was also a pronounced shift in sexual identity. The percentage of women translators in our corpus is just above 20 per cent for the period through to 1880; the figure for the period after 1880 rises to 83 per cent. The most prolific translator in the later decades was no doubt the American Mary Jane Serrano (d. 1923), whose work was published in New York and Boston. Between 1889 and 1900 Serrano rendered some thirteen novels from Spanish and Portuguese (Eça de Queirós, Emilia Pardo Bazán, Alarcón, Galdós, Valera), in addition to work from French. Productive at an industrial rate (seven of her translated novels are listed as being published in 1891 alone), Serrano was criticised for inaccuracies and abridgements. Her translations stay as close to the source as possible, stepping away from any fastballs.

We thus find that what might otherwise appear to be the one translation flow, the one set of translations going in the one direction, in fact comprises at least two very different cultural dynamics, with very different translators, different translation strategies, different historical reasons for translating and indeed different concepts of what translation is. There is no reason why the one directionality should be channelling the same contents. If there is any incipient inculturation here, it is probably in the first dynamic, the call to heroism, and not the second, the industrialisation of naturalism. And that first dynamic was facing an extremely daunting task: to convert a traditional enemy into a current ally. In political terms, it did not fail entirely: Britain became an ally of Spain and then Portugal, and the Napoleonic armies were indeed driven out of the peninsula. In longer-lasting literary terms, however, there would seem to have been no formation of a wider or higher cultural entity.

One of the reasons for this failure might be sought in the lack of a not-quite-foreign language able to mark the path of aspiration. Spanish and Portuguese remained firmly on the “source” side of the translational equations, only occasionally stepping across in the names of places and people as so much local colour. The language of aspiration, such as it was, could only have been the archaic diction drawn from romantic reconstruction, and that language could scarcely be contemporaneous with the Spanish or Portuguese texts being represented. Southey’s *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808), for example, had to deal with the problem of representing a twelfth-century text in the absence of any twelfth-century English available for the task (Spanish has changed much less than English). The resulting compromise is strangely reminiscent of the Authorized Version in rhythm, syntax and diction: the archetypal Crusader thus gains biblical authority, as might befit a struggle against Islam, which was indeed the matter translated. At the same time, however, the Biblical tone is combined with the flatness of medieval narrative, producing occasional comic effects:

Now it behoves that ye should know whence he came, and from what men he was descended, because we have to proceed with his history [. . .]  
(1808, 2)

At this time it came to pass that there was strife between Count Don Gomez the Lord of Gormaz, and Diego Laynez the father of Rodrigo; and the Count insulted Diego and gave him a blow [. . .] (1808, 3)

Our corpus has much more in that vein, comprising a miserable ruck above which the voices of Shelley, Longfellow and Edward Fitzgerald occasionally rise with considerable splendour. To illustrate the ideological reach of the project, and its literary depths, we awarded the prize for bad archaism to James Young Gibson,<sup>4</sup> whose rendition of Cervantes's tragedy *Numancia* was published in London in 1885. The play is about heroic resistance to the long siege of a city, and the translator's dedication explicitly links the matter to the heroism of Charles George Gordon and the two-year siege of Khartoum that ended tragically in 1884 ("This Quixotism, what is it but the sublime of imprudence?"). And the diction reads, to select almost at random:

Scipio: In very sooth, I am content to view  
How Fortune's wishes tally with mine own;  
Without a struggle, by my wits alone  
The occasion comes, I sense it as my due,  
For when it flits and runs and once hath flown,  
Full well I know in war we pay the cost,  
Our credit vanishes, and life is lost.

(1885, 55)

This may have been a slightly foreign language, perhaps arousing aspiration to a heroism justified by the past—there was still at least the attempt at inculturation into *translatio imperii*. By 1885, though, the movements of translation were doing several quite different things, working from the present rather than the past.

## FRANCOPHILE MODERNITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA

Let me go back to earlier research I did on how, starting just a little later than 1885, French aesthetics influenced literary production in Australia and Latin America (Pym 1992, 1996). Although those studies certainly came across translations, I was more seriously looking for what I termed "strategies of the frontier", broadly understood as ways the foreign could open space for a home cultural identity. In both cases I was able to detect elements of a general strategy of the "cultural lever", whereby French influences were used to move the decolonising peripheral culture (in Australia and the Latin American republics) away from the dominance of the coloniser (London and Madrid), thus allowing a more regionalist voice. At the time, that was how I sought to explain why certain parts of those literary cultures turned

to Paris, bearing in mind that France was relatively weak as a political and economic power—the dynamic was predominantly cultural, unmixed with the military, political and then industrial concerns that marked the Spanish-Portuguese-English translation dynamic.

Let me now try to reinterpret the data used in those studies on fin de siècle Australia and Latin America.

First, this is a field where a narrow sense of translation does not serve us very well. For the naturalist side of the aesthetics, to be sure, one could indeed draw up a fairly stable corpus of novels translated from French into English and Spanish, as we did for translations from Spanish and Portuguese into English. For what might be called the “aestheticist” or “symbolist” side, however, the enterprise is far more complicated. Since the peripheral cultures had virtually no market for translated poetry in book form, what translations there were tended to be found in generalist magazines, newspapers, ephemeral *petites revues* and critical essays. The translations are there, but their number is not enormous, and they rarely function on their own—they are part of wider acts of cultural transfer involving literary recreation, allusion, textual exegesis, historical explanation, news reports, cultural politics, aesthetic manifestos, a few parodies (in Australia) and no small amount of literary gossip. The translations are so difficult to separate from the wider functions of all that embedding material that it really makes little sense to study one without the other. Quantitative methods become relatively inappropriate.<sup>5</sup>

A second complicating factor is the evidence that poetry was read, or was supposed to be read, directly in French, which might account for a certain lack of translations. For example, in a popularising work like Víctor Pérez Petit’s *Los Modernistas*, published in Montevideo in 1903, we find the French (and Italian) literary texts cited without translation, whereas the few German pieces have been anonymously transposed into Spanish: it is assumed that the reader is able to read French but not German. This may have been a well-founded assumption given the cognate status of the French and Spanish languages and the existence of a *latifundista* class that could pay for a private or foreign education. Australia shows some signs of similar linguistic pretensions in the same period, but without anything like the same degree of surety. In Sydney, for example, A. G. Stephens’s *Bookfellow* published poems by Baudelaire and Verlaine in French in 1899, not just to be read but also to be translated by the readers, in open competition. As it happened, none of the readers’ versions of Baudelaire were considered fit to be printed, and no prize was given for versions of the “easier” Verlaine, where translators were pointedly reminded that “the rhyme scheme must be preserved, and the meaning” (*Bookfellow*, 29 April 1899; see Kirsop 2005).<sup>6</sup> So there must be real doubt as to the extent of competence in French, even among the few readers of a fledgling literary journal.

There should be little doubt, however, that the French language signalled cultural distinction and aspiration. In Latin America, Gallicisms of

all kinds entered the upper strata of urban life. In Santiago de Chile in the 1890s, the newspaper *La Época* published its Parisian gossip in French, the Parque Cousiño was an imitation of the Bois de Boulogne and “in elegant homes, the furniture and the liqueurs, the carpets and the ceramics were also French [. . .] the books that the new writers exchanged among themselves were written in France and generally published in Paris” (Silva Castro 1956, 231). In Mexico City in slightly earlier years, according to Riva Palacio, “everyone says *bouquet* instead of ‘ramillete’, *timbre* instead of ‘sello’, *chic* instead of ‘gracia’, ‘gusto’ or ‘garbo’, *reverie* instead of ‘ensueño’ or ‘delirio’” (1882, 155). The writer Gutiérrez Nájera remarked, “we were literally French minds deported to American soil” (1894, 98). As for fin de siècle Australia, we find writers and editors changing their names: George Lewis Becke wanted to be known as “Louis”, Charles Withers wrote in Western Australia as “Andrée Hayward” and John Feltham Archibald, editor of the *Bulletin*, famously took to calling himself “Jules François”. The weekly at the centre of Australian nationalism was in the hands of a decided Francophile. There was also a distinct painterly Francophilia: Jose notes of the younger Sydney artists of the time that “their jargon was nearly all French—*plein air* and *nature morte*” (1933, 24), and the Sydney artists gathered at the “Café Français” and the “Paris House”.

At this point, research can easily sink into the quicksands of detail. Since the cultural processes were very much of cities, are we sure that Santiago was like Mexico, Sydney like Melbourne? And if French was being used in fanciful names and technical terms, to what extent was it actually being understood? Then, since these are small milieux, one can more or less count the Latin Americans’ trips to Paris, identify the unsuccessful contributors to the *Bookfellow*’s translation competition (as Kirsop starts doing) or assess the extent to which French was effectively being taught at the universities (Kerr’s 1975 account of the Sydney professors sounds pretty grim and might partly explain why the translation competition had no winners).

We don’t see the woods for the trees, or the inculturation for the translations, or the elephant in the room.

When I now look at those five issues of the *Bookfellow* in 1899, the ones where the two poems are proposed for competitive translation, the first thing I see is a brave and perilous attempt to create a small periodical devoted to literature and things literary: a *petite revue*. And when literary historians look at the Latin American translations, imitations and commentaries, one of the things they all see is the seminal role played by the *Revista Azul* in Mexico, founded by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and friends in 1894. The important thing is perhaps not the isolated translations, but rather the attempt to transfer a particular kind of publication space. If we look at literary exchanges between French and German in this period, the same transfer is in evidence, but with rather more successful results (Pym 2007). In fact, if one looks at accounts of French poetry at the time, the ephemeral literary periodicals might be regarded as the most active literary form of the

period: Michel Décaudin's *La Crise des valeurs symbolistes* (1981) basically comprises genealogies of who joined whom on which *petite revue*, to the extent that the most significant literary products of the time were probably those ephemeral collective periodicals. In both the centre and the periphery, spaces were being created where writers would meet with writers (and occasionally with painters) in order to create incipient avant-gardes. To find out what was happening, one would go to those marginal spaces, wilfully separated from mass circulation and wider publics.

So let us look briefly at the *Revista azul* and the *Bookfellow* as examples of what might happen when the *petite revue* form operates on a periphery.

The Mexican periodical was actually born as the Sunday edition of the newspaper *El Partido Liberal*, where Gutiérrez Nájera was head copyeditor. Each edition had just sixteen pages, "beautifully and elegantly printed", cost double the price of the regular newspaper (the publication contract is cited in Ziegler 2005, 208) and had a print run of less than a thousand. The newspaper described itself as a *Diario de política, literatura, comercio y anuncios*, and the founding of the review was described by Gutiérrez Nájera as simply giving literature a place of its own: "for the 'mad woman' of the house, we had no house, and so we founded this *revista*" (1894, 1). The journal's aesthetics were decidedly Parnassian, seeking a modernity of elaborate forms and carefully avoiding the debates about *décadence*, which were more contemporaneous: a certain belatedness was safer. The citations and reports drew on European models, mostly but not entirely French. Gutiérrez Nájera explicitly sought a mixing of literatures (a position echoed by José Martí), which in practice meant European plus Latin American (and excluding the Indoamerican). This controlled internationalism was taken seriously: in its three years of existence, the review published some ninety-six Latin American authors, and it is justly cited as having created the *modernista* movement. If we look for a political message behind the European orientation, however, there is remarkably little to be found; politics and literature did not mix here. In fact, political questioning did not mix with the parent newspaper either: *El Partido Liberal*, despite its name, was one of several periodicals subsidised by the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship, and that alignment was never questioned by the mad woman in the literary house. That should explain why the *Revista azul* emphasised the role of classical models and took care to distance itself from anything remotely connected with drugs, homosexuality or decadence. Dependence on the dictatorship was made abundantly clear when Porfirio Díaz withdrew the newspaper's subsidy in October 1896, and the *petite revue* died as a result (although a version was reborn in 1907).

That political location of a Parnassian modernity becomes significant if we compare the Latin American *petite revue* with the similar attempt in Australia. A.G. Stephens, a newspaperman and literary editor for the *Bulletin*, founded the *Bookfellow* in 1899, when it lasted for five issues (it was later revived several times). The review could not make a profit, but its print run is mentioned as a respectable 2,500. Those five issues include

not only the winner-less translation competitions but also numerous notes on what was happening in the literary worlds of Paris and London. Here, for example, are the names dropped in the first issue: Swinburne, Rodin, Sarah Bernhardt, Nietzsche, Whitman, Puvis de Chavannes, Dumas, Rossetti, Baudelaire, Whistler, D'Annunzio and Mallarmé—the names are not all French, but they might all have been circulating in Paris. So where did the news come from? The notes show the editor was reading periodicals from London, not Paris: *Pall Mall Magazine*, *Critic*, *Star*, *Studio* and the *Graphic*, although there is also a mention of the *Mercure de France* as being “the best French literary magazine”. A. G. Stephens makes no direct citation of anything French: the language is there, in the background, but the news has largely been filtered through London. For direct knowledge of French, one has to turn to Christopher Brennan's pieces on “Newer French Poetry”, which appeared in the *Bulletin* as well as in the *Bookfellow*, and it is there that one finds the only translations that might have carried some authority.

If Brennan was the local source of knowledge about French poetry (although he had been to Berlin, not Paris), what was his function as a translator? Part of an answer might be gleaned from his partial version of what he considered Mallarmé's unfinished masterwork, “Hérodiade”, which I have compared (Pym 1996) with the translation of the same text by Arthur Symons, published in the eighth (and last) issue of the London *Savoy* in 1896. Although both translations now sound excessively marked by Victorian diction, Symons was visibly translating for an audience, adapting content to rhyme where necessary, whereas Brennan was translating for the text, remaining as literal as possible—Brennan's rendition was part of a philological and philosophical explanation, whereas Symons's translation came next to elegantly erotic drawings by Beardsley. The different co-texts have consequences within the translations themselves. For Mallarmé's “frisson blanc de ma nudité”, Symons has “white quiver of my nakedness”, whereas Brennan wants neither nudity or excitement in his “white shudder of my birth”. Or again, for “J'aime l'horreur d'être vierge”, Symons has “The horror of my virginity/delights me”, while Brennan can name neither virginity nor delight: “The horror of a heart untaught/woos me”. Symons's Mallarmé became part of the scandals of London, feeding into the same theme as the Salomé that Wilde had published (in French and English) in 1893. The Australian's Mallarmé, on the other hand, was saved from decadence by an assumed work ethic: since the French poet had spent most of his productive life on the text, Brennan's translation was itself heavily worked, abstruse, distant and decidedly otherworldly, thanks to a language designed to hide any content that might have been remotely scandalous. Unfortunately, scandal and gossip were part of what the *petites revues* lived on—as A. G. Stephens later commented with respect to Brennan's exegeses, “general readers requested something more amusing” (1933/1969, 142).

To return to the *Bookfellow*, an abyss clearly separated Brennan's Mallarmé from the translation competition that had no winners, and any

“newness” that Brennan contributed was likely to create more shudders than *frissons*. Notwithstanding this, A. G. Stephens was keen to reclaim the image of an avant-garde Paris. For instance, he notes in his editorials that “the English stage has lost the literary value and flavour maintained by the French” (18 February 1899), while on the anti-British side he takes pains to denounce Kipling as “literary footnote to the empire”, complaining that “the English have merged criticism with patriotism” (25 March 1899). The imperial literary culture, to which the earlier translations from Spanish and Portuguese had contributed, was still there. But now there was a clear alternative in things French.

In the Australian case, unlike Latin America, a symbolic allegiance to French culture already had a political content. In 1887 the *Bulletin* cited France as living proof of successful protectionism, opposed to “the decadence of Free-Trade England” (3 December 1887). In the same edition, in preparation for the centenary celebrations of Australia’s colonisation, the *Bulletin*’s account of history pauses to mention La Pérouse’s unfortunately mistimed visit to Botany Bay: “But Providence, which designed the country for Caliban, had arranged that the future of Australia should not fall into the hands of a people fresh from the partial awakening of the French Revolution.” The nationalist writer Henry Lawson declared that in 1887 he “dreamed of dying in the barricades to the roar of the Marseillaise—for the Young Australian Republic” (1899/1972, 110). Far from supporting a local class-based dictatorship, the attempts at an Australian inculturation were framed by national liberation: France was a republic, and Australia should be one too, in the here and now.

## A WORLD REPUBLIC?

Parts of literary culture in Australia and Latin America thus turned to French aesthetics at approximately the same time, thanks to the same basic postcolonial logic, and translations were part of that cultural process, linked to the form of the *petite revue*. The political contents were nevertheless radically different in the two cases, and this difference is important to retain.

We might now ask if these case studies in some way indicate the one underlying process of inculturation. Have we perhaps merely picked up pieces of what Pascale Casanova (2004) has conceptualised as the development of a “world republic of letters”? Did the cultural transfers operate in such a way that separate literatures were moving into the one world literature, particularly as centred on Paris?

Part of the process described by Casanova does seem to capture the literary transcendence that peripheral writers aspired to: “The author as exceptional and the text as unattainable infinite have been declared consubstantial with the very definition of literary activity” (2004, 349). Casanova sees this in terms of writers’ separation from their home contexts, leading



to “their exclusion or expulsion—to use the language of the church, their definitive excommunication—from history, which stands accused of being incapable of rising high enough in the heaven of pure forms” (2004, 349). Through this kind of inculturation, one moves from historical society to a transcendent world republic, and translation plays a crucial part in getting there, since “[c]onsegregation in Paris is indispensable for authors from all dominated literary spaces” (2004, 127).

So is this what was happening?

One of the main problems with Casanova’s history is that it has little methodology beyond the selection of convenient names. If you pick the right handful of writers, anything can be demonstrated. Although sometimes presented as an application of Bourdieu, there is nothing sociological in the portrayal of this republic. To have any kind of empirical discovery procedure for the social, you need at least a controlled sample of some kind. That is one reason why I have gone back to a study that attempted to account for all the translations within given parameters; it is also why I have tried to look at two peripheral reviews as whole collective publications functioning in particular social contexts. And that methodology, I suspect, is perhaps why I do not quite find what Casanova says we should find.

The first of these studies, on the translations from Spanish and Portuguese into English, shows a literary network that was rigorously anti-French in its foundational ideology and which managed to survive in one form or another through to the period in which the “world republic” was supposed to have been formed. Fair enough: that might be the kind of literary regime in opposition to which the “republic” was formed. The negative comparison is also useful to the extent that it helps us locate a temporal dimension for the content being translated. In the imperial regime, translations from a distant past enhanced a relayed nobility; in the more properly modernist regimes at the end of the nineteenth century, translations from a near present, accompanying fresh news from the international centres, created the sense of an international *Jetztzeit* (to borrow Benjamin’s term), a “now-time”, a dimension in which all pasts can be replaced by activity in a shared extended present. That is indeed what modernity is about. It is not just literary transcendence—which existed prior to modernity and in competition with it (and for that matter can be dated back to Boethius, at least)—it is the sense of a shared present, marked by translations across space more than across time.

Further, any “excommunication” was not necessarily from a historical localism or outdated ethics of the literary *banlieues* (to use Casanova’s derogatory term), but from active national contexts in which the *petites revues* gained a political content, either by supporting a *latifundista* dictatorship (figuratively supplying a dominant class with luxury consumer objects) or by associating with a nationalist republicanism. Both political extremes benefited from the sense of modernity since neither movement had any millennial right to which it could lay claim. To translate from the extended present served both decolonising cultures well enough.

The most worrying part of Casanova's construal is nevertheless this assumed "consecration in Paris", which certainly works for her selected cases but is not strongly in evidence in my studies. This is where translations are supposed to be most operative as peripheral authors apparently have to be translated into French in order to become known throughout the rest of the "republic". Yes, that did indeed happen for the Russian novel, Scandinavian naturalism and Nietzsche, belatedly. But it did not happen so easily for the Australians or Latin Americans. The French journals of the time did not translate anything Australian or Latin American, as far as I have been able to find, and the historical accounts of the period indicate relatively little awareness of what all these minor foreigners were doing in Paris. Indeed, Joseph Texte, a literary historian of the day, regretted the lack of French influence abroad, remarking that the only thing the foreign press paid attention to were the scandals of supposed *décadence* (1899, 698–700). None of the Australians actually got to know Paris in any profound way, and we have seen that the *Bookfellow* actually relied on the London periodicals for its literary news. True, Brennan wrote to Mallarmé, and the latter replied; Brennan sent his poems to the *Mercur de France* and was reviewed, negatively, by the translator Henry Davray, but that was that: hardly a consecration.<sup>7</sup> As for the Latin Americans, many stayed for some time in Paris and were able to publish there in Spanish,<sup>8</sup> but the autobiographies indicate no sense of a triumphant induction into a new state. Darío said of French society: "I have always felt myself a foreigner in their midst" (1911, 14). Manuel Ugarte, who was a member of the group that established itself in Paris at the turn of the century, describes the Latin Americans' voyages to the centre not in terms of a revelation but as the "general exodus" of an "unfortunate, defeated generation" (1943, 7–8). He goes on to confess that, in Paris, "we were anonymous *rastas*" (25).

Yes, there may have been a desire for consecration: books were sent, and voyages were made. But the desire might equally have been to learn a relatively unknown language, or to find a shared meeting place, or to gain the perspective of distance. If a republic implies equality and voting for a leader, it would certainly not describe the way literary modernity greeted these particular aspirants. More important, if republican democracy implies ease of communication in public discussion, to the extent that people feel they are coauthors of their laws, then there was very little republicanism around: French was still a relatively opaque language for many, and that very opacity tended to enhance its value, at the same time as there were few translations, and hence little active interest in communication, from French into the languages of the periphery.

The model of inculturation proposes that peripheral cultures aspire to features of a wider or more central culture and that both sides of the equation are modified as a result. When our case studies are viewed in this light, they seem thankfully far from anything like the history of Christianisation: a certain common aspiration is in evidence, as is a certain geographical centre

for the projection of the corresponding illusions, but it is very difficult to see the culture of the centre being enormously transformed as a result—the postcolonial revitalisation of European letters would have to wait for at least two generations. The few translations tended to have a conservative, reinforcing influence on dominant cultural forms. On the other hand, it is relatively easy to see how a mode of inculturation transformed parts of cultures on the periphery, and indeed created new spaces and modes of literary production, with long-standing consequences. Far from being “excommunicated” as they sought to enter a more international circulation of value, the peripheral figures strategically enhanced their local status, occasionally using translations, but more often using the mystique of a foreign language that could seem, not quite republican, but perhaps otherworldly.

## NOTES

1. Mathieu’s intervention is dated 6 June 2011: Pray Tell, “Academic Justification for *Liturgiam authenticam*?” <http://www.praytellig.com/index.php/2011/06/06/academic-justification-for-liturgiam-authenticam/> (accessed May 2012).
2. The inflection is even more pronounced if we factor in a number of re-editions. Mickle’s 1775 version of *Os Lusíadas*, for example, reached its seventh edition in 1807 and its eighth and ninth in 1809.
3. There are so few items in our corpus that some translators leave deceptively large footprints. In the 1860s and 1870s, for instance, there was a sudden wave of Calderón translations (twenty individual plays, as against just three for all other Spanish playwrights). The significance of the fact is to be sought in the enthusiasm of two translators (Edward Fitzgerald and D.F. McCarthy), both of whom brought out collections of plays, rather than in any general cultural trend.
4. See the *Dictionary of National Biography 1885–1900*, vol. 21, 277–278. In our entry in the *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, this James Young Gibson (1826–1886) is mistakenly confused with the James Young Gibson (1859–1935) who was a clerk, then magistrate and interpreter, in Zululand (see *Dictionary of South African Biography*, 1968, vol. 4, 180).
5. Quantitative historians of Latin American translations were duly scandalised when my book on the history of Hispanic interculturalities (Pym 2000) analysed only one phrase of Latin American translation (a line from Hugo cited in a poem by Darío). It was nevertheless possible to spend a whole chapter explaining that one translated phrase, as Erich Auerbach might have appreciated.
6. Note that translational adequacy, for Stephens, meant that “the rhyme scheme must be preserved”. This is despite several notes in the *Bookfellow* concerning debates over the use of blank verse. The rule effectively turned the competition into a test of versification. French translations of foreign verse at this time were mainly in prose or free verse.
7. See Austin (1969, 154–162). Davray’s review appeared in the *Mercure de France* of 24 October 1897 (299). Mallarmé is supposed to have rebuked Davray for the negative comments.
8. In 1912 the director of the Cuban national archives complained that Latin Americans were reluctant to read locally published works, “and if they ever do deign to accept a Latin American fruit, it first has to be peeled by a Garnier, a Michard, or an Ollendorff [all French publishers]” (Alcover 1912, 61, my translation).

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## 7 Rainer Maria Rilke in Lucian Blaga's Translations from English

*Sean Cotter*

In November 1959, sixteen years after the Soviet army's entrance into Romania, one year after its departure and in the midst of the tightened political controls that followed the Soviet presence, Lucian Blaga translated Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnet XLIII", which begins, "How do I love thee, let me count the ways" (Browning 1887: 428). Browning's poem speaks of emotion which has moved from the general love of her "lost saints" to "thee", a particular object of her desire. Blaga's translation reverses this transit as he changes the topic from the personal to the national. Through translation, Blaga attempts to reimagine his position and that of his nation in the new political context of Soviet colonisation and a socialist government. He is well placed to make this attempt: born in 1898, he was Romania's premier modernist poet between the world wars and one of its leading philosophers. Until the Soviet period, he was a member of the Academy and held a university chair in cultural philosophy. He turned his extensive aesthetic and theoretical formation to the question of translation once the new regime prohibited him from publishing anything else. The question of translation, for Blaga, is not only the question of his own voice as a banned writer, but also the question of his nation's survival in the face of outside domination. Blaga moves translation from a peripheral practice to the centre of his image of Romania, in terms more complicated than can be accounted for through standard hegemony/resistance models of cultural politics.

This identification of creative work with the nation is not itself a surprising move for an intellectual from Central/Eastern Europe. Of the group of intellectuals, which also includes historians, lawyers and scientists, the poet occupies a privileged position as the one who perfects the national language and, in some cases, creates it. In the smaller nations of this region, you are what you speak. Given the relative lack of political power of smaller nations—confronted with the Austro-Hungarian, Russian or Ottoman empires—the state's authority relies on the nation's language, rather than the other way around; and the high cultural status of linguistic creations legitimates the political status of the language's speakers. If it seems tenuous, in this context, to make a language from a dialect and an army, then Ukrainians, Slovaks, Poles or Romanians may do so from a dialect and a poem. "These languages

became surrogate national homes and the seedbeds for future national states”, writes Zygmunt Bauman, “[. . .] nowhere else in modern times has there developed such a deep belief in the well-nigh magical power of the word and of cultural symbols in general; nowhere else have such far-reaching hopes and formidable fears surrounded their use” (1989, 78–79). When Blaga attempts to articulate the nation in his poetry, he is not extending the role of the writer but fulfilling basic requirements for the position, inherited from the nineteenth century. His sensitivity to this definition of the poet dates from his first book, which was to be published in 1918, the year his native Transylvania joined the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia to create modern Romania. Blaga delayed publication by a year so that a book as sombre as his would not be the region’s first contribution to the new national culture.

It may be more surprising, for an intellectual from this region or any other, to identify the nation and a translation. Yet in the same sense that the Petrarchan sonnet of “How Do I Love Thee” is a translated literary form, the nation is already a translated social form. As Bauman argued, the creation of the Central European nation depends upon the power of words and cultural symbols. One proposes an anthem, designs a flag or builds a theatre, not because there already is a local community of actors, but because these forms define the modern nation. In Benedict Anderson’s phrase (1983), the European nation “pirates” American national forms; in Central Europe, one translates another, sometimes literally. Thomas Cooper has identified the translation that, unacknowledged as such, forms part of the anti-Austrian play by the Hungarian József Katona: “The irony is that a play which now occupies a place in the Hungarian canon as an early call to liberation from foreign rule contains passages that are plagiarized, if in translation, from . . . one of the greatest Austrian playwrights” (Cooper 2010, 136). Indeed, when considering the reduced number of speakers and writers of this region’s languages, we may easily imagine the greater reliance on translations to maintain literary life. (In contemporary Latvia, for example, translations account for 70 per cent of published titles.) The romantic idea of the nation travels through literal and metaphorical translation to the intellectuals of this region in order to create nations which exist in translation, despite nearly constant claims to national particularity.

Given the historical importance of translation to the region’s nation building, what seems unusual in Blaga is not his association of translation and nation, but his recognition thereof. “This [poetry translation] was a way to live”, a character states in Blaga’s novel from the 1950s, “or better put, to smoulder, in a country that had capitulated” (1990, 126).<sup>1</sup> Even here we must adjust our reading of translation and the nation. What the notion of translation as “a way to live” and Blaga’s corresponding translation practice indicate are not the adoption of translation as a site of resistance to threats to the nation, the kind of argument we find in the work of Tejaswini Niranjana or Lawrence Venuti. Blaga does not advocate disruption of the Soviet presence through the strategic mistranslation of Soviet texts, or

a foreignising translation practice to resist Soviet power (one which itself foreignised Romanian public speech) (see Cotter 2008). Rather, Blaga uses translation to revise his national idea into one based on translation. As the romantic poem was to the nineteenth-century nation, the translation is to Blaga's twentieth. If the perfection of the national language in poetry legitimised the romantic nation, the "defects" of a literary text assembled from other texts model Blaga's modern nation.

Blaga's translation of Browning was part of his large-scale translation effort during the 1950s. He translated *Faust*, poems from world literature and a series of poems from English. He was also able to publish some articles related to translation and to give a public presentation about *Faust*, attended by a crowd so large that the pressure of it tore the seats from the floor. Translation proved such an effective platform for Blaga's public persona that when the regime eventually offered him the chance to publish original work again, he asked instead for more translation assignments. In a posthumously published poem, Blaga declares, "I translate, I always translate, even when I write original verses, I do nothing more than translate" (1996, 470). Blaga embraces translation, in other words, with great enthusiasm, as though he had found in it a solution to a national crisis. Yet his translation practice is unusual, and the image of the nation that results is complicated.

We see an example of unusual practice in the variegated relationship of Blaga's translation to Browning's original. Blaga's version makes a sudden shift between its first two stanzas, from the first, which follows the English very closely, to a second stanza that does not. Barrett writes:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.  
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height  
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight  
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

And Blaga translates:

Cât te iubesc? Îngăduie să cumpănesc.  
Atât de-adânc eu te iubesc, atât de-nalt,  
cât sufletu-mi cătând ajunge, până-n alt  
tărâm, care întrece rostul pământesc.  
(Blaga 1975, 152)

[How much do I love you? Let me take account.  
So deeply do I love you, and so high  
as my soul can climb, until another  
realm which moves beyond earthly purpose.]

Blaga matches Browning's rhyme scheme precisely and maintains, as she does, a constant measure (six feet per line to her five). Aside from dropping



“ideal Grace”, he preserves her rhetoric of the soul’s expansion in space. This performance shows that Blaga is not hampered by the inherent differences between Romanian and English: he can translate “closely”. For this reason, his second stanza presents a puzzle. Browning’s original reads:

I love thee to the level of everyday’s  
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.  
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;  
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.

And Blaga:

Și te iubesc până-n acel îndepărtat  
zenit, ce fiecare zi l-atinge-n drum.  
Și liberă, în dreptul meu, și pur, precum  
acei care de glorie s-au lepădat,

[And I love you until that far-away  
zenith that each day reaches on its path.  
And freely, as is my right, and purely, as  
those who from glory turned away.]

The English is not suddenly more difficult to translate; there is no inherent reason why Blaga should introduce the idea of the “zenith” and omit the repetitions of “I love thee”. These changes are not explained by the interactions of Romanian and English, or Blaga and Browning, nor should we be tempted to read the possessive pronoun politically, in the change between “strive for Right” and “as is my right”. The changes are more persuasively explained by the fact that when Blaga changes stanzas he changes his source text. The second stanza is, in fact, translated from a German version of the same Browning poem, by a poet Blaga admired intensely, Rainer Maria Rilke:

Ich liebe dich bis zu dem stillsten Stand,  
den jeder Tag erreicht im Lampenschein  
oder in Sonne. Frei, im Recht, und rein  
wie jene, die vom Ruhm sich abgewandt.  
(Rilke 1936, 157)

[I love you up to the quietest point  
each day reaches by lamplight  
or sun. Freely, as is right, and purely  
as those who from glory turned away.]

Rilke’s version includes the image of “the stillest point reached by the sun”, omits the repetitions and ends “pure, like those who turned away from glory”

(“rein, wie jene, die vom Ruhm sich abgewandt”), diction Blaga's text follows precisely. The Rilke translations appear in a German-language anthology of world poetry, *Die schönsten Gedichte der Weltliteratur*, which Blaga cites in a manuscript essay. Blaga presents us, therefore, with a Romanian text created programmatically from one English and one German text.

This choice means that Blaga's translation does something the original cannot, in the same way that John Felstiner's famous translation of Paul Celan's “Todesfüge” creates a regression from English to German. Blaga encompasses an interaction of cultures within his Romanian text. Part of the aim of translation from multiple sources is to demonstrate the capacity of Romanian, something like playing two pianos at the same time. But even this analogy does not capture the role of the Romanian-language text itself as a third participant. The language of the translation shows no seam or defect as a result of this complicated cultural heritage, nor is it a particularly transformed or foreignised language: it is a refined, domestic, high-cultural Romanian text, produced by a high-status poet. The point, however, is not about Blaga's abilities, but about Romanian culture's ability to excel within this kind of interaction. As a demonstration of a national idea, Blaga's text argues for the possibility of a viable Romanian culture, even under the strong influence of the Soviet. Romanian culture has not “capitulated” and will not disappear; rather, it will distinguish itself in its absorption and reformation of cultural forces stronger than itself.

The translation's elegance points to a more accomplished cultural performance than we might imagine for the “transcultural” Romania, the culture Blaga's compatriot Constantin Noica would later argue is simply an “original synthesis” (1995, 4). The translator is more important than a synthesiser. Rather than being the dialectic product of local and foreign, the text uses translation as a type of assemblage. Its Romanian predates the entry into Romania of Browning and Browning/Rilke, encompasses these divergent texts and asserts continued life, but only in relationship with them. Romania persists as party to the interactions of Romanian and English, German and English and Romanian and German. The nation becomes multinational. Such is the cultural idea created by moving translation into the place that had been occupied by the Romantic poem. Blaga creates the national translator.

This national role for translation depends, not only on the historical association of poet and nation described earlier, but also on a complex set of associations, some of which are personal to Blaga. To understand why Rilke is not an accidental choice for this cultural performance, we must leave behind, for a moment, the synchronous Soviet context and move diachronically through Blaga's biography, from the 1950s to the 1930s. Blaga “pirates” Rilke for the role of national translator because Blaga reads him as the emblem of the multilingual nation of Switzerland. In a 1956 essay, Blaga identifies Rilke's multinational biography with his cultural production:

Rilke, the Austrian from Bohemia, wandered quite a bit. He was familiar with most of the countries of Europe. At the end of last century

he lived one year in Russia, whose Muscovite-Byzantine influences can sometimes be felt in his creations. The poet wandered on the Via Appia, in Italy. He lived in France, in England, in Scandinavia. In Paris he was for some time the secretary and friend of the sculptor Rodin, on whose art he wrote with the great passion of youth and an ardent apologist. (Blaga 1956, 76)

Like Blaga, Rilke is born into in a region of the Austro-Hungarian empire which, in the 1950s, is controlled by a Soviet-backed regime. While some Russian influence might appear in his work, it is not determinative; Rilke is identified with “most of the countries of Europe”. His appreciation of Rodin seems to follow, rhetorically, from this biography, as a natural outgrowth of his multinationality. An intercontinental biography breeds a refined cultural sensibility. This diversity extends to a diversity of cultural traditions in Rilke: Blaga states that he “cultivated a Christian pantheism along almost Brahministic lines, and led a life of Franciscan poverty” (1956, 76). The multitude of cultures exists simultaneously: Rilke is a pantheist, Franciscan Brahman who lived all over Europe and Russia and died in Switzerland. “He who changed so many countries made Switzerland, which he called ‘God’s waiting room’, his final country, on whose high plateaus he learned to die” (76). Taking the sequence of the essay’s ideas as a kind of causality, we see Blaga suggest that Switzerland, that multilingual and multicultural country, is the most appropriate home for Rilke, the only place where he would finally rest. When Rilke appears as a source for Blaga’s translation, he is not one pole in an English-German binary. He is a metonymy for the multilingual cultural product his German text helps create. Rilke enables Blaga to create, through translation, a Romania along a Swiss ideal.

In Blaga’s national imagination, Rilke occupies the role of poet of Switzerland. His value is charged with the country’s personal significance for Blaga, who resides there, with his family, for several years as a diplomat. “That’s where my philosophy was made”, Blaga declares to his wife in 1937, “here in Berne, and no-where else!” (Brediceanu and Blaga-Bugnariu 1982, 158). In Switzerland, Blaga engages in his first serious translation projects, and he makes some of his closest friends. These two events are intertwined such that the experience of translating is infused with the emotions of friendship. This association does not, as one might expect, lead Blaga towards more faithful versions. On the contrary, the more disparate the original and the translation, the more intense the sensation of friendship. This dynamic is repeated in the disparate relationship of Browning’s original and Blaga’s translation; the greater distance strengthens the performance of Romanian culture. Switzerland becomes Blaga’s model for vibrant national culture created through the assemblage of various language cultures.

Hugo Marti, a Swiss novelist, is one of only two close friends Blaga makes in his lifetime. Already ill from monoxide poisoning when they meet, Marti enjoyed an intense friendship with Blaga until 1937, when Marti died

at the age of 43. His last words were said to be "My greetings to Blaga" (Curticeanu 1995, 263). From 1922 until the end of his life, Marti edited a weekly literary supplement to the newspaper *Der Bund*. He and Blaga met as a result of the latter's duties as Romanian press attaché. The two writers pursued different opportunities to promote Romanian culture: they organised a special issue of *Der Bund* on Romanian literature, they set up readings of Romanian poetry in translation and they arranged a special radio program of Romanian music and poetry, broadcast in Zürich and rebroadcast in Basel. Marti had some prior experience of Romania: for two years he was a tutor to a Cantacuzino royal house, in Blaga's home region, Transylvania, and he wrote two collections of novellas about the country. Both men were married, each with one child, and the families became very close. As an example of the depth of feeling between the two families, it is significant that in 1974, Lucian's daughter Dorli visited Hugo's son Rolf, weathering passport struggles beyond the norm for the socialist period. This meeting continued to be emotional for Dorli when she recounted it many years on (D. Blaga 2003, 116).

This closeness between two writers finds cultural expression, above all, in translation. Marti translates Blaga's play, *Meșter Manole*, into German, and Blaga brings Hugo Marti's collection of novellas, *Rumänisches Intermezzo*, into Romanian. Blaga's wife Cornelia notes in her journal:

I could even say that they are among our closest friends. Marti translated *Master Manole* for a theater in Berne, and the production was, as much for ourselves as for them, one of those beautiful moments, never to be forgotten. Lucian then translated a book of Marti's in Romanian and published it . . . (Brediceanu and Blaga-Bugnariu 1982, 154)

Cornelia's description uses the reciprocal translations as evidence of her and Lucian's affection for the Martis. For the translation of *Manole*, Blaga and Marti's work is "Truly a duet" in the words of Marti's wife (quoted in D. Blaga, 1989, 184). The translation is produced by the juxtaposition of the two authors, one Romanian and one Swiss, working over a desk, literally in the space between their bodies. "They often sat at the desk together, drafting line by line" (D. Blaga 1989, 184). According to Dorli, the German manuscript has pages in both Marti's hand and Blaga's. They may have been taking turns, passing the pen back and forth across the desk, while the translation precipitated from their friendship onto the paper.

This association of friendship with translation is doubled, in Blaga's accounts of Switzerland, by his experience of the productive juxtaposition of cultures. Blaga collaborated with a second poet, Hermann Hauswirth, on the translation of a collection of Romanian folk poems. The subject is ripe for a romantic, nationalistic approach, and it is possible that the Blaga of the 1930s, who wrote "In Praise of the Romanian Village", experienced some of this motivation. Yet this experience of bringing the national together with

translation persisted, somewhere within Blaga, to bear fruit during the Soviet period. Blaga introduced himself to his collaborator, Hermann Hauswirth, by asking him for help with a governmental letter. Blaga negotiated the meeting with diplomatic skill, as Hauswirth recounts in 1982:

One afternoon of the year 1930, one of the elderly host ladies in the house on number 6 Kramgasse entered my study and, a little shocked, told me that a man from abroad wanted to see me. She asked me if she should show him in. I said: yes and she brought the respective gentleman into the room. He presented himself: My name is Blaga, Lucian Blaga.

He looked curiously at the manuscript on my desk. It was a translation, nearly complete, of Victor Hugo's most beautiful poem: "Booz endormi." Blaga seemed very interested. He was looking for someone to help him with the stylisation of certain business texts in German. He also asked me if I would be disposed to translate, with his help, Romanian folk poetry into German. I responded to both questions in the affirmative. (quoted in D. Blaga 1989, 115–116)

The story, as told by Hauswirth, places strong emphasis on Blaga's foreignness. In a precisely identified Swiss location, an old woman announces with wide eyes that a man had arrived "from abroad". The first paragraph ends with the enunciation of his exotic name. The story foregrounds the national difference between the two men. Blaga finds the passage from his first to second questions, and from foreign to Swiss, in the translation lying on the desk, the same medium that connected Blaga and Marti. The foreigner and the Swiss are able to meet in the company of a third nationality, a Frenchman. This multiple juxtaposition of nationalities in translation seems appropriate to Switzerland, a country with four national languages.

Blaga's collaboration with Hauswirth was similar to his collaboration with Marti. In both cases, the translators did the most substantial part of the work together, with the manuscript on the table between them. They met at the embassy or at Hauswirth's family house in the country. Blaga explained the literal meaning of the texts he had chosen, as well as the metre, sounds and rhyme schemes. Hauswirth recalled that translating *Miorița*—the most famous of Romanian folk poems and most important to Blaga—was a special event:

I will never forget the day when it came time to work on *Miorița*. This was in the summer of 1930, at Saaneen, where I had invited Blaga to visit my parents. Blaga spent several pleasant days there. In my parents' house we wrote the largest part of the translations, both with a great enthusiasm. He loved this area of Saaneen, where, some years later, Béla Bartók stayed for some months, the guest of Dr. Paul Sacher, in a beautiful old house, where he composed the *Divertimento* minuet. While we walked the paths in this beautiful area of Saaneen, I learned much about Romanian folk poetry and folk music (which both Béla Bartók

and Blaga's father-in-law, Tiberiu Brediceanu, had collected). (Quoted in D. Blaga 1989, 116)

The accounts of translation resemble each other, in their productive multinationality. While walking through the Swiss mountains alongside a foreigner, the treasures of Romanian folk culture appear. Not only the poetry they were translating, but also the folk music. Hauswirth's description makes apparent the reach of "Swiss translation", to use a particular sense of the term "Swiss". It is one thing to argue that Blaga's translation practice is charged with the memory of his friend Marti. It is one step further to observe that this practice engenders a textual community as international as Switzerland. The association does not stop at friends like Marti or relatives such as Tiberiu Brediceanu, but it also includes Victor Hugo and Béla Bartók. These Swiss translation experiences create lasting, emotionally resonant associations for Blaga. Blaga experiences Swiss culture as a weaving together of relationships with cultural figures.

As a result of his lung illness, Marti often wrote Blaga letters from a sanatorium in Davos, an old gold mining town (see D. Blaga 1989). This association of his friend with gold mining may have supplied Blaga with the conceit he uses to describe his emotions during an evening dedicated to his and Hauswirth's translations. The final paragraph of his essay "Miorița' in Switzerland" is filled with the enthusiasm Blaga feels for Swiss culture:

As a Romanian—you experience, attending this kind of evening, the most curious feelings. Alongside foreigners, you feel, for the first time it seems, the beauty you thought you had left at home. Alongside foreigners, you delight in all you knew once and tried to forget. Alongside foreigners, you begin to unearth treasures, which in a way belong to you because they lie hidden beneath your land. And the happiness you feel while you dig is just as great as that the foreigner feels, even though you know what you will unearth, and he does not. (Blaga 1973, 161–162)

Swiss culture is a place where one stands, as Blaga's rhetoric insists, "alongside foreigners". One's own nationality is not erased, even if one tried to forget it. On the contrary, the juxtaposition with the foreign uncovers native treasures. Blaga, in this essay, is working out the central problem of the national translation: how to create that space between nationalist ideas of absolute cultural particularity and (what we would now describe as) absolute hybridity. It is Romanian, as the one digging has knowledge of the mine, but it is a Romanianness only available in the company of foreigners. It charts a space similar to translation in that the translation, a Romanian treasure, only comes into being through the interference of the foreign. The translation, like the nation it creates, belongs to you only "in a way".

Switzerland comes back to Blaga during his 1950s translation projects as a cause for optimism. The aforementioned repetitions of "alongside foreigners"

are an uncommonly insistent rhetorical device for Blaga, who is known for the power of his restraint. They appear, along with the same tropes of enrichment and national treasure, in one other essay: the introduction to his collection of translations from world poetry. The concluding paragraph of Blaga's introduction to *Din lirica universală* was written 20 November 1956:

Translating—I assuaged an ardent thirst. Translating—I enriched myself through an experiment. I wanted to see how much poetry could pass from one language into another. Translating—I felt myself growing. For I wearied myself only with poems that awakened my enchantment, and which, through translation, could become in a way mine, ours, Romanians'. (Blaga 1957, 5–6)

Across the intervening decades, “translating” repeats the earlier cadence, as a metonymy for “alongside foreigners”. This rhetoric allowed Blaga to recall his Swiss friends and translation projects during his oppression in the 1950s. He wanted his translations to help create a Romanian culture that could operate like the Swiss: multinational and, importantly, connected to the community of great Western artists. In another essay from this period, Blaga rejects the image of a “smouldering” Romania: “I look at Cluj, I look at Sibiu, I look at Bucharest, Iași and Timișoara, and all the Romanian towns and villages; I strongly believe that these will last for centuries and will not be turned into mounds of ash” (Blaga 1954, 10). Translation is Blaga's means to protect the Romanian cities he loves, to unearth their treasure from their future destruction. Swiss translation gives Blaga the basis from which to believe with such conviction. And a Swiss translation is what Blaga creates by invoking Rilke's version of Browning's poem.

Something like this image of Switzerland, therefore, lies behind Blaga's incorporation of Rilke into his translation of Browning. This complicated and idealistic image of multicultural Switzerland is frankly idiosyncratic, based not on wide reading in the languages and literatures of the country, but rather on intense experience of collaborative translation. Depth rather than breadth describes the powerful mark this experience leaves on Blaga's ideal of national culture, such that, confronted by Soviet colonisation, he turned to translate with Rilke and an idealised Switzerland. While the efficacy of this turn lies beyond what this essay can show, the significance of this turn is clear. Blaga rewrote ideas of national culture in order to place translation at the centre. This practice uses the forms of Romantic nationalism to create a very different type of national idea. Yet, for this idea of a Romania-as-translation, Blaga remained ready to devote (what turned out to be) the last decade of his life.

Blaga's image of a complex nation, in which multiple languages, nationalities and histories constitute a viable culture, lies at the centre of the larger, theoretical point his case holds for the study of translation. In the same way that Romania-as-translation encompasses overlapping cultural interactions,

so too must our models of translation move beyond the binaries of hegemony and resistance. An account of Blaga's translation practice must follow these personal associations of Switzerland, Rilke and translation. Otherwise, as much the choices themselves as Blaga's personal investment in translation are difficult to explain. A reading that focused solely on the political role of translations (and translations did have such a role) in this period, one that would present translator choices as symptomatic of the Soviet colonisation, would describe only that he turned to translation during the 1950s, not the precise, idiosyncratic contours his turn involved. Blaga's national Romanian idea was in flux over the period in which he produced his best-known definitions of the culture, and he began to change his position before the Soviet period. The changing definitions of English and modern poetry were also important to Blaga's choices, as were the conditions which permitted Rilke's perambulation. More than Browning or Rilke, however, circulates in Blaga's translations. The most important network of circulation in this story is that which brings nationalism east with the German romantics and the social form of the intellectual east from the French Revolution. Blaga's translations evidence the circulation of national forms, a fact which suggests that the idea of a particular, national character may be one of the most successful transnational cultural phenomena. Lucian Blaga's substitution of a translation for the role of a poem unveils the antinationalist structure that haunts the history of the nation-state.

## NOTE

1. All uncredited translations are my own.

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## 8 Rabindranath Tagore and “World Literature”

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Outside of the 300 million people conversant with the Bengali language in Bangladesh, India and their considerable diasporas, Rabindranath Tagore's name is known to those who follow the ebbs and currents of international literary prizes and the trends they fashion. In 1913, this poet of undivided, British-ruled India, writing in what was still an emergent literature in a vernacular language, won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Passing over Thomas Hardy for the signal honour, the Swedish committee awarded the prize to *Gitanjali* (*Song Offerings*), a collection of 103 poems and assorted bits of writing, translated into English by Tagore himself and reprinted by Macmillan ten times between March and November 1913 *before* the award of the Nobel (Dutta and Robinson 2009, 185, 167).<sup>1</sup> Cheered on enthusiastically by W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and William Rothenstein, Tagore was to have an extraordinary international influence on and enduring encounters with intellectuals from Germany to Russia, from Argentina to Japan.<sup>2</sup> Tagore's reputation in these circles is a curious one, reminiscent of some others who hail from contexts where poetry and piety, the sacred and the secular, are deemed to go hand in hand. The names of Rumi and Kahlil Gibran come to mind. Like them, Tagore shot to fame on the basis of mystical, metaphysical poetry, and, like them, his reputation has suffered ever since from his reception in these terms.<sup>3</sup> Hailed as an Eastern seer and prophet who would bring to the West the esoteric wisdom of the East, Tagore also fitted in well with the mandate of idealism that the Nobel demanded. Obviously, the committee “had not the foggiest notion that in far-off Bengal Tagore was a polemical critic of religious, social and political orthodoxy” (Dutta and Robinson 2009, 185). Remarking on “how startling Tagore's incursion was into the various languages of the twentieth century”, Amit Chaudhuri contends that Tagore was perhaps the modern world's “first international literary celebrity” (quoted in Tagore 2011, xx). However, in 1993, E.P. Thompson, the historian of British radical movements, observed, “The West is still, after half a century, groping in the half-light to discern the features of Tagore's genius” (quoted in Dutta and Robinson 2009, v). The year 2011 was the 150th anniversary of the Nobel Laureate's birth, and while the poet was honoured with much fanfare in Latin America and Asia, Ian Jack in the

*Guardian* asked, “Rabindranath Tagore was a global phenomenon, so why is he neglected?”

Indeed, the ephemerality of Tagore’s presence in the realm of global literature is in marked contrast to his powerful influence not only in the annals of subcontinental literature and culture, but in the daily lives of the 300 million Bengalis who continue to sing his two thousand songs today, to celebrate his birthday every year on Rabindra Jayanti and to hold *rabindra sangeet sabhas*—that is, gatherings where his songs are practised and performed. Whether deified, reified or vilified, Jack testifies, “No other language group reveres a writer as 250 million Bengali-speakers do Tagore. Shakespeare and Dickens don’t come into the picture; the popularity of Burns in Scotland 100 years ago may be his nearest equivalent in Britain” (Jack 2011). Even if we disregard the continual lament of Tagore admirers that he is not accorded the place he deserves, mainly in the Anglophone world, there is still something remarkable about his enduring presence among ordinary Bengalis 150 years on. This is despite his appropriation by the connoisseurs and cognoscenti of Bengali high culture, immortalised in the word *rabindrik* (from Rabi, part of the poet’s first name) and the audacious extension of the copyright over his works by Visva Bharati University, which holds his estate.<sup>4</sup> If uploads on YouTube can be relied upon, impromptu recitals of Tagore’s songs at Calcutta’s upmarket cafes and bars by Europeans and Indians together are not unknown (Café Tagore n.d.), nor are recent adaptations of his classical raga-based romantic lyrics for Valentine’s Day shows in Bangladesh (Saurav Goswami n.d.)! In a democratic transgression of Tagore’s exalted reputation, high and low cultures continue to pay equal homage to his songs. Such is the affective appeal of his lyrics that they were adopted as the national anthems of two different nation-states, divided by religious persuasion, but united in a shared love of the Bengali language: India in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971. No wonder that Narmadeshwar Jha reports in *Prospects*, the UNESCO quarterly review on education: “Rabindranath Tagore’s reputation as a poet has so eclipsed his contributions to other fields that these have seldom received the attention and appreciation they deserve” (Jha 1994, 11). So what happened?

Notwithstanding changing trends in literary taste and genre and the vagaries of translation, Jack declares, in his article that sparked off rejoinders and correctives in the *Guardian* in recent years: “Tagore’s neglect is extraordinary”. In the arena of popular culture, via bookstores and the great books tradition, Tagore is often perceived as another Kahlil Gibran, while his theoretical interventions in literary criticism are nowhere acknowledged in contemporary scholarship in the currently resurgent field of world literature. Despite his transnational appeal, his cosmopolitan eclecticism, his transcendence of claims of religious and regional chauvinism, his continuing relevance as world *littérateur* and his astounding oeuvre of “thousands of pages of poetry, prose, plays, essays, letters, humorous pieces, autobiographical writings, and travel literature” (Tagore 2011, 1), Tagore garners

scant mention in the growing scholarship on “world literature” in the Anglophone world: even till the mid-1990s, the *Norton Anthology of Literature* was probably the only mainstream university volume to have included selections from his work. This neglect is even more marked given that one of Tagore’s critical contributions to literature is the conceptualisation of his idea of world literature or *visva sahitya*. As the Anglo–North American and European academy scrambles to reconstitute and refresh an old field of study by purportedly mining gems of world literature, such neglect remains not only curious but criminal. Tagore does not feature in contemporary formulations of world literature theory, even though he is now included as a “sample” in world literature anthologies. Still impaired and underserved by the exigencies of translation in a global publishing market even more dominated by English, Tagore is both the *litmus test* and *limit case* of what world literature might be between and beyond the borders of his linguistic origins. Even today, Tagore’s composite, collective vision refuses to be contained within a comparative mode that compartmentalises different literary traditions in a “national” smorgasbord approach to world literature studies. His formulations ask the still-relevant questions: what is world literature and how is it distinct from *literature*?

My aim in this essay is to illuminate the need to accommodate Tagore’s vision in contemporary world literary theory (“world literature” studies) and to suggest how the neglect of Tagore from a theoretical perspective illustrates the central and symptomatic problem of the field. A nomenclatural aid that seeks to bring to world/global citizens of today the irrefutable proof of a small world and the globalisation of culture, this “new” world literature continues to fight some old battles: the meeting of East and West, nationalism versus internationalism, the absolute necessity of linguistic diversity and the paradoxical effect of translation on the language pool, the place of the university in our public lives and a continuation of the idea that peace and prosperity, security and solidarity, may be achieved through the ideological vehicle of literature. This essay gestures towards how one may “do” world literature in an age that is still deeply invested in the nineteenth-century legacy of the nation-state, where the borders of geographical territories and the boundaries of intellectual imaginaries are not only *not* porous or limitless but are increasingly surveilled and managed. My argument is divided into two parts. The first part rehearses some of the recurrent assumptions specific to recent debates in world literature studies. It interrogates the investments of Western monolingual and monocultural conceptualisations of literature and expands upon its nineteenth-century, binary-driven paradigms. It then situates Tagore under the rubric of comparative literature studies in the local Indian context, where the idea of world literature is in direct contradistinction to how it is understood in the “global” metropolitan academy. The second part resurrects Tagore’s expansive vision of world literature to suggest an alternative vision of how world literature studies may be revamped and reconfigured. Reading Tagore’s vision of *visva sahitya*, this

essay speculates upon a far more porous, promiscuous and productive genealogy of literature that derives from Asian traditions and radicalises the very idea of what we may mean by the “literary” in our contemporary world.

## CONTEMPORARY WORLD LITERATURE: NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES?

The recent impetus for carving out a new field of study in “world literature” is partly being powered by the current crisis in comparative literature departments in the Anglo-North American and forced-to-be-multicultural European academy. The idea of world literature has gained particular favour in a regressive post-9/11 world as a means of resolving the recurring tensions between an East and West deemed to be distinct cultures, giving rise to the notion of the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996). Even as scholars respond to world political events and retool themselves in the face of theoretical and institutional shifts (through, for example, the creation of global studies or peace and conflict resolution studies as fields of inquiry), world literature studies is being hailed as a necessary innovation that will revitalise dwindling literature departments.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the *invention* of “world literature” takes place as comparative literature departments lose support and funding and their scholar clusters are broken up and redistributed into other departments in the humanities. The most famous instance of this was the 2009 “dis-establishment” of the Centre for Comparative Literature at the University of Toronto, which was founded in 1969 by the preeminent Canadian poet and critic Northrop Frye. Highlighting the intellectual and institutional loss that this move entailed, Neil ten Kortenaar, director of the centre, initiated an online signature petition in the form of an open letter to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, university professor in the humanities at the Centre for Comparative Literature at Columbia University, who had herself fought hard, and lost, the battle to save comparative literature departments on her home ground in the US. Spivak had traced the history of the demise and “the last gasp of a dying discipline” in her quietly insistent and fervently mournful *Death of a Discipline* in 2003 (Spivak 2003, xii). Traditionally, departments of English and comparative literature have had little traffic with each other: they speak in different tongues and address different congregations. English has capitalised on the various theoretical moves that swept metropolitan academe in the last half century: feminism, deconstruction, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism and so forth. Comparative literature’s hallmark remains a “care for language and idiom” (Spivak 2003, 5). As Spivak put it, under the shadow of the Iron Curtain and in the wake of the Cold War, comparative literature departments used to supply the know-how to engage in diplomatic relations, and yes, also war. Some argue that it is indeed the linguistic rigour of comparative literature, the contingent demands of area studies and the sheer

inventiveness of international relations that keeps English honest and on its toes. Now, in the face of denuded language studies and declining student numbers in language classes, comparative literature departments face slow dissolution or absorption into English departments. The task of teaching literatures from non-English backgrounds and other geographies falls to English literature, or what they are called now: departments of literature and/or culture, where an entity named “world literature” is surrogately carried, given birth to and taught.

World literature has periodically reared its head in times of such “terminal” (Medovoi 2011, 643) or “moral” (Smith 2011, 585) crises in the Western psyche and polity. Starting with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who has been resurrected as the indisputable founding father of *Weltliteratur* by almost every metropolitan theorist of contemporary world literature, origin stories about the intrinsic globality of the field abound (Casanova 2004, Damrosch 2003, Gallagher 2008, Jullien 2011, Moretti 2005, Moses 1995, Saussy 2006, Simonsen and Stougaard-Nielsen 2008). In 1827, Goethe, the progenitor of linguistic-cultural nationalism in the Weimar Republic in the mid-eighteenth century, envisaged a literary “market, where all nations offer their goods” to foster “a general intellectual commerce” (quoted in Casanova 2004, 14). In a letter to Thomas Carlyle, his Scottish Calvinist interlocutor, Goethe had hoped that such a market would promote ideas of peace and understanding, first among intellectuals, and then among *hoi polloi*. Such literature would have no dominating impulse, no master narrative, no overarching standpoint and no normative conditionalities of achievement. It would derive from the ethnic roots of art and yet escape political chauvinism. All this would be accompanied by a universal and moral vision of man with the principles of unity behind the chaotic surface of nature. Overdetermined as the field is by the weight of this single word mentioned in a single letter, the current avatar of world literature is driven by different anxieties. At the heart of this revival of the “world literature” model is a desire to assert a constructed continuity of post-Constantinople traditions that, under the guise of an appropriated Greek classicism, supports a civilisational battlefield. Such a claim is the last bastion holding out against postcolonial and poststructuralist interrogations of the Enlightenment even as the Other threatens to tear down the doors of Western societies from within.

Most contemporary theorists of world literature concede that the lion’s share of the market is occupied by European literatures and that this “world” lacks “an eastern and a southern hemisphere” (Miner 1990, 20). Despite the attempts to make national and linguistic diversity the pivots upon which world literature turns, this field admits only those works that can either be easily translated into English or that fit readily into European literary expectations. This problematic of world literature was identified decisively by Gregory Jusdanis in “World Literature: The Unbearable Lightness of Thinking Globally” (2003) and Gayatri Spivak in *The Death of a Discipline*

(2003). The subsequent years have seen the urgency and intensity of the debate both in the field of literary studies and literary history as evidenced by special issues on the theme in *Comparative Literature Studies* ("World Literature and Globalization", 2004), *New Literary History* ("Literary History in the Global Age", 2008), *European Journal of English Studies* ("Theorizing New English(es): The Double Contingency of Postcoloniality and Globality", 2008), *Literature and Philosophy* ("Literary Theory in an Age of Globalisation", 2008) and *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* ("Debating Local Cosmopolitanisms", 2011), to name just a few. That the debate has become deeply impassioned can be seen in recent essay titles like "World Literature, *Littérature-Monde*: Which Literature? Whose World?" (Forsdick 2010), "'Terminal Crisis?' From the Worlding of American Literature to World-System Literature" (Medovoi 2011), "What Good Is World Literature? World Literature Pedagogy and the Rhetoric of Moral Crisis" (Smith 2011), among many.

In order to counter the hegemonic hold of European traditions in this debate, and provide explanations about how the elusive Other's mind works, claims have been made in linguistic and regional terms in special issues like "Arabic Literature Now: Between Area Studies and the New Comparatism" (Amireh and Hassan 2010) and "Getting Ideas about World Literature in China" (Tsu 2010). Few will miss the coincidence of these two "trouble spots" eliciting interest in a "world" threatened by concerns of security and economic supremacy. Sites as distinct as Beijing and Canberra hosted conferences in 2011 on "The Rise of World Literatures" and "Opening the World: Literature in a Global Age", respectively. However, while the idea of "one global world" seeks to transcend national affiliations in this frame, it has become clear that each "national" literature actually wants a piece of the world literature cake. Major national literatures, like Australia's, for example, are dismayed that they do not even register on the map of world literature, which is dominated by Euro-American perspectives, as evidenced in the heated, and proprietary, discussions at the inaugural "Rise of World Literatures" conference in Beijing in 2011. An anxiety of inclusion prompted conferences like "Scenes of Reading: Is Australian Literature a World Literature?" at the University of Sydney, May 2012. Spivak had warned precisely of such an eventuality in her plenary address at the conference, "Supplementing the Vanguard": "The moment of transgression in world literature might well be nationalism". In a supposedly postnationalist world, the clamour of "national" literatures reinscribes parochialism: "Is *my* literature world literature?"

These engagements at conferences and in special issues of journals deal with what David Damrosch, one indefatigable champion of contemporary world literature, has himself identified as the justifiable critiques of the field: that it can often be "methodologically naïve, culturally deracinated, philologically compromised, and ideologically suspect" (Spivak and Damrosch 2011, 461). To counter such inadequacies, he proposes that a text be studied

wherever its “effective life” extends beyond its original literary culture and that it be seen as “a mode of circulation and reading” and “a traffic in ideas between peoples”. Reception here dictates the terms of the exchange and obliterates any influence the writer might originally have had in his milieu, as is evident in the case of Tagore. While many writers, “foreign” in relation to English, might have faced the same fate of being relegated to oblivion in terms of first-world reception, the exceptional case Tagore presents is all the more acute because, after all, he was the first Asian writer to be awarded the Nobel, and because of the expansive vision he had of world literature itself, something that is only now, belatedly, being recognised by the Anglo metropolis. This is not to deny that contemporary debates on world literature have reinvigorated a discussion about the role of literature itself in an even more fast-changing landscape of the world, in the face of globalisation and cultural ferment. What Spivak called supplementing the vanguard is actually a critical continuing task of unlearning ignorance. If new world literature wants to reconceptualise the field, it has to start by unlearning what it knows to be its definitions of “literature” and to stop trying to taxonomically diagnose “civilisations” and understand “cultures”. Instead, it maps out the field already, as evident in Moretti and others, and then leaves the task of “gap filling” to those who might choose to fill the gaps. Such a cartographic impulse is not only colonising but always anticipates what Aijaz Ahmad (1992) calls the supposition by the metropolis of the belatedness of theory in the ex-colony. So whether a “traffic in ideas” is actually made possible in the field and in the classroom is another matter altogether: my own attempts at teaching the few poems of Tagore included in the *Norton Anthology of World Literature* were marked by an inability to translate the felicitousness of Bengali into the frigidity of English. Again, to borrow Spivak’s words, “the first language acts as a monitor where understanding is no guarantee”. While one is cognizant of the impossibility of having multiple languages printed alongside the English translations in such collections, so that students have some fragile introduction to the original, the very mode of representing the richness of world languages and literatures monolingually in bite-sized pieces in hour-long durations for thirteen classes in a semester mitigates against any attempt at “broadening” the idea of literature.

## DIFFERENT PLAYING FIELDS: IN THE COLONY

Now I would like to shift to a location which can be claimed as the birthplace of both English and comparative literature as disciplines: Calcutta, India, in the heyday of the British Empire. This exercise is not designed to establish who got past the post first or motivated by desires of “me-tooism” in academic premiership. Rather, this genealogical excavation is an attempt to delineate the historical conditions by which fields and disciplines come into existence in order to prompt a necessary and timely reconnaissance



of the current minefield of world literature. Most students of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial studies are acquainted with the infamous “Minute on Education” by Thomas Babington Macaulay in 1835, wherein he declared the dire need for the creation of “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, English in taste, in morals, and in intellect”, in order to run the Jewel in the Crown efficiently (Macaulay 1995, 430). The University of Edinburgh in Scotland lays claim to housing the oldest department of English literature, “having first offered courses on ‘rhetoric and belles lettres’ nearly 250 years ago” (Edinburgh University n.d.), while the first “English honours degree was not established at Oxford until 1894” (Delbanco 1999). However, it is highly likely that English literature as a *named* discipline was devised first in the subcontinent to indoctrinate subaltern Indians into desired Victorian values (Bhattacharya n.d.). Post-colonial discourse analysis clearly traces and establishes the evolution of English literature as the ideological instrument that shaped colonial subjects into good subjects of the Empire (Viswanathan 1989). However, what many scholars may not know is that the argument for a comparative study of Indian and European works was made fifty years earlier, by Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of India, in his introduction to Charles Wilkins’s translation into English of the *Gita* (1785). Hastings wrote: “I should not fear to place, in opposition to the best French version of the most admired passages of *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, or the 1st and 6th books of our own Milton, highly as I venerate the latter, the English translation of the *Mahabharata*” (quoted in Das 2011, 22).

An introduction to these Eastern literatures immediately posed conceptual and methodological problems for Western readers, who were by then riding the high tide of nineteenth-century Enlightenment belief in the unquestionable superiority and infallible singularity of their own literatures. Indian literary traditions proved to be a challenge both to their literary expectations and cultural/civilisational notions. Equally unfortunately, the Macauley Minute came to prevail in European policy perspectives on India. When the College of Fort William was established in Calcutta in 1800 to educate young civil servants for the Indian Administrative Service, to better serve the British Empire, one student, T. Macan, who proposed to translate the Persian poem *Shahnamah*, raised interesting questions not only about different literary traditions but also about the methodological problems involved in studying them:

The laws of composition by which the poets of Europe have been generally guided since the works of Homer became generally known, have never been established or recognized in the Eastern world and consequently the rules of criticism founded upon these laws are wholly unapplicable to the writings of Firdoose [sic]. Of his merits indeed a fair estimate can be formed only by his countrymen or the inhabitants of those Eastern narratives to whom the languages, customs and

laws of the ancient Persians are comparatively familiar, and such it may be safely affirmed that he is admired, esteemed and venerated in a degree not unsurpassed by the most ardent lovers of Homer and Virgil. (Quoted in Das 2011, 22)

Two things emerge from this observation. First, the subcontinent already possessed recognisably long-standing multiple traditions of literature, which had come to infuse and inform each other due to the commingling of Arabic (theological and religious), Persian (courtly) and Sanskrit (Prakrit and Pali). Thus the argument seems to be a strengthening of the multiple literary traditions rather than the consolidation of one language. Second, “East” and “West” came into contact with each other, with translation as the midwife, to serve the exigencies of imperial trade and colonial governance. In the Indian context, the situation was complicated even further when the English language education being imparted by the English ruling class and initially imbibed heartily by the Bengali elites came head to head with growing anti-imperialist sentiment.

In 1906, 120 years after Hastings and 70 years after Macaulay, after much historical water had flowed under the bridge of the British Empire in India (the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, or First War of Indian Independence, being a decisive indication of things to come), a National Council of Education (*Jatiya Siksa Parisad*) was formed by the intelligentsia in Bengal to counter the effects of a foreign education and mind-set. The impetus was to establish a parallel system of education outside of Calcutta University so as to enable a perspective outside the English canon that was at that very moment being consolidated to fit the ideological purposes of imperial rule. In 1907, Tagore was invited to speak on the topic of comparative literature. The title he gave his paper was “*Visva-sahitya ki?*” (“What Is World Literature?”). Such a convergence of the ideas of comparative literature and world literature would have been uncannily prescient, except for the fact that Tagore was not seeking to make a case for comparative literature or world literature. Rather, his vision of *visva sahitya* was but another name for *sahitya* or literature itself, his appeal was to accord each literature the proper attention and regard it deserved. The opening paragraphs of his essay on *visva sahitya* bear citing at length:

Whatever faculties we have within us exist for the sole purpose of forging bonds with others. We are true and achieve truth only through such bonds. Otherwise, there is no sense in saying “I am” or “something is”.

Our bonds with truth in this world are of three kinds—the bonds of reason, of necessity, and of joy.

Of these, the bonds of reason may be described as a kind of contest. It is like the bond between the hunter and his prey. Reason builds a dock, makes truth stand in it like a defendant, and cross-examines it till it is forced to yield its secrets bit by bit. That is why reason cannot help

feeling a self-conceit with respect to truth. It senses its own power in proportion to its knowledge of truth.

Next comes the bond of necessity. The bond of necessity, that is, of work, engenders a collaboration between human power and truth. Enforced by need, this bond draws truth closer to us. Yet there remains a distance. Just as the English trader had once secured his aims by bowing to the Nawab and offering him gifts, but, his mission accomplished, eventually ascended the throne himself, so also we think we have gained the empery of the world when we have used truth to material advantage to achieve our purpose. We then boast that nature is our waiting woman; water, air and fire, our unpaid servants.

Finally, the bond of joy. The bond of beauty or joy erases all distance: there is no more self-conceit; we do not hesitate to surrender ourselves to the small and the weak . . . What is this bond of joy? It is nothing but knowing others as our own and our own selves as other. Once that knowledge is achieved, we have no more questions. We never ask, “Why do I love myself?” The very sense of my own being gives me joy. When we feel the same sense of being about someone else, there is no need to ask why I like that person. (Quoted in Tagore 2011, 138–139)

As an opening gambit to an address about world literature, these passages seem, at first reading, in translation, too vague, too sentimental, too insubstantial altogether. Where is the linguistic flourish, the intellectual rigour, one might ask?

On second and subsequent reading(s), with an open *heart* and alert *mind*, we may approach these words differently. Systematically, step by step, Tagore narrates the nature of the bond between human beings and thereby simplifies the post-Enlightenment story of mankind in ways that are even more relevant today to ensure our globalised coexistence. The three bonds, of reason, of necessity and of joy, prefigure many elements of colonial discourse analysis half a decade before postcolonial theory comes into vogue. Tagore’s summation of reason may seem self-evident today. Even as he acknowledges the uses of rationality as a valuable disciplinary mechanism, his metaphor of reason as an agent of the court of law reveals the power dynamics by which the mightier (hunter) proclaims a victory over the meek (prey). While not a wholesale indictment, Tagore’s acknowledgement of reason as a necessity for the “school” of life and its self-serving approximation to truth claims is a devastating critique of Enlightenment instrumentalisation. What Tagore calls necessity is nothing but a powerful appeal to the self-preservation of humankind, something that can be achieved only by paying careful attention to our relations with nature and labour—i.e., by not boasting that “nature is our waiting woman; water, air and fire, our unpaid servants”. Today, Tagore’s words may be read in terms of ecological awareness and environmental concerns, also as a denunciation of capitalist modes of relationships that are nothing but exploitative.

But it is in the final bond, that of joy, that Tagore unfolds his manifesto for life and love and literature. It is solely the joy of life, experienced in knowing the self and the other, that fulfils the category of literature for Tagore. It is only when we see ourselves powerfully reflected in another being’s world of imagination that we can know ourselves. This self and other are not, however, at one with Enlightenment ideas of the same: here, the self and the other are but expressions of bonds that unite everyone: “nothing but knowing others as our own and our own selves as other”. Tagore’s ideas of unity are infused with what many will recognise as nineteenth-century romantic ideals, but they also incorporate syncretic Hinduism’s ideas of the universal. His self is the *atman*: “one who is part of or linked to one’s self” and thus always already included within a cosmic vision of universal humankind (quoted in Tagore 2001, 402). Such a vision of the universal is far from being ethnocentric: instead of seeing the Other created and represented in binary (oppositional) terms to the Self, subcontinental philosophy’s idea of the self is of a unity of all selfhoods. Emphasising the literary universals distilled in the Indian subcontinent, in the particular site of the Bengal renaissance, of which he was an exemplary product, Tagore understood literature as *Sahitya* (from the Sanskrit *sahit*, “to be with”), a functional union of word and meaning that evokes the *sahridaya* (from the Sanskrit *hridaya*, “one with heart”). In other words, he jettisoned altogether the thorny issue of cultural relativism to argue for the commonality and commensurability of all literatures from around the world through the only possible mode of “being with” and “in heart with” their sociohistorical specificities and contextual lineages.

Tagore’s vision of *sahitya* as a “social, companionable thing” that is closely related to *sabhyata* or “civilisation” (from the Sanskrit “company” as well as “where there is light”) offers a paradigm shift from nineteenth-century ideological forms and formulations of literature. Instead of ethnocentric narratives of otherising, Tagore sees literature as not only a way of being with and in another’s shoes, but also of experiencing what it feels like to walk in shoes that might be of a different make, using different materials and methods of manufacture, perhaps walking without the “concept” of shoes at all, but walking nevertheless. The task ahead would be to find out the “why” and the “how” of walking and to envisage an *immanent critique* of the literary itself from the “deep time” (to borrow a phrase from Wai Chee Dimock, 1989) of Indian linguistic and philological traditions. Coming at the apotheosis of the Bengal renaissance (1775–1945), which was a felicitous commingling of Eastern and Western thought, philosophy and the arts, Tagore was an extraordinarily creative writer who pushed against the limits of language, community and nationality. Refusing any simple answers, he offers a nuanced and intricate understanding of a world in transition, at the cusp of independence from colonial rule and confronted by modernity, when questions of attachment, both to family and one’s country, challenged the very core of human existence. Schooled in Sanskrit

and Arabic, deeply influenced by English literature and Bengali rural and folk traditions, Tagore literally fashions a new grammar out of Bengali, an emergent language that he wrests from the intricacies of ancient Hindu poetics, Buddhist ethics and medieval Muslim aesthetics. In his hands, the nascent possibilities of Bengali are transformed into an energetic lingua franca that engages both with the modernity of a colonised nation coming into its own and a cosmopolitanism that is as worldly as it is vernacular. He not only changes the way the Bengali script is written ever after, but also the way in which literature is to be imagined as an exercise in *human* conversation rather than as political ideology.

The thirteen-page essay on *visva sahitya* goes on to explain the nature of reason, necessity and joy in terms that would be virtually unrecognisable to anyone requiring a primer on world literature. Indeed, Tagore himself is aware of his refusal even to define what such a world literature might be; his vision goes beyond any attempt to encompass the nature of *all* literature. His is not the dominating impulse of “knowing” the body of a literature. Rather, this appeal is to inhabit the body of imagination so as to know the self. His closing words in the essay are as follows:

Do not so much as imagine that I would guide your way through world literature. We must all cut our paths through it as best as we can. I simply wished to say that just as the world is not my ploughland added to yours and to someone else’s—to see the world in this light is to take a rustic view—so also, literature is not my writing added to yours and to someone else’s. We usually regard literature in this rustic light. It is time we pledged that our goal is to view universal humanity in universal literature by freeing ourselves from rustic uncatholicity; that we shall recognize a totality in each particular author’s work, and that in this totality we shall perceive the interrelations among all human efforts at expression. (Quoted in Tagore 2001, 150).

It would be a mistake, however, to gauge Tagore’s idea of world literature on the basis of this essay alone. Between 1888 and 1941, Tagore published eight books on literary criticism and theory, more than a hundred essays, a large number of book reviews and numerous observations on art and literature. Two interconnected concerns animate these writings: an assessment of contemporary Bengali literature and the problematisation of certain theoretical issues that dominated literary debate at the time, in the yet-to-be-independent Indian subcontinent and in Europe. The interconnectedness of the “local” and the “global” and how the particular infuses and informs the universal are a consistent thread in these writings. Tagore’s comments on Bengali literature come at the formative stage of a minor literature on its way to becoming major, a transition in which he was the sole factor. Without any rigorous formal training in philosophy or the history of

the arts, accompanied by an eclectic, unregulated and voracious practice of reading, Tagore went on to address the task of criticism from the perspective of a poet on “silent” and “natural” poets, historical and psychological changes in the evolution of poetry, the constituents of epic, issues of genre, and so forth (Tagore 2001). Combining a knowledge of Sanskrit poetics (*alamkara shastra*) with European aesthetics, Tagore fashioned an utterly fresh approach to matters of philological and rhetorical commentary. A representative selection of his writings includes *Samalochana* (*Criticism*, 1888); *Panchabhut* (*The Five Elements*, 1897), *Adhunik Sahitya*, *Prachin Sahitya* and *Loksahitya* (*Modern, Ancient and Folk Literature*, all published 1907), *Sahitya* (*Literature*, 1907), *Sahityer Pather* (*On the Road to Literature*, 1937) and *Sahityer Swarup* (*The True Nature of Literature*, 1943, published posthumously). Though selections from these are now available in English translation, it remains the task of a comparatist fluent enough in Bengali (not only the language but the literary tradition) to undertake the task of collating a cogent and comprehensive idea of the work of this subcontinental genius. Unless contemporary world literature studies can locate, understand and *critique* a figure such as Tagore, all its claims of globality and expansiveness remain empty.

Amartya Mukhopadhyay explains: “Tagore has to be understood in his totality. For, his ideas are strewn and hidden not only in the five thousand odd pages of his essays but also in the huge oeuvre of his verses, plays, short stories, belles lettres and even songs. So, it would be eminently ‘arabindrik’ (i.e. non-Tagorean) to probe any one genre of his works to trace the source of his ideas” (2010, vii). *Rabindrik* is the term given to an entire sensibility, an entire evocation of the milieu Tagore created and commented on, and is still used today to explain everything from Satyajit Ray’s mise-en-scène to a contemporary college girl’s sartorial choices. The cliché about Bengal being the subcontinent’s heart of song and high culture is nothing but a *rabindrik* effect. But to return to Tagore’s oeuvre: certainly, his essays alone exhibit an astonishing body of knowledge and expression, ranging from Plato to *De Profundis*, from the weighty Upanishads to the wandering minstrelsy of the Bauls. This is comparativism applied to the whetstone: a sharpened sense and sensibility applied to all literature that can arise only from the fullest and deepest *immersion* in all the traditions which Tagore references. In this, he is contrary and oppositional to the smorgasbord approach of contemporary world literature studies, which offer only a sampling from the heterogeneous “cultures” around the world, in order to reflect upon the assumptions of its own: there is no possibility of a two-way traffic in this current avatar.

Tagore’s intervention in world literature is as occasional as Goethe’s single letter to Carlyle, on the shoulders of which the mighty weight of world literature is now being carried. While Goethe’s language deploys the language of the market at the height of a European mercantile imperialism that would soon colonise a third of the world, Tagore’s *visva sahitya*, coming a

century later, is determinedly located in an anticolonial *and* antinationalist ethic. This central contradiction serves to make Tagore's work both fully acquainted with and admiring of the literature of Europe and equally conversant with the task of placing the literary traditions of the Indian sub-continent on a par with the former. For him, this was not a political task, but a task of readership, of profoundly considering what it meant to intimately inhabit such diverse ideas of the literary. In all his protests against the claims of the colonial and the national, Tagore never once forgot the primacy of literature as having a life of its own. As he said in an early essay entitled "Literature" (1889):

The essence of literature does not allow itself to be trapped within a definition. It is like the essence of life: we know what it cannot exist without, but what it is we do not know . . . Literature incorporates a certain life: that life seeps out from the hidden centre of the writer's human existence, achieves perpetuity in language, and endows language itself with perpetuity. (Tagore 2011, 49)

Tagore's readers today are scattered among a general reading public and scholars who make it their task to understand the genius of this figure, not in the spirit of providing a definitive key to his legacy, but in the spirit of curiosity and awe about his vision of life, the very stuff of literature. Surely it behoves all students of literature to again make that old-fashioned argument for the proliferation of all such lives in languages which achieve perpetuity without the intervention of the global market? Or as Chaudhuri says in his introduction to *On Clearing a Space: Reflections on India, Literature and Culture*:

The reason readers continually revisit Tagore and several writers after him in India—writers who all deal in the sensuous, the local, in every language spoken here, including English—is not for the sake of those sights and sounds, but for a renewing sense of how writing remakes language and culture as habitation, a dwelling, which the reader, too, has occupied in India in the last century, in a manner that's very different from living in the nation-state. The poem, or literary work, as a space in our history: this, too, has to be adequately comprehended and described. (Chaudhuri 2008, 31)

The task ahead is enormous. The start that these renewed debates on world literature have inaugurated now needs to be followed up with the hard work of clearing the space. This task is far greater than simply supplementing the vanguard by sampling representative bits of nationally defined literatures. The task is to actually allow for a space that might enable reflection, that might facilitate listening to what a 150-year-old figure might have said that is still relevant today.

## NOTES

1. The politics of the Nobel itself may be seen as a kind peacekeeper's canon making, a booster to the great books tradition. The list of writers the Nobel committee routinely passes over is a continual matter of debate and chagrin for literary communities. As Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, authors of a new biography of Tagore, suggest: “What could not be doubted was *Gitanjali's* idealism—which was crucial since Alfred Nobel's will stipulated that prize-winners have an ‘idealistic tendency’”. This condition dominated the thinking of the selection committee in the early period of the Nobel prize and was responsible for the rejection of some of the great names mentioned above [Tolstoy, Ibsen, Strindberg, Shaw and Yeats]” (2009, 185). The award of the Nobel was certainly contentious for Indians at the time and contributed to the international reception of Tagore as an Eastern mystic and seer.
2. An anticolonial humanist and a universalist internationalist, Tagore traveled to twenty-five countries and made an impression on intellectuals as diverse as Henri Bergson, Benedetto Croce, John Dewey, Albert Einstein, Carlo Formichi, Gu Hongming, Sylvain Levi, Liang Qichao, Lu Xiaoman, Noguchi Yonejirō, Okakura Tenshin, Qian Zhixiu, Paul Richard, Romain Rolland, Bertrand Russell, Tan Yun-Shan, Moritz Winternitz, Xu Zhimo and Zhou Enlai. His work influenced that of Zenobia Camprubi, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Yasunari Kawabata, Gabriela Mistral, Guo Moruo, Pablo Neruda, Victoria Ocampo, José Ortega y Gasset, Octavio Paz and Xie Wan-ying, among others. He was translated by a Chinese founding father of the Communist Party, Chen Duxiu, Czech indologist Vincenc Lesný, French Nobel laureate André Gide, Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and the Turkish prime minister Bülent Ecevit. His circulation was formidable, to say the least.
3. Iman Mersal (2008) explains how Kahlil Gibran's political edge was perforce transformed into a performance of the orientalist fantasy during his time in America.
4. A special petition was made by Visva Bharati to the government of India to extend the copyright over Tagore from fifty to sixty years, and despite the protests of intellectuals like Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, this was granted in 1991. There has been an efflorescence of translations since 2001. [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2001-12-29/kolkata/27250783\\_1\\_visva-bharati-copyright-rabindranath](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2001-12-29/kolkata/27250783_1_visva-bharati-copyright-rabindranath) (accessed June 2013).
5. See Andrew Delbanco's “The Decline and Fall of Literature” in the *New York Review of Books* (November 4, 1999), a review essay on seven state-of-the-humanities (especially literature) books published at the turn of the twentieth century.

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## 9 Buzzati's French Connection

### Translation as a Catalyst in a Literary Career

*Felix Siddell*

While clearly a major figure of twentieth-century Italian literature, Dino Buzzati is not easy to situate in the context of his contemporaries. His lifetime (1906–1972) spanned some of Italy's greatest political upheavals and cultural movements and coincided with changes in both the status of literature and approaches to literary criticism. While these developments provide a relevant context for Buzzati's literary production, he nevertheless stands apart from the period as a lone figure who did not take an explicit political stance and who cannot be classified as a member of a school of writing. And if the term *fantastico* has frequently been used by critics when referring to Buzzati's work, it does not seek so much to connect him to a literary school as to identify certain preoccupations which are also evident in the works of his contemporaries. Often mentioned in connection with Buzzati is Kafka, though Buzzati's knowledge of the Czech author whose writings preceded him was scant (Veronese Arslan 1974, 20). These affinities are best understood as elements of a common zeitgeist, rather than influences. Stephen Martin cautions readers against facile intertextual assumptions which "are not helpful in elaborating a full meaning for a Buzzati text" (1995, 72). Yves Frontenac (1982) draws links between Buzzati and his contemporary Julien Gracq, though, once again, the two authors worked independently, perhaps drawing on some common sources. Buzzati has been compared and contrasted with Bontempelli (Airoldi Namer and Panafieu 1992) and Calvino (Lagoni Danstrup 1992). Claudio Toscani points out that Buzzati's work follows on from a continuum of writers of *racconti fantastici*, including Tarchetti, Govoni, Palazzeschi, Bontempelli, Savinio and Delfini, but also emphasises that, with respect to his contemporaries, he stood apart: "Buzzati stands to one side . . . in the literary scene of the time" ["Buzzati è in un angolo . . . nel panorama letterario dell'ora"] (1987, 25).

Buzzati's first works, *Barnabo delle montagne* and *Il segreto del Bosco Vecchio*, published in 1933 and 1935 respectively, during the Fascist period, possessed a quality of magic and mystery which did not accord with the period. While Buzzati did not take an explicit stand for or against Fascism, his situation as journalist with *Il Corriere della Sera* and subsequently as a war correspondent at sea and in North Africa undoubtedly meant that

the ideological context was a force to contend with. When submitting the manuscript of *Il deserto dei Tartari* for publication, the only revision of an ideological nature which was imposed upon him was to change the polite form “Lei” into the “voi” preferred by the regime. Mussolini saw the “Lei” form as a sign of foreign domination, erroneously believing that it had arrived in Italian from Spanish. In the days before word processing and “Replace All”, Buzzati assigned the task to his friend Arturo Brambilla, who dutifully made the alterations manually.

As to be expected, when *Il deserto dei Tartari* appeared in 1940, its military setting was a cause for considerable speculation. Buzzati himself said that he had intended to evoke the stagnant situation of working as a journalist at *Il Corriere della Sera* and that he had only chosen a military context because of his own personal fascination with the life of a soldier (Veronese Arslan 1974). Even more so than the preceding two works, whose settings were clearly identifiable with the Dolomites and their foothills, *Il deserto dei Tartari* was detached from the contemporary context, with an indeterminate yet oneirically familiar historical and geographical setting. The left-wing critics in Italy distanced themselves from Buzzati, attributing his flight into the fantastic as a sign of a lack of commitment (Fanelli 1990, 16). If not exactly dismissed in Italy, Buzzati was widely regarded as detached from the pressing questions raised by Fascist Italy's colonisation of Africa and involvement in the war.

The publication in 1949 of Michel Arnaud's French translation, *Le Désert des Tartares*, by Robert Laffont represented an important step in Buzzati's literary career by exposing the novel to readers and critics of a different mind-set, for whom Italy's experience of war and Fascism were unimportant, and who were no doubt unfamiliar with the referential details of the Dolomites, which, for Buzzati and his Italian readers, were a fundamental aspect of the setting evoked in the novel (Veronese Arslan 1974, 24). The publisher, Robert Laffont, was to become a pivotal figure in Buzzati's status as a European, as opposed to an Italian, author. Speaking almost thirty years later at a conference dedicated to Buzzati in 1977 at UNESCO in Paris, Laffont spoke of his high professional and personal regard for the author, whom he declared to be one of his favourite writers, expressing personal pride in his achievement in introducing Buzzati to France (Laffont 1978, 21–25). Yet Laffont also provided some interesting insights. For example, the first edition of *Le Désert des Tartares* sold slowly, taking ten years to sell five thousand copies. Buzzati had not become a bestseller, but in certain literary circles in France the concept of record sales is regarded with some cynicism, so that was not necessarily a bad thing. To use Laffont's words, Buzzati “did not experience success with the public, but rather with the élite” [“n'a pas connu un succès populaire. C'est un succès d'élite”] (Laffont 1978, 23). Laffont proceeded to publish a wide selection of Buzzati's works, even though they all had low sales. When *Le Désert des Tartares* was published in *Livre de Poche*, the sales reached three hundred thousand—

certainly not large by the standards of Anglo-Saxon publishing houses, but an achievement nevertheless.

The success of the novel in France, Laffont was quick to point out, was due in large part to the efforts of Marcel Brion, whose literary interests were similar to those of Buzzati (Bahuet-Gachet 1994, 227–242). They also shared an interest in the visual arts—Brion as a historian of art and Buzzati as a painter. That they were kindred spirits is demonstrated by their correspondence, twenty-two letters written between 1950 and 1971 (Demont 2003, 72–86). A true humanist, Brion spoke seven languages and wrote prolifically on history, music and the history of art as well as producing his own works of fiction. With this background, he was quick to spot original talent; for example, he is also credited with introducing James Joyce and Rainer Maria Rilke to France. When the translation of *Il deserto dei Tartari* appeared in France, it was Brion who, in his role as literary editor of *Le Monde*, published a favourable review which set the novel on course for success. He was proactive in introducing Buzzati to French publishers and translators. The correspondence with Brion attests to Buzzati's reasonable command of French but also reveals that he had never travelled to France before 1955. This was the year that Brion introduced Buzzati to Albert Camus.

Recognising affinities with his own view of the Absurd, Camus took an interest in Buzzati's work, in particular his play *Un caso clinico*, which had been so well received in Milan that it subsequently toured South America. In a letter to Buzzati, Camus commented favourably on the play but expressed reservations about how it might be received by a Parisian audience, too frivolous to bear its profound truth. In a conversation with a friend, Camus reportedly referred to it as “sinister” [“du genre sinistre”] (Briamonte 1994, 129). Camus proceeded to write a French version of Buzzati's play, renaming it *Un cas intéressant*. It was performed at the Théâtre La Bruyère in Paris, and the reviews were extremely negative (Briamonte 1994, 123). Ironically, this reaction may not have been a bad thing for Buzzati's reputation—conferring some notoriety upon him and linking his name with the prestigious figure of Camus. As Briamonte points out, the process of creating the French version involved much more than translation. Buzzati's play was in turn a theatrical version of his own short story, “Sette piani”, which tells the story of a businessman, visiting a clinic for a seemingly minor ailment, who is moved down from floor to floor to progressively more critical wards, to the terminal ward of the ground floor where he meets his demise. Briamonte demonstrates that the original short story morphed through six stages to become the French version as performed: text of the story, text of the play, text of the play as performed in Milan, translation of this text, Camus's adaptation, text of the play as performed in Paris (1994, 116). He also documents the changes made in the French version, including the cutting of scenes, the replacement of a scene eliminated by Buzzati, the neutralising of language (in particular the coarse expressions of the businessman) and certain liberties and errors in the translation. This analysis

brings Briamonte to the conclusion that Camus was not the translator, but that an intermediate version was prepared by an unnamed translator. In fact, "adaptation" was the term Camus used to describe his creation of this version, preferring it to "translation" or "texte français de", which he had used in other contexts (Briamonte 1994, 134).

The positive reception in France of *Le Désert des Tartares* generated interest in Buzzati's earlier works, and in 1959 Laffont published a French translation of *Bàrnabo delle montagne* (see prior discussion). The translator was Michel Breitman, a native French speaker who had also published his own first novel in Italian. While, as Dalla Rosa (2004) points out, Breitman's translations are not without imperfections, he was a competent and prolific translator of a large number of Buzzati's works into French. The appearance of *Bàrnabo des montagnes* in 1959 was more than the introduction of a new work to French readers. It cast a retrospective glance at the earliest origins of the preoccupation with the fantastic which would characterise Buzzati's writing and of the metaphysical significance of the mountains. What is more, it included a preface by Marcel Brion, which not only signalled these currents to the reader but also placed Buzzati firmly in a European context, in the company of authors as diverse as Thomas Mann, Conrad, Somerset Maugham and Kafka. Once again, this fine reading and critical focus on the part of Brion situated Buzzati in a context quite apart from his Italian contemporaries, who were still preoccupied with the neorealist and political questions of the postwar period. Nella Giannetto emphasises that Buzzati's choice to stand apart from the literary movements of his time was not only conscious, but courageous: "Buzzati [. . .] deliberately chooses to be out-dated and, both as man and writer, accepts the risks of being so" ["Buzzati [. . .] si sceglie consapevolmente il ruolo dell'inattuale e accetta, come uomo e come scrittore, i rischi di tale inattualità"] (1996, 31). In this way Brion promoted Buzzati's works to a readership of quite different tastes, one which undeniably always existed in Italy, but which was arguably much more consolidated in France (Rawson 1995, 470). The translation of Buzzati into French meant not simply a broadening of literary contacts and an increase in sales; it was a fundamental part of the creation of his unique identity as a writer.

Throughout Buzzati's career, the central point of reference of his French connection was unfailingly the publisher of *Le Désert des Tartares*, Robert Laffont. His continued publication of translations of Buzzati's work means that even today French is the language into which Buzzati has been most widely translated. Michel Arnaud's translation and subsequent French translations of Buzzati acquired some authority with translators working in other languages, as Michel Bastiaensen points out in his textual analysis of the Persian translation of *Il deserto dei Tartari* (Bastiaensen 1994, 25–26). Laffont supported the project of one of his Italian-to-French translators, Yves Panafieu, to complete a series of interviews with Buzzati, published in French as *Buzzati mes deserts: entretiens avec Yves Panafieu* and in Italy as

*Dino Buzzati: un autoritratto*. This work represented a major step in Buzzati studies by providing scholars with a wealth of insights into the author's life and attitude to his work. Panafieu noted that the experience of conducting the interview in Italian, editing the tape scripts and producing the French transcripts informed and refined his translation technique. The work of selection and transcription was a literary discipline in itself. In particular, the need to work with speech rather than text alerted him to the challenges of cadence and rhythm posed by Buzzati's turn of phrase. When translating, he became increasingly aware of the need to bear in mind the spoken style of the author. To deal with this, he often resorted to reading aloud when translating and exercised particular care with punctuation. Panafieu stresses that a translator of any given piece should ideally have read the author's work widely in order to understand the linguistic and conceptual idiosyncrasies in operation (Panafieu 1994b). Conceiving of himself as a "critico-traduttore", Panafieu maintains that the work of a translator is also a work of criticism. His knowledge of both Italian and French, his sensitivity to the nuances of translation and his awareness of the critical dimension of translation provided him with the qualities necessary to present Buzzati to the public. The interviews appeared in 1973, the year following Buzzati's death. Panafieu, with the backing of Robert Laffont, then embarked on his next project, the translation into French of Buzzati's posthumous works.

Another significant posthumous step in Buzzati's fame was realised by his French connections—the film version of *Il deserto dei Tartari* directed by Valerio Zurlini. Buzzati had discussed the project with various directors, but it had only gained momentum by the 1970s when a reappraisal of fantastic, magical and surrealistic aspects of writing had brought authors like Buzzati to the forefront (Capoferri 1998, 227). Then as now, cinema projects were conceived and realised at an international level, and the connections between French and Italian cinema were multiple. Zurlini, regarding the film as an opportunity to transform *Il deserto dei Tartari* from an Italian novel into a European classic, was drawn to French cinema from the outset. In the end he chose to work with the French producer Jacques Perrin, convinced by the screenplay of André Brunelin. Making no pretensions of fidelity to the original, his film proposed "an interpretation of the novel" (Capoferri 1998, 228).

While different from the novel, the film once more stimulated interest in Buzzati and reaffirmed his French connection. The quirks which had made Buzzati initially problematic for Italian readers suited the style of trends in French structuralist criticism of the 1970s, in particular readings inspired by Tzvetan Todorov and Vladimir Propp, which highlighted the fantastic elements of his writing. Soon after Buzzati's death, in response to this growing critical interest, an organisation was founded to promote research and scholarship into his work: *L'Association des amis de Dino Buzzati*. Since it seemed unusual for this to be established not in Italy but in France, in their charter, the founding members, Michel Suffran, Yves Panafieu, Yves

Frontenac and Maurice Sendek, provided the following justifications for their French base: the warm reception given by the French public to *Le Désert des Tartares*; culture, intelligence and artistic and literary creation know no boundaries; and the support to the initiative given by Buzzati's family (Association des amis de Dino Buzzati 1977). With the encouragement once more of Robert Laffont, the association set up a new journal, *Cahiers Buzzati*, which was written in French but often included abstracts and hitherto unpublished works in Italian. Laffont was the publisher of eight numbers, all but the final edition. The association proceeded to organise conferences on aspects of Buzzati's work, maintaining good relations and close connections with their colleagues in Italy but also creating new links in other countries. Individual members were often academics who made sure that Buzzati was included in their research and teaching programs. Notable among these figures is Marie-Hélène Caspar, whose wide spread of interests in Buzzati ranged from literary criticism and analysis of translations to documentation of the author's experiences as a war correspondent in Africa (Caspar 1997). Research completed by French critics such as Caspar not only highlighted qualities in Buzzati's writing which appealed to a French readership, but also connected it with the critical approaches of figures such as Gaston Bachelard, Mircea Eliade, Gilbert Durand, Roland Barthes and Gérard Genette (Rawson 1995, 470).

In 1994, the focus of Buzzati studies returned to Italy, when this organisation merged with the newly founded Associazione Dino Buzzati, under the direction of Nella Giannetto. Based in Feltre, in the province of Belluno, not too far from the villa in San Pellegrino where Buzzati spent his childhood, the association maintains a research centre (Centro Studi Buzzati) and edits the journal *Studi buzzatiani*, which has taken over the role occupied by *Cahiers Buzzati* from 1977 to 1994 as the premier international journal of Buzzati studies. The reference point of research came home to the formative places of the author's creativity, but the French connection was maintained, with French scholars continuing to contribute articles to the journal or complete research at the Centro Studi. If anything, in the generous spirit of Robert Laffont and the founding members of L'Association des amis de Dino Buzzati, that focus has been expanded. A glance at the journal now shows contributors from all over the world, and abstracts are now routinely included in English, French, Romanian, Italian, Spanish and German.

Having retraced some of the steps in Buzzati's literary career, it would be useful to revisit Michel Arnaud's French translation of *Il deserto dei Tartari*. It is a fine piece of literature possessing the haunting qualities of the original, with some subtle differences: of colour, of focus, of emphasis on sections. Is it "une belle infidèle" (Panafieu 1994a, 73)? Or are these simply the inevitably subjective impressions of personal rereadings?

Patrizia Dalla Rosa, a researcher based at the Centro Studi Buzzati in Feltre, seems ideally qualified to provide some answers. Her appraisals of the French translations of Buzzati continue an interest which began with



her thesis in 1991 (Dalla Rosa 2004). She makes a number of criticisms of the translation relating to punctuation, ellipsis of the article (restored in French), word order (hyperbaton), use of gerund and use of colours. She notes a tendency on the part of the translator to correct perceived grammatical errors, for example a distorted concordance of tenses set up deliberately by the author for stylistic effect. The Arnaud version tends to domesticate oddities in order to iron out potential sources of confusion for the reader. The result of this, according to Dalla Rosa, is a reduction of the effect of the fantastic which is so characteristic of Buzzati's writing style. Close comparison of the translation with the original supports Dalla Rosa's concerns about those elements which have been lost. She concedes that difficulties will inevitably arise both from stylistic differences between French and Italian and the idiosyncrasies of Buzzati's writing. She emphasises the need for closer analysis of the author's style, which so far has only emerged after the appearance of the translation (Dalla Rosa 2004, 19). This observation illustrates how the ostensibly functional and mechanical process of translation can also provide valuable literary insights into the workings of the text. The Michel Arnaud translation, a finely wrought piece of prose, which conveys much of Buzzati to the reader, is now subjected to analysis with the benefit of hindsight, with the expertise of years of scholarship which, in large part, were due to the momentum created by that very translation. It is an irony which Buzzati himself, who was always happy with his French translators, would probably appreciate.

The commitment of Robert Laffont ensured a steady production of high-quality French translations which both contributed and responded to Buzzati's profile in France. Reference to the bibliography of translations published in the conference proceedings of "Dino Buzzati: la lingua, le lingue" shows that by 1992 the Buzzatian opus had been substantially translated into French, with a consistent output since 1949 (Formenti and Pilo 1994, 267–278). The number of French translations listed, at thirty-one titles, surpassed that of all other languages, with German coming in second at fifteen. Translation activity has continued, and in 2006 Éditions Robert Laffont marked the centenary of Buzzati's birth by bringing out new editions of all the narrative works published during the author's lifetime. This project uncovered a gap: nineteen stories which had not yet been translated into French. These have now been translated into French in a collection entitled *Nouvelles oubliées* (Buzzati 2009). As the translator, Delphine Gachet, explains in her preface, the title does not correspond to any Italian collection but contains those stories which had been omitted from the first French anthologies to avoid the overlap between the anthologies which had originally appeared in Italy. These editorial decisions about selection reveal much about the role that activities of translation and publication can play in defining an author's corpus. Decisions concerning selection and timing will inevitably entail a change of critical focus. This particular translation is significant not only for the fact that it connects the texts more closely with

the linguistic and ideological developments of the twenty-first century, but for the temporal span that the choice of stories represents, from 1942 to 1968. These “forgotten tales” effectively provide a sampler of all the styles and preoccupations that marked Buzzati’s writing.

Gachet’s work is a milestone in French translations of Buzzati in that it marks a conscious step away from the naturalising tendency of earlier French translators to correct the apparent quirks in Buzzati’s writing, whether these derive from his own idiosyncrasies or the greater malleability of Italian expression. Dalla Rosa’s research on the French translations had documented and often lamented those modifications or choices, whether deliberate or inadvertent, serious or slight, which diminished the Buzzatian character of the texts. Gachet’s new translations constitute a valid response to these concerns. She states this in her preface to the anthology entitled *Nouvelles inquiètes*, a selection of tales and vignettes drawn from *Le cro-nache fantastiche*:

The task we have undertaken in this translation has been to restore as closely as possible the specific quality of Buzzati’s language. [...] As much as possible we have transposed the stylistic quirks : breaks in syntax, in particular sharp changes in tense, recurrent use of “but”, frequent placing of the adjective before the noun, the rich vocabulary used (semantic field of worry, anxiety and fear, description of city architecture, evocation of fog and clouds [...] to mention just a few examples).

Le travail de traduction qui a été le nôtre a cherché à rester au plus près de la spécificité de la langue buzzatienne. [...] Nous avons, autant que faire se peut, transposé les particularités stylistiques: rupture de construction syntaxique, notamment changements brutaux de temps grammaticaux, récurrence des «mais», antéposition fréquente de l’adjectif, richesse du vocabulaire utilisé (champ sémantique de l’angoisse, de l’inquiétude et de la peur, description de l’architecture urbaine, évocation des brouillards et des nuages [...] pour ne citer que quelques exemples). (Gachet 2006, 12)

The publication of this selection is especially significant as it introduces French readers to Buzzati’s journalistic output, in the form of “elzeviri”, short articles published in newspapers, a fortuitous genre for Buzzati, straddling both literature and journalism: “This journalistic form seemed made for him and his way of practising journalism and literature together” [“Questa forma giornalistica pareva fatta per lui e per il suo modo di praticare insieme giornalismo e letteratura”] (Marabini 2000, 354). While Arnaud and Breitman, when they completed the earliest translations, could not yet know that this stylistic interface would become the key to appreciation of Buzzati’s writing, this point is not lost on Gachet. Her own research emphasises Buzzati’s preoccupation with writing as a code which, after the

manner of journalism, creates plausibility through mastery of procedure rather than pretensions to veracity (Bahuet-Gachet 2000, 453–469). Her sensibility to this dimension informs her work as a translator, resulting in greater care when confronted with apparent inconsistencies; her stated aim is to preserve those aspects of style that reflect the author's at once literary and journalistic purpose. The translation of this anthology of *elzeviri* also ensures that this pivotal section of the Buzzatian corpus is accessible to French readers, not only for the quality of the articles themselves but for the insights these can bring to the interpretation of the major works. Gachet's continued collaboration with Italian and international Buzzati scholars in her role as director of the French branch of the *Associazione Internazionale Dino Buzzati* is an example of translation as criticism, further evidence that the activity of translation, much more than transposition, is also an act of literary and intercultural exegesis. It is a sign that Italian responses to French translations continue to be incorporated into the translators' methodology, reflecting the depth of analysis that the French connection has brought to Buzzati scholarship. Given the large number of readers and researchers who are competent in both French and Italian, critical activity in both cultural spheres is closely intertwined. French translation of Buzzati is subject to constant scrutiny. In this way the interactions between the French and Italian versions create a fine critical lens for a deeper appreciation of Buzzati, casting new light on the stylistic and thematic preoccupations of his writing, reinforcing the role of translation as a scholarly activity which "if nothing else, brings all the difficulties to the surface" ["se non altro, porta i nodi al pettine"] (Dalla Rosa 2004, 36).

So, if the French connection was a catalyst in Buzzati's early career, it continues to ferment today, like an organic culture in his posthumous career. Even though Drogo could never know what lay in the abyss beyond the mists of the horizon, Buzzati would undoubtedly be intrigued by the notion of a literary career which survives him, where the French connection and other connections continue to bring his works to life, like the springtime resurgence of sap in the woodwork of the Bastiani Fortress. It is fitting to conclude by revisiting this passage, not only in Buzzati's words but also in translation: Michel Arnaud's historic version, which did so much to establish a French connection, and that of Stuart Hood, which no doubt will continue to forge new Buzzati connections within the ever-expanding readership of global English.

C'est l'époque où un regret tenace de la vie ressuscite chez les vieilles planches. Il y a très longtemps, aux jours heureux, elles connaissaient alors un afflux juvénile de chaleur et de force, des bouquets de bourgeons sortaient des branches. Puis la plante avait été abattue. Et maintenant que c'est de nouveau le printemps, un frisson de vie, infiniment léger, s'éveille encore dans chacun de ses fragments. Jadis feuilles et fleurs; maintenant, plus qu'un vague souvenir, ce qu'il faut pour faire crac, et puis c'est fini jusqu'à l'année prochaine. (Buzzati 1949, 166)

This is the time when an obstinate lament from life re-awakens in the old beams. Many, many years ago in happier times there had been a surge of heat and youthful strength and clusters of buds sprang from the boughs. Then the tree had been cut down. And now it is spring and in each of its dismembered parts there still awakens a pulse of life, an infinitely weaker pulse. Once there were leaves and flowers; now only a dim memory, enough to make a cracking noise and then it is over until next year. (Buzzati 1990, 131–132)

Ecco il tempo in cui nelle vecchie assi risuscita un ostinato rimpianto di vita. Moltissimi anni prima, nei giorni felici, era un giovanile flusso di calore e di forza, dai rami uscivano fasci di germogli. Poi la pianta era stata abbattuta. E adesso che è primavera, in ognuno dei suoi frammenti ancora si sveglia, infinitamente minore, un palpito di vita. Un tempo foglie e fiori; ora soltanto un vago ricordo, quel tanto per fare crac e poi basta fino all'anno venturo. (Buzzati 2000, 130)

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## 10 A Crook's Tour

### Translation, Pseudotranslation and Foreignness in Anglo-Italian Crime Fiction

*Brigid Maher*

In the Anglophone literary climate, publishers are often reluctant to “advertise” the foreignness of translated literature. Indeed, it can be difficult to persuade them to publish translations at all, and one rarely sees a translator’s name on the front cover of a book (with the exception of translators already famous as writers, or classic works accompanied by learned commentaries). Concerns about the commercial viability of the foreign are often cited, and it has been argued that generally a fluent, transparent translation style tends to be favoured, one that shows few traces of the source language (see Venuti 1995 on the “translator’s invisibility”).

In the case of contemporary Italian fiction, relatively little gets translated into English, and the sales of these translations are far outstripped by the commercial success of another kind of writing exposing Anglophone readers to Italian milieus: crime fiction set in Italy but originally written in English. Such works are produced in considerable number by British and North American authors including Donna Leon, Michael Dibdin, Magdalen Nabb and, most recently, Tobias Jones. Interestingly, they often do show traces of a foreign language, namely Italian. The books proudly display their Italian setting and characters while at the same time exploiting the comforting familiarity of an English author’s name on the front cover and a trusted detective protagonist who serves as a kind of tourist guide for the Anglophone reader.

When travelling through reading, the destination is, of course, every bit as important as the guide, and these books seem partly intended to expose readers to daily life in certain Italian cities, particularly the most charming and historically significant ones. Magdalen Nabb’s main detective is a *carabiniere*, Marshal Salvatore Guarnaccia, and her series of rather genteel mystery novels (fourteen in total) is set in Florence. Donna Leon’s police officer, Commissario Guido Brunetti, is based in the equally picturesque city of Venice (twenty novels). Moving a little further down the food chain of major Italian tourist destinations, Tobias Jones’s quite recent effort (with two books out so far) is centred on Iuri Castagnetti (Casta for short), a private investigator from Parma.<sup>1</sup> Finally, Michael Dibdin’s oeuvre reads like the table of contents of Lonely Planet’s *Italy on a Shoestring*, since

Vice-Questore Aurelio Zen, conveniently for the tourist-reader, always gets posted somewhere new between novels. Individual novels are set in Perugia, Sardinia, Rome, Venice, Naples, Rome again, Sicily, Tuscany, Alto Adige and the Italian Alps, Bologna and Calabria.

The Translation Studies scholar Carol O'Sullivan (2004/05) has described novels like these as examples of a variety of pseudotranslation. The term is generally used to refer to texts that are presented as translations, but for which no foreign-language source text exists (Tourey 1995, 40; cf. Bassnett 1998, 27–33; Apter 2006, 212–213). Or, as Rambelli puts it, “it refers to a relationship of imitation which does not link a target text to a specific source text but rather to an ideal one, possibly abstracted from a group of texts identifying a particular genre” (2008, 209). Although the Anglo-Italian crime writers mentioned earlier do not overtly present their work as translated (indeed all the texts have the author's name writ large on the cover), in many ways, as O'Sullivan says, the works “behave” and “are consumed” as translations. For publishers, these “pseudotranslations” have the advantage of not requiring expenditure on translation and of avoiding the thorny problem of cultural content that might take Anglo readers too far out of their comfort zone (O'Sullivan 2004/05, 66).

In this essay I examine the way Magdalen Nabb, Michael Dibdin, Donna Leon and Tobias Jones mediate between their Anglophone audiences and their Italian settings and protagonists. In particular I analyse the presence of Italian linguistic and cultural content in the books, exploring the roles of authors and translators, and some of the processes by which texts and genres move between cultures.

## FOREIGNISING AND EXOTICISING STRATEGIES

The writing of Leon, Dibdin and Jones is characterised by not-infrequent incursions from Italian which serve to draw attention to the setting of the novels. First, there are occurrences of what one might call “culture-specific items”, concepts for which English has no exact equivalent. These include culinary terms and customs (*limoncello*, *ragù*, *sfogliatelle*, *caffè ristretto*, *spumante*, *sagra* and so on), other aspects of daily life such as the names of newspapers, or *vaporetti* and *acqua alta* in the case of Venice, as well as glossed references to social, political or organisational concepts like the DIGOS antiterrorist unit and *il meridione* (the south).

In addition, titles, terms of address and formulaic expressions also make frequent appearances: there are countless instances of *buongiorno*, *ciao*, *scusi* and *come stai?*; *caro*, *signore*, *professore*, *dottore*; as well as occasional swear words and other exclamations. The names of ranks within the police force, like *questore* and *commissario* as well as *questura* (police station), are also retained, generally without italics.<sup>2</sup> Some of these concepts, too, are somewhat culture specific, but in many instances one can see the

authors moving into the realm of Italian as a source of local colour or even of the exotic, rather than as a necessary tool for conveying untranslatable concepts. After all, translators do not normally have any trouble translating *buongiorno*, for example, into English. While expressions like *good morning* and *hello* undeniably have slightly different connotations and ranges of use from *buongiorno*, they are fairly close equivalents, so the use of *buongiorno* in these texts would seem to serve primarily as a strategy for reminding readers that they are “in” Italy.

This hypothesis is supported by the fact that the books are also peppered with words that are neither culture specific nor conversational phrases or terms of address. One striking example is the following: “She asked for his coat and hung it in a large *armadio* that stood on the left of the hallway” (Leon 1996, 98); *armadio* simply means “wardrobe”, nothing more exotic or Italian specific than that, and in the book it requires no gloss because its meaning is so obvious in context. One can only presume *armadio* is used to remind readers that this is an *Italian* woman putting away a coat in an *Italian* home. Numerous examples occur in Jones’s work: “He tries anything and I’ll put more bullets in him than a scolapasta”, declares the hard-boiled detective at one point (2009, 194). Jones generally eschews italics for Italian words, and in this instance no gloss is provided to help readers work out that Casta is referring to a colander, though the references to pasta and holes would certainly help the more attentive reader. Moreover, readers familiar with the hard-boiled genre of crime writing to which the book belongs would most likely recognise the bitter, threatening tone in the statement, even if the detail is lost. In this same book the murder weapon is revealed to be a *batticarne*, which readers will soon work out to be that cooking implement used for beating out meat (or rather, *cotolette*). (I am assuming here a non-Italian-speaking reader, though of course many of Jones’s readers are likely to have some familiarity with the Italian language and culture.) Often, it seems that Jones uses unglossed Italian words deliberately to create a slight degree of alienation in the reader. This is particularly evident in his second book, where he seems to have been given free rein by his publishers to include a wide range of Italian vocabulary, never in italics. It seems unlikely that readers who do not know the Italian word already would be able to work out what the mystery word in this phrase means: “There was a gentle wind combing the city, hurrying *scontrini* across the cobbles and ruffling the rabbit-skin cuffs of people’s coats” (Jones 2011, 2). *Scontrini* does not refer to leaves or fluff, but to those ubiquitous receipts one receives at even the tiniest commercial transaction in Italy; here the reference seems like a nod to like-minded readers, those who know Italy quite well but who are partial outsiders (tourists, expatriates, Italophiles, etc.). Indeed, if there is an “ideal reader” for this kind of writing it is probably this very group—those who have visited or lived in Italy for some time and can recognise cityscapes and cultural references. The novels can present these readers with the key words of Italian culture



(customs, terms of address, greetings, culinary vocabulary) in the manner of a phrase or guide book.

The cultural immersion attempted in Jones's works is not limited to referencing artefacts from day-to-day life. Some of the Italian words he includes refer to abstract concepts that require quite complex background knowledge to be properly understood:

It [*La Gazzetta*] was mostly reports about *viabilità*: how new roundabouts were replacing traffic lights and making the city run more smoothly. (Jones 2009, 46, original italics)

Someone had decided to reach for some sand, as they say. Decided to throw some sand in our eyes. Sand up the joints and cogs and connections. *Insabbiatura*, they called it. (Jones 2009, 82, original italics)

I'm fed up with everyone settling for appearances, fed up with conceit-edness and *menefreghismo*. (Jones 2009, 155, original italics)

In regular translation, such words would almost certainly be omitted, and their meaning simply paraphrased. The last example does not even come with a gloss (*menefreghismo* is something akin to “give-a-damn-ism”); a real translator would be unlikely to get away with that, but as author Jones is able to choose to leave the word in its “original” Italian, relying on the context and the reader's recognition of the figure of the disillusioned, alienated detective to fill the semantic gap. Once again, the shared familiarity with the genre, with the “proto-text” (Rambelli 2008, 209) of hard-boiled crime writing, allows the pseudotranslation to introduce new words to the receiving culture.

It would also be a luxury for a translator to get the chance to add information explaining a metaphorical source-language word like *insabbiatura*, which is a little like the English concept of a “smokescreen”, but drawing on the imagery of sand. Again, Jones's status as a kind of author-translator allows him certain liberties not always afforded regular translators—he is able to tease out the metaphorical image and thus give a more culturally nuanced picture of how corruption and *insabbiatura* work in Italy to bring the machinery of government and public administration to a slow, painful, grinding halt, in the process blinding wider society to what is going on.

The frequency of Italian words in Jones's books perhaps helps us believe his protagonist is Italian and thinks and speaks like an Italian. The lack of glosses also suits the character. Unlike the other novels examined here, the Castagnetti books are written in the first person, and it would hardly be appropriate for a hard-boiled, cynical private investigator to be surreptitiously including explanations and cultural background in the way an omniscient narrator can. While readers might not always understand every

word, this is presented as an inevitable effect of “eavesdropping”, as reader, on the life of an Italian detective.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in spite of this foreignness, we still know there is a British or North American author behind these novels, making sure readers are not out of their depth. The fact that these books are, ultimately, presenting Italy and Italian through Anglo eyes is, to my mind, most evident in this example from Donna Leon:

“*Pantegane*,” he explained, giving the Venetian word for rats, a word which, though it named them clearly—rats—still managed to make it, in the naming, somehow charming and domestic. “They come in and eat the covering on the wires.” (Leon 1996, 44)

The spoken dialogue here is from a man who has just been fixing some wiring, while the observation is presumably a kind of free indirect discourse of his interlocutor, Inspector Brunetti. It is a rather odd observation, however, given that Brunetti is supposed to be a native of Venice and presumably very familiar with *pantegane*, both the word and the creature. It also seems likely that, like most Italians, he would find them anything but “charming and domestic”.

In his first book, Jones actually seems occasionally to write as if he were translating from Italian; turns of phrase crop up that would probably get edited out of a translation, either by the translator or by an editor. Characters apologise for “the disturbance” (*il disturbo*); instead of staring at someone the narrator “fixed him” (which would appear to be a calque from the Italian *fissare*, meaning “to stare”); someone is told “if I ever went near her family again [. . .] she would denounce us” (*denunciare* means “to report to the police”); and a drug dealer is referred to as “the kind of cuckold who gave away alibis like he gave out poisons” (a calque of the insult *cornuto*) (Jones 2009, 15, 168, 235, 204).<sup>4</sup> Tahir Gürçağlar describes the use of a similar strategy by Kemal Tahir, the writer of several new Mike Hammer novels commissioned by a Turkish publishing house—the inclusion of some English vocabulary and syntax, combined with frequent references to US cityscapes and foreign names served to emphasise the American setting and culture, adding a kind of “authenticity” to the Turkish-penned novels (2010, 178).

This slightly hybrid style, which Rambelli calls “creolizing” a text “by scattering across its pages signals of ‘translationese’” (2008, 209), recalls a recent debate in Italy about Giorgio Faletti’s 2009 bestseller *Io sono Dio*, a crime novel set in New York (Faletti 2011).<sup>5</sup> Two highly regarded translators, Eleonora Andretta (2009) and Franca Cavagnoli (in Cappellini 2009), drew attention to the fact that Faletti’s novel includes numerous formulations that are virtually incomprehensible to Italian readers, appearing to be clumsy calques from English. Perhaps the most striking examples are “non girare intorno al cespuglio” (“don’t beat/turn around the bush”, which has only the literal meaning in Italian), “grandi” for “grand” (in the sense of a

thousand dollars) and “te ne devo una” (a literal translation of “I owe you one”), but several other examples can be found throughout Faletti’s novel. Commentators in the books and culture sections of a number of newspapers weighed in, including Matteo Sacchi, who, quoting the 1956 song “Tu vuoi fa l’americano”, declared that the book reads like a bad translation of a cheap mystery novel (“ricorda le traduzioni mal fatte dei gialli a basso prezzo”) (Sacchi 2009). Faletti’s novel, like those analysed here, is a kind of pseudotranslation; the “proto-text” is the genre of hard-boiled American crime fiction, which was imported into the Italian literary system in the postwar period in a way comparable to its importation and subsequent development in the French system, as documented by Clem Robyns (1990). Thus, one might well posit that Faletti’s peculiar style is a literary nod to this tradition. However, he said little about his authorial intentions in his decidedly prickly response to his critics; instead he directed his energies towards defending what he perceived to be accusations of plagiarism or “concealed translation” (cf. Tahir Gürçağlar 2010), though neither Andretta nor Cavagnoli had made any such accusation. Far from elucidating his choice of narrative style, Faletti attacked the credentials of the translators and critics who first drew attention to the peculiarity of his writing, going so far as to suggest that a translator of three Nobel Prize-winning authors (Cavagnoli) is no more qualified to comment on literary writing than a world-class footballer’s barista is to shoot penalties (Faletti 2009).

## LANGUAGE GAMES

One textual feature translators really struggle with is the inclusion of dialect or a mix of languages in a source text and, worst of all, appearances of the target language of the translation. In these cases, one must resort to the tired old footnote “English in the original”, try to find ways of indicating when characters switch between or play with languages or else resign oneself to yet another loss in translation. Given the difficulties, one might expect pseudotranslators like Dibdin, Jones, Leon and Nabb, who also hold the reins of authorship, to avoid this kind of linguistic complexity. However, they often delight in playfully exposing the illusion of the language of narration—English—by including narrative twists in which Italian characters are required to speak English.

In Dibdin’s *Così fan tutti*, an arrested man claims he is an American sailor and unable to speak Italian: “*Only spik Ingleesh*”, he repeats (1996, 51, original italics). Aurelio Zen suspects he is really a local, so he tests him out with his own limited English, which comes entirely from songs—“Oh yes, I’m the great pretender” and so forth—and finds the man is fooled and unable to respond (51–52). These language games ask readers to believe that Zen does not speak English, even though they have been reading him in English all along.

The only character in this novel who does speak English—of a sort—is a taxi driver, Immacolata Higgins (pronounced “Igginz” by many characters), who married a Londoner after World War II and speaks a bizarre form of Cockney English that she picked up during their short marriage. A comical series of events means she has to interpret Zen’s Italian into English (or rather, into her own variety of Cockney English) for an American, who finds it almost as incomprehensible as Italian (Dibdin 1996, 193–196). Again Dibdin manages, through the use of a single language (albeit in different varieties), to convey an illusion of bilingual (or perhaps trilingual) exchange.

Informal interpreting appears in Nabb’s *Death in Springtime*, too, when the family of an American kidnap victim in Florence speak with police. Sometimes the captain, whose English is limited, does parts of an interview in English (“We’ll waste less time that way”), but on one occasion he has to “break off [and call in his junior colleague, Bacci] for lack of an English verb that he remembered as soon as Bacci pronounced it” (Nabb 2005, 93, 115). It is not just the characters, but also the author and readers, who “waste less time” thanks to the convenient circumvention of the language problem, while the reference to the captain’s vocabulary lapse (the forgotten verb is *to hire*) neatly reminds us of the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic nature of the conversation that is taking place.

In another Dibdin novel, *Back to Bologna* (2005), things get even more complicated. This novel is characterised by self-referentiality from the beginning. Its characters include a professor of semiotics called Edgardo Ugo who has written a best-selling novel. His next work is to be a detective novel with a protagonist called Nez, which would be a pun on various phrases related to the nose (and which is also “Zen” backwards). There is also a private investigator, Tony Speranza, who models himself to the point of parody on the hard-boiled US investigators of fiction, as well as a celebrity chef, Romano Rinaldi, who has a television show called *Lo Chef Che Canta e Incanta*, during which he sings opera while cooking.

In one scene the bombastic chef is speaking to a foreign journalist in what he considers “perfect English” (learnt in just “a few months”) but which is actually highly comical and incorrect: “‘For me, the cooking is the life! I wait tomorrow like a promised spouse his moon of honey!’” (Dibdin 2005, 108). He then speaks “in Italian” to all the foreign press who have gathered. This is almost all still English on the page, but is supposedly being translated for the journalists’ benefit. Now, his native “Italian” is ridiculously florid and over-blown:

“When we [Italians] create *un piatto autentico, genuino e tipico*, it isn’t just to satisfy our bodily hunger. No! We want to take inside ourselves all of Italy, her history, her culture [. . .] We want to imbibe the very heart and soul of this earthly paradise. [. . .] For we Italians, dining is like taking Holy Communion, tasting the very body and blood of our

sacred culture that we consume in this daily domestic mass.” (Dibdin 2005, 109)

Lo Chef’s “Italian” is marked by all the comical stereotypes of Italianness—exaggeration, religiosity and an almost carnal obsession with food (at the end of his speech he bursts into tears and declares “Romano Rinaldi is a lover! I COOK WITH MY COCK!!”).<sup>6</sup>

These sorts of self-referential language games, along with the deliberate inclusion of exoticising Italian words, suggest a certain self-awareness and playfulness on the part of these bicultural writers, an eagerness to acknowledge and exploit their own position as privileged cultural commentators and quite visible “translators”.

## TOURISM, TRAVEL AND TRANSLATION

The strong sense of place in these books does not come only from linguistic shenanigans. As pseudotranslators exposing readers to the cultural Other, the authors also seem to make a point of including some sort of cultural and historical background that makes their stories Italian specific and sometimes almost gives the books the feel of an educational holiday. There are story-lines linked with such historical events and problems as the 1966 Florence floods and the closure of mental asylums set in train by the Legge Basaglia (Nabb 2003); the internal migration of Sardinian shepherds to Tuscany (Nabb 2005); the legacy of fascism and wartime resistance (Nabb 2002); the spate of sinister “Uno bianca” murders in Bologna in the 1980s and 1990s (Dibdin 2005); and the “Mani pulite” investigations into corruption (Dibdin 1996). More generally, topics relating to political and police corruption and organised crime, including building speculation and redevelopment (Jones 2011) and protection of Highly Placed Persons (Leon 2006), are features of most of the books. Often criminals go unpunished thanks to their links with powerful people. This seems to be a feature these books share with home-grown Italian crime fiction. In a review of Italian *gialli* and noir (in English translation), Tobias Jones has observed that they, too, tend to be dominated by a rather cynical view of corruption and power relations: “Most Anglo-Saxon detective fiction is concerned with justice: the Italian version tends [. . .] to focus on injustice” (2004, 30). This may be a reflection of the widespread perception in Italy that corruption is endemic and that the powerful are all too rarely held to account.

The fact that culture-specific background and explanations are incorporated into all the works is one of the main reasons for the association with travel writing and guidebooks. And indeed this feature comes as no surprise; after all, surely the point of setting a crime novel in a foreign country is to be able to do something one cannot do at home: one pseudo-translates in order to introduce something new to a literary system (Toury

1995, 41), just as one travels in search of some kind of break with routine or experience of the Other. Where background knowledge is required in these books, it is helpfully provided in just the right doses. This is how pseudotranslators save publishers and readers from the perceived problem of intractable cultural content. So the books are, in a manner of speaking, “just foreign enough” and, in fact, provide convenient reassurance that societal ills like corruption are more common elsewhere than at home (Chu 2000, 80).

It goes without saying that one would not generally draw a link between *Italian* crime writers like, for example, Lucarelli, De Cataldo or Carlotto and travel writing. There is, therefore, a strange cross-over here between travel writing and detective fiction simply by virtue of the contrast between, on the one hand, the author's cultural background and main audience (non-Italians) and, on the other, the books' setting and characters.

## THE VISIBILITY OF TRANSLATION

Michael Cronin has noted how travel narratives can find ways of conveying the presence of translation even while doing most of the translation work for the readers, for example by occasionally including nonstandard forms or foreign words to remind them where the action is taking place: “inscribing” the foreign language in the (English) language of the narrative through “word, accent, word order” (2000, 42). Cronin interprets this as a way of making translation visible, alerting readers to the complexity underlying the narrative.

The notion of visibility (or invisibility) in translation is one that has been explored at length by Lawrence Venuti (1995). He laments the fact that the act of translation is very often concealed, thanks to the preference of publishers and reviewers for fluency and transparency of style and for the elision of any markers of the source language (nothing is ever supposed to “sound translated”). In his own translation practice and in his “call to action” to fellow translators, Venuti advocates the inclusion of “foreignizing” elements in a translation in order to limit the ethnocentrism inherent in the act (particularly in the case of translation into a globally dominant language like English). This kind of translation is, he believes, “a potential source of cultural change” (Venuti 1998, 87).

Traces of the foreign are certainly very visible in the works discussed here. Of course, these are not translations but pseudotranslations (of sorts), written in the world language, English, and served up with generous helpings of exoticism, so it does not pay to get too carried away suggesting that they are paragons of “cultural change”. Actually, in some respects these are rather conservative texts, and, as Mark Chu has pointed out, they sometimes perpetuate stereotypes about Italy (Chu 2000). Still, certain banalities do not detract from the fact that these books are quite adventurous linguistically

and can tell us something about the creation and circulation of texts, genres and images of the Other.

These texts never let readers forget that they are “in” Italy, and conveying a sense of place is often a preoccupation of translators as well. In my own work translating the Sardinian novelist Milena Agus (recounted in Maher 2011, 133–159) I have sought to create a sense of place and of cultural and linguistic difference through the inclusion of traces of the source languages (Italian and Sardinian) that I hope will serve to remind readers of the cultural specificity of the world they are reading about. These included kinship terms like *mamma*, *papà* and *nonna*, which are central to the narrative, as well as names of culturally specific items like certain foods and occasional (glossed) phrases in dialect that would preserve some shadow of Italy’s linguistic variety even in English translation. Yet I look at the work of Leon, Dibdin and especially Jones, and I see them getting away with all sorts of things that most translators never could, at least not without being accused of not earning their meagre fee per word. Whether there is anything to be gained from retaining words like *scontrino* or *armadio* in a translation is highly debatable, but I think there are some useful lessons for translators (and publishers) in this kind of pseudotranslation. Because while we might scoff at the exoticising overuse of Italianisms by some of these authors, translators and translations probably have a similar purpose to these books—that of exposing readers to an unfamiliar setting and culture while also holding their hand enough for the reading experience to be meaningful rather than alienating.

The self-referential linguistic games of these writers also provide food for thought: translation sometimes shies away from dialect and linguistic play, assuming it is an inevitable loss in translation, but maybe this is to underestimate the ability of readers to suspend disbelief, to know at once that their protagonist is speaking English on the page even while actually being Swedish, Italian, bilingual, whatever. The ways the authors incorporate cultural glosses and explanations is illuminating, too, and reminds us of how much translators might be able to offer—for example, by inserting cultural explanations and writing informative and accessible prefaces to their translations. Such creative strategies are becoming more important with the spread of heterolingual, multicultural and transnational writing throughout the world.

There is an odd disjunction between, on the one hand, the nervousness of many publishers about making translation visible (whether paratextually or textually) and, on the other, the enormous success of books like these Anglo-Italian novels, whose very essence is predicated on linguistic and cultural difference. There is most likely a fairly obvious reason why such pseudotranslations have an advantage over actual translations: publishers probably see greater value in a native English-speaking writer who can do interviews and book signings and incorporate the roles of both author and cultural mediator. But perhaps publishers should take more notice of the saleability and appeal

of the foreign among many readers. Instead of being seen as arcane niche products, translations—particularly of genre fiction—might be recognised for their ability to make the foreign accessible, so that in our bookshops they can sit alongside home-grown interpretations of exotic other worlds. What needs to happen is an acknowledgement that real translators—a bit like Dibdin, Jones and the other pseudotranslators—*already do* simultaneously carry out the roles of writer, critic and cultural mediator.

One example of the translator as cultural mediator is Stephen Sartarelli, the American translator of the celebrated Sicilian crime writer Andrea Camilleri. Sartarelli's translations always end with a few pages of notes explaining any references to the Italian political and social situation, as well as literary allusions, cultural references, culinary terms, customs, proverbs and idioms and Italian terms, including jobs and titles (see, for example, Camilleri 2006, 2009). He also finds creative ways of dealing with the novels' mix of language varieties: the clumsy Catarella speaks a garbled, mistake-riddled English similar to his language in the source texts, while the housekeeper Adelina speaks an Italian-American variety of English, presumably an attempt to convey her use of Sicilian dialect. In some other characters, dialectal speech is conveyed by nongrammatical, colloquial English. All these translation strategies serve to create a sense of place in the translations, an important feature of Camilleri's writing, which is always deeply rooted in his native Sicily. In this respect, then, Sartarelli's work has a lot in common with that of the pseudotranslators discussed here and certainly makes visible—through nonstandard English, italicised foreign words and the paratextual apparatus of notes—the extent of the cultural and linguistic mediation carried out by a literary translator.

Sartarelli has said that this work does not come easily (2002). He seeks to create new spaces in English for the rich expressivity of Camilleri's Sicilian-inflected language but finds himself constantly battling with editors who seek to make his translations conform to American English norms. Yet Sartarelli's techniques have apparently been well received by the reading public, for he has translated several books in the Inspector Montalbano series. As he himself points out, while the setting, language and cultural background of Camilleri's novels are relatively unfamiliar to Anglophone readers, the crime fiction genre certainly is not, and this most likely explains Anglophone publishers' preference for the Montalbano novels over other works by the prolific Camilleri: they portray an alterity that is not so unfamiliar as to be daunting or impenetrable; they are “‘altro’ ma non troppo”.

If Western European literature can be said to constitute a kind of “megasytem” (Tymoczko 1995, 17), one can assume a degree of shared heritage, at least when it comes to the conventions and expectations of crime fiction, a genre whose spread has been the fruit of decades of translation and pseudotranslation, even as each receiving culture subsequently developed it in its own way. Textual movement within this megasystem has included the export of the US and British traditions of crime writing; the development of



these traditions within Italy, which today boasts a number of highly regarded crime writers; the translation of (some) Italian crime fiction into English; and the generation of a new subgenre of Anglophone crime writing set in Italy and complementing to some extent the already well-established genre of travel writing by Anglos about Italy (see, for example, Pfister 1996). The cultural authority bestowed upon writers like Michael Dibdin, Tobias Jones, Donna Leon and Magdalen Nabb has meant that they can also become advocates for Italian writing in translation. Thus, Jones has reviewed translations of Italian crime writing (2004), while praise from Leon and Dibdin is used on the cover blurbs of translations from Italian, translations that are then compared to these authors' work by yet other reviewers (O'Sullivan 2004/05, 74). Numerous different agents play a part in all this: translators, pseudotranslators, publishers, editors, marketing departments, critics, reviewers and, above all, readers. Here we see in action what Rambelli calls the "reciprocal relationship between a present text [a pseudotranslation] and its sources" (2008, 209). As it undergoes multiple inscriptions from different cultures and languages, the genre of crime fiction provides an insight into the processes of cross-fertilisation, intertextuality and recreation that characterise much writing within Europe today.

## NOTES

1. Jones is an interesting case because he is also known as a travel writer; before he launched this series he was already an occasional commentator on Italy for foreigners thanks to his 2003 nonfiction book, *The Dark Heart of Italy* (2003). His most recent work is an account of a true crime in southern Italy, *Blood on the Altar* (2012).
2. A similar strategy tends to be used in English translations of Italian crime fiction. See, for example, Lucarelli (2004), in which translator Oonagh Stransky preserves the Italian names of positions within the police force and of administrative entities.
3. An analogous case might be television medical dramas—writers surely know that the vast majority of viewers will not understand all the complex medical terminology that makes up the dialogue, but it is an essential tool in creating a sense of drama and realism.
4. Jones makes similar use of translationese and "false friends" in *The Dark Heart of Italy* (see Maher 2012, 186–187).
5. I am grateful to Guendalina Carbonelli for alerting me to this discussion.
6. In *Zen*, the television adaptation of three of Dibdin's Aurelio Zen novels (BBC 2011), the use of accents, locations and occasional phrases in Italian serves to convey a similar effect to that of the novels. Although the hero is played by super-English Rufus Sewell, it is repeatedly pointed out that his curious surname is Venetian, and there are frequent shots of paved streets and the Roman cityscape to reinforce the sense of place. Zen speaks with a standard British English accent but some of the lowlife characters have more working-class accents, while Zen's *mamma* and his glamorous love interest, Tania Moretti, speak with mild Italian accents. Thus these representatives of the two major stereotypes of Italian womanhood are marked a little more strongly as Italian.

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## Part III

# Reception: Texts and Their Readers

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# 11 Of Migrants and Working Men

## How Pietro Di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* Travelled between the US and Italy through Translation

*Loredana Polezzi*

Pietro di Donato's 1939 novel *Christ in Concrete*<sup>1</sup> has been described as a “minor classic” unjustly “relegated to the margins of mainstream American culture” (Gardaphé 1993, ix). Yet the history of its production, its complex circulation and its multiple receptions tells a much more elaborate story, one which has implications for the construction of national, hyphenated and transnational literatures, as well as for our understanding of the connection between these models and the history of mobility, both social and geographic—that is to say, with the history of class and with that of migration.

The key agent in forging and shaping these multiple connections is translation, both in the form of the self-translating processes which informed di Donato's work and of the way in which his novel subsequently travelled between languages, cultures and critical establishments. In following the vicissitudes of one book, from its first publication till today, I will therefore be carrying out an exercise in the history of reception, but I will also be questioning issues of method and classification, as well as the imbrications between critical frameworks and broader political constructions of literary heritage. I intend to examine, in particular, how the politics of class and those of migration have informed the translation and the interpretation of the novel (two closely related processes) in different places and at different times, starting from 1940s America and then moving to the postwar period and the development of Italian American studies on one side of the Atlantic,<sup>2</sup> but also to Fascist as well as to contemporary Italy on the other, before finally taking a transnational perspective on di Donato's work. The intention is to show how, as a result of these multiple readings, *Christ in Concrete* has been perceived—over time and in different places—as the ultimate working-class novel, as a startling testimony to the harsh lives led by migrants in early twentieth-century America, as a compelling portrait of the specific history of Italian migration to the US and as an ethnic narrative of Italian greatness in distress, or even as an icon of regional Italian identity. These interpretations, which inform translation processes both in the form of micro- and macro-textual strategies and are often particularly visible in the accompanying paratext, are themselves subject to translation and retranslation. As they

travel across the Atlantic, they link di Donato's work to distinct and at times conflicting models of both identity and literature, which are in turn based on notions of national, international or transnational culture. To ask how *Christ in Concrete* and its translations fit these models therefore also raises questions as to whether and in what sense this "minor masterpiece" can be defined as an Italian, American or Italian American classic; as an example of world literature; or as all of the above.

Ultimately, I want to ask whether focusing on the multiple processes of translation and self-translation, fashioning and self-fashioning, which inflect the history of *Christ in Concrete* can lead us to a broader conception of writing linked to migration, one which does not oppose but rather recomposes its double belonging (within a country of origin and a host culture) as well as its multiple contextualisations (cultural, geographic, linguistic and political). If framed in a transnational perspective, this broader circulation of the writing of migration can both illuminate and be illuminated by such notions as minor literature on the one hand, and world literature on the other.

## THE MAKING OF A MINOR CLASSIC

*Christ in Concrete* was di Donato's first and by far most successful novel. The book had a complex genesis. Its first chapter initially appeared as a short story in *Esquire* in March 1937 (di Donato 1937). The popular success of the story—which was included, among other things, in an anthology of that year's best new writing (O'Brien 1938)—led di Donato to expand it into a full-length work. Published in 1939, the novel was an immediate success, even beating Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, which was published in the same year, as a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club (Gardaphé 1993, x).

The author was a second-generation Italian American, born in New Jersey in 1911, the eldest son of migrants from the Abruzzi area of Italy. *Christ in Concrete* is largely autobiographical in content, narrating the story of a family of Italian migrants from the same region and centring on the figure of Paul, a young boy whose father, Geremio, dies in a building accident and who is subsequently forced to work as a bricklayer in order to support his mother and siblings. If this fate is very similar to that of the young Pietro di Donato and of his family (his father also worked in the building trade and died in an accident), the language in which the story is told is far from realistic. As noted by a number of critics, the power of the novel (and, markedly, of the initial short story, devoted to the death of Geremio) lies in the impact of its language, which mixes mimetic and expressionist traits, producing an idiosyncratic idiom which Gardaphé has described as "neither Italian nor English, but an amalgam of the two" (1993, xii).

Pietro di Donato constructs the language of his tale and that of his characters by mixing registers and styles so that Biblical tones, modernist

experimentalism and the everyday language of New York builders sit side by side. He also inscribes his pages with processes of self-translation, often rendering literally into English the rhythms and the expressions of the migrants' plural, strongly regional and dialectal "Italians", as well as those of their imperfect yet highly expressive and creative "Englishes". This complex language has intrigued but at times also alienated critics, who have often treated it rather reductively, as a token of the "ethnic flavour" of the novel, as in the case of the back cover of the 1993 edition, which describes the book as follows:

Vibrant with the rich ethnicity of the city neighborhood, sonorous with a prose that recalls the speaker's Italian origins, and impassioned in its outrage at prejudice and exploitation, Pietro di Donato's *Christ in Concrete* is a powerful social document and a rare, deeply moving human story about the American immigrant experience.

In recent years, however, greater attention has been paid to the function played by di Donato's linguistic and stylistic choices. The best assessment so far comes probably from another Italian American writer, Helen Barolini, for whom:

At his best, as in *Christ in Concrete*, di Donato's narrative patterns form, in their diversity, one of the richest linguistic textures to be found in the twentieth-century novel and make the bridge, for him and for his characters, between a lost and mythical Italy and a real but never realized America. (Barolini 2000, 183)

It is this antirealist quality which takes the language of *Christ in Concrete* beyond a purely mimetic level, giving it a unique character which has nothing to do with the imperfect cadences of inexperienced language learners and pidgin speakers. An extract from the initial pages of the novel, which introduce Geremio and his team of builders, can serve to prove the point:

Six floors below, the contractor called. "Hey, Geremio! Is your gang of Dagos dead?"

Geremio cautioned the men. "On your toes, boys. If he writes out slips, someone won't have big eels on the Easter table."

The Lean cursed that the padrone could take the job and all the Saints for that matter and shove it . . . !

Curly-headed Lazarene, the roguish, pigeon-toed scaffoldman, spat a cloud of tobacco juice and hummed to his own music . . . "Yes, certainly yes to your face, master padrone . . . and behind, This to you and all your kind!"

The day, like all days came to an end. Calloused and bruised bodies sighed, and numb legs shuffled toward shabby railroad flats . . .



“Ah, bella casa mio. Where my little freshets of blood and my good woman await me. Home where my broken back will not ache so. Home where midst the monkey chatter of my piccolinos I will float off to blessed slumber with my feet on the chair and the head on the wife’s soft full breast.”

These great child-hearted ones leave one another without words or ceremony, and as they ride and walk home, a great pride swells the breast . . .

“Blessings to Thee, O Jesus. I have fought winds and cold. Hand to hand I have locked dumb stones in place and the great building rises. I have earned a bit of bread for me and mine.”

The mad day’s brutal conflict is forgiven, and strained limbs prostrate themselves so that swollen veins can send the yearning blood coursing and pulsating deliciously as though the body mounted leaping streams.

The job alone remained behind . . . and yet, they also, having left the bigger part of their lives with it. The cold ghastly beast, the Job, stood stark, the eerie March wind wrapping it in sharp shadows of falling dusk. (di Donato 1993, 5–6)

What di Donato is using here is an elaborate composition technique which incorporates multiple strategies of translation and self-translation: from language to language, but also across registers and social as well as regional variants of both English and Italian. This is accompanied by calques of foreign syntax, examples of borrowing and paraphrasing, the foregrounding of culture-bound items and of untranslated expressions and so on. So among religious echoes and poetic turns of phrase (particularly evident in the last three paragraphs), we encounter Italian words like “padrone” (master) simply dropped in the middle of an English sentence, while others, like “piccolinos” (little ones), are modified in accordance with English syntax. Translation strategies are at times incorporated into the writing, as in “master padrone”, where the English and the Italian word are given in quick sequence. Elsewhere, however, the reader is left to interpret the text on its own: “bella casa mio” remains opaque unless one knows at least some Italian or makes the connection between the expression and the following sentence, which refers to the place where the worker visualises his family waiting for him—i.e., the home. “The Lean” is a likely translation of one of the typical nicknames which often replaced both individual and family names in rural Italian culture and which travelled with working-class migrants across countries and languages. And the reference to “big eels on the Easter table” evokes regional culinary traditions which would not be familiar to most American (and possibly also to many Italian) readers.

This type of writing makes di Donato a firm candidate for the label of translingual or, preferably, heterolingual author (Kellman 2000; Grutman 2006): his writing is intrinsically polylingual and could not exist without

the multiple languages which underpin it. Whether translation is eagerly displayed or openly refused within it (Gentzler 2006, 2008), polylingual writing always bears its mark. Translation processes are always already inscribed in this kind of literature, from the moment of its inception, rather than happening a posteriori as a second (and possibly secondary) process. Therefore translation is also a constitutive element of a work's production, rather than purely a component of its circulation. It is an integral part of its birth and of its life, not an additional (and optional) afterlife (Benjamin 1999).

The presence of translation within the “original” also produces particularly complex scenarios if and when a polylingual work eventually gets translated in a more conventional sense—that is, transported into another culture and language. In the case of a work which is associated with a personal or collective history of migration, as is often the case with polylingual writing, this process is further complicated by the sense of a double belonging, which can inscribe the writing within the cultural, literary and linguistic context in which it was produced, but also in the one to which it is linked and of which it bears traces: the culture and language of its more or less remote, at times even mythical, origins. That same double inscription, however, can become an instrument of exclusion or marginalisation, labelling the work (and its author) as neither fully belonging to one culture's context, literary system, canon, nor to another. It is these mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and marginalisation, that I want to explore next, looking at the reception of *Christ in Concrete* in the US and Italy.

## THE DOUBLE LIFE OF *CHRIST IN CONCRETE* IN THE US

In the US, from the start, the novel had a double reception: on the one hand it was read as a “working-class bible” and as essentially a political or social novel; and on the other it was seen as a direct testimony of the experience of migration or, more specifically, as a form of autobiographical testimony offered by di Donato, his act of bearing witness to the life of the Italian immigrant community in the US or, even more specifically, in New York, in the first half of the twentieth century. While the two interpretations may to an extent combine, the tendency has been for one to prevail over the other, as already demonstrated by the quotation from the back cover of the 1993 edition of the novel cited earlier. A number of scholars—including Fred Gardaphé (2004), Robert Viscusi (2006) and others—have documented this double reading within di Donato's American reception, so I will offer just a few salient examples here.

In an article entitled “The bricklayer as bricoleur” (1991), Arthur D. Casciato has discussed the appropriation of Pietro di Donato's figure and of his work by the League of American Writers, showing how the association (directly linked to the US Communist Party, of which di Donato was a rather

unorthodox member) tried to present the author of *Christ in Concrete* as the embodiment of the worker-as-artist. According to Casciato, “the [image of the] bricklayer-writer” created by the League becomes “a hyphenated construction based on class that inscribes even as it erases . . . the more typical ethnic designation, ‘Italian-American’”. That hyphen is “an ideologically charged one meant to hold, in this case, the working-class ethnic writer ‘at hyphen’s length’, so to speak, from the established community” (75).

Louise Napolitano has also examined the explicit “politicization” of di Donato’s work, listing critics who spoke for and against it from the 1940s to the 1980s (she is clearly against it, by the way). Already in 1939, E. B. Garside described the author as a “shining figure to add to the proletarian gallery of artists”. Two years later, Halford Luccock spoke of *Christ in Concrete* as a proletarian novel written “by a workman resembling more nearly the much heralded actual ‘proletarian’ author than any other”. More recently, Napolitano cites L.J. Oliver, who, writing in 1987, follows the same line and “interprets the novel’s subtext as Marxist”. At the other end of the spectrum, she points to Louis Adamic, whose 1939 review “contrasts the novel with other ‘novels by the laboring class’ praising Di Donato for not shaping, adjusting and twisting the truth ‘to conform to the intellectuals’ notion of synthetic Marxians” and pointing out that in the book “[t]here is nothing twisted to fit an intellectual hypothesis. There is no ideology, no simplification of life . . . There is no sentimentality or subservience. There is always a sense of the dignity of man and the worker” (Napolitano 1995, 70).

Even outside an explicitly political reading linking di Donato to the Communist Party and to Marxist theories (or equally explicitly denying those links), the image of “worker’s bible” stuck to *Christ in Concrete*, eventually resurfacing, either on its own or side by side with the increasingly visible and eventually dominant label attached to the book as one of the founding texts of Italian American literature. Today, critics talk of “a work of social protest, proletarian manifesto, genius work of primitivism, modern Greek tragedy, and the prototypical Italian-American novel” (Burke n.d.); “something rare, a proletarian novel written by a proletarian” or “an instructive display of worker exploitation that in the words of writer Helen Barolini, ‘fit the social protest sympathies of the period’” (LaGumina n.d.). The novel has also been described as “a metaphor for the immigrant experience in America” (Severo 1992), while Studs Terkel, in his preface to the 1993 edition, writes of “the story of so many immigrant peoples whose dreams and realities were in conflict. It is the story of fathers and sons and the hard-bought legacy” (vii).

As the status of Italian American studies (as a cognate subject area to African American or Hispanic American studies) grew within US academic circles, di Donato’s figure and, in particular, his first novel, were the object of a process of ethnic,<sup>3</sup> rather than political, affiliation, eventually taking their place among the founding fathers and founding texts, respectively, of the new discipline (Barolini 2000; Gardaphé 2004; Tamburri 1998). For Anthony Tamburri, for instance, writers like Pietro di Donato and John

Fante played a key role in creating “a corpus of writing heavily informed by their Italian heritage”, with works that “celebrate their ethnicity and cultural origin” (16)—and those works have a rightful place at the heart of the newly established Italian American library. Fante and di Donato were part of that “second generation” of Italian immigrants which emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, making the explicit choice to use English, but also to write, in many cases, for a broad American public—which makes their appropriation as Italian Americans all the more important for the field, if a little bit fraught (Tamburri 1998, 124–125). This direct association with the emerging category of Italian American literature has undoubtedly brought new visibility and recognition to di Donato, and the most recent editions of *Christ in Concrete* are a result of that process. At the same time, the label, replacing or at least gaining prominence over that of “proletarian novel”, has encouraged a new kind of niche positioning, associating the book with an ethnic context and potentially restricting its appeal.

A gradual shift seems to have taken place in the US, then, from the prevalence of a class-related reading of *Christ in Concrete* to that of an ethnic, hyphenated interpretation. This shift also corresponds to a parallel move which sees di Donato’s novel transported from the margins of a national canon of twentieth-century American literature to the centre of a smaller corpus of Italian American writing. National readings (i.e., readings which place the novel in the broader context of American literature, rather than emphasising its ethnic colouring) were, as we have seen, more frequent in earlier critical appraisals but are nevertheless still current.<sup>4</sup> They tend to connect di Donato’s novel to other fictional renditions of the Great Depression and to a tradition of proletarian novels that emerged around that time. They also stress class-based interpretations of the book and often underline, for instance, the multiethnic nature of the migrant world of the tenement described by di Donato, as well as the ties of class solidarity sustaining the community of its inhabitants. Ethnic (i.e., Italian American) readings of *Christ in Concrete*, on the other hand, usually centre on ideas of Italian national character and heritage, on the drama of Italian migrant workers’ lives in the US and on their role in the (literal as well as cultural) construction of America. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in the US context those interpretations which stress the Italian (and therefore Italian American) credential of di Donato should also emphasise the realistic, mimetic and “Italianate” traits of his language, often choosing to ignore or even to explicitly deny its more experimental qualities (Mulas 1991).

## “BACK” TO ITALY

The enduring opposition (and occasional superimposition) of ethnic and national appropriations which has characterised both the initial and the continuing US reception of *Christ in Concrete* also had its permutations in

Italy. The critical assessment of the novel and the way in which its translation has been presented to Italian audiences have changed over the years, offering different modulations of national-, regional- or class-focused interpretations of di Donato's work. The "italianità" of the author, of his characters and of his work as a whole dominated Italian reading in the early years and is to an extent still present today. Political interpretations of *Christ in Concrete* (especially of its connections with communist ideas) had to be played down initially but emerged more forcefully in the postwar period. Today, regional appropriations of both author and book are also frequent, as are interpretations which directly link di Donato to a specifically Italian critical appreciation of Italian American literature and of its development.

The years in which di Donato wrote and published his masterpiece were dominated, in Italy, by Fascism and by its attempts to control the cultural life of the country. These were also, however, the years of the "discovery" of contemporary American literature, and, in spite of the imposition of increasingly stringent censorship measures, Cesare Pavese could call the 1930s "the decade of translations".<sup>5</sup> Volumes translated from the English included some names and works now associated with the Italian American second generation, starting with John Fante and, precisely, with di Donato's *Christ in Concrete*. Critical reception of these works was mixed and tended to construct Italian American writing as firmly "other" from Italian literature even as it underlined the spirit of "Italianness" it placed at the heart of individual works. This first phase of the reception of Italian American writing in Italy effectively established boundaries and critical criteria, and its limitations remained in place more or less unchanged (just as the translations produced at that point kept being reprinted almost without alterations) until at least the 1980s.

From the 1990s onwards, a new generation of critics with a specific interest in Italian American literature started to emerge in Italy,<sup>6</sup> and a new wave of translations and retranslations also began to appear. In the intervening decades, of course, Italian American studies had grown significantly in the US, both in size and in methodological rigour, but also in strategic influence and visibility. So the "italoamericanisti" who appeared in Italy in this phase could rely on a solid base of historical, philological and theoretical research. Yet they had to fight against the received wisdom of the Italian critical establishment, which relegated Italian American writing to a sociological phenomenon—rather than a literary one—with the exception of isolated "great voices" or "masterpieces". The latter were more likely to be perceived purely as an integral part of the American tradition by specialists in Italian literature, while at the same time finding themselves on the margins of the American canon and therefore of the interests of Italy's "americanisti". This created a continuing double erasure which occluded the specificities of Italian American writing as a field in its own right—and it was this double barrier that any revaluations had to battle against. At the same time, notions of local and ethnic identity which had been almost

excluded from Italy's mainstream political discourse between the 1950s and the 1980s (a period dominated by a political model based on ideological and class battles) gradually resurfaced. It is not purely by chance that the renewed interest in Italian American writing emerged in Italy with a new generation of scholars who had seen the collapse of that ideological model and of the corresponding political project, as well as the reappearance of localist messages, and the resurfacing of racism and ethnic tensions which marked the transformation of Italy into a country of immigration. These new or renewed instances have at least partly opened up previously unavailable spaces for the reception of Italian American writing in Italy and for a rethinking of its role in a plural cluster of "Italian cultures". Yet this new phase carries its own risks, including the potential ghettoisation, marginalisation and political exploitation which go hand in hand with localist readings of the writing of Italian emigration. The risk is double: the appropriation of writers or works at a regional or even subregional level, turning them into some sort of folk heroes; and the corresponding exclusion from both physical and critical circulation at a national level.

The case of di Donato and *Christ in Concrete* is emblematic of these shifts in the perception and political affiliation of Italian American literature and, more broadly, of Italian emigration and the cultural production associated with it in Italy. The novel was translated into Italian for the first time in 1941 for one of the country's leading publishing houses, Bompiani. In October 1939, the English version of the book had already been introduced to the Italian public through a review written by Elio Vittorini for the popular weekly magazine *Oggi*. Vittorini was one of the leading novelists and intellectuals of that period and played a key role in introducing modernist American writing to Italy, especially through translation. At the time, he was working for Bompiani in Milan, and one of his main projects was the production of *Americana*, an anthology of contemporary American literature whose publication was the subject of one of the most notorious cases of Fascist censorship (Billiani 2007, 209–220). Vittorini's review of *Christ in Concrete* was markedly negative and focused on what he described as di Donato's "tedious old-fashioned psychology" as well as his "taste for an almost provincial realism", reminiscent of followers of Verga, and "due perhaps more to bad habit and sluggishness of taste than to an ineluctable personal inclination" (quoted in Marazzi 2004, 179; his translation).

The history of the translation is complex and emblematic of the pressure exercised by the Fascist regime on the cultural industries. The first edition of the volume did not name a translator, though this was later identified as Eva Amendola. It seems, however, that Amendola was not the actual, or at least the sole, translator of the work. Martino Marazzi (2000, 55–59; 2004, 311) has suggested that the actual translator may have been an anti-Fascist intellectual whose name could not appear in print at the time. Recent research by Marazzi and by Paola Sgobba confirms this hypothesis (Sgobba 2010, 91–92). Eva Kuhn Amendola—the wife of the anti-Fascist leader Giovanni

Amendola and herself not necessarily *persona grata* to the regime—was best known as a translator from the Russian and does not appear to have worked on English texts (Billiani 2007, 62). The translation may in fact have been, at most, a joint effort, where the bulk of the work was actually carried out by Bruno Maffi, a communist intellectual who was repeatedly sent into internal exile or *confino* and incarcerated by Mussolini's regime and who was also the translator of Marx's *Capital*.

In spite of the initial strategic silence about the name of the translator, as well as of micro-textual decisions aimed at concealing the communist leanings of di Donato,<sup>7</sup> the translation was subjected to retroactive censorship: although the publication had initially been authorised, copies were seized shortly afterwards, and the book did not reappear until 1944, when it was reissued without substantial changes (Bonsaver 2007, 223–224; Piazzoni 2007, 201–203). In this context, the introduction added to the first edition by the “editore” (the publisher, i.e., officially Valentino Bompiani, though Marazzi [2004, 22] suggests the piece may actually have been penned by Vittorini) acquires particular resonance:

It is not only because we consider it a good book that we are publishing, in Italian translation, the novel *Christ in Concrete*, written by the Italian-American Pietro Di Donato. There is, in addition to this, a different and profound reason; a reason which would have led us to publish it even if we had not thought it so pleasing. The reader will judge for himself. Formally, the novel is possibly quite distant from our literary forms: it does not display, in its prose, the solemn elegance of many of our writers; nor, especially in its dialogues, their traditionally accomplished syntax. It does not remind us, in short, of Manzoni, D'Annunzio, or Verga. Yet, as the reader will not fail to see, this is a deeply, spiritually Italian book, as few others, written in the Italian language, can be. Italian is the sentiment that runs through it, from one vertebra to the next. Italian suffering, Italian joy, both taken to the extreme, vibrate in its pages. And its characters suffer in the Italian way, with hot, baking pain, without anguish. Italian is the way in which they rejoice, with impulsive and timeless passions, which come straight from the blood, not from passing excitement. Consider, in this respect, the episode of the celebrations among the emigrants, as well as the countless pages in which the widow and her orphan son cry for their dead husband and father, evoking and invoking him at one and the same time. It is this, more than the external details about the environment in which our emigrants live or the battles they have to fight as sons of the people, that strikes us and captures our hearts. It is their Italianness as an expression of nature, imperiously manifesting itself in the form of a different language—a language which is conquered, not conquering.<sup>8</sup>

Non soltanto perché lo giudichiamo un bel libro noi pubblichiamo qui, tradotto in italiano, il romanzo *Cristo fra i muratori* dell'italo-americano

Pietro Di Donato. V'è, insieme un altro motivo; ed è profondo: un motivo per cui lo avremmo pubblicato anche se non ci fosse sembrato così bello. Vedrà il lettore. Formalmente il romanzo è forse lontano dalle nostre forme letterarie: non ha, nel discorso, l'eleganza solenne di molti nostri scrittori, o, specie nel dialogo, la loro ancor tradizionale compiutezza sintattica. Non si ricollega insomma, nè al Manzoni, nè al D'Annunzio, nè al Verga. Ma intimamente, spiritualmente, lo vedrà bene il lettore, è libro italiano come pochi altri libri di lingua italiana lo sono. Italiano è il sentimento che, di vertebra in vertebra, lo percorre. Sofferenza italiana, gioia italiana, l'una e l'altra all'estremo, vibrano nelle sue pagine. E i personaggi in esso soffrono all'italiana, con caldo dolore che cuoce, senza angoscia; all'italiana gioiscono, con entusiasmi impulsivi e immemori che provengono dal sangue, non da eccitazione. Si considerino, al riguardo, l'episodio della festa tra paesani, e le innumerevoli pagine in cui la vedova o l'orfano piangono il marito e padre morto, ad un tempo evocandolo e invocandolo. Tutto ciò, più che i dati esterni sull'ambiente dei nostri emigrati e sulle lotte loro di figli del popolo, ci colpisce e appassiona. È l'italianità come natura, che si manifesta prepotentemente nell'aspetto di un altro linguaggio: conquistato, non conquistatore. (di Donato 1941, 5)

Elsewhere, in the blurbs added to the covers, the novel is described as being “as rough as a piece of uncut granite” [“Rude come un pezzo di granito non ancora squadrato”] and as marked by “expression devoid of all technique, born out of the harsh life, the self-contained silences and the dense articulation of the workman” [“periodare spoglio di qualsiasi tecnica, nato dalla vita dura, dai silenzi contenuti e dal discorrere denso dell'operaio”]. Additionally, the biography of di Donato is given prominence and is presented as a story of collective tragedy and personal heroism. The reading suggested by the paratext therefore foregrounds the interpretation of *Christ in Concrete* as an Italian emigrant's autobiography, stressing (perhaps inevitably, given the Fascist context) the plight of Italian migrants, their exploitation and, of course, their enduring “Italianness”.

The 1941 translation was repeatedly reprinted, first by Bompiani and then by Mondadori, over the following decades. While the text did not change, the paratext did. The publisher's preface eventually disappeared, substituted by new introductions and blurbs. The ones produced by Edmondo Aroldi for the 1973 Mondadori edition are emblematic of the new political and cultural context. His introduction stresses *Christ in Concrete's* position among “the most significant works of that social literature which flourished in the United States during the 1930s” [“le opere più significative nell'ambito della letteratura sociale fiorita negli Stati Uniti negli anni trenta”] (back cover) and is built on two premises: on the one hand, the fact that, if anything, the Italian reader would be familiar with Edward Dmytryck's 1949 film adaptation of di Donato's novel;<sup>9</sup> and on the other (but coherently with



the foregrounding of Dmytryck's work) the association of the book with a strong anti-American message:

At times imbued with populism, Pietro Di Donato's work, which is autobiographical down to the last little detail, never goes beyond the limits of the reportage denouncing a thankless America, thick with social contradiction, trapped within the false equilibrium of puritanical moral hypocrisy. Neither explicitly nor through veiled allusions does *Christ in Concrete* ever become a *roman à thèse*, or a political novel. Rather, it aims to be a finger pointed against ills which have to disappear, which in a modern society should not even exist. In this respect, *Christ in Concrete* still maintains all its relevance today.

A volte di un populismo palpitante, l'opera di Pietro Di Donato, autobiografica fin nei più minuziosi particolari, non oltrepassa mai le misure del "dossier" di denuncia a carico di un'America ingrata, irta di contraddizioni sociali, chiusa nel falso equilibrio dell'ipocrisia morale puritana; né esplicitamente né velatamente, *Cristo fra i muratori* diventa mai un romanzo a tesi o un romanzo politico, intende essere piuttosto un dito puntato su piaghe che devono scomparire, che in una società modernamente organizzata non dovrebbero nemmeno esistere. In questa direzione, *Cristo fra i muratori* conserva tutta la sua attualità. (Aroldi 1973, 7)

This anti-American interpretation, based on the reappropriation of the history (and the stories) of Italian emigration, can also be found in more recent commentaries on di Donato's work, such as the following description, taken from the Web site associated with a well-known textbook for Italian as a foreign language:

Pietro Di Donato himself remains a character within the great history of our emigration. An outstanding author committed to denouncing social injustice; an undisputed member of a literary generation which also produced the great voices of John Fante, Pascal D'Angelo and Mario Puzo; this son of the harsh history of Italian emigration, impartial witness to the huge social injustice which characterised America at the start of the century [. . .] has unfortunately lost some of his appeal over time.

Lo stesso Pietro Di Donato rimane un personaggio sospeso nella grande storia della nostra emigrazione. Grandissimo autore di denuncia sociale, indiscusso esponente di una stagione letteraria italoamericana esaltata anche da John Fante, Pascal D'Angelo e Mario Puzo, questo figlio della dura emigrazione italiana, testimone obiettivo delle grandi ingiustizie sociali americane di inizio secolo [. . .] non ha avuto fortuna nella gara del tempo. (Superciaioit n.d.)

In parallel with these national, Italo-centric readings, a localist or regionalist image of di Donato and of his work has also emerged in Italy over the past few decades. A number of associations based in the Abruzzi have turned to di Donato as an icon of the region's history of emigration, and any Google search for his name will produce a substantial number of Web pages marked by a distinctly "local" flavour.<sup>10</sup>

This move from a national to a more restricted horizon of reception can also be observed in the new translation of *Christ in Concrete* by Letizia Prisco which appeared in 2001 for Il Grappolo, a small publishing house based in the Southern Italian town of Mercato S. Severino. The size and geographical location of the publisher signal a more limited, niche-target audience, yet, paradoxically, they also point to new, transnational perspectives since the publisher has direct contacts with US-based scholars of Italian American studies (especially Luigi Fontanella). The direct link between this new translation and the renewed interest in di Donato fostered by the growth of Italian American studies in the US is also signalled by the fact that the only critical apparatus included in the Il Grappolo edition is in itself a translation: an Italian version of Fred Gardaphé's introduction to the 1993 English edition of the novel. This translation accompanying a translation underlines a move towards the inscription of *Christ in Concrete* in the context of Italian American literature, even within an Italian critical horizon and when the target audience is constituted by Italian readers.

## CONCLUSIONS: CLASS, NATION AND HYPHENATION

As highlighted in this essay, the two main readings of *Christ in Concrete* have regularly focused either on its social and political dimensions or on its ethnic ones. Ultimately, these readings are not antithetical, nor incompatible, in spite of the fact that each one of them has tended to dominate in different places and at different times. In fact, with its generic and linguistic hybridity, di Donato's masterpiece seems a perfect fit for the definition of minor literature offered by Deleuze and Guattari (1986). According to their description, a minor literature is one written by a minority in the language of a majority. This kind of writing always has a political and collective, as well as individual, nature. And, ultimately, this deterritorialised form of art is also the most innovative form of literary production.

Considering *Christ in Concrete* and other such works emerging from the experience of migration as minor literature has a number of significant consequences. It opens up a new space in the Italian cultural context, releasing Italian American writing (or its reappropriation by Italian audiences) from the ghettoising risks of localism and, at the same time, from straight annexation into the canon of national literature. Instead, the minor literature label points to other possible interpretations which focus on the complex genesis and circulation of works of this kind and invite us to read them as eminent examples

of transnational writing. Emily Apter (2001) has cautioned, however, that the transnational label can indicate widely differing things, including the kind of “literary product” which, like pop music bands and television series, is intentionally produced to be sold on the global market. In the case of di Donato, on the contrary, what we have is a form of writing in which what Apter calls a “translational transnationalism” (5) is always already inscribed in the texture of the work, from the very moment of its inception—a writing which is marked by polylingualism, multiple cultural references, complex language politics and processes of self-translation. That transnational nature can then be enhanced by further translation, in this case into a language—Italian—which already had a link with and a presence in the original text.

In his discussion of world literature, David Damrosch gives a “threefold definition” of this type of writing:

1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures.
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation.
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time. (Damrosch 2003, 281)

He also states that “a work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read *as* literature; second, by circulating into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin” (6). These definitions seem particularly suitable for works such as *Christ in Concrete*, in which translation (as self- as well as hetero-translation),<sup>11</sup> and also transnational circulation (in the sense of the inscription within multiple cultures), was always already present, even before (and as one of the reasons for) its move beyond the boundaries of more restrictive categories such as American, Italian or Italian American literature. If we reverse the perspective, we can also note that the acknowledgement of strong links with the history of both migration and translation could defuse at least some of the hegemonic risks implicit in the concept of world literature (and patently present in its history, from Goethe’s formulation of the concept to most of today’s reinterpretations, including those proposed by Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova).

The kind of world literature which emerges from migration, polylingual writing and multiple translation processes is always already “minor”—which means that it is also political, strategic and capable of circulating between peripheries as well as of reaching the centres of our global cultural maps.

## NOTES

1. All references will be to the 1993 edition of the novel. I also follow this version for the spelling of di Donato’s surname, although other versions (Di Donato and occasionally DiDonato) have appeared in print and will be

- left unchanged in quotations. There is also some variation in the title of the novel in Italian translation, and hence in critics' references to it. The earlier translation is entitled *Cristo fra i muratori*, and the later one, *Cristo tra i muratori*.
2. In line with recent scholarship, I will not hyphenate the label "Italian American", except in relevant quotations. Nevertheless, I will occasionally refer to hyphenated literatures and hyphenated identities as these definitions were (and to an extent are still) in use during the period covered in this article. On the debate surrounding this terminology, see Durante (2001, 5).
  3. "Ethnic" rather than "national" is clearly the appropriate word here, since in the US context the label "Italian American" forms part of a discourse (and a debate) about ethnicity and finds itself in opposition to the unhyphenated "American" (which stands, in this case, precisely for "national"). Things will change, at least in part, when we look at the critical reception of di Donato in Italy, where "national" and "regional" rather than "ethnic" become the key words of the opposition.
  4. I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers of the initial version of this article, who effectively proved this point for me by remarking that "to understand the impact of di Donato's work, the author needs to look at it in terms of its US context, to compare it with other ethnic novels like Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, published in the same year. The US-based Italianists are unlikely to carry out this sort of research because they are not Americanists, not scholars of American literature."
  5. On this definition see for instance Lajolo (1983, 105).
  6. See for instance the work of Francesco Durante or, more recently, of Martino Marazzi.
  7. At a crucial point in the novel, for instance, di Donato describes Christ as a "comrade-worker" (137), but the expression was turned into the much less charged "compagno di lavoro" in Italian (1941, 193).
  8. This and other translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.
  9. Dmytryk was one of the Hollywood directors blacklisted during the McCarthy era for their political ideas. His adaptation of di Donato's novel was filmed in London and appeared in 1949; it was initially known with the title *Give Us This Day*.
  10. See for instance the page "Emigrazione abruzzese e letteratura" (D'Angelo n.d.), the page on di Donato on the Web site Siamoabruzzesi (D'Alessandro n.d.) or even the Premio giornalistico Pietro di Donato sulla sicurezza in ambiente di lavoro (n.d.).
  11. For this terminology, see Cronin 2000 and 2006.

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## 12 *Terra Australis Incognita* Even Now?

### The Reception of Contemporary Australian Literature in Italian Translation

*Rita Wilson*

The international circulation of literature depends to a great extent on translations that consecrate national authors, texts and traditions in the international sphere. In recent years, the term *Weltliteratur*, coined by Goethe (Eckermann 1998, 165–166), has reemerged in the wake of theorisation on globalisation (Saussy 2006), and scholars have paid increasing attention to the migration and mobility of literary products (Moretti 2003; Damrosch 2003; Casanova 2004). This renewed interest in “world literature”, together with a rapidly growing interest in “transnational literatures”, has led to a reconsideration of the crucial role played by translation in the circulation of literature. Aijaz Ahmad, for instance, draws attention to the worldwide network of interrelations that are inherent to the conditions of contemporary literary production: “By the time a Latin American novel arrives in Delhi, it has been selected, translated, published, reviewed, explicated and allotted a place [. . .] That is to say, it arrives here with those processes of circulation and classification already inscribed in its very texture” (1992, 45). A translation can be seen at each level of the movements of the text described by Ahmad. The process of transfer described includes choices, interventions and explanatory stages which could all be considered forms of translation. In this context, translation becomes “a shaping force in the construction of the ‘image’ of a writer and/or a work of literature” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990, 10), and internationally acclaimed writers necessarily occupy a dual position: “each writer is situated once according to the position she or he occupies in a national space, and then again according to the place that this occupies within the world space” (Casanova 2004, 81).

It follows that Australian literary works belong, in part at least, to a transnational literary system and that literary translation represents one of the major ways in which complex and differentiated conceptions of Australia as a cultural nation become accessible to educated, internationally networked, globally mobile populations around the world. It thus seems imperative to understand what foreign markets are acquiring from the field of Australian literary production, which agents are dominant and what readers expect or are taught to expect. Yet, although the translation of Australian literature overseas is a significant area of literary production,<sup>1</sup> it remains largely

under-researched, and little attention has been paid to the export of literature in translation as a cultural product, especially with regard to the role of translation as a subtle mechanism of so-called cultural diplomacy. This essay seeks to address that gap to some extent by considering the body of Australian texts which, through translation, is made available to an Italian-speaking readership. If we accept that Australian texts in translation constitute an extension of a national archive, then, arguably, the translations of contemporary novels, together with the paratexts (critical reviews, promotional materials) that accompany them, contribute to shaping the image of Australia and its culture for an Italian-speaking readership.

## FORMS OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

A report published in 2005 by the United States Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy presented a compelling argument for the increased dissemination of US literary culture abroad as an important way to restore “our trust and credibility within the international community”. Specifically, the authors noted that

translation lies at the heart of any cultural diplomacy initiative; some misunderstandings between peoples may be resolved through engagement with each other’s literary and intellectual traditions; the poverty of insight displayed by American policy makers and pundits in their view of other lands may in some cases be mediated by contact, in translation, with thinkers from abroad. (Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy 2005, 12)

While the United States’ initiative is largely ideological and concerned with “soft power”, the use of culture to improve trading opportunities has become widespread in many countries during the twentieth century (Anholt 2002). Hence the *Creative Nation: Commonwealth Cultural Policy* introduced by the Australian federal government in 1994 focused not only on the national imperative to foster cultural development but also on the economic potential generated by cultural activity. One of the initiatives implemented under the *Creative Nation* policy was a translation program administered by the Australia Council Literature Board over a six-year period (Australia Council for the Arts 1994–1995).

More recently, a report entitled “Australia’s Public Diplomacy: Building our Image”, submitted to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in 2007, noted that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s “Images of Australia” branch “has primary responsibility for implementing Australia’s public and cultural diplomacy programs to advance Australia’s foreign and trade policy objectives. Its programs aim to create positive perceptions of Australia and to ensure that Australia’s international



image is ‘contemporary, dynamic and positive’ ” (Senate, Australian Parliament, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade 2007, 31). The wording is remarkably similar to that of a Canadian report on the benefit of including “cultural workers” in official delegations abroad as they help promote “a positive image of Canada as culturally diverse, creative, innovative and modern” (Canada World View 2002, n.p.). In both the Canadian and the Australian policies, the focus is on the export of culture for trade initiatives through image development and management, but little is said (unlike in the US initiative mentioned earlier) about the linguistic and cultural transfer without which a cultural policy can hardly be said to exist as an effective form of strategic communication.

In other words, translation, to use Lawrence Venuti’s canonic formulation, “continues to be an invisible practice, everywhere around us, inescapably present, but rarely acknowledged” (1992, 1). The general silence on translation has been one of the key motivations for the development of a wide-ranging collaborative research project on the reception of Australian literature in non-Anglophone markets.<sup>2</sup> In the longer term, the project in which this essay originates aims to provide a knowledge base upon which authors, translators, literary agents, publishers and cultural institutions can draw in order to contribute to the global flow of Australian literature in better informed ways. Emily Apter suggests that the global politics of “literacy and literateness” (2001, 5) in relation to potential reading publics are better understood by aligning the sociological with the aesthetic. Such an approach implies a reorientation of the analytic methodology from individual textual analysis to systemic analysis, from “literary texts” to “literary objects”. It permits a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics underlying literary production and offers empirical support for the claim that literature is “produced and managed as a cultural formation by a range of institutions and their affiliate figures—publishers, editors, reviewers, academic critics—who are paid to think about it” (Davis 2008, 7). It is a methodology that assumes a pragmatic logic of the global market of literary production, distribution and consumption and, consequently, ignores traditional literary hierarchies.

In the global flows of literature in translation, genres take on a new significance, based on their statistical weight rather than the value accorded to them by literary critical elites (Smith 1988). Peripheral literatures also acquire prominence in world literary systems, as cultural innovation frequently comes from the border regions (Casanova 2004, 175–179; Lotman 1990, 134; Even-Zohar 2000, 193). The gradual rise of European interest in Australian literature,<sup>3</sup> which is still a relatively peripheral subsystem within the literary world system, has gone hand in hand with shifts in the international perception of Australia itself: from colonial backwater, to destination of economic migration and, subsequently, with the changing international status of Australia, from a destination for economic migration to a destination for lifestyle migration or tourism.

IMAGINING AUSTRALIA IN ITALY<sup>4</sup>

In one of the few scholarly works published on the subject, Guerrino Lorenzato (1995) suggests that, historically, Australia's image in the Italian imaginary has been one of either Myth or Utopia. Focusing on the second half of the twentieth century, Lorenzato describes Italian imaginings of Australia as "a series of perceptions" which, filtered through the optics of various Italian journalists and commentators, create an awareness of a place where

"difference" functions only in terms of an *alter mundi*, a reversal of nature apparent in the environment [. . .] Terrestrial Paradise, purgatorial place or antipodean wilderness.<sup>5</sup>

il "diverso" esiste solamente in funzione di un *alter mundi*, di un rovescio naturale evidente nell'ambiente [. . .] paradiso terrestre, luogo penitenziale o antipode selvaggio. (Lorenzato 1995, iv)

Lorenzato's survey of media reports over the period 1960–1980 reveals how European perceptions of Australia remained fairly stable. His findings also confirm the enduring view of Australia as both an actual tourist destination and a utopian ideal associated with immense and unspoilt natural landscapes bathed in brilliant light—a place so radically different that Mario Praz, renowned scholar of English literature, compared it to the "altro polo" in which Dante located Purgatory (in Lorenzato 1995, 94).

By and large, Italian perceptions of the supposed "exotic otherness" of Australia remain fairly widespread today. Indeed, the interest in Australian literature in Italy is closely linked to this perception. Giovanni Tranchida, explaining his interest in publishing Australian fiction, draws on the well-worn topoi of the country's vast unpopulated landscapes ("terra nullius"), its unique fauna and flora, its Aboriginal peoples, and concludes that not much has changed over the years with regard to the Italian "imaginary map of the antipodes, especially the cultural map" and that perhaps the "tyranny of distance" has contributed to a vision of Australia based on those glossy travel brochures that tend to both exaggerate and limit themselves to the "exotic aspects".<sup>6</sup>

It is generally assumed that translations of narrative texts reflect the target readers' interest in the foreign culture underlying the text. The narrative text offers the foreign experiences of a foreign author to which the target language reader is introduced by a translator, who in this respect acts as a mediator.<sup>7</sup> As cultural artefacts, texts chosen for translation tend to be "what is seen abroad as 'Australian' in markedly—marketably—stereotypical terms" (Huggan 2007, xii). It is within this context that I locate my discussion of the reception of Italian translations of Australian fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, with a view to assessing whether the product of translation merely confirms stereotypical imaginings or whether it adds breadth

and depth to the cultural repertoire that represents contemporary Australia in Italy. As the focus of this essay is on “translation as response” (Pym 2010, 27), the analysis concentrates on the extratextual elements involved in the transfer from source text to target text.<sup>8</sup>

## AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE IN ITALY: WHAT DO THE STATISTICS SAY?

The Italian-language sector of the larger project has generated a catalogue of 461 translation entries published in the period 1950–2010 (Gerber and Wilson 2011, 12). The most obvious feature of the data collected to date is the very marked increase in volume since the mid-1990s: of a total of approximately 115 literary titles translated since 1945, more than half (62 to be precise) have been translated since 1996. Of these, works by non-Aboriginal writers elicited less interest than those of Aboriginal Australians,<sup>9</sup> and only major canonical works and some genre fiction (such as Greg Egan’s science fiction novels) achieved conspicuous sales and media attention in Italy.

A glance at the numbers for the decade 1996–2005 reveals that the overall number of translations—literary and genre fiction—grew exponentially from twenty-five in the previous decade to reach a total of eighty-one. Of these, thirty-one could be classified as “literary” titles, revealing a marked disparity between canonicity and translation volume. Canonical “literary” or highbrow literature actually makes up a fairly small sector of the overall translation volume. The vast majority of translations are of popular genres such as romance, fantasy, science fiction, crime novels and children’s literature, which in most literary markets make up the bulk of the texts produced.<sup>10</sup> While a number of prominent contemporary Australian authors have had multiple works translated into Italian, including Peter Carey (eight titles), David Malouf (eight titles), Neville Shute (nine titles), Christina Stead (five titles), Tim Winton (seven titles) and Patrick White (five titles), the largest number of titles translated are those that would appeal to a “middle-brow” readership (Carter 2004), such as the works of Colleen McCullough (seventeen of her twenty-two titles) and Morris West (twenty-one of his twenty-eight titles).

While the choice of texts to be translated is most often motivated by economic factors, cultural, social and ideological factors also have a significant role to play in the global literary market. Trends in publishing can be read as the commercial face of Itamar Even-Zohar’s “polysystem” theory (2000), which investigates the interrelated collection of systems that governs the production and reception of literature within a given culture, including ways in which translated texts are positioned within cultures. The buying trends of different cultures indicate the preferences and tastes of a culture and the palatability of certain outputs. Knowing, for example, that there is a strong

Italian market for science fiction means that Australian science fiction novels automatically have a place to go within that literary system, as evidenced by the popularity of Greg Egan, acclaimed as “l'autore di spicco” (the leading author) of the latest generation of science fiction writers and published in Mondadori's best-selling *Urania* series (Gallo n.d.), and Matthew Reilly, who has had seven of his eight novels translated into Italian, all of which have been commercially successful.

The reasons behind the extraordinary spike in translations during the 1996–2005 decade are complex, but the growth is at least partially linked to the Australian government funding initiative mentioned earlier which, in this decade, targeted Italian publishers. There is a discernible trend to select titles which reflect a notion of “Australianness” as defined by settings and authorship. This is substantiated by a survey conducted among Australian members of PEN in 2006 which indicated that an author's chances of being translated increased considerably if he or she was a literary prize winner and if the text contained “a strong dose of the Australian landscape” (Škrabec 2007, 38).

## SHAPING THE RECEPTION OF TRANSLATED LITERATURE

As Pierre Bourdieu (2008) reminds us, texts circulate without their context; their signification is provided by the context of their reception. In considering how translated works meet and engage with an already existing culture, whose discourses, carried in the media (in the form of reviews, critiques, responses), can have a sizeable impact on the new, incoming cultural products, it is necessary to take into account both the increasingly complex global interactions that have contributed to the creation of a “translational transnationalism” (Apter 2005) and Gérard Genette's assertion that a literary work is “rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions” that surround and extend it (1997, 1). Genette defines anything that affects a reader's ability to make sense of a text (celebrity status of the author, cultural knowledge, promotional materials and so on) as “paratext”, further subdividing this into “peritext” and “epitext”: peritext being the paratextual factors that are physically attached to the text (cover design and blurb, preface), and epitext being those factors “not materially appended” to the book (interviews, press releases) (1997, 344). Both are of interest here: the peritext because it has much to do with marketing, usually being put in place with a didactic or promotional intention; the epitext, not only because it consists typically of reviews that are directly linked to defining the novel in some way, but also because it is constituted by various promotional activities or interviews which discuss broader details of the author's life, the source culture of the text or even the conditions of production of the work. All these are said to have a paratextual effect in that they do not directly link themselves to the

text, but do influence readings of the work and, therefore, are inseparable from the transfer of that text into another cultural milieu.

We know from large-scale studies of translations (Bourdieu 2008) that translators and publishers often construct a “domestic representation of the foreign text and culture [. . .] informed by the codes and canons, interests and agendas of certain domestic social groups” (Venuti 1998, 68). That is to say, publishers and translators work *for* the target culture: creating interest and supplying it with reading materials that shape its readers’ tastes and expectations. For example, reviewers of Italian translations of works by Henry Lawson, including respected scholars like Franca Cavagnoli,<sup>11</sup> usually begin by referring to him as the “father of Australian literature” and by praising his ability to render the essence of the “bush”. Cavagnoli (2000a) praises Lawson’s fine portrayal in *Racconti australiani*<sup>12</sup> of “everyday” characters whose stories of daily struggles are intensified by their isolation and the continuous battle against a hostile nature. Mention is made of itinerant workers on droving treks carrying a bedroll or swag: the “matilda” of the famous ballad “Waltzing Matilda”. Cavagnoli’s explanation that “dancing with Matilda meant going on an adventure” is both a form of cultural translation and a compensation for those terms left untranslated in her review—namely, “outback” and “bush”—because Australian nature is “untranslatable”. By highlighting those aspects of Australian culture and society that are, and at the same time are not, Europe, Cavagnoli kindles readers’ interest in books that she is careful to distinguish from other literature that Italian readers may perceive as exotic, such as books from Africa or the Caribbean, maintaining that when Italians read an Australian book: “It makes us feel [. . .] that Australia is our shadow half, our dark side” [“Ci fa sentire [. . .] che l’Australia è la nostra metà in ombra, la nostra metà oscura”] (2009, n.p.).

In attempting to understand the complex economies and the roles of the various agents (authors, publishers, translators) that make up the “translation zone”, key factors include the role of the author’s celebrity; the visibility of translator-advocates, like Cavagnoli, in championing a particular work or author for a particular readership; and the effects of extratextual circumstances, such as international cultural or sporting events, in promoting both an awareness of the literary works and a sympathetic understanding of their country of origin. These diverse phenomena can often be crystallised around a single event: the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 are a case in point. During the lead-up to the “Millennium Games”, important Italian dailies actively publicised and reviewed Australian books. The *Corriere della sera*, one of the most widely read national newspapers, published a lengthy reportage written by Cavagnoli (2000a) in which she maps a literary journey across the country, beginning at its “heart” with Patrick White’s *Voss* (1957), fittingly titled *L’esploratore* in the Italian translation by Florentine poet Piero Jahier (published in 1965). She then gives brief plot summaries of novels by canonical authors that represent different iconic localities: David Malouf (the “outback” and Queensland), Hal Porter (the “red centre”), Peter Carey

(New South Wales), with a Sydney stopover courtesy of a “sparkling translation” of Christina Stead’s first novel *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (1934) by controversial novelist Aldo Busi (*Sette poveracci di Sydney*, published in 1988). Finally, readers are directed to two collections of Australian short stories, *Il cielo a rovescio* (1998) and *Cieli australi. Cent’anni di racconti dall’Australia* (2000b), both edited by Cavagnoli herself, in which Australia appears as a country traversed by “vital and heterogeneous” cultural currents, brought together by its writers to contest the versions of history offered by colonial texts and to fashion a new sense of national identity. The writings collected in these anthologies offer interesting prospects “for the continent that preserves the primeval memory of the planet” [“per il continente che conserva la memoria più antica del pianeta”] (2000a, 33).

This view is shared by Claudio Gorlier, one of the founders of the Italian Society for Australian Studies (SISA) in the 1970s and a regular contributor to the Turin daily *La Stampa*. Writing for its highly respected literary supplement *Tuttolibri*, Gorlier begins by quoting extensively from A.D. Hope’s poem “Australia”, arguing that the poem encapsulates “the passionate and often tormented complexity of the literature of a nation-continent with an ancient natural history (kangaroos are a fortunate anachronism) and a modern political history” [“la problematicità appassionata e spesso tormentosa della letteratura di un continente nazione antichissimo per storia naturale (i canguri sono un felice anacronismo) e recente per storia politica”] (2000, 3). He goes on to refer to the recent translation of Tim Winton’s *The Riders/I cavalieri*, remarking that the lack of a solid tradition has resulted in at least two distinct “lines of force” in Australian literature: the dominating, often hostile, presence of nature and the intense, contradictory interpersonal relationships, in many cases resulting from the loneliness and isolation associated with the great distances and harsh environment.

Both articles draw attention to the “geographies of circulation that supersede and interrupt the borders of the nation state” (Baucom 2005, 36). To grasp these geographies means that we have to think beyond the cognitive limits of specific national spaces and imaginaries and work through the mechanics of literary exchange, particularly for those texts that travel between countries and cultures that are geographically (and linguistically) far apart. Since the mid-1990s Australian literature has increasingly entered a sending phase (Lotman 1990, 144–147), and the voices of Brenda Walker, Gail Jones and Beth Yahp have joined those of Henry Lawson and Frank Sargeson, enabling Italian readers to access worlds viewed “through unfamiliar perspectives [...] by talented writers who are often confined to remote geographical and cultural niches” [“da angolazioni inedite [...] da parte di scrittori di talento che spesso restano confinati in remote nicchie geografiche e culturali”] (Tranchida n.d.).

The extent to which the publishing industry itself positions readers to receive foreign cultures can be investigated through media reviews of translated narratives as well as through press coverage. Critical reviewers contribute

to those paratextual effects which function in the translation zone, with the power either to maintain or to subvert stereotypical imaginings of a foreign culture for its readership.<sup>13</sup> Space does not allow me to go into detail here, but—briefly stated—an analysis of reviews of the Italian translation of Tim Winton’s novels, sourced from the Web site of his Italian publisher Fazi and from print media, reveals a consistent tendency among reviewers to establish parallels with authors and themes within world literary canons: for example, Winton’s writing is described by one critic as “halfway between the grand designs of the Nineteenth Century realists (Zola, Verga, Balzac) and the typical postmodernist anxieties of a McEwan or a Woolf” [“a metà strada tra la grandezza di disegno dei naturalisti dell’800 (Zola, Verga, Balzac), e le inquietudini tutte post-moderne di un McEwan o di una Woolf”] (Murizzi 2003, n.p.). More recently, the same tendency has emerged in reviews of Craig Silvey’s (2009) novel *Jasper Jones*: “Considered the Australian version of *To Kill a Mockingbird* for its denunciation of racism, associated with the works of Mark Twain for its allusions to friendship and its ironic tone” [“Viene considerato la versione australiana de *Il buio oltre la siepe* per la sua denuncia del razzismo, viene accostato alle opere di Mark Twain per gli accenni all’amicizia e all’ironia”] (Atlantidelibri 2010, n.p.). In comparing Winton to Woolf or Zola, and Silvey to Harper Lee or Mark Twain, the Italian reviewers play an important part in the process whereby national literature and writers become part of the international literary scene through the association with universally acclaimed writers invested with noteworthy cultural capital (Casanova 2004, 133 and passim). Such “internationalisation” is noticeable in the cover blurbs of the Italian translations of books by David Malouf, Peter Carey and Tim Winton, among others, which often refer both to the international and the Australian literary prizes awarded to the author in question. The paratextual effects they generate are recognised as fundamental in bringing Australian-originated literary fiction to prominence within the international marketplace. For instance, noting the achievements of Winton’s long-awaited novel, *Breath/Respiro* (Winton 2008), one reviewer remarks approvingly that winning a significant number of prizes in the Anglo-Saxon context, the latest being the Miles Franklin Award, confirms “good old Tim’s status as one of the leading authors of international fiction” [“il buon Tim come uno degli autori di punta della narrativa internazionale”] (Atlantidelibri 2009, n.p.).

By and large, Australian texts are not, to use David Damrosch’s definition, “actively present within a literary system” that extends beyond a national context of production and reception (2003, 4). However, as Tranchida notes, Australian literary production has been particularly “intense and varied” from the 1970s thanks to federal government policies aimed at promoting cultural activity, and for some years now Italian readers have been able to undertake “exceptional and daring forays into this branched literary map of Australia” [“felici e coraggiose incursioni in questa ramificata mappa letteraria australiana”] and find numerous

publications, both “classic” and “new”, by Antipodean writers that epitomise its variety (Tranchida n.d.).

Thus, while Australian literature in Italy remains peripheral, it is now most often positioned as a new and innovative form of artistic expression, largely due to those recurrent themes that contribute to preserving the finest exemplars of a type of literature that could perhaps be defined as “minor but certainly not inferior” [“minoritaria, ma nient’affatto minorata”] (Scandroglio 2005, n.p.). This shift of perception has been accompanied by a broadening of the palette of cultural products available from Australia on the international market, from film (recently, for instance, Baz Luhrman’s hyperbolic *Australia*) and television serials (especially soaps, from *Neighbours* to *McLeod’s Daughters*) to music (from AC/DC to Kylie Minogue), to indigenous art in all its manifestations. The paratextual effect is evident in the influence of film and television on perceptions of culture, and hence other culturally specific texts. Potential readers are likely to have come across images from film and television—or even more likely the Internet—before they approach a text: to give just one example, the book trailer of *Beautiful Malice* posted by Einaudi on YouTube has had 2,421 views at the time of writing. Most of the comments recorded are from people who have not (yet) read the book but express enthusiastic interest in doing so (Einaudi 2010).

The rhetoric of recent critical reception is encapsulated in the lengthy title of a review article published in *Corriere della sera*: “Sorpresa. Una generazione di narratori scala le classifiche e ottiene riconoscimenti. Banditi, mare e avventura. I nuovi scrittori australiani. Da Roberts a Winton, voci (e temi) dell’ultima frontiera” (Bozzi 2009, 27). The reviewer guarantees the reader surprises and adventure through award-winning, chart-topping books by a new wave of authors from a “distant frontier”. Noting, a little tongue in cheek, that we do not know if the two major concerns of Australians are truly “sports and criminals”, as author Steve Toltz maintains in the interview, Bozzi emphasises how both emerging and established writers (Toltz, Man Booker Prize shortlist 2008 for *A Fraction of the Whole* [Toltz 2008]; Peter Carey, twice winner of the Booker Prize) portray “the spirit of rebellion” that distinguishes the “former penal colony”. The latter view resonates with that of another reviewer, writing for the well-regarded national daily *Il giornale*, who expressed appreciation for the irreverent quality of Australian writing, declaring that what sets many of the new Australian authors apart is that they try to dispel the clichés of postcolonial literature while avoiding the seductions and fashions of postmodern literature, especially American (Scandroglio 2005, n.p.).

Recognising that Australia is a large and heterogeneous country and that its writers cannot be grouped into one school or tendency, some Italian publishers have also realised that contemporary Australian narratives may well defy expectations of Italian readers. Research into the intercultural movement of texts indicates that, frequently, books are chosen for translation because of a providential correlation between the symbolic capital of



a particular author and the interests of a publisher acting to implement his or her cultural and/or commercial corporate strategies. Such is the case of Giano Editore, whose director Tiziano Gianotti claims that choosing to publish the translation of Craig Silvey's second novel *Jasper Jones* proves this publisher's commitment to importing high-quality books for the Italian market.<sup>14</sup> The novel has, in fact, garnered glowing reviews in Italy. Exemplary in this regard is the one that appeared in *Corriere della sera*, which contains all the epitextual elements calculated to provoke the maximum interest in the potential readership: details of the author's life, the source culture of the text, its quintessentially Australian setting, not least the global marketability of the work due to the universal appeal of the story:

the extraordinary narrative talent of Craig Silvey, a 26-year-old Australian who was born and raised in an orchard 100 kilometers from Perth, helps us to picture the country in its ruthless simplicity and beauty with his novel *Jasper Jones* [. . .], a gem to read because the dialogue is vibrant and the storyline is original, and because one has the feeling of seeing and hearing the voice of a tiny and remote community, a microcosm of a closed society, whose self-preservation and whose conventions are shaken by generational tensions. Tensions that are very close to us, all around us. [. . .] It is not surprising that publishers in the United States and China have acquired the rights. It is a story that has no boundaries. (Emphasis added)

lo straordinario talento narrativo di Craig Silvey, un ventiseienne australiano che è nato e vissuto in un frutteto a cento chilometri da Perth, ci aiuta a visualizzarlo nella sua spietata semplicità e bellezza con il romanzo *Jasper Jones* [. . .], un vero gioiello della lettura perché i dialoghi sono vibranti e la trama è originale, poi perché si ha la sensazione di vedere e ascoltare la voce di una minuscola e remota collettività, un atomo di società blindata, il cui istinto di conservazione e le cui convenzioni vengono scossi dalle tensioni generazionali. Che sono le tensioni vicinissime a noi, attorno a noi. [. . .] E non sorprende che dagli Stati Uniti alla Cina gli editori ne abbiano acquisito i diritti. È una storia che non ha confini. (Cavalera 2010, 44; emphasis added)

This is the type of media discourse that prompts Annarita Briganti, literary columnist for the music and culture magazine *Il mucchio selvaggio*, to ask: "Will Australian writers be the new publishing phenomenon after the Scandinavians?" ["Gli scrittori australiani saranno il nuovo fenomeno editoriale dopo gli scandinavi?"] (2010, 136). Referring to an earlier review of *Jasper Jones* published in the same magazine, she first praises Craig Silvey for "revitalising the *bildungsroman* by setting it in the Australian countryside of the late sixties" and then applauds the best-selling debut novel by Rebecca James, *Beautiful Malice*, in the "beautiful translation" by novelist

Alessandra Montrucchio (James 2010). The rest of the article consists of an interview with Rebecca James, in which, once again, the discussion of the novel is supplemented by biographic and geographic details: we learn that James is an ex-secondary school teacher and lives in Armidale, the rural hinterland of Australia, with her partner and four children.<sup>15</sup> The tone of the review is overwhelmingly positive: the foreign is both recognised and welcome; readers are told they will find that “Australia is a country yet to be discovered, beginning with its literature” [“l’Australia è un paese ancora da scoprire, a partire dalla letteratura”] (Briganti 2010, 136).

## TRANSLATING LITERARY AUSTRALIA: A NEW MAP?

At a time when national branding seems to be increasingly unimportant in a globalised world, and when “stories” sell largely as good narrative material that may, briefly, fulfil some purpose in the local environment, the “cultural diplomacy effect” must be questionable. However, the intercultural movement of texts, precipitated by the selection of a title for translation, is a reflection of the cultural, economic or political power relations between nations and cultures. Australian literature when translated continues to belong to the national culture, indeed often aggressively markets the specificity of that national culture, yet paradoxically extends well beyond the borders of the nation and makes up an integral part of the cultural archive of the nations whose literatures it enters via translation. The history of the Italian translation of Australian works in the second half of the twentieth century—which saw considerable developments in the number of Australian authors and the range of texts translated into Italian—seems to show that a joint effort between Italian publishers and modest Australian funding has begun to bring some of the modest results that the US Committee on Cultural Diplomacy projects: some dissemination of ideas and information, some nuanced views on Australia and perhaps increased empathy and understanding.

Australia and its present-day authors are regarded as dealing with relevant and intriguing topics in the (post)modern, globalised world, and perhaps as offering alternatives to European and North American experience and models. Even though Australia is probably still not regarded as an autonomous literary entity by the general Italian-speaking public, and the image of a “Europe translated to the Antipodes, an upside down Europe” [“Europa tradotta agli antipodi, un’Europa a testa in giù”] (Cavagnoli 2009) is still prevalent, nevertheless its renown as the origin of excellent writers has definitely increased. The texts that have been translated in the last few years offer considerable insight into Australia’s diversity and have clearly enhanced understanding of its literary production: the blog of Libreria Atlantide, an independent bookshop in the province of Bologna, recently

proclaimed: “Australia, a very interesting continent, even from the literary point of view” [“Australia, un continente molto interessante, anche dal punto di vista letterario!”] (Atlantidelibri 2010, n.p.).

The trend in the study of translation which deals with the meaning and fate of translated texts opens a wide range of possibilities for the analysis of the relations between cultures and of the processes of intercultural knowledge transfer. The capacity to endow a text with new life and meaning by placing it in a different linguistic and cultural setting, an act that simultaneously enriches their own language and literary heritage, may be the greatest achievement of translation. Literary translation is an active process, transforming what it transfers, creating something new, reinventing literature and keeping it alive: it is, in other words, “a concrete manifestation of cultural exchange” (Damrosch 2003, 289).

## NOTES

1. A recent catalogue of Australian literature in German translation compiled by Russell West-Pavlov and Jens Elze-Volland (2010) lists almost three thousand titles.
2. *Windows on Australia: Perceptions in and through Translation* is an ongoing interdisciplinary research project coordinated by Translation and Interpreting Studies in the School of Languages, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash University, Melbourne. The initial phase of the project was supported by the Copyright Agency Ltd. See <http://www.austlit.edu.au/specialistDatasets/WindowsOnAustralia/>.
3. The European Association for Studies of Australia (EASA), bringing together a number of European universities, was established in 1989 (a year after the Australian Bicentenary). It aims to “promote the teaching of and research in Australian Studies at European tertiary institutions, as well as to increase an awareness of Australian culture throughout Europe”. See <http://www.easa-australianstudies.net/>.
4. To borrow the title of a one-day conference held in 1997 by the newly constituted Centro Studi sulle Letterature Omeoglotte dei Paesi Extraeuropei at the University of Bologna.
5. All translations from Italian are mine.
6. Giovanni Tranchida Editore is an independent publisher (established in 1983) based in Milan whose “specific task [. . .] has been that of bringing literary works to our attention [. . .] with particular attention paid to both cultural and linguistic context to a level not usual for us in Italy”. Works from Australia and New Zealand are featured in the thematic area “Pae-saggi, Voci e Mondi dagli Antipodi”. See <http://www.tranchida.it/>.
7. A number of recent research tendencies in Translation Studies focus explicitly on the translator’s agency, highlighting the social and cultural (in addition to the obvious linguistic) aspects of this role. For more on this, see Wolf and Fukari 2007.
8. For a more detailed discussion of the particular translation strategies employed by individual Italian translators of Australian texts, see Formica 2010.
9. I will not be considering here Aboriginal or Indigenous literature because the contexts of its dissemination are sufficiently different to warrant a separate discussion. For more on this, see Di Blasio 2008.

10. The romance genre far outstrips any other genre in terms of the number of translations overall. In Italy, the only other clearly popular genre is science fiction/fantasy, but only in terms of numbers of authors translated (rather than numbers of works by each author). A brief investigation of blogs and Web-based reader forums indicates that Australian sci-fi/fantasy authors do have a significant following in Italy (Gerber and Wilson 2011, 13).
11. Franca Cavagnoli has played an important role in the translation and publication of the works of David Malouf in Italy. A novelist herself, she lectures in Translation Studies at the Università degli Studi di Milano and, in addition to a succession of Malouf's novels, has translated numerous Anglophone postcolonial writers.
12. First published by Tranchida in 1998 (Lawson 1998), reprinted in 2000, it combines two previously published volumes: *Gente del bush* and the novella *I gerani della signora Spicer* (Lawson 1901 and 1902, both translated by Giuliana Prato). The short story "The Drover's Wife" was included in a collection entitled *Cieli Australi. Cent'anni di racconti dall'Australia* (Cavagnoli 2000b), edited by Franca Cavagnoli and translated by Silvia Fornasiero.
13. To put it another way, "the mechanisms of the literary market, and literary taste at the target pole appear to function as commercial and aesthetic censors affecting the [ . . . ] reception of translated literature" (Vanderauwera 1985, 199).
14. See the Giano promotional blurb from *Libri News*, 23 May 2010. Giano Editore is credited with being the first publisher of Dorothy Hewett's *Neap Tide* (published in 1999) with the title *La marea delle quadrature* (translated by Giovanna Scocchera) in 2005. The Italian version was republished in 2009 as *Il cottage sull'oceano* by Neri Pozza, who in 2010 also published the short story collection *I raccoglitori di fragole e altri racconti* (A Baker's Dozen).
15. There is an editor's note to inform the reader that Armidale is in New South Wales—a two-and-a-half-hour drive from the coast—"between the city lights of Sydney and Brisbane".

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# 13 Prizing Translation

## Book Awards and Literary Translation

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October 2005 saw the inaugural ceremony of the Deutscher Buchpreis, awarded on the eve of the Frankfurt Book Fair to the “best” novel written in German and published in Germany, Austria or Switzerland that year.<sup>1</sup> Founded by Germany’s main book trade association, the Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels, and endowed with 37,500 Euros in prize monies, the Deutscher Buchpreis was a high-profile addition to the existing range of German-language prizes for literature and the first to focus exclusively on novels in German. The rationale for the new award, however, had less to do with a specific attachment to the genre of the novel than with a desire to raise the profile of literature in German as a whole: the Buchpreis, according to the Web site, was founded in order to draw attention “beyond national borders to authors writing in German, to reading and to the keynote medium of the book”, meaning across borders within the German-speaking world but also—and more importantly—beyond its external borders. At the inaugural prize ceremony, Gottfried Honnefelder, speaking on behalf of the Buchpreis steering committee and the Börsenverein, highlighted the unequal flow of literary translation between English and German (nearly two thousand works translated into German each year, compared to forty the other way) and noted that Germany had a high proportion of translated bestsellers, with domestic bestsellers playing a minor role.<sup>2</sup> For many in the German book trade, these statistics told a familiar tale: German-language literature’s “chronic export problem”, as the *Tagesspiegel* (Richter 2005) put it, was already a source of concern for publishers and cultural intermediaries and played into critical debates in which the “transnational value” (Taberner 2011, 636) of German writing was at stake. At the same time, the apparent failure of German-language writers to find a broad-based readership in the domestic market confirmed for some the insignificance of contemporary German-language fiction in a global context (Finlay 2007, 32). These concerns combined around the time of the Buchpreis in the view of Germany as a “literary importer”, with German-language literature perceived to be underrepresented at home and abroad.<sup>3</sup> The new award aimed to remedy this situation by promoting German-language literature in the domestic market and bringing novels in German to the attention of foreign-language publishers.



This essay aims to examine the Buchpreis as a mechanism for influencing the circulation of German-language books. It draws on and contributes to existing scholarship on cultural prizes by engaging with the question of translation and the international outreach of literature, considering the Buchpreis in the context of the global literary marketplace and alongside other initiatives to create a local and an international readership for German-language books.

## THE (INTERNATIONAL) PRIZING OF GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURE

Prior to the Buchpreis's creation, large numbers of literary prizes were awarded every year to German-language writers without any obvious effect on domestic sales (Vandenrath 2010, 239). While certain prizes elsewhere in the world are renowned for their commercial influence, there was no such connection between prizing and bestsellers in Germany. In modelling the Buchpreis on commercially powerful prizes, the award's founders took a new approach to prizing in the German-language context, designed to create "best" books in German, endorsed by critics and the market as a whole. This domestic endorsement can be seen to create the potential of the Buchpreis as a tool for promoting German-language literature abroad, but translation here was not envisaged simply as a spin-off of prizing: it was present in the aims and strategies of the project from the start. The Buchpreis's international drive was (and still is) conducted vigorously, drawing on the resources of other German organisations with an international presence and incorporating elements of translation support into the running of the prize. At the same time, the explicitly international reach of the Buchpreis provided a rallying point in the German-language context, uniting institutions and individuals concerned about the global status of German-language books and enabling the Buchpreis, precisely through its emphasis on German-language literature "beyond borders", to function as a representatively "national" German award. As such, the effort to promote German-language literature globally is implicated in, as well as being premised on, the success of the Buchpreis in conferring acclaim and high sales on winning books at home.

In its brief history the Buchpreis has gained a domestic status such that it features, by no means incongruously, in a recent volume on contemporary writing as one of the "more established and mainstream" German-language awards (Marven 2011, 10). But before examining the Buchpreis's domestic strategies, it is helpful to consider its international workings, which have been less evident. Its international outreach takes two main forms: first, it seeks to attract attention through activities conducted under its own aegis; and second, its "recommendations" are communicated worldwide via the programmes of other translation organisations. Where one strategy ends and the other begins is somewhat hazy, however, because two of the official partner organisations—the *Ausstellungs- und Messe GmbH* (AuM for short; organisers of the Frankfurt Book Fair, with a wider remit to represent the German book trade internationally) and the

Goethe-Institut (Germany's worldwide cultural association)—are members of the Buchpreis steering committee, which also includes Germany's federal commissioner for culture and media and the president of the Börsenverein.

From the outset, considerable effort was made to publicise the Buchpreis outside the German-speaking world, with the Web site and press releases published in English as well as German (and since 2007 in French) and press information sent directly to key news media around the world. The announcement of the winner coincides with the beginning of the Frankfurt Book Fair, the world's biggest trade fair for foreign rights, and flyers are distributed to thousands of publishers and agents, with events and exhibitions themed around the prize. Through the AuM and the Goethe-Institut, the Buchpreis has access to the resources of the two biggest institutions for promoting German-language literature abroad, and Buchpreis-commended novels are presented at international trade fairs and showcased at local Goethe-Instituts. The Buchpreis thus draws on existing networks of translation support to target foreign-language publishers and even offers samples in English and translation grants via the Goethe-Institut's subsidy programme.

In certain respects, the Buchpreis resembles other translation initiatives such as Litrix.de, founded shortly before the prize and also citing Germany's export problem in its mission statement.<sup>4</sup> Litrix.de also includes jury-selected books and backs its selections with samples and subsidies, but it focuses on a particular region and offers tailored recommendations. Customising translation support for individual markets has become standard practice for many German translation initiatives, including the AuM's Book Information Centres and German Book Offices as well as projects such as the London-based New Books in German. Heilbron and Sapiro view this as a general trend in their analysis of the global circulation of books, noting that organisations promoting translation are "increasingly obliged to take into account the space of reception and the activities of importing agents [. . .] most particularly, publishers" (2007, 99). The Buchpreis can be seen as a different response to this challenge, focusing not on matching books to particular markets but on creating books that will be attractive globally—critically acclaimed and commercially successful "best" novels.

## PRIZING BOOKS

Prizes, James F. English notes, bring together "an unusually wide range of cultural 'players'" (2005a, 51). The Buchpreis, with its international remit, expressly invites the participation of a wider range than most. English, drawing on Bourdieu, sees prizes as

facilitating cultural "market transactions," enabling the various agents of culture, with their different assets and interests and dispositions, to engage one another in a collective project of value production. (English 2005a, 26)

As explored in the following, different prizes lend themselves to involving particular cultural agents to a lesser or greater extent, but all literary prizes—particularly book awards—have the potential to involve numerous groups and agents within and beyond the literary and publishing worlds, the activities of whom, though variously motivated, contribute to the functioning of the prize. English pays particular attention to the role of writers, judges, journalists, sponsors and administrators, but we can also include publishers, retailers, book buyers and academics as well as cultural intermediaries, translators and agents in other places (whose activities can influence the functioning of the prize at home as well as vice versa). Viewed thus, prizes do not express the agency of any single individual or group, but founders and administrators have particular opportunities to shape the workings of prizes, not least insofar as they define their format and criteria, select and appoint judges and adapt procedures to include (or potentially exclude) various groups, thereby influencing the prize's symbolic and commercial reach. In the domestic market, the Buchpreis's organisers took an approach designed to encourage the participation of journalists, publishers, retailers and book buyers and so maximise the effect on home sales. According to the inaugural press release, this new model of German-language prizing was based on the Prix Goncourt and the Man Booker, the two most prestigious and commercially powerful French and British awards, although in its specifics the Buchpreis is much closer to the British prize.<sup>5</sup>

Like the Man Booker, the Buchpreis engages a panel of judges, convened by the steering committee each year.<sup>6</sup> Book submissions are solicited from publishers, with each publisher entitled to submit two works and five further recommendations. This marks a significant departure from preexisting German-language prizes, the most prestigious of which traditionally have not been book awards.<sup>7</sup> Both the Man Booker and the Buchpreis stipulate that submitted works must be full-length novels, either published since the last prize cycle or scheduled to be published before the shortlist is announced, thereby guaranteeing that commended books (specifically, novels—the most popular literary form) will be available for sale, review and purchase during the key phase of the prizing process. Publishers are not only assigned a formalised role in the submissions process for both prizes but are also enlisted in marketing commended books. The Man Booker requires a financial contribution towards “general publicity” from publishers of shortlisted and winning titles (five thousand pounds, in each case); the Buchpreis, taking a different tack, states in its conditions that publishers of shortlisted titles must refer to the prize in their marketing and furnish the eventual winner with stickers or paper bands. The Buchpreis also solicits retailers' participation in the marketing effort by supplying gratis marketing packages (branded posters, display shelves and so forth) to booksellers for the various stages of the prize.

Following the Man Booker format, the Buchpreis comprises three separate selection rounds for the longlist, shortlist and winner. This again departs from previous German-language prizing, where standard practice, as Todd

says of pre-Booker British prizes, was “simply and nakedly” to make the award (1996, 75). The multistage approach can be seen to increase book trade involvement, augmenting the number of participating publishers (and, significantly for the prize’s prestige, the number of writers) and providing the framework for branded marketing and point-of-sale campaigns as outlined earlier. Multistage awards also encourage media participation, giving journalists a readymade news cycle and—as Street (2005) and English (2005b, 169) note of the Man Booker—inviting speculation and controversy, which are valuable in media terms. Prizes that simultaneously engage the book trade and the media over a prolonged period have the potential to involve a large number of book buyers throughout the process and, above all, in the final act of prizing—as demonstrated by the Man Booker and, as we shall see, by the Buchpreis. As English (2005a, 114–118) observes, administering any kind of prize is costly, and this is particularly true of multistage awards with a commitment to marketing and PR. While the Man Booker is corporately sponsored, the Buchpreis draws its funding from several sources—in its first three years, from private patrons, civic authorities, the Börsenverein and the *Spiegel*, Germany’s most widely read news magazine.

Reviewing the Man Booker’s history, English attributes its success to its ability to generate “scandal”, achieved partly through refinements to the prize’s procedures, such as the introduction of publicised shortlists (2005b, 169) and the revelation of the winner at a ceremony attended by the press (2005a, 206). For English, scandals and controversies are necessary for the functioning of prizes, not only to ensure journalistic engagement (hence visibility, leading to sales and prestige) but also to reinforce the notion of inherent literary value and the possibility of a truly “deserving” winner—the *illusio* in Bourdieu’s terms (2005a, 208–212). From this perspective, the journalistic response to the creation of the Buchpreis is striking. Far from supplying the kind of antiprize discourse that English considers typical of, and necessary for, the functioning of awards, commentators in the major German newspapers welcomed the Buchpreis in its initial years as a useful tool for the promotion and sale of German-language books, describing the mechanisms by which the prize sought to generate publicity in precisely these terms—as a means of holding media attention for months (Wittstock in the *Welt*) in order to achieve sales and visibility (Greiner in the *Zeit*) through the combined efforts of publishers, booksellers and the media (Mangold in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*).<sup>8</sup> How this relates to conceptions of literary value is discussed in the following, but the Buchpreis can be seen to have secured media involvement precisely because there was widespread support for its aims.

## PRIZE-WINNING BESTSELLERS AT HOME

The efficacy of the Buchpreis in generating sales for winning novels took many by surprise. Gustav Mechlenburg, reporting on the inaugural ceremony

in October 2005, comments on the level of enthusiasm but states that “sales of 100,000 copies of the kind generated by foreign prizes are surely not to be expected of the Frankfurt award”. By the end of the year, Arno Geiger’s winning novel (2005) had sold one hundred thousand copies and was still in the *Spiegel*’s list of top twenty hardback bestsellers, having entered the chart straight after the award. Subsequent Buchpreis winners have also attained six-figure sales and bestseller rankings: Figure 13.1 shows reported sales of the first eight Buchpreis-winning novels immediately before and two months after the prize. In each instance, post-prize sales outstrip pre-prize sales, but the pre-prize period varies from book to book (Table 13.1). The sales history of Hacker’s *Die Habenichtse* (2006) and Schmidt’s *Du stirbst nicht* (2009) is particularly striking in this regard. Both novels appeared as part of their respective publishers’ spring programme, over six months before the award. By October, sales of novels published in February or March would normally be in steep decline, but following the award of the Buchpreis, these novels experienced a second and more successful commercial life.

All eight winning novels entered the *Spiegel* chart<sup>9</sup> or climbed further up the rankings following the award. However, the fact that three novels—the 2007, 2008 and 2011 winners—were already bestsellers could be seen to conflict with the aim of the prize as understood by critics at the time of its creation. Writing in the *Zeit* newspaper in the run-up to the first award, Greiner states that the Buchpreis “aims to generate attention for the sort of literary fiction that finds favour with critics, but not with readers and buyers of books” (2005). The pre-award appearance in the charts of novels by Franck (her fifth book, seventh prize and first bestseller), Tellkamp (his third novel, sixth award and first bestseller) and Ruge (a debut that had already won two awards, one for a reading from the unpublished script) points not

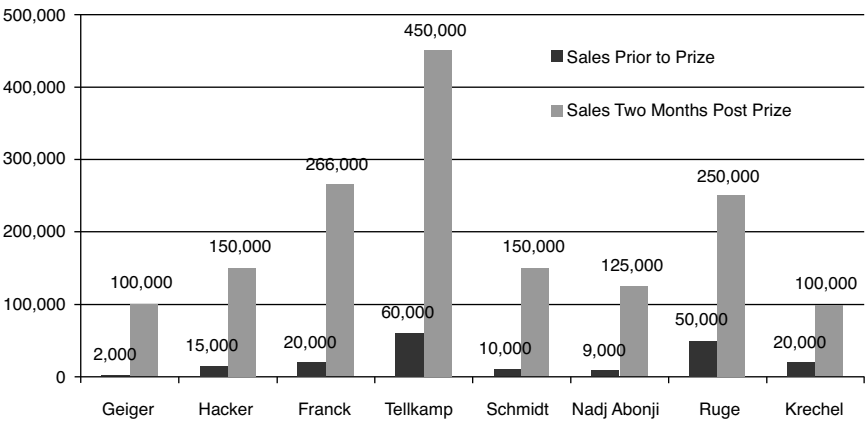


Figure 13.1 Sales of winning titles (2005–2012) immediately before and two months after the award of the prize

Data source: Sales figures supplied by the Börsenverein.

Table 13.1 Performance of winning titles (2005–2012) in the *Spiegel* charts

Author	Title	Publication Date	Prize Awarded	<i>Spiegel</i> Ranking at Time of Prize	Weeks in Top Twenty	Highest Ranking
Geiger	<i>Es geht uns gut</i>	19 August 2005	17 October 2005	–	17	3
Hacker	<i>Die Habenichtse</i>	13 March 2006	2 October 2006	–	18	1
Franck	<i>Die Mittagsfrau</i>	10 September 2007	8 October 2007	20	29	1
Tellkamp	<i>Der Turm</i>	15 September 2008	13 October 2008	13	40	1
Schmidt	<i>Du stirbst nicht</i>	27 February 2009	12 October 2009	–	9	4
Nadj Abonji	<i>Tauben fliegen auf</i>	28 July 2010	4 October 2010	–	5	9
Ruge	<i>In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts</i>	1 September 2011	10 October 2011	12	26	1
Krechel	<i>Landgericht</i>	21 August 2012	8 October 2012	–	6	5

Data source: Compiled from *Spiegel* weekly bestseller lists.

only to the slipperiness of this “sort of literary fiction” as a category but also to the impossibility of isolating—let alone quantifying—the Buchpreis’s commercial influence. Indeed, all three novels had been longlisted prior to entering the charts, and Franck’s novel was published only two days before the announcement of the shortlist, with the Buchpreis thus part of the novel’s critical reception and commercial record from the start. Nonetheless, a Buchpreis win can be seen to provide an immediate commercial boost, with large numbers of winning novels reportedly ordered in the aftermath of the ceremony: 37,000 before noon the following day in the case of Franck’s novel (Heimann 2007).

While shortlisting is widely considered to affect sales significantly, the main beneficiary of the multistage format is the eventual winner, with other commended titles tending not to sell at a sufficient rate to enter the *Spiegel* charts. Between 2005 and 2012, only six of the non-winning shortlisted titles reached the top twenty: in three cases the book made the charts before the longlist was announced.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, the presence of these and other German-language titles in the charts cannot be dissociated from the wider workings of the Buchpreis, which, as a high-profile celebration of German-language novels in the domestic market, focused attention on

Table 13.2 Breakdown of titles by language of origin in the annual *Spiegel* bestseller lists

Year	German	English	Other
2001	3	10	7
2002	3	12	5
2003	3	11	6
2004	4	10	6
2005	3	11	6
2006	9	9	2
2007	9	9	2
2008	7	8	5
2009	11	9	0
2010	8	8	4
2011	10	5	5
2012	7	10	3

Data Source: Compiled from *Spiegel* Top Twenty Hardback *Belletristik* Titles of the Year, 2001–2012.

German-language writing and encouraged its commercial valorisation more generally. The early years of the Buchpreis saw an increase in the proportion of German-language domestic bestsellers (Table 13.2) and also the emergence of what Squires (2007, 75), writing on the influence of the Man Booker, calls “that possibly paradoxical entity: a popular literary title”, emblematic of which is Kehlmann’s 2005 shortlisted novel *Die Vermessung der Welt*. Both developments are part of longer-term processes in which numerous factors are at play, but the Buchpreis can be seen as an expression and driver of these trends.<sup>11</sup>

BUCHPREIS WINNERS ABROAD

To date, Buchpreis-winning novels have been translated into a total of nearly forty languages. As an overview, Figure 13.2 shows the number of foreign-language licences sold for each title up to the end of 2012. Clearly, these figures cannot be taken straightforwardly as evidence of the Buchpreis’s influence on the sale of foreign rights; however, its role in shaping the commercial and critical profile of these novels and in bringing them to the attention of publishers abroad cannot be discounted—or quantified. Kovač and Wischenbart, comparing the Buchpreis, the Man Booker and the Goncourt on the basis of published translations and book sales in twelve European countries, conclude that the Buchpreis is “still far from having the international appeal” (2010, 37) of the other awards, with the Man Booker

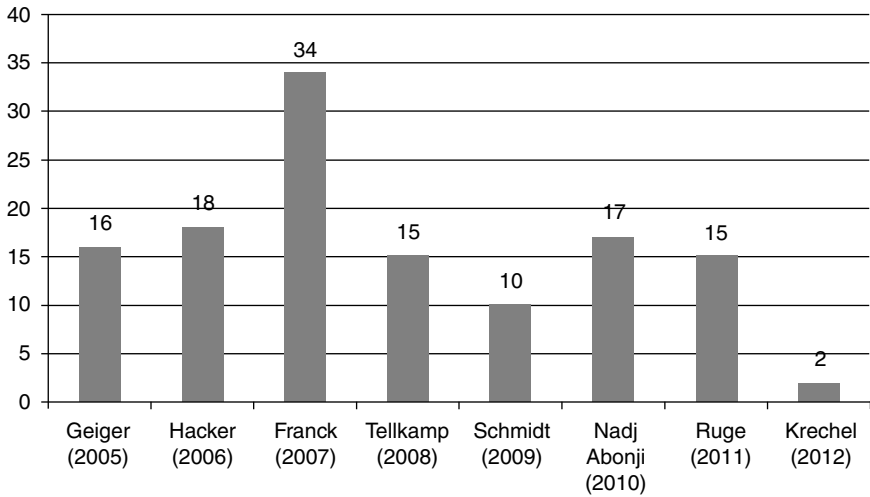


Figure 13.2 Foreign rights sales by language for Buchpreis-winning titles 2005–2012  
Data source: Information supplied by the Börsenverein and German-language publishers.

said to exercise greater influence than the Goncourt (3). Strictly, though, their assessment is based on the fact that Buchpreis-winning novels have sold into fewer languages and registered less frequently on foreign-language bestseller lists than winners of the other prizes, which could equally be read in terms of general trends governing translation from these languages or indeed in other ways unconnected to the workings of these prizes. Similarly, it is possible to compare rights sales for Buchpreis-winning novels with those for other German-language novels, but, given the complexity of variables (from textual features and writers' status to personal relations between publishers and so forth), it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions on this basis either.

These rights sales, which are often cited alongside domestic sales figures in German-language media articles about Buchpreis winners, are part of the prizing process at home, but the process also has a potential extension with each translation, as the participation of publishers, booksellers, journalists and so forth shapes the symbolic and commercial reach of the prize in these different markets (and affects the prize's influence in future rights sales of commended novels). Outside the German-language context, however, the workings of the Buchpreis as a collective project are considerably less coordinated: foreign-language publishers are free to produce and market their editions of prize-winning novels as they please, booksellers do not receive marketing material and journalists are provided with information on the judging cycle but not at a time when translations of the winning novels are available to read, review or buy. If the activities of these and other groups are understood to constitute the functioning of the Buchpreis in each context, any kind of generalisation is fraught.



A brief consideration of Buchpreis-winning titles in the Anglo-American market points to some of the constraints on the prizing project in English, an area of particular significance in relation to concerns about the circulation of German-language literature. First, it is important to note that the only prize awarded outside the English-speaking world that currently generates serial and sustained media attention in the Anglo-American context for foreign-language writers is the literary Nobel, which has invited media reporting and commentary as a “win/lose competition, global in scale, nationalist in appeal” (English 2005a, 259) for over a century. This is not the case with prizes dedicated to books in a foreign language by writers who are unlikely to be known in English at the time of the award, and indeed the Buchpreis has received limited attention in mainstream media so far. The Nobel is also widely credited with boosting sales, which plays into its newsworthiness and encourages bookseller participation, but the perception of this effect—which is not usually sufficient to register on bestseller lists—depends on works being available in translation at the time of the award, thereby allowing “before and after” comparisons, which for winners of novel-of-the-year awards in foreign languages seldom applies. Second, literary titles, as Pickford (2011, 225) notes in her comparative study of the Man Booker and Goncourt, are generally translated into English by independent houses and by select imprints of mainstream corporate publishers. Thus far, publishers of Buchpreis-winning novels, like those of Goncourt winners, have conformed to this typology, which tends to circumscribe the likely market. Nonetheless, prizes—when incorporated into publishers’ marketing—can endow winning books with a form of “accredited visibility” (Thompson 2010, 276) that may encourage the involvement of booksellers, book buyers and reviewers, especially if the award in question is known.

The Buchpreis has featured—albeit with varying emphasis—in the marketing of all three winning novels published in English to date.<sup>12</sup> It receives a brief back cover reference on US academic publisher Ariadne Press’s translation of Geiger’s novel (2011) and front cover strap lines on Europa Editions’ translation of Hacker (2008) and Harvill Secker’s hardcover edition of Franck (2009), which also includes the tag “International Bestseller”. Sales figures for the books are not publicly available and review coverage has varied, with the Buchpreis mentioned in many but not all reviews.<sup>13</sup> Franck’s novel—in Anthea Bell’s translation—was nominated for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2010, after which the Buchpreis strap line was replaced with a reference to the shortlisting (Franck 2010a). This could be taken to indicate, and construct, the Buchpreis’s place in the awards hierarchy, but it also draws attention to the way in which the Buchpreis, as a mechanism to valorise German-language literature, has intersected in the English-language context with initiatives aimed at the promotion and celebration of fiction in translation—from new prizes and festivals to the recent growth in small publishers specialising in translated fiction, among them Europa Editions.<sup>14</sup> Within these circuits, there are increased opportunities for a prominent prize

in one of the top languages for literary translation into English to play a role. Of course, the influence of the Buchpreis with regard to translation should not be conceived simply in terms of commended novels, and the prize's wider workings, including its part in creating a celebratory discourse around German-language literature, should be considered. For cultural intermediaries and commentators, the global situation of German-language fiction is no longer cause for acute concern, with the novel in German said to be "gaining international popularity again" (Cordsen 2010). The Buchpreis, not least through its assertion that German-language fiction deserves international prizing, can be seen to have contributed to this.<sup>15</sup>

## A "SUCCESS STORY WITH SIDE EFFECTS"

Prior to the fourth ceremony, German-language commentators were agreed that the Buchpreis had proven highly effective in generating domestic sales and media attention for commended novels. However, while Schröder, writing for the Goethe-Institut Web site, termed this a "success story with side effects" (2008), a number of commentators called for the abolition of the award. In an online forum hosted by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, writers and journalists accused the Buchpreis variously of polarising the marketplace, endorsing "stardom" and turning literature into a spectacle (FAZ.NET 2008). James F. English, highlighting the way in which negative commentary on prizes is frequently voiced by "the very people whose capital is augmented by its circulation through the prize economy" (2005a, 211), tends to view such charges as "antiprize rhetoric" (212), but prizes—particularly high-profile awards such as the Buchpreis and the Man Booker—play a manifestly significant role in the marketplace and the media. Insofar as they focus attention on a limited number of titles, such prizes can be seen to have polarising and commodifying effects, playing into what Thompson describes as a "winner-takes-more market" (2010, 391) and promoting an understanding of literary value in which commercial success has a constitutive role. From this perspective, a tension exists in the prizing project of the Buchpreis between drawing attention to and away from German-language novels and in popularising literary fiction in a context where the special role accorded to writers and writing has traditionally been associated with a view of literature as an elite activity distinct from commercial trends.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the model of patronage and prestige proposed by the Buchpreis is very different from that of preexisting prizes and marks a shift from a mode of evaluating and valorising literature that Braun (2011b) terms "creator fetishism" towards a means of prizing more akin to "transatlantic market-driven models" (320). It should be remembered, though, that the Buchpreis currently functions alongside these other German-language prizes in a context where there is significant funding for literature and book prices are fixed by law (a measure designed to protect literary diversity).

After the high-profile controversies of 2008, the Buchpreis seems to have found its place as a serial literary event, prompting debate and discussion over the merits of commended novels but seldom provoking “wholesale denunciations” of the kind that English (2005a, 208) sees as central to the functioning of prizes. While media coverage was at its highest during that year, it seems doubtful that eliciting this sort of journalistic attention is a “central aim” (208) of the Buchpreis’s promoters: indeed, in the German-language context, literary prestige cannot be equated simply with media attention (much less with “mere visibility”, as English [222] suggests).<sup>17</sup> Rather than leaking gossip and exploiting scandal in the manner that English (207–209) describes for the Man Booker, the Buchpreis’s organisers have been concerned with maintaining a level of seriousness also reflected in the composition of the juries, which include critics, booksellers and writers but not the Booker’s “man in the street” or celebrities. High-profile awards, though, have an “investment in popularity” (Squires 2007, 81), and how this will affect the Buchpreis’s media strategies, judging procedures and indeed aesthetic choices over the longer term remains to be seen.

## NOTES

1. All information on the Buchpreis not otherwise credited can be found on the Web site, <http://www.deutscher-buchpreis.de>. Direct quotations are from the English-language version of the site. Unless otherwise stated, all other translations are my own.
2. Speech at the Deutscher Buchpreis ceremony in Frankfurt, 17 Oct 2005 (transcript supplied by the Börsenverein).
3. I discuss this view (also expressed in the online Buchpreis press release dated 17 Oct 2005), and the associated statistics, in “A Literary *Importland*” (Spencer 2012).
4. See “Background” on the Litrix.de Web site.
5. The Man Booker (called the Booker until 2002) was itself inspired by the Prix Goncourt (Maschler 2003, 20). Certainly, the two share the same basic format and are renowned for driving sales, but Pickford (2011) highlights differences in their history, procedures and construction of prestige.
6. Buchpreis submission guidelines are in the section on “Teilnahme” and in a form posted online during the submissions period. Man Booker information can be found at <http://www.manbooker.co.uk>.
7. Thus the Georg-Büchner-Preis and Joseph-Breitbach-Preis are awarded for a writer’s oeuvre, the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Preis for a reading from an unpublished work. These formats minimise the role of publishers in nominations and in co-promotional activities. Prior to the Buchpreis, single-book awards tended to be framed as “Förderpreise” (talent prizes).
8. Greiner (2005); Mangold (2005); Wittstock (2004).
9. All data on *Spiegel* bestsellers is accessible through the archive at <http://www.spiegel.de>. Lists published in the print edition comprise sales data for the week ending eight days previously, thus the rankings published in the *Spiegel* at the time of the prize (and listed in Table 13.1) do not cover sales in the week preceding the prize. If this latter data is selected instead, Franck

- ranks at #14 at the time of the Buchpreis, Tellkamp at #9 and Ruge at #16. In the week following the prize, they climbed up the charts, with Franck at #2, Tellkamp at #1 and Ruge at #1.
10. Walser (2006), Trojanow (2006) and Herrndorf (2011) were *Spiegel* bestsellers prior to the longlist (the chart appearances of Trojanow and Herrndorf can be associated with the Leipzig Book Fair Prize—another new book-of-the-year award but without the Buchpreis’s concerted domestic marketing or international focus); Müller’s (2009) chart appearance followed the announcement of the Nobel. The other non-winning shortlisted bestsellers so far are Kehlmann (2005) and Thome (2012), both published just before shortlisting, soon after which they entered the charts.
11. See Liebenstein (2005, 32–36) on longer-term trends regarding German-language bestsellers and Fischer (2010) on other factors relevant to this. On the subject of previous attempts to popularise German-language literary fiction see Braun (2011a, 86–87).
12. At the time of writing, translations of three further winning novels—Tellkamp (2008), Nadj Abonji (2010) and Ruge (2011)—are scheduled to appear in English.
13. Geiger’s novel attracted the fewest and Franck’s novel the greatest number of reviews, which can be read above all in terms of the different profiles of these publishers. When mentioned, the Buchpreis features straightforwardly as an accolade awarded on the basis of merit.
14. New forums for translation include the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (revived in 2000), the Best Translated Book Award (for which the US edition of Franck [2010b] was longlisted), Pen World Voices and other festivals, the London Book Fair’s Literary Translation Centre, new publishers, Web sites, online magazines, etc.
15. The perception that German-language literature has become more popular internationally does not correlate straightforwardly with overall statistics on rights sales for literary titles that were cited in evidence of its “export” problem at the time of the prize’s creation. There are too many variables affecting rights sales and too many factors affecting the reading of the statistics (including their place in longer-term trends) to be discussed here, but if the “popularity” of German-language literature is understood not least as a question of belief, then clearly mechanisms that celebrate German-language literature as (internationally) valuable will play a role in creating that perception, which in turn may influence translation.
16. See Braun on the “phenomenon of highbrow, specifically literary, celebrity in the German context” (2011a, 76).
17. Media coverage statistics supplied by the Börsenverein. Moser (2009) discusses attention and prestige in the German-language context. The Büchner is still widely referenced as Germany’s most prestigious prize.

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# 14 Footnotes *sans Frontières*

## Translation and Textual Scholarship

*Esther Allen*

If we take at face value Walter Benjamin's famous conclusion that "The interlinear version [. . .] is the archetype or ideal of all translation" (2006, 307), then a translation, any translation, is a sort of prolonged annotation. In the century-old Loeb Classical Library series, which will serve here as an archetype or ideal of the relationship between translation and textual scholarship in the Anglophone world, the original Greek or Latin is on the left-hand page with its translation on the facing page and the footnotes (always resolutely sparse) positioned beneath both original and translation. James Loeb's purpose, set forth in a statement published in the series' earliest volumes and now on its Web site, was to "make the philosophy and wit of the writers of ancient Greece and Rome once more accessible by means of translations that are in themselves real pieces of literature [. . .] and not dull transcripts [. . .] and to place side by side with these translations the best critical texts of the original works" (Harvard University Press n.d.).

Both the belletrist nature of its translations and the paucity of its annotations were indicators that the Loeb series was aimed at general readers, not scholars, and it was welcomed as such by Virginia Woolf in a 1917 paean characterising the Loeb Library as a "gift of freedom" for the "ordinary amateur" (Harvard University Press n.d.).<sup>1</sup> Yet, with its continuous publication of revised and new editions—as advances in scholarship affect understanding and hence translation, and as our view of translation itself evolves along with our approaches to it—the Loeb Library also confirms the intimate link between translation and textual scholarship.

In his magisterial overview of the field, David Greetham defines textual scholarship as "all the activities associated with the discovery, description, transcription, editing, glossing, annotating and commenting upon texts" (1994, 2). Though translation per se is not on his list (or even in his index), it can and does involve, to varying degrees, each of the activities Greetham mentions. Examples abound of translators who discovered or identified texts, from the nineteenth-century scholars who travelled to Iraq to acquire the fragmented cuneiform tablets they would later study, compare, piece together and translate into what we know as the Epic of Gilgamesh, to the youthful would-be translator of, say, contemporary Japanese

fiction, who reads something excerpted in a Japanese literary magazine or Web site; tracks down the complete work; secures grant funding, a publisher and translation rights; and finally brings the work into his or her language. As for description, in addition to those found in essays or studies translators may write about the texts they work on, translation itself can be understood as a kind of prolonged description of the source text in another language (or dismissed, by those with little knowledge of either translation or transcription, as simple transcription). Translation's editorial component is clear, as well; where differing versions or editions of an original text exist, translators are called upon to compare and choose among them, often producing a translation based on a composite of variant originals, as in the celebrated edition of Chekhov's letters by Simon Karlinsky and Michael Henry Heim, which draws from comparative reading of three varying censored editions of Chekhov's correspondence (Heim and Karlinsky 1973, ix). Barbara Cassin (2010) has compared the textual *fixion* by the philologist Hermann Diel of the sole surviving work of pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides to an act of translation. Diel's production of Parmenides's *Poem* by long analysis and interpretation of the fragmentary manuscripts that cite or allude to it is part and parcel of "le trafic de la lettre" subsequently carried forward by the text's multiple translators in an *arborescence* of interlinked and forking paths and complex interpretative decisions. Cassin cites Borges: "Erudition is the modern form of the fantastic" ["La forme moderne du fantastique, c'est l'érudition"].<sup>2</sup>

Finally, translators are often called upon to gloss, annotate, comment upon and provide source references for the texts they translate (the famous Translator's Note), and their efforts to create a more informed intellectual and cultural context for their work can go far beyond that. Ammiel Alcalay tells me that before he could publish his 1996 anthology of translations of contemporary writing from Israel, *Keys to the Garden*, he had first to establish a framework, in his 1993 study *After Jews and Arabs*, within which the translated work could be received. Along the same lines, Peter Cole, who translates from Hebrew and Arabic, has sought to widen the cultural space for such works by establishing a publishing house, Ibis Editions, to bring into English books that "embody the cultural cross-fertilization that characterizes the best writing from the Levant" (Ibis Editions n.d.).

In a thoroughly enjoyable treatise, Anthony Grafton points out that in all its manifold variations, the footnote itself—for of Greetham's list of the activities associated with textual scholarship, it is annotation that primarily concerns us here—may well have originated in the ancient practice of inserting a gloss to explain a foreign or difficult word between the lines or along the margins of a manuscript (1999, 27–28). While our archetypal page layout—translation on the facing page, footnotes below—suggests that translation and annotation are two very different practices, the distinction grows ever hazier the more closely we scrutinise them. Even the movement between languages that initially seems a key distinguishing factor turns out



to be quite irrelevant. Roman Jakobson's well-known tripartite classification of translation begins with "intralingual translation", which he defines as "an interpretation of verbal signs by other signs of the same language" (2000, 139). Meanwhile, Jacques Derrida has noted that "it is not contradictory to the concept of annotation that it be done in a language different from that of the annotated text" (1991, 196).

Further insight into the vagueness of conventional distinctions between translation and annotation can be gleaned from the popular Web site Rap-genius.com (its motto: "Our aim is not to translate rap into 'nerdspeak', but rather to critique rap as poetry"). Here is its transcription of the first two lines of rap artist Kanye West's 2010 "Dark Fantasy", delivered, on the recording, by Nicki Minaj, in a British accent:

*You might think you've peeped the scene  
you haven't, the real one's far too mean*

Clicking on these lines, the consulter of Rap Genius learns:

. . . the intro is a thuggification of children's author Roald Dahl from "Cinderella" in his book "Revolting Rhymes":

*I guess you think you know this story.  
You don't. The real one's much more gory . . .*

Suggesting that the herd has turned against Kanye like a pack of youths. The public doesn't know what really goes on behind the scenes.<sup>3</sup>

This is certainly helpful, but is it a source reference, a commentary or a sequence of translations (Dahl of Charles Perrault, West of Dahl, the Rap Genius commentator of West)? And how will its status change in the likely event that a Kanye enthusiast in Beijing works it into Mandarin?

Perhaps annotation and translation are like twins who become separated, only to meet up later in life and discover that their fates have been strangely similar. In historiography, the focus of Grafton's work, the annotation of source references is a crucial demonstration of the historian's authority, establishing the basis and precedent for the historical account he or she presents and thus making it verifiable. Nevertheless, even in that field, extensive annotation readily becomes emblematic of "sterile pedantry" and has, Grafton points out, been reviled as "the quintessence of academic foolishness and misdirected effort" (1999, 25). The degree to which translation, too, is a conventional object of scorn has been well documented. "Let's not kid ourselves", a widely read 2005 essay by Wyatt Mason begins: "everyone hates translations". The impassioned fans on Rap Genius, who spend untold hours elucidating lyrics (some of them by Maya Angelou), may not see it that way, but it's probably more often the case that both translation and

annotation are suspected of denaturing the texts they purport to explicate, rendering them lifeless, dull and dry, clouding them over with intermediary and extraneous matter, getting in their way. Can you dance to erudition?

What most fundamentally unites translation with annotation is their mutual orientation towards a clearly delimited subset of readers. The nature of any given translation or corpus of annotations is dictated not by the original text, but by the readership for whom the translation or edition is destined. Quite obviously, a translation intended for a Portuguese audience will differ greatly from one of the same work destined for readers of Japanese. The same can be said of annotation; every note of whatever sort anticipates the lacunae, requirements and areas of expertise of a specific group of readers. Australians require no clarification of a mention of the Burke and Wills expedition; Americans do. Professional Shakespeare specialists demand a facsimile edition of Shakespeare's First Folio that indicates which of the Folger Library's copies was the source of each page; desperate undergraduates want a cheap paperback that will tell them what on earth a "moiety competent" is. The authors of crowd-sourced explanations on Rap Genius may feel strongly that the commentary offered in the Yale University Press *Anthology of Rap* (Bradley and DuBois 2010) represents precisely the type of "nerdspeak" they are eager to avoid. In that sense, translation and textual scholarship both evoke the infinite potential avatars of a given text or narrative (be it literary, documentary or historical) across the unlimited series of finite circumstances within which it can be reread—in other words, rediscovered, retold, reinvented.

One of my favourite footnotes occurs in Heim and Karlinsky's aforementioned Chekhov volume, appended to a letter sent to Maxim Gorky from Yalta on 15 February 1900. Praising the sensory immediacy of one of Gorky's stories—"Twenty-Six Men and a Girl"—Chekhov dashes off a line translated as: "It very strongly evokes its setting. You can smell the rolls." The following footnote is appended:

The kind of roll that Chekhov mentions is the hard one with the hole in the middle which is now called "bagel" in the United States. But a translation of *bubliki* as "bagels" would have moved the setting of Gorky's story from a bakery in Russia to a New York Jewish delicatessen for most American readers. (Heim and Karlinsky 1973, 382)

The relevance to translation of Viktor Shklovsky's fundamental notion of defamiliarisation (остранение) becomes apparent. For Shklovsky (1991) the artistic techniques that induce defamiliarisation serve to delay easy understanding so as to break through the veil of habit and open the mind to new and fresh perceptions. Here, the translator/annotator might be tempted to trade on the familiarisation effected by immigrants from the Slavic world who collectively transformed a characteristic Eastern European foodstuff into something that by 1973 was strongly associated with certain ethnic

enclaves in north-eastern urban centres of the United States. Yes, a бублик is a bagel. But to translate it as “bagel” would be to effect a kind of reverse defamiliarisation, making the бублик all too misleadingly familiar, reincarnating the Gorky story Chekhov alludes to as an Isaac Bashevis Singer tale, set in Brooklyn. A very different footnote would be required in a place where the bagel remained unknown (if such still exists on our globalised Earth), and none at all might be needed in a culture where the bagel, while familiar, remained so strongly associated with its point of origin that the first evocation it brought to mind was an Eastern European scene. (Glossed as “rice sandwiches” by the writer credited with first introducing the term into English in 1893,<sup>4</sup> sushi has since become familiar worldwide, but translators of Japanese literature, at least in the United States, need not worry about evoking anything but Japan when they translate 鮭 as sushi.<sup>5</sup>)

As globalisation perpetually shifts the gamut running between familiar and unfamiliar, the question of what needs to be translated or annotated for whom is in constant flux—but this is nothing new. The evolution of technology, however, has brought new factors into play. When readers in most parts of the globe can, within seconds, establish the basic facts of the Burke and Wills expedition for themselves, annotators and translators may well consider themselves permanently relieved of the need to provide that sort of information. Any visitor to Rap Genius who doesn’t recognise the name “Roald Dahl” has only to click on it to reach Dahl’s Wikipedia entry (though a familiarity with Cinderella is taken for granted and no hyperlink is provided there). Even in our old-fashioned medium of print, a translator who ponders the possibility of a brief footnote to give basic information on an obscure Danish theologian whose name crops up in a Kierkegaard essay might well reject the idea, given that a reader interested in learning more about that odd name—Pontopiddan—need only pull out a cell phone to encounter far more information about Erik Pontopiddan (1698–1764) than any reasonable footnote would give.

Have the search engines rendered annotation unnecessary, even as digital translation is fast making human translation obsolete? Heim and Karlinsky’s translation/annotation of Chekhov’s бублик attests to the fact that machine translation, however sophisticated it might become, will always be something quite different from literary translation. Whether it is a program that performs translation or a Big Data search engine such as Google Translate, a mechanical translation device will not translate бублик as anything but “bagel”; that tautology is the successful performance of the machine’s task. Nor will it append a footnote discussing the factors that influenced its decision. Literary translation is the re-embodiment of a text within the lived experience and erudition of a translator, using rational thought, sense memory, nostalgia, yearning and a host of other conscious and unconscious factors to negotiate among shifting resonances of meaning that echo against and through a given culture at a given moment. To put it in Saussurian terms, while machines can select and reorder signifiers,

sometimes successfully mimicking the way humans have previously done so, only humans can experience and create signifieds.

Likewise, rather than putting an end to any need for annotation, the Internet's offer of unlimited positive data at the touch of a button instead calls on annotators to undertake more focused analysis of a given textual question in relation to its present context, rather than simply presenting data that any search engine could provide. (What does Pontoppidan seem to have represented for Kierkegaard and his contemporaries? Where else does Kierkegaard mention him? etc.)<sup>6</sup>

Another reason for questioning the boundary that purports to separate the twin phenomena of translation and annotation lies in the fact that it is constituted so differently in different languages, media, genres and individual practices. Take, for example, two recent translations of Spanish Golden Age poetry, both published by university presses: Christopher Johnson's 2009 *Selected Poetry of Francisco de Quevedo* and the section of Roberto Tejada's (2010) poetry collection, *Exposition Park*, entitled "Golden Age".

Both sets of translations, seeking to engage the reader emotionally and intellectually, clearly strive to be "real pieces of literature [. . .] and not dull transcripts". In his preface, Johnson expresses the conviction that Quevedo's verse "will win him an English reader's devotion" (2009, 24). Both Johnson and Tejada eschew footnotes in favour of less intrusive endnotes, attaching no mark to the poems themselves that might deflect the reader's attention from them. Johnson's translations appear in the familiar parallel text format with the originals on the left and a discreet numeral every tenth line; his thirty pages of endnotes aim "to give the poems some historical context, identify important literary precedents, and adumbrate somewhat major themes and currents of reception" (191). In keeping with our Loeb archetype, his work anticipates a reader, possibly even an ordinary reader, who approaches these texts as literary classics of lasting significance and wishes to enter their sphere via translation, with the aid of a limited degree of contextualisation.

Tejada's translations are also presented bilingually. However, they are unexpectedly positioned *above* the Spanish; here, the original is footnote. Both text and translation are on the right-hand page while other poems by Tejada himself appear on the left. Indeed, it isn't immediately clear which of the poems are translations, for Tejada's translations dispense with the original sonnets' organisation into quatrains and tercets, introducing neologisms ("wind-corpses") and employing a kind of cubist syntax, full of sharp corners, hard assonances and unexpected shifts, that at first seems more connected to the other English poems in the collection than to the Spanish. A closer reading reveals responsive and responsible translations that bear an attentive, devoted and intricate relationship to the Spanish poems they grow out of.

The single paragraph among the volume's endnotes entitled "Golden Age" reads not as annotation but as prose poem; it offers no additional information on any given word or line of text, but rather a glimpse into the project

as a whole: “The timing of translation, like any measurement of when and where to act, matters deeply to the ethics and energies of a language and its culture” (2010, 66). Tejada’s goal, as the arrangement of his pages and the nature of his annotation suggests, is not to assist the reader into a timeless space of classic literature, but to wrench the Golden Age sonnets into the present, expending their cultural capital in the service of a fiercely urgent *now*. In Tejada’s rendering, Garcilaso de la Vega’s lover’s lament might be the voice of a community or individual in the United States today, caught between English and Spanish, assimilation and racial discrimination:

for if, with this very hand I could slaughter  
myself, why—not on my account but because  
so suited—would my enemy do otherwise?  
(Tejada 2010,17)

Though I’ve dwelled on the contrasting layout of their pages, the more crucial distinction between Tejada’s work and Johnson’s resides in the fact that Tejada is identified as the author of the book in which his translations appear, while Johnson is billed as editor and translator. Therein lies the origin of the hierarchical relationship between original and translation/annotation that Tejada’s page layout and translation technique seek to challenge; it is Tejada’s status as author that permits him to mount such a challenge.

Pursuing this elusive boundary into the realm of much of my own work as a translator, I will note that while contemporary Anglophone convention makes annotation (of any sort) a viable recourse for translators of poetry, be it of recent or archaic vintage, translators of fiction confront a different situation. The annotation of a fictional work (by anyone other than its author) typically occurs long after original publication; the notes arrive as confirmation of the work’s classic status.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps in partial result of this, the Anglophone publishing sphere, and particularly the commercial publishing industry—the sector where contemporary fiction writers have a financial interest in seeing their works appear—only rarely tolerates or even entertains the idea of annotation by the translator of a work of recent fiction. When it is not used as a device by the author himself (in such works as Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*), but introduced into the text by another, the footnote in and of itself, in the context of contemporary fiction, turns out to have semantic content: that content can be translated as “meant for scholars and not for the ordinary reader”. The Anglophone anti-footnote stance in the practice of translating contemporary fiction can be confirmed in any bookstore, magazine or library; I’ll mention here the annual *Best European Fiction* anthologies, edited by Aleksander Hemon and published by the Dalkey Archive Press, which present work from across Europe rendered into English by a myriad of translators. Among the hundreds of stories that have appeared in the series since its inception in 2010, not one has been annotated by its translator.

Though this is by no means true of every literary culture,<sup>8</sup> within the Anglophone sphere, recourse to annotation in the translation of contemporary fiction tends to be regarded as evidence of inadequate skill. The performance of recent or recently translated fictional works is not to be interrupted by asides, references or extraneous information that would distract us, pull us out of the immediate experience of the text. Nuances of meaning, sources and additional contextualisation are to be worked into the translation itself via a literary virtuosity whose tools include techniques such as what Jason Grunebaum (2013) calls the “stealth gloss”, the incorporation of contextual information that is presumed self-evident by the original but is deeply unfamiliar to readers of the translation. The example Grunebaum gives from his translation of Uday Prakash’s novel *The Girl with the Golden Parasol* involves inserting into the text, after a line he translates as “it was two days to Rakshabandhan”, the supplementary clause, key to any understanding of what follows (and as unnecessary and redundant for readers of the original Hindi as a description of Christmas would be for an Episcopalian), “when sisters tie colorful threads of affection—the *rakhi*—around the wrists of their brothers, or those they consider like their brothers” (2013, 162).<sup>9</sup>

Now here’s a curious paradox. Scandal might ensue if Brian Nelson were to insert such a gloss, adding to a line in chapter 4 of Emile Zola’s *The Fortune of the Rougons*, which relates that Jean never had so much as five sous to pay for a *Gloria*, the phrase “that delicious mixture of coffee, sugar and rum he craved” (2012, 299n).<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, for Grunebaum, it is a matter of firm principle *not* to define Rakshabandhan in a footnote: “if there were no footnotes in the original, I won’t use any in the translation”, he writes in a footnote to his essay (167 n2). It seems reasonable to assume that the difference in approach is attributable to the classic status of Zola’s work and the existence of a scholarly field devoted, among other things, to establishing the text of his books.<sup>11</sup> Such scholarship provides material for the prospective annotator/translator to draw on, but also limits the substance of the text—its every jot and tittle pored over and debated—to precisely what the editors of the critical edition or editions have established, thus perhaps rendering the work more brittle, less open to the interpolation of a stealth gloss or other collaborative techniques.<sup>12</sup> A work of contemporary fiction, unfixed by scholarship, more flexibly incorporates into itself the different contexts into which translation inserts it. A textual scholar may consider it his or her task to preserve a text from corruption; a translator of contemporary fiction is probably more concerned with attracting potential readers to it. And while a textual scholar is unlikely to do so, a living author can assent to any number of alterations and interpolations (though translators don’t always seek permission) and may even be eager for them when it is clear that recourse to annotation would affect the work’s saleability. Within the context of an academic conference on textual scholarship, Derrida describes the “rigorous, determinable exteriority of the annotation in relation to the principal, primitive text” as one of the “distinct predicates” of annotation

(1991, 196). But within the marketplace for contemporary fiction, that exteriority is not so rigorous after all.

In the end, it is our idea of what constitutes authorship that turns out to be key in making the distinction between translation and annotation. Yes, both are generally viewed as subordinate to the original text, whether their subordination takes the form of Benjamin's "interlinear version" or the relegation of annotation to the bottom of the page, the back of the book. The annotator, however, is the undisputed *author* of the notes, and this is true whether the annotator is author, editor or translator of the body of the text and whether the notes consist of source references, glosses, digressions or commentary. The relationship of translator to translation is more ambiguous, less immediately visible or graphically delineated. Most translations, of course—or certainly most translations of prose, fictional or otherwise—appear in editions that are neither interlinear nor bilingual; in such cases the translation *is* the page and the original is not present, or, as in historiography, is present only as annotation, as source reference. That may be why translation remains the more troubling instance of the famous deconstructionist "double bind". Derrida, extemporaneously translating himself, says to his academic audience: "[The text] says to the reader [. . .] 'Be quiet, all has been said, you have nothing to say, obey in silence', while at the same time it implores, it cries out, it says, 'Read me and respond: if you want to read me and hear me, you must understand me, know me, interpret me, translate me, and hence, in responding to me and speaking to me, you must begin to speak in my place, to enter into a rivalry with me' " (1991, 202). Deconstructionist texts such as Derrida's 1974 *Glas* propose new typographical layouts, a new textual topography to challenge the "theologico-political" hierarchy of original over translation, annotated text over annotating text. "Peeping the scene" in closer scrutiny of what translators actually do is another way of challenging a similar hierarchy which still seems to exist in the Anglophone university between the practice of textual scholarship and that of translation.

## NOTES

1. It's not clear how many of today's "ordinary amateurs" are curling up with Loeb volumes of a summer's eve, but the library's name has, I am told by a colleague in classics, come to be employed as a verb among graduate students preparing for oral exams: "I Loebed the heck out of the Nicomachean Ethics last night", etc.
2. In other contexts, including a paper given by Cassin herself at the Lycée Henri IV in February 2000, this phrase is attributed to Gérard Genette, in reference to Borges. Both authors would undoubtedly have delighted in the conflation.
3. The Rap Genius Web site attributes this note to three authors, Maboo, DLizzie and Lemon; an accompanying graph shows that it was first created by Maboo who contributed 90 per cent of its content. As of 19 January

- 2013, it had been upvoted by 62 members and had received no downvotes. See Rap Genius (n.d.).
4. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (online edition, retrieved 10 January 2013) dates the first use of “sushi” to A.M. Bacon’s *Japanese Interior*: “Domestics served us with tea and sushi or rice sandwiches.”
  5. See also Maureen Freely’s account of her debate with Orhan Pamuk on whether or not to translate Turkish foods such as *börek* (2013, 121).
  6. A recent issue of the literary series *McSweeney’s* uses six versions of Kierkegaard’s 1844 “Skrift-prøver” to launch its romp through “twelve stories translated in and out of eighteen languages by sixty-one authors” (Thirlwell 2012). None of the six authors of versions of “Skrift-prøver” appends a footnote to Pontopiddan or includes any further information about him within the text.
  7. To give but one example, *The Great Gatsby* appeared in 1925, but the first annotated critical edition, by M.J. Bruccoli, was published by Cambridge University Press in 1991.
  8. Again, to give only one example, José Manuel Prieto’s densely intertextual *Livadia* (1999) has no notes, and neither does its English translation by Carol and Thomas Christensen, *Nocturnal Butterflies of the Russian Empire* (2002). The Russian version, *Ливадия*, by Pavel Grushko (2006), includes 155 endnotes.
  9. The dilemma Grunebaum describes in translating “chai” is akin to the issue Heim and Karlinsky confronted with “bagel”. In the world of the Hindi novel he translates, chai is “something that comes in . . . an oversized shot glass” and is “boiled in a dented aluminum pot over a cow-dung fire”. It has “a little layer of something brownish and thick and creamy floating on top that your average Starbucks chai drinker would likely describe as ‘gross’”. Meanwhile, for the US reader chai is “a beverage of double-digit ounces, full of Splenda, topped with soy foam and two shakes of ground cinnamon” (166–167).
  10. Nelson wisely opts to provide the recipe in a footnote, instead.
  11. In his select bibliography, Nelson pays tribute to Henri Mitterand’s “superb” scholarly edition of *Les Rougon-Macquart* in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1960–1967).
  12. Though perhaps not always. Is it a stealth gloss when John Rutherford unpacks the Spanish semantic echoes of the alternate forms of Don Quixote’s name mentioned in the first paragraph of the eponymous novel? “His surname’s said to have been Quixada, or Quesada (as if he were a jawbone, or a cheesecake)” (2003, 25). Might we conjecture that as more and more textual scholarship is amassed over the centuries its sheer accumulation gradually opens up greater freedom to the translator?

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\* \* \*

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