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A program of Center for the art of Translation
We as academic and independent translators have a long way to go to convince the general public and the academy of the importance of translation and, in particular, literary translation. The common notion that to translate, one only needs to use a dictionary or even one of the machine translation software packages surfaces in most conversations with people who have never thought about translation. The academy is not much better in that respect, since a great number of modern language departments do not recognize translation work as a legitimate scholarly or intellectual activity. Deans and chairs of language and English departments are often reluctant to consider for promotion faculty members who have produced extensive book publications in the field of literary translation. Actually, some academic translators even hide the fact that they are working in translation.

However, there are signs that perhaps we are beginning to pay more attention to matters of translation. Recent articles in magazines have raised on our consciousness with respect to existing translations. We are told that the translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* is one of the more distorted renderings of an original French text. Most of us were brought up with reading Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev in Constance Garnett’s translations, who during her lifetime produced seventy volumes of Russian prose. In a recent article, “The Translation Wars,” in *The New Yorker* (November 7, 2005), David Remnick reminds us that we are probably not reading translations of Dostoyevsky or Tolstoy as Russian writers but rather as Garnett’s translations, which make each writer sound exactly like the other. Nabokov called Garnett’s translations “a complete disaster.”

Translation thinking must be in the air this October and November. The October 2005 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* features an extensive article by Clive James titled “No Way, Madame Bovary,” a review of a new translation prepared by Margaret Mauldon. The vogue of retranslation seems to be in full swing: Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Manzoni, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Albert Camus, Isaac Babel, all the new translations of nineteenth-century German philosophers, not to speak of the never-ending chain of new Dante translations. Even Günter Grass’ *The Tin Drum* will get a facelift with a new translation by Breon Mitchell. The reasons for the necessity of new translations of the same work are manifold: to adjust a previous translation to the pulse of the present language; to improve on a previous translation; to incorporate new scholarly discoveries, as was the case with the Bible; to bring new interpretive perspectives to the translation in view of cultural and aesthetic changes. We have no clear guidelines for how and when a retranslation of a work is initiated or becomes necessary.

Retranslations will continue to occur in the future with greater or less success. What is not occurring, however, in any satisfactory manner is the craft and seriousness of reviewing translations when they are first published so that major weaknesses and distortions in a translation could be revealed to the reader. Remnick shows us the danger of one person translating several volumes of Russian prose, and Clive James leads us more extensively into the detailed solutions of Mauldon’s translation of *Madame Bovary* in comparison to some other existing translations, only to come up with the conclusion that the current translation by Mauldon does not improve previous translations.

The question then has to be raised: who is equipped and willing to engage in the art of reviewing translations? To respond to this question should be the challenge of the academic world. I say academic world, since most independent translators either are unwilling to write reviews, since they do not want to speak negatively about their translator colleagues or consider the act of reviewing an unnecessary activity or perhaps even a waste of their time. We therefore have to rely more extensively on scholars who are not only steeped in the respective language but also in the historical, social, and cultural environment of a given writer or work. Only then can we expect to receive balanced and well-informed reviews. Those scholars
would also be able to see a given translation in comparison to already existing translations of the same work or to other works translated by the same author. We as readers need to be provided with perspectives that place translations in their present and past context and also illuminate for us the specific interpretive nature of a translation. I would like for a reviewer of existing Dante translations to inform me that the John Giardi translation would be more appropriate for an undergraduate literature course and the Allen Mandelbaum for a graduate seminar, since they are different in their language and scholarly orientation. Furthermore, we need articles and essays that deal with the assessment of the totally available translations of a given writer. Here I propose that the academic world wake up and institute seminars and workshops into the curriculum that would train graduate students in the art and craft of writing reviews of translations. Interesting and stimulating doctoral dissertations lie ahead! This addition to the curriculum of graduate studies would not only revitalize the interaction with the source-language texts but also change how world literature courses should be taught in the future.

In comparison to other countries, especially France and Germany, the number of literary translations from all foreign countries into English is frightening. Publishers Weekly ran statistics around 1994 that claimed that about 1800 translations in the field of literature and the humanities were published in the U.S. Cliff Becker, the late director of the literature program at the National Endowment for the Arts, suggested that about 300 fiction works in translation were published per year. However accurate these figures might be, it does not change the fact that publishing translations is not a priority of the American publishing world.

We know very little of how the transfer of literary works from a foreign language into English comes about. Who makes the decision of what should be translated? Which works travel successfully across cultural borders? Thus, it would be opportune to have regular columns in Translation Review that report on the most recent literary publications in other countries, works that deserve to be translated. At one point, the journal World Literature Today had adopted a practice to indicate in their review sections of foreign works those books that deserved to be translated. Unfortunately, that practice has been abandoned.

The landscape of translation publishing should also be expanded in terms of the anthropological underpinnings of literary texts. Generally, translations are being dealt with in terms of their linguistic dimensions. The anthropological foundation of linguistic expressions would reconnect the visualization of words with their social, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions as they have been developed through the traditions of a country. Anthropological investigations would reconnect words to their sensuous origins and furthermore revitalize the etymological and philological understanding of human expressions.

Translations have been cultivated throughout the centuries, from the Greeks through the Romans to our modern times. Each age has produced its own perspectives on the art and craft of translation, and the respective translators have imprinted their interpretive approaches on the nature of their translations, approaches that also reflect the cultural and anthropological orientation of their times. We are always interested in deepening our understanding of past historical events and attitudes. The illumination of the aesthetic and intellectual forces that drove the interpretive directions of translations at a particular time in the past will enlarge our understanding of the Zeitgeist as well as the psychological and emotional orientation of people.

In his book The Civilization of Illiteracy, Mihai Nadin argues that verbal literacy is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the 21st century. That statement should also be discussed seriously in the context of translation studies. The visual and musical worlds have drastically reduced the impetus in students to read works of literature, especially collections of poetry. The possibilities of the digital technology will allow us to transform poems through the translation process into visual and three-dimensional images, which will recuperate the sensuous foundations of poetic expressions and reconnect the reader with the visual presence of words. Through that intersemiotic translation, readers recuperate the internal movement of words and participate in the visual expansion and even the musical color of words. Digital representations of words will give the spatial dimension back to the words and instill the excitement of anticipatory expectation in the reader.
Thus, we should consider the methodologies derived from the art and craft of translation an essential paradigm for education in the 21st century. Translation blows off boundaries and creates new realities by finding new linkages. The failure of the past few decades was the assumption that quantitative analysis could explain the world. We now need an imaginative entering into the situations through artistic and critical thinking, which can be realized through the inherent activity of translation.
INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE BERLIND

By Rebekah Presson Mosby

Bruce Berlind began translating Hungarian poets thirty years ago, while the Cold War was still being waged. In addition to falling in love with the work itself, Berlind possessed just the sort of adventurous spirit needed for the job of translating work from a communist country. He fully enjoyed the frisson of working in a place where informers lurked and the phones were bugged and drank in the rock star treatment that he sometimes enjoyed as the friend and collaborator of Hungary’s most famous poets. As a widely published poet himself, he embraced the challenges of exposing the subversive subtext of the poets while simultaneously veiling the political nature of their ideas in the interest of the poets’ safety.


**Rebekah Presson Mosby:** In your introduction to the Ottó Orbán book, you said that poetry is the national art form of Hungary. Is that an official designation?

**Bruce Berlind:** No, it’s not official. But everybody would acknowledge that it is because it’s so intimately connected to the history of the country. The poet that I think most Hungarians would say is their greatest is Sándor Petőfi, who died at a very young age, in his twenties. He was a colleague of Kossuth in the 1848 Hungarian rebellion, and that was a landmark in Hungarian history even though it was unsuccessful, as it was everywhere else in Western Europe. So, since then, or perhaps earlier, poetry has been considered the prime art form, in the same way that music is so important to Austrians, to Viennese.

**RPM:** What was it about Petőfi that captured people’s imaginations so much?

**BB:** His patriotism. His “National Song” is the equivalent of the French “Marseillaise.”

**RPM:** Do people in Hungary go around quoting poetry? Do most people know poetry?

**BB:** Less in the past quarter-century or so than earlier. What’s happened now is that Hungary, especially metropolitan Hungary, has become Westernized, so kids are more interested in blue jeans than they are in learning poetry. But, yes, the first time I was in Hungary, which was in 1977, waiters would be able to quote poetry. And, so being a poet and being able to translate poets, I was a figure. I was interviewed by Hungarian journalists and television as if I was a personality.

**RPM:** Did Hungary find you or did you find Hungary as a venue for translation?

**BB:** That’s a long story. Want to hear it?

**RPM:** Yes.

**BB:** Okay. I got interested in Hungary in 1975 when I was visiting Ted Hughes and his wife Carol in Devonshire. It was Easter Sunday, I remember this
distinctly, because it was Carol’s birthday and we three were going out to lunch. And Ted wanted to change his clothes and he said, “Here’s something to read while I’m up changing.” And it was a manuscript of a translation of János Pilinszky, which was subsequently published in this country. And I read it, I liked it, and when he came down I said, “But you don’t know Hungarian, how did you do this?” And he said there was an émigré Hungarian poet in London who fed him literals and he worked from there and checked back with the Hungarian poet whenever he wanted to. So I asked Ted Hughes if he knew of another Hungarian poet that I might try my hand at in the same sort of way. He did not, but he would look into it and let me know. A few months after I got home I had a letter from him saying that he’d seen some roughs of a woman named Ágnes Nemes Nagy and he thought that she’d be worth working on. So I found a book of her poems in a Hungarian bookstore in New York and hired a local Hungarian-born woman to make a literal translation. And for whatever reason I don’t recall, I sent them to Paul Engle at the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa and he accepted them and hoped that the book could be out by such-and-such a date because Ágnes was coming there as part of that program, which he ran.

RPM: And you didn’t know that.

BB: No, I didn’t know that. But the book wasn’t out by the time she got there. So that was that, and the book came out later.

RPM: You did this on your own initiative? Nobody said, if you translate this I’ll publish it, you just did it.

BB: I just did it. I sent it to Engle and he published it.

RPM: When you were at Ted Hughes’ and you were reading these Hungarians, was there something distinctly Hungarian in the work that intrigued you? Why would you want another Hungarian; why not a Chinese or a Japanese?

BB: It was the language Ted had worked from, using a process — collaboration — I’d never thought of. At some point it must have occurred to me that my Hungarian neighbor could be a help. My Hungarian translations have always been collaborative. Even today, having been to Hungary several times and lived there for a six-month period in 1984, I wouldn’t undertake to translate a poem without working in part from somebody’s literals.

RPM: Many of the poets you’ve translated speak pretty good English, right? Do they collaborate with you? Do you translate first and they look at it; are they part of the process?

BB: In the case of Imre Oravecz, he went over the whole manuscript, we spent a lot of time together, and he made suggestions. If I had done something wrong, he would say so. I don’t know whether Ottó Orbán read the whole manuscript or not. His English was very good. His daughter did the roughs for some of the poems in the book, and she was a graduate student at Rutgers at the time. In other cases, Ágnes Nemes Nagy’s English was not very good. She was fluent in French and insisted that we talk in French, at least the first time that I met her in 1977. But she read English. Eliot was an influence on her. She translated some English into Hungarian. My last book was of Gyula Illyés, whom I never met, and I have no idea what kind of English he spoke. For the most part, my collaborator was a woman who worked at the Hungarian PEN club, Mária Körösy, and she was excellent. We worked together for years on all of my trips to Budapest. She finally retired from the PEN Club, which, under the old regime, supported translation. I don’t know whether they still do.

RPM: Your decoration is from the government, right?

BB: No, from the PEN club … which was then the government, of course.

RPM: Because everything was run by the government. When you started doing this, Hungary was Communist. Were these writers that you were translating mostly subversive? Was there a subversive aspect to doing these translations?

BB: I suppose the best example of this is that more recently I’ve done a lot of translations of György Petri, whose name I never heard in 1977, 1979, or indeed 1984. He’d had a couple of politically uncontroversial poems in Miklós Vajda’s anthology
Modern Hungarian Poetry, which was published by Columbia University Press in 1977. But for the most part, Petri was very subversive indeed. He was not allowed to publish after his first couple of books, so things came out in samizdat editions. And it wasn’t until the meltdown of 1989 that a volume was published that shot his stock up enormously in Hungary. After that, he was the only Hungarian poet I found who had a cassette out of him reading his poems. His popularity was enormous.

RPM: What was he saying that kept him underground?

BB: That Communism sucked.

RPM: So it was directly political —

BB: Oh, it was directly political, yes, yes.

RPM: And do you think that there’s a subversive political-ness to some of these other poets, or not? Were they pretending the poem was about one thing when it was really about politics?

BB: Yes, there’s a long major poem by Gyula Illýes, “One Sentence on Tyranny,” and the myth was that it was about 1956. It was not. He’d written it earlier, about 1950, and it was really about the tyranny of Communism. But it was first published in a Budapest journal in 1956, and the authorities assumed — not unreasonably — that it was about the uprising.

RPM: What did it appear to be about?

BB: About tyranny generally, but not specifically about the uprising or its crushing. It was rather about the tyranny Illýes felt they were living in under Communism. He did get in some trouble over his refusal to consider the uprising a “counter-revolution” and had himself committed to a psychiatric institution in order to avoid more serious consequences. He was silenced once for alluding to the suppression of Hungarians in Rumania. Part of the settlement after World War Two — which was similar to the previous settlement after World War One — deprived Hungary of a large part of its land and of its population. Transylvania went to Rumania, and Hungarians were second-class citizens there. And, yes, Illýes referred to that and was silenced for a while. He was not allowed to write. I forget how it worked; he was not allowed to write prose, only poetry, something like that. So, yes, it was dangerous. And Nemes Nagy couldn’t publish for many years. Incidentally, my introduction to her book, my selection of her poems, could not say a lot of things because it would have endangered her. I did publish an essay later in American Poetry Review (January/February 1993) that says the things I could not say then.

RPM: About Nemes Nagy.

BB: It’s more about Nemes Nagy than anybody else. It was called “Poetry and Politics: the Example of Ágnes Nemes Nagy.” But I have an analysis of one of Robert Lowell’s poems, for example, which struck me as being political in a disguised sense.

RPM: Your introductions are really good, by the way. But your introduction to Nemes Nagy was a little more, sort of even-keeled, should I say, than the one to the Orbán book, for example. But I thought maybe it was because it’s okay to be scathing when he’s essentially writing about America.

BB: That’s true. Those were Orbán’s “American Poems.” It was not a book that had appeared in Hungarian, although many, maybe all of the poems had appeared in Hungary. But he wanted those poems to be collected and published here, and he selected and ordered the poems and provided the book’s title, The Journey of Barbarus. Now that was late. That was almost after the end of Communism. That book came out in 1997. But the poems in it did not have an anti-Communist political agenda.

RPM: Was that kind of an adventure for you? It’s being part of a conspiracy in a way, isn’t it?

BB: Yes, especially at first. I waited until going to Vienna to get visas — I was with my then-wife Mary at the time — and we were at the Hungarian embassy in Vienna and they didn’t want to give us visas. Now I had an invitation from the PEN Club in Budapest. It was a Friday. They said, well, come back Monday. I said, “They’re waiting to meet me in Budapest today.” We were going to take a boat from Vienna to Budapest. So we sat in this room feeling eyes of
hostility on us. A woman came up and asked me if I would take some medicine to a son in Budapest, and I said, “If they agree here I will do it.” And that was the last I saw of her. I think there was a testing operation going. It was spooky.

RPM: Oh, so she was really working for the government.

BB: That’s my guess. And finally somebody came out, all smiles, and said we have your visas. Have a nice trip. At which point another woman came over with some flowers for us. So we got on the boat, went to Budapest, and we were met by the secretary of the PEN club. I was wringing wet from all this. In a way it was an adventure. We were regaled for the first week we were there; somebody would pick us up every day and take us to a different place, a different city. Illýes’s son-in-law took us to Lake Balaton, which is a wonderful body of water; it’s the largest lake in Europe. And Illýes wasn’t there, but we saw his house and somebody else took us to Szentendre, which is an artsy town up the river, and so I didn’t start working for close to a week. And I went to the PEN club and to this huge conference room, which was to be my office. Mária Körösy was at the desk, and my immediate reaction was that she reminded me of an actress in some movie about German concentration camps. I don’t think she would like to hear this, but I found her at first in a way frightening, though that feeling passed very quickly, and we’re now friends. But, yes, I knew the hotel where we were put up was bugged, as well as the office. So this was exciting.

RPM: At this point you had done no translation. They just knew you were coming.

BB: No, I had done a first draft of Ágnes’ poems, which accounted for my invitation, and I went over it with her. There was an Americanist from the university who was with us to make sure that there was no language problem. Incidentally, it wasn’t a case of a language problem. It was a case of this Americanist not really understanding what Ágnes was up to in her poems.

RPM: And neither of you could say it right out.

BB: That’s right. At one point Ágnes said, “Bruce understands the poem, let’s go on to another one.”

RPM: So let’s go back to where we were a little while ago. In addition to this sort of spy adventure going on, there was also the aspect of poets being stars. Can you talk about how that manifested itself?

BB: One of the experiences that may not have been typical was when we were in a restaurant — it was a wonderful restaurant — and the waiter asked me in French what we were doing there. And I said I was there translating, and this excited him and he asked me who I was translating. When I said Ágnes Nemes Nagy, his eyes lit up. He said, “Have you met her?” I said, “Yes, yes, I had lunch with her today.” Well, I was his hero. And that may not have been typical. But it impressed the hell out of me at the time. And photographers were all around. It wasn’t exactly a paparazzi bit, but guys would come in and shoot us. And when I gave a reading, it was reported. I felt more important than I’d ever felt here.

RPM: But you never encountered any difficulties, nobody ever tried to stop you or change what you wrote?

BB: Well, wait a minute. Yes. My introduction to Ágnes Nemes Nagy’s book was published in what was then the *New Hungarian Quarterly*. I’d made a reference to Pasternak, and the editor, Miklós Vajda, said, “Come on, Bruce, you know better than to think I can utter that name on paper.” Pasternak was a non-person. It wasn’t any major thing, so I said, “I’ll cut it out.”

RPM: Had it been unconscious on your part?

BB: I think it was unconscious. I guess I knew that Pasternak hadn’t been published in Hungary. But just to mention the name didn’t strike me as that bad, but it would have been bad. I should add that Vajda was as critical of the regime as anybody. He was just exercising the sort of self-censorship that enabled him to do his job.

RPM: When I was a student in 1973, I went to Hungary and hung out with some Hungarian young people, and what they did when they wanted to break
the rules was go these old Turkish caves where they could play Western music and party. Was there a literary equivalent of the Turkish cave?

BB: I never heard that expression, incidentally, Turkish cave. There were a lot of coffee shops and bars.

RPM: But those would be public places, they didn’t have secret places?

BB: Well, I dare say they existed, but I wasn’t aware of them because I was in an official capacity.

RPM: Oh, you had to be discreet.

BB: Yes.

RPM: You were being followed or watched.

BB: Probably.

RPM: That makes a lot of sense. Let’s talk about the process a bit more. When you get a literal, are there line breaks in it? What resemblance does it bear to the original manuscript?

BB: With respect to line breaks, the line is preserved. If my version is going to have some line breaks different from the original, I do that. I never depended entirely on the literal. In fact, the introduction to the Nemes Nagy book includes an example of just such a thing for a short poem: a four-line poem, “Lazarus,” in the original Hungarian, then the literal, and finally, my translation.

RPM: The literal reads:
As he sat up slowly, in the region of his left shoulder every muscle of his whole life was torture. His death was torn off, like gauze. Because it is just that hard, being re-born.

BB: As I explain in the footnote to that poem, in Hungarian, the suffix denoting possession attaches to the thing possessed, so that, for example, the relationship of life (élát) to muscle (izom in the nominative) is delayed until the line reaches iżma (muscle in the form clarifying its grammatical position vis-à-vis élát). Okay, the point is you can’t carry all of this stuff over — I mean, it’s a different language. So I used the Translator’s Preface to explain what I was trying to do in my final version.

RPM: So we went from the literal to:
Slowly as he rose in the region of his left shoulder every muscle of his whole life was torture. His death was flayed from him, torn off as gauze is torn. Because it is just that hard, being re-born.

BB: Yes.

RPM: And I love that last line, but how did you come up with “his life was torture” from “hurt?”

BB: All life’s every muscle hurt. Well — his whole life, every muscle was torture. Incidentally, this is a closely rhymed poem. It’s epigrammatic, and one of the things I insisted upon was preserving that quality, including rhymes.

RPM: So you chose torture to go with shoulder.

BB: Yes, that’s right.

RPM: In the case of someone like Nemes Nagy, you met her and understood what kind of person she was, which I’m sure helped you understand the character and color of her poems. But how would you go about doing that ordinarily? Getting to know what the poet’s getting at?

BB: Close reading is the principal thing.

RPM: So it sounds as if it would be hard to just translate one poem. Wouldn’t you have to know more about somebody’s work before you could translate one poem?

BB: Not necessarily. But the more poems of the poet, the better sense you have of what the poet’s up to.

RPM: Can you make Hungarian syntax be like English syntax?

BB: No.
RPM: So what do you do?

BB: Use my own language. I use the resources of English, which are very different from the resources of Hungarian.

RPM: But you obviously have some tactic for making those resources resemble the intent of the poet.

BB: I don’t want it to sound like a translation. And there are too many characteristics of Hungarian poetry and the Hungarian language to try to replicate them in English. Hungarian poetry is quantitative, for example.

RPM: Explain — I don’t know what that means.

BB: The length of syllables is important and is regularized. There are long and short syllables. We have an enormous range of quantity: tit is one syllable, squelch is another. Those are two syllables with hundreds of varieties in between. That length resource, which a poet in English has, is not a resource of Hungarian. On the other hand, they have all kinds of possibilities that we do not have. For example, rhymes come very easily in Hungarian, in part because the language is suffixal; it’s an agglutinative language, all kinds of signals are in the suffixes of words. So it would be difficult to write without rhyming in Hungarian. English, especially in this, in the twentieth century, would sound archaic if you overdid the rhymes. I guess the best example in my own translations is a longish poem, a 400-line poem, by the Hungarian poet Mihály Babits, called “The Book of Jonah.” It’s in rhymed couplets. I decided early on that I was not going to rhyme that poem. It was the narrative that I wanted to come through, and I didn’t want it impeded, I didn’t want it to sound archaic in English.

RPM: And was it your impression that in Hungarian it was a modern or an experimental poem?

BB: It was done in, I think, the 1940s, something like that. It’s not that it was so experimental. It was very relevant and incidentally, in its own way, very political. Let me try to put this in context. There is of course free verse being written in Hungarian today, and there has been for several decades. But not as much as there has been in English. Because a poet would have to abandon the immensely rich possibilities that Hungarian offers. And there weren’t many poets who wanted to do that. Plus it required a totally different concept of lineation, of how a poem flows, and that came late to Hungarians. Today there’s a great deal of free verse being written.

RPM: When a poet like Ottó Orbán does something that seems to be inspired by Walt Whitman, how does that look in Hungarian? In translation, some of his poems look like he’s been inspired by Whitman.

BB: Orbán had all kinds of facilities. I mean, Whitman was indeed a kind of influence on him. So was Robert Lowell, so was Allen Ginsberg.

RPM: That all goes back to Whitman.

BB: Orbán wrote sonnets, wonderful sonnets.

RPM: In Hungarian, would these poems that you’ve translated in The Journey of Barbarus still have a lot of attention to form?

BB: Yes. In some sonnets I’ve got second and fourth lines rhyming, and I don’t at the moment know exactly what the Hungarian was, but it was formal. Maybe there were two rhymes in each stanza rather than one. There were a lot of rhymes in here, but there’s no way out of it. I mean that suffixal endings, including plural endings, are more limited in number than our endings in English.

RPM: You can rhyme just by doing the plurals?

BB: Not quite. But making a plural requires an entire syllable, as does a third-person verb ending. Incidentally, there is no differentiation in Hungarian between he, she, or it in a verb ending.

RPM: So in the title of Imre Oravecz’s book When You Became She, how does that work?

BB: Oh, well, that [laughs] — The title of that book in Hungarian translates as September 1972, which my publisher rightly said would not be attractive to an American audience. And he suggested When You Became She, which is what Oravecz was getting at,
the distance thing, of the intimacy between him and in that case his ex-wife. That book has been translated into just about every language by now. I had a letter from Imre recently, asking me if I wanted a copy of the Italian edition, which had just come out.

**RPM**: He *humbly* asked you if you wanted — I don’t get the significance of your remark.

**BB**: There are a few things I’d like to say about Hungarian translation. Translation — both into and out of Hungarian — is of major importance in Hungary. The language is isolated; it has no close relative in Europe; and it is spoken by only about ten and a half million people in Hungary, and perhaps another million abroad. Yet it has produced more important poets in proportion to its population, I’d guess, than any other culture. The desire to make its literature known in major languages has resulted in major efforts to recruit foreign poets to its cause, probably more English-speaking poets than others. Most of that work has been done collaboratively.

Conversely, the need for foreign literatures to be known in Hungary has been responsible for the fact that poets over the past half-century have expended enormous amounts of energy translating. I don’t believe I have ever met a Hungarian poet who had not translated extensively from the literature of one or more major language. There is even a periodical devoted to publishing foreign literature in Hungarian translation. (Several of my poems are in the current issue; some years ago, several others were in the company of Saul Bellow and Harold Pinter.)

**RPM**: How frightening is it to be a translator? Is it humbling?

**BB**: It’s humbling, but also very satisfying. But I wouldn’t think of translating prose, for a number of reasons. For one thing, a prose translator has to have an intimate knowledge of the source language.

**RPM**: Because of idioms?

**BB**: Because of all kinds of things. You’re less free in improvising with your own language. And also, I would not have the same relationship to a piece of prose that I translated as I have with a poem that I’ve translated. Which is why, incidentally, I declined an invitation from Isaac Bashevis Singer to translate some of his stories.

**RPM**: From Yiddish.

**BB**: From Yiddish into English. He would have supplied me with literals, but I wouldn’t have felt the result was mine in the same way that I feel a poem I’ve translated is mine — which doesn’t mean that I have not been as faithful as I could be to the poet in the source language.

**RPM**: It’s just that it really is a creative work and it requires a poet to do it.

**BB**: That’s right. Yes, that’s right.

**RPM**: What do you think is the main skill that you as a poet bring to a translated poem?

**BB**: What I can do with English.

**RPM**: Just a really intimate knowledge of the language.

**BB**: Yes, of the possibilities that English offers for a poem.

**RPM**: Has anyone ever really objected to a translation that you did?

**BB**: There was somebody in a recent issue of the Hungarian Review. He was comparing my work with that of another translator, and he said mine was flat because I didn’t understand Hungarian. Well, I wrote a letter to the editor saying simply that if it was flat in the negative sense that this guy meant, it was not because I didn’t know Hungarian, but because I was deficient as a poet. The editor, by the way — Miklós Vajda, whom I’ve already mentioned — has spent much of his life promoting collaborative translations.

**RPM**: So the person that the reviewer was comparing you to knew Hungarian, but was he a poet?

**BB**: He happens to be, yes. He happens to be a poet.
RPM: But how many such people are there in the world? People who are fluent in English and Hungarian and also poets?

BB: Well, see, I hesitate to say this because there are a few Hungarians who translate poetry. But there are not many such people who do it well.

RPM: Certainly not enough to do justice to Hungarian poetry, I would imagine.

BB: Absolutely right.

RPM: It’s a pretty small world that you travel in —

BB: Oh, it is, yes.

RPM: Although I’m amazed that there’s a Hungarian Quarterly, that’s a kind of odd one.

BB: There may be comparable publications in some other minor languages but I don’t know.

RPM: You were telling me earlier that the editor of Hungarian Quarterly has arranged for you to do some future translations.

BB: He asked me if I’d do some translations of Attila József, since this is his centennial year. So I said yes, but I haven’t heard from him since then.

RPM: And he will send you the literals?

BB: Yes, yes.

RPM: So this has to be kind of a labor of love on his part.

BB: Oh, yes, sure. But he’s been doing it for decades and decades, and he’s built up this enormous record of publication in the Hungarian Quarterly, and many poems have appeared elsewhere of just this kind of collaborative work.

RPM: When did your interest in translation start?

BB: I think I was nineteen when I first translated a poet, a French poet named André Spire, who had resettled in this country in the early forties. He was in his mid-seventies and was invited to Princeton by a professor I’d done some courses with named Maurice Coindreau, who was himself an important translator of American fiction into French. He’d done Hemingway and Faulkner and Caldwell and some others. Now whether it was he or Spire or myself who suggested that I translate Spire, I don’t remember. Spire had had a book called Poèmes d’ici et de là-bas published in New York. And that would be 1945, which means I was nineteen. I translated a lot of the poems, though none were published.

RPM: Was this an assignment?

BB: No, it wasn’t an assignment. Maybe I got some kind of credit.

RPM: Did Spire see them?

BB: I don’t know.

RPM: You just did it without even telling him?

BB: As I remember.

RPM: Okay.

BB: Maybe I got some credit from Coindreau for a course, but I just don’t remember. But I never did it with a view to publication. It was a couple of years later that I started being more serious about translating from French, and I translated a poet named Pierre Emmanuel, whom I had met. I think I was still in graduate school when I started that. I published a number of those poems and intended to do a whole book, which Emmanuel wanted me to do. But I finally lost interest in his poetry. It became more and more fideistic, Catholic, as his subsequent books were published, and I just couldn’t follow him. But I did some of his earlier poems, and they were published in Poetry and elsewhere. I was being much more serious about translation as a legitimate mode of activity than I had been when I was translating André Spire. Spire had an historical importance — he was one of the founders of vers libre.

RPM: So did you continue doing French until you did Hungarian, or did you just drop off and concentrate on your own stuff?
BB: No, I also did a chapbook of a Haitian poet who lived in Cazenovia, Philippe Thoby-Marcelin. Some of my translations of his poems were published, though they never appeared as a book. So, my initial translation was all from French. Since then I’ve done some German, but not much. Trakl and Eich and Rilke. But the whole corpus doesn’t amount to probably more than a few dozen poems. But, yes, then I was getting interested in Hungarian, and that occupied all my head.

RPM: Did translation ever take precedence over your own work, or did they work side by side?

BB: No, no. See, this is another thing. I always thought of translation as my own work. I long ago stopped using my own work as a term for my untranslated poems. I don’t even file them bibliographically with any difference. My running bibliography has individual poems and, though the translations are identified as such, I don’t separate “my own poems” from the translations in that list.

RPM: So are you saying that you’re finding it as artistically satisfying to — in essence — rewrite a poem? Would you consider a translation be a rewrite of the poem?

BB: The term rewrite implies that you’re getting away from what the poem in the source language is all about. That you’re writing your own poem. Now the trouble with that is, of course, in a sense that is what you’re doing. But you always have one eye on the original. I mean, there are people who translate who don’t make that kind of distinction, who really rewrite. If, for example, you take a twenty-line poem in four-line stanzas and proceed to make it fifty lines of free verse, that’s not good translation; it’s a rewriting in the sense that should not apply to translation.

RPM: It’s “inspired by,” or something like that. But the original question is, do you find it as artistically satisfying to translate a poem as to start from scratch and write a Bruce Berlind poem?

BB: If I write a poem that strikes me as being as good as some of the poems I’ve translated, the satisfaction is going to be enormous. But most of the people I’ve translated are better poets than I am, in my own language. Maybe that’s a little extreme, but, yes, Ágnes Nemes Nagy is a great poet. She is a great twentieth-century poet. Would I trade any of her poems for any of mine? Probably. I wish I could write as well as she wrote!

RPM: What’s the worst part of being a translator?

BB: That the profession is not sufficiently recognized except by those of us who do it. I’m a member of The American Literary Translators Association. All of us are literary translators, and those of us who translate poetry are, for the most part, poets. So, the annual conference that I have been going to for about twenty years is an important event in my life because these are people who speak the same language as I do.

RPM: Do you spend much time worrying about the fact that the rest of the world doesn’t pay much attention to…

BB: No, because I’d go nuts if I did that. I get pissed off every now and then if a foreign work is published or talked about in English and the translator isn’t mentioned.

RPM: That’s not right.

BB: However, there are more translations being published today than was the case twenty, twenty-five years ago. But still it’s not enough.

RPM: I forgot to ask you about all your Hungarian girlfriends. [laughs]

BB: Is your machine still on?

RPM: (Lying.) No.

BB: No, there weren’t that many.

RPM: There weren’t that many — that’s a good answer.
COMMENTARY ON A LINE BY ROBERT FAGELS

By John DuVal

No long poem is perfect. “Bonus dormitat Homerus,” says Horace, or, “Even good Homer sleeps,” implying that when Homer slips in his craft, he puts some readers to sleep, but because he is good, what Homer usually does, line by line, is wake them up, which is what a good translation of Homer should do.

Over the centuries, two factors have enabled English-language translators to take huge liberties in choosing a variety of forms for translating Homer’s epic dactylic hexameters. First, unrhymed Greek quantitative metrics are so foreign to our blend of accentual and syllabic metrics, often rhymed, that no English rhythms can be said to equal Homer’s rhythms, and translators have been free to look for approximations among a variety of English meters, rhymed and unrhymed, as well as in the rhythms of prose. Second, Homer’s reputation does not rest on any one translation. Whatever form a translator chooses for his or her version of the Odyssey today will be forgivable, because that version will not be definitive. George Chapman, translating way back in 1616, might reasonably have persuaded himself that Homer’s reputation in English hinged on the success of his pentameters, but any critic today who claims that a single translation does gross disservice to Homer is overstating the influence of the translation in order to slam the translator.

Whatever the form, the translator’s job is to wake Homer and keep him awake for those of us who can perceive his Greek hexameters only as a distant dream. I realize that good prose is a good medium for story telling and that exciting versions of Homer’s poems do exist in prose, but I prefer the verse translations, where the language calls attention to itself even while pointing to exploits that took place long before the language existed.

Recently, as I was reading Book Eleven of Robert Fagels’ translation of the Odyssey, this line,

“The doom of an angry god and god knows how much wine,”

woke me to a major theme of the Odyssey as laid out in the opening scene on Mount Olympus by the first character to speak, Zeus. Like many big shots speaking among their underlings, Zeus tries to sound intellectual while justifying himself. Free will versus determinism: that’s his subject for today. He accuses human beings of wrongly blaming their troubles on the gods when, he says, people actually bring their troubles on themselves. To prove his premise he cites one example, that of the murderer Aegisthus, whose sins of adultery and murder resulted in his own destruction. Zeus is, alas, no logician. Athena immediately demolishes his example with a counter example, the long-suffering Odysseus, and we’re off on one of the greatest adventures of all time, with the question whether the gods or we ourselves determine our fates unresolved.

Unresolved, but not unanswered. Homer has already implied contrary answers in his introductions to both epic poems. Introducing the Iliad, he blames the gods. He blames Apollo and Zeus for the troubles among the Greeks, although we quickly learn that the man Agamemnon’s arrogant behavior is also responsible. Introducing the Odyssey, he blames men, Odysseus’ men, for preventing their own homecoming by eating the cattle of the Sun, although we eventually learn that nine tenths of Odysseus’ men have already been killed by the time the remnant commit the sacrilege and that Zeus himself plays a few tricks to help the men along the way of their folly. Indeed, the gods do seem more to blame in the Iliad, where they are forever interfering, usually to make things worse. And the Odyssey, which after all is a comedy, does speak more for free will: Athena may interfere occasionally to save Odysseus; Poseidon to wreck him: but Odysseus’ character, personality, and intelligence are so energetic that he seems at least as responsible for his survival as Athena or the “will of Zeus.”

What surprised and delighted me about Fagels’ “The doom of an angry god and god knows how much wine” was how it condensed, comically and succinctly in a way that prose could not, Zeus’s whole ponderous question of free will versus determinism.
Odysseus has just left the comfort of Circe’s island and set out for the Land of the Dead, but before he left, one of his men, Elpenor, crawled up drunk onto the roof of Circe’s palace to sleep in the cool night air, awakened suddenly, fell off the roof, broke his neck, died, and reached the land of the dead before Odysseus could reach it in his swift ship.

So the first person Odysseus meets is Elpenor, who explains how he got there, in T.E. Lawrence’s prose translation:

Son of Laertes, ready Odysseus, the harsh verdict of some God sealed my doom, together with my own unspeakable excess in wine.²

There we have the two causes of the one individual catastrophe, some god and too much drinking, but nothing in the sprawled-out prose recalls the old question of free will versus determinism. George Chapman’s verse is more fun:

In Circe’s house, the spite some Spirit did have
And the unspeakable good licour there
Hath been my bane.³

Chapman, with characteristic Elizabethan high spirits, is having fun with his sp’s, making the poor recently dead, recently drunk, young man sputter in his confusion. Though less concise than either Homer’s or Fagels’, Chapman’s verse allows a nice balance between some supernatural cause for his death in one line and the quality of the liquor a cause in the next. Even Elpenor’s grammatical mistake, the singular verb hath for the compound subject, spirit and licour, works to unite the two causes into one. This is good writing, and clever in the way the pun on spirit and spirits implies that the only spirit responsible for the fall of Elpenor is alcoholic spirits.

The word that Lawrence translates as some God and Chapman translates as some spirit is δαίμονος (daimonos), which Greek scholar Josh Garvin tells me is indeed a god though usually not one of the Olympian gods; but because “some Spirit” doesn’t connect thematically to Zeus’s initial speech the way “some god” would, it doesn’t wake the reader to the marvelous unity of Homer’s poem the way Fagels’ line did for me.

Fagels’ translation of The Odyssey is almost what you would call free verse. Here is how he describes it in the “Translator’s Postscript”:

Working with a five- or six-beat line while leaning more to six, I expand at times to seven beats — to convey the reach of a simile or the vehemence of a storm at sea or a long-drawn-out conclusion to a story — or I contract at times to three, to give a point in speech or action sharper stress. Free as it is, such interplay between variety and norm results, I suppose, from a kind of tug-of-war peculiar to translation: in this case, trying to capture the meaning of the Greek on the one hand, trying to find a cadence for one’s English on the other, yet only to give my own language a slight stretching now and then, but also to lend Homer the sort of range in rhythm, pace and tone that may make an Odyssey engaging to the reader (p. 492).

If I could read Greek instead of just talk about the language, and if I wanted to contract myself to the immense job of translating one of Homer’s poems, I think I would be more cautious and would probably stick to a conventional pentameter verse that I could depend on to reflect the regularity of Homer’s meter without degenerating into prose. Fagels, however, implies that Homer’s “spacious hexameter line” is more flexible than our English pentameter and that a variety of line lengths is therefore more appropriate for translating Homer. What’s important for the English verse is that Fagels keeps his varying line lengths distinct from one another and plays his hexameters, pentameters, tetrameters, and trimeters off one against another for convincing dramatic and lyrical sound effects. The Odyssey stays poetry in his English, as Elpenor’s words to Odysseus, including the line I’ve quoted, beautifully illustrate.

My comrade groaned as he offered me an answer:

“Royal son of Laertes, Odysseus, old campaigner,
the doom of an angry god, and god knows how much wine –
they were my ruin, captain... I’d bedded down...”
Fagels lays out formally Elpenor’s response to Odysseus’ how-did-you-get-here-so-fast. First, extra white space on the page announces a paragraph change for a change of speaker; then a full-length almost perfectly regular iambic pentameter line (the first line I quote) introduces Elpenor’s answer. Elpenor’s first words are even more formal, a perfectly balanced grandiloquent double salutation in a single hexameter line. The rhythmically identical proper nouns, Laertes and Odysseus (seus being one syllable), divided by a strong caesura, pull all the weight in the line to the center.

The next line, beginning Elpenor’s explanation, is also a hexameter. Because Fagels is writing his Odyssey in varied measures, not all hexameters, this one noticeably echoes the previous hexameter, and again the weight of the line is in the center, this time with two identical monosyllables: god.

The first god translates Homer’s δαίμονος, but being a single syllable before the caesura, it carries more weight, and being more Olympian in its meaning, points back toward the opening scene on Mount Olympus. The second god is little more than an expletive, but paired with the god that immediately precedes it, it emphasizes the caesura between them and this symmetrical six-foot line: half attributing a man’s death to a god; the other half to the man’s folly, doom and wine weighing against each other at opposite ends of the line, theological determinism and individual responsibility in comic balance before Elpenor’s syntax breaks in confusion: “— they were my ruin, captain.” His sentence, which began with two epic, line-filling salutations, ends with a simple sailor’s salute, captain, and trails off into ellipses.

That’s poetry, the poet taking advantage of the language and the language taking advantage of line, rhythm, syntax, and vocabulary for a complex, inimitable effect. It’s the kind of poetry that the best poems deserve to be translated into. Because an angry god is a little more Olympian than δαίμονος, the line “the doom of an angry god, and god knows how much wine” is more emphatically true to Homer’s whole poem than even the original line.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSLATIONS: FRANZ KAFKA’S VOICE AND ITS ENGLISH ECHO

By Monika Hubel

Every text undergoes a metamorphosis when it enters the reader’s mind. Reader-response criticism, above all that of Wolfgang Iser, avers that every reader, even though the text controls somewhat her/his response, fills the gaps a text leaves with her/his individual experiences. Therefore, when we say we are reading Kafka, we are in fact creating our own Kafka, and this may today not be the same as it was yesterday or will be tomorrow. But when we read Kafka in a translation, whose Kafka is becoming our Kafka? After all, the person who one day set out to translate the original German text had first of all been a reader her/himself. S/he filled the gaps in the text with her/his experiences, and what we read is her/his Kafka. The translated text has already gone through a filter, and the gaps we can fill are only those left or opened up by somebody other than the author. When Kafka wrote the sentence “Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt” (56), he formulated a clause meant to lead the reader toward what is to come. Willa and Edwin Muir rendered this passage as “As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.” By reading Ungeziefer as insect, they suddenly named the thing and — bang! — it leapt into existence. Rendering the abstract Ungeziefer as insect over-anticipates Kafka; it yields a specificity Kafka has yet to denote. Insect narrows the reader’s expectation more than Kafka intended, taming scenes like Gregor’s struggle with his tiny legs.

One may hope that there is something like an invisible translator, so distanced from the text that s/he merely transcribes it. Such an ideal translator may be a machine, an entity completely in command of two languages but without any emotions or individual experiences to be imposed on the text. Anyone who has ever come across the result of a mechanical translation knows that this is again not at all what we desire. Machines do not understand language as a means of communication. Language is to them merely lifeless material and not environment, as Schleiermacher and Humboldt defined it. In 1823, Schleiermacher gave a lecture “On the Different Methods of Translating,” in which he distinguished between inauthentic and authentic translations. Schleiermacher considered as inauthentic any attempt to render a text in a foreign language as if it had been written in that language. Such translations neglect the spirit of the original language, a spirit gradually developed like history and thus constituting environment. Moreover, they subordinate the language of the original to the target language and betray an ethnocentric, domineering attitude. Authentic, non-ethnocentric, translation tries to express the foreign in one’s own language and is, according to Schleiermacher, transplantation. With due respect for it, the foreign is transplanted into and will transform, broaden, and enrich the new idiom. Wilhelm von Humboldt called this approach “fidelity,” which leaves “a certain colouring” over the text and lets the reader “feel the foreign, but not strangeness” (Berman 150–154). In short, Schleiermacher and Humboldt asked for the abandonment of insensitive literalness as well as exoticism and pleaded for translating with respect for the different and dissimilar. Their plea coincides with Foucault’s for “conceiving differences differentially instead of searching for common elements” (182).

To muster respect for the different can be difficult. How can one, for instance, respect the spirit of the German language after this people has displayed a terrifying lack of healthy spirit? Willa Muir addresses this difficulty. She sees in the heavily verb-controlled German syntax a will to power, which dominates not only German sentences but German people. For her, German syntax mirrors a rigid subordination shaping “Macht-Menschen.” She goes even further and parallels the German fondness for compounds to a predilection for sausages, which is, according to her, a sign for an inherent anal-erotic: “The right image of the German sentence … is that of a great gut, a bowel, which deposits at the end of it a
sediment of verbs. Is not this the Reich desired by Hitler, who planned to make mincemeat of Europe?” (95). Granted that she may hit on something here, those statements do not recommend her as a respectful translator of German literature, even less so of Kafka. Even if his verb-controlled sentences could reflect subjugation, his writing attacks it. Moreover, the above-quoted first sentence of “The Metamorphosis” shows how waiting for the verb keeps the reader on tenterhooks. The all-revealing verb transformed, containing the full terror of the whole sentence, is its very last word. Only after reaching it can readers really know the entire message.

Strangely enough, Willa Muir’s own last words reveal exactly the wish to subjugate. She concludes her essay by stating that “to turn classical German into sound democratic English — there is the difficulty” (96). Those words suggest precisely the ethnocentric and domineering attitude Schleiermacher and Humboldt condemned. Muir’s goal is to deliver an English story, which then can find its English critics. One of them, Stanley Corngold, titles an essay “Metamorphosis of the Metaphor” and expounds on Kafka’s use of “images from ordinary speech … [as] a second metaphorization — one that concludes in the metamorphosis of the metaphor” (40). Here, theory banks on conclusions drawn from the translation instead of from the original. Better shun the pun metaphor/metamorphosis, because the German original offers only Verwandlung transformation] /Verwandtschaft [relation]. Corngold notes that “only the alien cleaning woman gives Gregor Samsa the factual, entomological identity of the ‘dung beetle’ … She does not know that a metamorphosis has occurred, that in this insect shape there is a human consciousness” (43). Heinz Politzer, a German Kafka expert, disagrees with both theories. He clarifies that the charwoman’s “dung beetle” is not at all an entomological classification but a common insult in colloquial German. What is far more important is how Politzer deals with the story’s title. He does not talk about Gregor’s metamorphosis but about the Verwandlung, the transformation that occurs, and detects an interesting connection with Gregor’s Verwandtschaft. “The title of the story might apply to Grete with greater justification than to Gregor. … She has become a turncoat … has changed into her father’s daughter. By taking over his gestures and glances, she has visibly joined forces with him. … More and more she plays herself into the foreground: the end will show her transformation completed” (277–278). The English translation of Verwandlung as metamorphosis kindles images from classical mythology like Daphne turned into a laurel tree and thus instigates the questionable search for the transformed person’s new entomological identity. It misses the fact that transformations can very well happen without visual signs and thus cheats the text of its purport.

Theory aside, it is time to look at the text. To elaborate on some differences, I have selected the eight translations published in the United States. I will refer to them by number, identifying them in the appendix, where the first two paragraphs of each are given.

“Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt” (Kafka 56).

The syntactical problems of this sentence have already been mentioned. Beyond this, it is interesting to note that no translation renders the verb in the title as to metamorphose but as to change or to transform. Kafka used the same word in both cases, as both title and first main verb; doing so is not likely a coincidence, because repetitions are one of the predominant literary devices used in this story. Admittedly, the verb to metamorphose sounds pretentious, but then so might the title. Beyond the loss of title/verb duplication, naming the story “The Metamorphosis” bears strange fruit indeed. One critic, Douglas Angus, scrutinizes the story for traces of folklore and myth and finds parallels between Kafka and fairy tales like “The Beauty and the Beast” (264).

The introductory sentence holds a further problem for its English translation. The repetition of the negating prefix un- in unruhig, ungeheuer, and Ungeziefer cannot be reproduced. This sequence is, however, an important instance of Kafka’s deliberate wording. Annullment, the negation of his humanity, and his being turned into a “not” is exactly what happens to Gregor. Later, his sister will call him a mis-creant, and the charwoman will treat him as discard. This nullification of Gregor’s humanity is suggested by Kafka’s careful word choice.

Throughout the story, it is also implicit in a certain phrasing, overlooked or neglected by all translations. Kafka strictly referred to the members of Gregor’s family as “der Vater” or “die Schwester”
(Kafka passim). If translations render this as “his father/sister” instead of “the father/sister,” they deprive the reader of Kafka’s intention to show that Gregor’s father is not his anymore. Moreover, the neutral phrase “the father” contains a general aspect, important in connection with the period of the story’s genesis. It was a time when German Expressionism, obsessed with the dethroning of all authorities, saw the paterfamilias as the foundation of general obedience and subjugation that had to be overthrown. Many of Kafka’s texts show his disgust with a society based on hierarchy and anonymous power. His concern was to reveal what this system does to the individual. To overlook a political allusion, however slight, may not change the overall import of “The Metamorphosis.” Such a default, however, points to a temptation intrinsic to translation in general: the temptation to censor, an issue widely explored by many scholars. Generally speaking, to be inattentive to allusions might not change the external edifice of the piece translated, but underneath, where something should happen between text and reader, a fundamental change takes place.

“Er lag auf seinem panzerartig harten Rücken und sah, wenn er den Kopf ein wenig hob, seinen gewölbten, braunen, von bogenförmigen Versteifungen geteilten Bauch, auf dessen Höhe sich die Bettdecke, zum gänzlichen Niedergleiten bereit, kaum noch erhalten konnte” (Kafka 56).

This sentence is a wonderful example of the German habit to complicate sentences by intertwining main and subordinate clauses and insertions. Here we have a sentence containing two insertions, “wenn er den Kopf ein wenig hob” and “zum gänzlichen Niedergleiten bereit.” The comma before and after the insertion stands for a pause, a breath-taking. The insertion itself is supposed to be read in a slightly lower pitch, as if it were a thought inserted in a piece of reported speech, or some message whispered into one’s ear. Changing this structure into two equally valid clauses without insertions spoils the sentence’s speed and pitch. It also obliterates the special denotation of the words placed between the commas. For instance, the two inserted phrases contain the verb heben (lift) and the noun Niedergleiten (fall down). Again, Kafka’s deliberate wording and structuring is of great portent. With these devices, the author tells without telling that we have to deal with a person who is about to fall down from his usual height, from a being walking on two legs to a creeping creature.

A short excursion into Jewish legends further illuminates the significance of Kafka’s wording here as well as in his choice of title. In Jewish tradition, transformations are a common motif. Gershom Sholem relates an fable in which the wise man warns his listener that “great saints undergo but one incarnation, while ordinary mortals — may you be spared such a fate — undergo a hundred and more.” Those incarnations or transformations are inflicted as punishment for transgressions against the commandments. Their result is always the person’s banishment from his family or community (Bruce 12). Gregor’s fall from grace, implied in Kafka’s second sentence, together with his annulment as a human being implicit in the first, are indications that the solution to the mystery of Gregor’s present condition may lie somewhere in his past. This example shows clearly how certain words rendered not correctly can obscure the subtext of whole passages.

Gregor falls and ends up lying on his back. Translations can hardly convey the connotation of the German wording. Gregor’s “panzerartiger Rücken” is his shield, be it armor-plated or shell-like. Far more important is the word back. Gregor’s back serves as a shield, much as his memories shield him at first from a full realization of his situation. Similarly, Gregor’s concern for his family has protected him until this time from becoming independent, from the pain of revolting against his exploitation by the family. Back, memory, and concern are in German Rück-en, Rück-erinnerung, and Rück-sicht. Suddenly, Gregor’s “panzerartiger Rücken” has become far more than simply a hard-plated back. It is a symbol for Gregor’s entire state of life and mind, and it is no coincidence that the lethal wound caused by his father later in the story is inflicted upon Gregor’s back.

A similar problem with connotations and denotations faces the English translator with Kafka’s use of the verb erhalten in connection with a bed-quilt. Kafka chose a highly unusual word combination. Erhalten means to sustain and is commonly used to describe a person’s effort to keep his life going. Translations 5 and 6 omit this verb completely; others miss the point by rendering it as clinging, poised, or perched. Translations 2 and 8, creating constructions that include the verb hold, come closest to the original. The point here is, however, that Kafka chose an unusual word
combination. Incompatibles, when fused, spark ambiguous meanings, and ambiguity contributes to disarray. To turn it into “sound democratic English” divests the text of significance and strips it of subtlety. Moreover, it alters the author’s style, because personal style is, according to Ortega y Gasset, the author’s ability to use words in a sense slightly different from their common usage.

When Gregor lifts his head, he sees his belly, which has also been changed. It is geteilt (divided). Clayton Koelb detects in Kafka’s work the concept of syllepsis and dialepsis. Syllepsis stands for the unity of two entities, e.g., human and animal, that are ordinarily apart. Dialepsis means ordinarily indivisible entities, e.g., the belly, that are presented as split in two. At the same moment Gregor realizes that he is human and animal, he also notices an unusual dividedness of his body. Koelb sees in Kafka’s repeated use of dialepsis a symbol for his self-alienation and the split he felt between himself as author and himself as self (25–27). In Gregor’s case, one might, therefore, entertain the idea that dialepsis occurring at the same time as syllepsis symbolizes a schizophrenic mind. Such an idea seems not to be too far-fetched when one considers Kafka’s concern with a schizophrenic mind. The reader finds her/himself together with Gregor in a “richtiges, nur etwas zu kleines Menschenzimmer” (Kafka 56). The word Menschenzimmer is Kafka’s creation. It does not exist in German but clearly alludes to something like a doghouse. It is certainly not “a regular human bedroom” (1, 5) or “a real man’s room” (6). Kafka’s neologism must find its counterpart in English to let the intended imagery arise. “Sound, democratic English” describing the room as regular, normal, or ordinary will not do. Gregor lives in a real humanroom. This is once more a phrase full of ambiguity and with a special halo around the written words suggesting that one also reads something that is unwritten. Furthermore, spoken with a full stop, it is a simple, though strange, statement. Spoken with an exclamation mark it is mocking and sarcastic. This equivocacy is important in connection with the sentence that follows. Gregor’s eyes turn toward a picture that is untergebracht in a frame. Again, Kafka combined words that are not usually combined. Untergebracht means in German to store something away or to find a place for someone to stay that provides no comfort whatsoever. Four translators render this verb as to put in, which is correct. Nevertheless, we know that to put is one of these English verbs weakened by overuse. Translators 3 and 7 chose to lodge, to insert, or to place and capture Kafka’s intentors best. They suggest the necessary connection between picture and Gregor, both encased in a confined area. This confinement is further emphasized when Gregor looks out the window and sees that the weather is trüb. A reader familiar with Goethe immediately is reminded of the “Trüber Tag” scene in Faust. Translations of of trüb in works by Goethe as well as Kafka range from overcast, foggy, or dismal to dull, gloomy, dreary, and murky. We must be aware that trüb in this scene applies to both the weather and to Gregor’s psychological condition, which excludes translations like overcast or foggy. Daring to depart from the literal, a plausible and simple translation is gray. It expresses melancholy and meteorology, and it conforms to Kafka’s style,
drawing complex pictures with the simplest words possible.

Meanwhile, the reader has learned Gregor’s profession. He is a Reisender. The translations, ranging from “commercial traveler” (1) to “traveling salesman” (2, 3, 5, 7) or “commercial traveler” (4, 6), are all persuasive in that they don’t leave the reader any space for imagination. Reisender is turned into a mere profession, and a very common one besides. Translation 8, talking about Gregor being a traveler, is literal and may at the first glimpse seem weak. However, this rendition is suggestive, because it does not specify a profession but leaves room for second thoughts. After all, Kafka provided hints enough (fabric samples) to conclude on our own what kind of traveler Gregor is. Describing him simply as a traveler, however, allows the reader to see the implied ambiguity of a profession as well as a person constantly on the move and nowhere at home. This is Gregor, and whether he is a salesman or not becomes virtually irrelevant. Just as reducing Ungeziefer to an insect narrows the range of legitimate associations available to readers, making Gregor a specific kind of traveler when Reisender clearly does not demand such specificity diminishes the text’s richness and interpretive possibilities.

Here I must return to the first sentence of “The Metamorphosis” and the word unheuern. This word connotes a wide variety of meanings. It can simply mean threatening or hideous, as well as unusually huge. Its oldest meaning, however, is “foreign, not being a part of the family,” which, applied to animals, denotes “any animal that is not considered domestic” (Deutsches Wörterbuch). Having this in mind, one realizes how important it is to render Kafka’s wording as inconclusive as he had made it. The traveler is apart from the family. His father has become a disconnected entity. Gregor has fallen from grace and is denied humanness. He is kept in a kennel and has lost the power to sustain his individuality. Those connections are meant to be made by the individual reader. When translators render abstract images in unnecessarily concrete figures, they inappropriately channel readers toward specific textual interpretations and deny them the chance to discover their own Kafka.

What is happening in all these translations if not a transformation? They are certainly not metamorphoses, “complete changes of form, structure, or substance … appearance, character, circumstances” (Random House College Dictionary). Their differences are of no importance to critics like Patrick O’Neill. He sees every translation as a particle of an overall macrotext. Every single translation is like every single reading, only together forming Kafka’s macrotext (33). If this is so, no translation can be evaluated, because any of them is just one particular rendering following one particular reading of the original. This view endangers fidelity to authorial intentions in favor of the translator’s response to them. Moreover, it regulates the reader because one facet of the macrotext is, after all, only what one translator, through a process of reading and rendering, makes of that text. Only where the highest possible fidelity to authorial intention is maintained will a translation most completely allow a text to be what its author imagined rather than what a translator might like it to be.

To defend this demand for fidelity, I want to return to the issue of the title. I have already shown how certain translations kindle particular interpretations. Now I want to allow the author to speak. He writes to his fiancée, Felice: “The story’s name is ‘Verwandlung,’ it would scare you enormously…. Today [the hero reached] the last stage of his going to be a continuous misfortune” (Heller 52). So the change is continuous, not sudden. It is not an immediately complete metamorphosis decreed by some almighty authority. Yet, translation 7 tells the reader that Gregor “found that he had been transformed.” It turns the active clause “he found himself transformed” into a passive one, implying that Gregor has in fact fallen victim to an act of God. Does this translation itself fall victim to an established and maybe misleading title? Kafka once stated that “the right word leads, the wrong one misleads” (Heller 150). Had Kafka’s first English translators not titled the story “The Metamorphosis,” a theory like Douglas Angus might not so easily have developed; Corngold’s search for an “entomological identity … the insect shape in which there is a human consciousness” (43) might not have happened. Without the concept of metamorphosis already fixed in their minds, subsequent translators might not have decreed Gregor’s transfiguration into a bug.

In addition to the concepts of syllepsis and dialepsis, Clayton Koelb also detects prolepsis in many of Kafka’s stories:

Kafka’s prolepsis usually works in a paradoxical and unsettling fashion. A
statement whose meaning we have no reason to question is discovered to anticipate later discourse suggesting or requiring an entirely different interpretation. This use of prolepsis is a rhetorical construction … in that it not only produces a text readable in two conflicting ways but also actualizes both readings in the text. (33)

Interestingly enough, Kafka once said: “‘Die Verwandlung’ is a terrible dream. … The dream reveals a reality, which our imagination cannot conceive” (Heller 60). Hearing his words, considering prolepsis, listening carefully to Kafka’s ambiguous word choices, and, above all, abandoning metamorphosis as a synonym for Verwandlung, might significantly change English-language readers’ understanding of Gregor’s misfortune.

Literary texts are made of words their authors carefully chose at a particular moment in time. The great problem of translation is to successfully use a language other than the author’s to be faithful to that author’s intentions. It would be a mistake, avers Ortega y Gasset, to expect from a translation a copy of the original just set to a different vocabulary. A translation can never be the text itself but merely a road toward it, an aid to bring it closer to a foreign reader. Ortega, therefore, fancies an “unsightly and unpleasant translation … a piece of art in its own right … but without any claim to literary beauty, not easy to read though very clear, even if this clarity requires many footnotes. The reader must be aware that reading a translation he does not read a fine book but uses an arduous aid to penetrate” (4:149) the author and her text.

Works Cited

I. Franz Kafka: Primary Sources


II. Secondary Sources


Appendix

Als Gregor Samsa eines Morgens aus unruhigen Träumen erwachte, fand er sich in seinem Bett zu einem ungeheuren Ungeziefer verwandelt. Er lag auf seinem panzerartig harten Rücken und sah, wenn er den Kopf ein wenig hob, seinen gewölbten, braunen, von bogenförmigen Versteifungen geteilten Bauch, auf dessen Höhe sich die Bettdecke, zum gänzlichen Nieder gleiten bereit, kaum noch erhalten konnte. Seine vielen, im Vergleich zu seinem sonstigen Umfang kläglich dünnen Beine flimmerten ihm hilflos vor den Augen.


Gregor’s Blick richtete sich dann zum Fenster, und das trübe Wetter …

(Muir 1948)

2. One morning, upon awakening from agitated dreams, Gregor Samsa found himself, in his bed, transformed into a monstrous vermin. He lay on his hard, armorlike back, and when lifting his head slightly, he could view his brown, vaulted belly partitioned by arching ridges, while on top of it, the blanket, about to slide off altogether, could barely hold. His many legs, wretchedly thin compared with his overall girth, danced helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he wondered. It was no dream. His room, a normal if somewhat tiny human room, lay quietly between the four familiar walls. Above the table, on which a line of fabric samples had been unpacked and spread out (Samsa was a traveling salesman) hung the picture that he had recently clipped from an illustrated magazine and inserted in a pretty gilt frame. The picture showed a lady sitting there upright, bedizened in a fur hat and a fur boa, with her entire forearm vanishing inside a heavy fur muff that she held out toward the viewer.

Gregor’s eyes then focused on the window, and the dismal weather …

(Neugroschel 1993)

3. When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin. He was lying on his back as hard as armor plate, and when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly, sectioned by arch-shaped ribs, to whose dome the cover, about to slide off completely, could barely cling. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, were waving helplessly before his eyes.

(Kafka, Die Verwandlung 1915)
“What’s happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human room, only a little on the small side, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Over the table, on which an unpacked line of fabric samples was all spread out — Samsa was a traveling salesman — hung the picture which he had recently cut out of a glossy magazine and lodged in a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady done up in a fur hat and a fur boa, sitting upright and raising up against the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm had disappeared.

Gregor’s eyes then turned to the window, and the overcast weather …

(Corngold, 1986)

4. When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from troubled dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect. He was lying on his hard shell-like back and by lifting his head a little he could see his curved brown belly, divided by stiff arching ribs, on top of which the bed-quilt was precariously poised and seemed about to slide off completely. His numerous legs, which were pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk, danced helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human room, if a little small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the desk, on which a collection of fabric samples was unpacked and spread out — Samsa was a traveling salesman — hung the picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put in a pretty gilt frame. It represented a lady complete with fur hat and fur stole, who was sitting upright, dressed in a fur hat and fur boa; her entire forearm had vanished into a thick fur muff which she held out to the viewer.

Gregor’s gaze then shifted to the window, and the dreary weather …

(Freed 1996)

6. As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from a troubled dream, he found himself changed in his bed to some monstrous kind of vermin. He lay on his back, which was as hard as armourplate, and, raising his head a little, he could see the arch of his great brown belly, divided by bowed corrugations. The bed-cover was slipping helplessly off the summit of the curve, and Gregor’s legs, pitifully thin compared with their former size, fluttered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a real man’s room — though rather small — lay quiet within its four familiar walls. Over the table, where a collection of cloth samples was scattered — Samsa was a commercial traveller — hung the picture that he had recently cut from an illustrated paper and had put in a pretty gilded frame. This picture showed a lady sitting very upright, with a small fur hat and a fur boa; she offered to the gaze a heavy muff, into which her arm was thrust up to the elbow.

Gregor looked towards the window; … the foggy weather made him sad.

(A.L. Lloyd 1937)

7. When Gregor Samsa awoke from troubled dreams one morning, he found that he had been transformed in his bed into an enormous bug. He lay on his back, which was hard as armor, and, when he lifted his head a little, he saw his vaulted brown belly divided into sections by stiff arches from whose height the coverlet had already slipped and was about to slide off completely. His many legs, which were pathetically thin compared to the rest of his bulk, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What has happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, if a little small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. Above the desk, on which a collection of fabric samples was unpacked and spread out — Samsa was a traveling salesman — hung the picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and put in a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, sitting upright, dressed in a fur hat and fur boa; her entire forearm had vanished into a thick fur muff which she held out to the viewer.

Gregor’s gaze then shifted to the window; … the foggy weather …

(Pasley 1992)
comparison to the rest of his girth, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

“What’s happened to me?” he thought. It was no dream. His room, a real room meant for human habitation, though a little too small, lay peacefully within its four familiar walls. Above the table, on which an unpacked sampling of fabric swatches was strewn — Samsa was a traveling salesman — hung the picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and had placed in a pretty gilt frame. It depicted a lady, who, decked out in a fur hat and a fur boa, sat upright, raising toward the viewer a heavy fur muff in which her whole forearm was encased.

Gregor’s gaze then turned toward the window, and the dismal weather

…

(Appelbaum 1996)

8. Gregory Samsa woke from uneasy dreams one morning to find himself changed into a giant bug. He was lying on his back, which was of a shell-like hardness, and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-shaped brown belly, banded with what looked like reinforcing arches, on top of which his quilt, while threatening to slip off completely at any moment, still maintained a precarious hold. His many legs, pitifully thin in relation to the rest of him, threshed ineffectually before his eyes.

“What’s happened to me?” he thought. This was no dream. His room, a normal human room except that it was rather too small, lay peacefully between the four familiar walls. Above the table, which was littered with a collection of drapery samples — Samsa was a traveller — hung the picture that he had recently cut out of a magazine and mounted in an attractive gilt frame. It showed a lady in a fur hat and boa, sitting up straight and holding out an enormous fur muff that entirely concealed her forearms.

Gregory’s gaze shifted to the window, and the murky weather. …

(Underwood 1981)
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At the beginning of 1960s, there was a migration movement from Turkey to Western Europe, and especially to Germany, in comparison to Holland, France, Belgium, Spain, and Greece. The reason was that there was a demand for manpower in Germany, because it was industrialized. The migrants who moved were primarily of rural origin, having different habits, customs, and ways of speaking and thinking in comparison to the Turks of urban origin. Thus, migrating to Germany was a big adventure for these people, because this was a totally different country speaking a different language, having a different religion, and obeying different customs and traditions. Nevertheless, the migrant people had one aim: finding a good job, earning enough money, saving it, and returning home to start a new life with good living conditions.

The migration continued, and the migrants who moved to Germany in the 1970s were different from the group mentioned above. Rather than workers, these were educated young people coming from urban areas. Their aims were similar to those of the previous migrants. In addition to good jobs, they were in need of better living conditions. In a technologically developed country, they wanted to improve themselves in their jobs.

There was another group who also migrated to Germany. These were political refugees who wanted to take shelter in a European country where they could act freely and live the way they liked.

The three above-mentioned groups who migrated to Germany were living in this country for socioeconomic and political reasons. Coming from different origins, it was not easy for them to adapt to a country that they did not know. Though they were trying to cope with life and conditions here, they had become the “other” in the host country’s terms.

The “otherness,” in other words, meant that these people were different in the culture of the country they were living in. Their roots were in their own country, but the host country they chose had become their home country. It was not easy to integrate into the German community in a short time. So the migrants began to feel marginalized, discriminated against, and/or rejected. Nedret Kuran Burçoğlu points out that this hurtful experience can be categorized into five stages:

1. The confrontation with the other and the other’s cultural environment
2. Formation/transformation of the image of the other
3. Coming to terms with one’s own self
4. Drawing consequences out of this experience
5. Formation of such feelings as disillusionment, pain, suffering, rejection, loneliness, nostalgia, anxiety, and guilt (1997: 118).

Migrant Literature

This experience also consisted of the works of literature the Turkish people were concerned with. So a new kind of literature began to emerge and develop. The migration had brought new writers into German life and culture. It was difficult even to define this literature. Kuran Burçoğlu explains this literature in the following manner:

As the majority of the migrants consisted of workers, there had been a tendency at first to call the newly emerging literatures Gastarbeiterliteratur (literature by guest workers), which was later considered as both misleading and humiliating and was soon replaced by the two other designations Ausländerliteratur or Migrantenliteratur. (1997: 117)

The migration movement had created a new literature for the Germans. In fact, this new literature reflected the bitter feelings of leaving the home country behind on the one hand and feeling alienated, isolated, and frustrated in a foreign country on the other hand. Coming from a different language, religion, roots, and culture, the Turkish people continued to live as the “other.”

These people were not happy either in the countries they left behind or in the foreign country that they were living in. Not knowing where they belonged, or the feeling of living between two
communities made them anxious. They felt themselves neither Turkish nor German. They could not identify themselves with the German culture but also could not spread their own culture.

On the other hand, the Germans were also concerned and wanted to know the “other” and what the Turkish people thought of themselves. For this reason and because of the cultural policy of the German government, the German publishing houses began to follow a wide-angled publication policy. This meant that they would publish the works of the new literature. The works of women writers were particularly interesting for the Germans. Women writers discussed their sorrows, how their husbands committed violence against them, how unhappy they were, and how difficult it was to be a woman. In this context, Germans were finding women writers fascinating because they were reflecting a different life that the Germans did not know.

Emine Sevgi Özdamar, a Representative of Migrant Literature Women writers who wanted to appeal to the Germans rather than the Turks believed that they would better express their lives and culture in German. They were right, because otherwise they would have to be translated into German. One of the writers who shared this view was Emine Sevgi Özdamar. In 1976, when she was in her twenties, she moved to Germany of her own volition. She did not speak and write in German, but being an actor, dramaturge, and playwright, she began to learn German in a short time, memorizing expressions and dialogues and using them in daily life. Soon she chose German as her literary language rather than Turkish, but her German was different. She spoke and wrote broken German, because for her, the words themselves were important, rather than the sentences or syntax. In an interview, she stated that “in drama, the meanings of words are important; in other words, words are free, they cannot be scared off, they have their own beings” (Kuruyazıçı 1994: 84). On the other hand, she was criticized severely because of communicating in broken German or even for writing in German but thinking in Turkish. Özdamar did not accept this accusation and thought that using the language this way gave her freedom.

Actually, Özdamar was creating a new style among the migrant writers who moved to Germany. This style was neither totally German nor totally Turkish. This was a style squeezed in between the two languages and cultures. In other words, it was a hybrid style, which meant mixing the two languages and cultures. Özdamar described how she began to be interested in this form of German in the following manner:

I was interested in this form of German on train journeys between Berlin and Turkey when German was the lingua franca of a very mixed set of travellers — Bulgarians, Yugoslavs, Turks who spent the time together telling each other stories from their own cultures. They made mistakes, of course, but the German they spoke was devoid of clichés and came out almost like poetry as they struggled to express the images of their mother tongues in this new language (Horrocks and Kolinski 1996: 47).

The Germans, nevertheless, liked her style, and her literary works appealed to them. Conversely, her works did not appeal to the Turkish readers. The reason was that when her books were translated into Turkish, they did not give the same taste they gave in German. For Germans, her broken language represented a minority population, in other words, the migrant group living in Germany.

Another topic of argument was whether the Turkish people writing in German belonged to German literature or not. There were literary critics who pointed out that though the works were written in German, they were grounded in Turkish. This meant that writing in a foreign language required thinking in that language. Özdamar’s response to this was “we have no choice but to rebuild the tongue we have lost with the tongue we have found” (Mother Tongue).

Though Özdamar was both criticized and praised, she won two prizes for her novel titled Hayat Bir Kervansaray (Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai). The first prize the novel won was the 1991 Ingeborg Bachmann prize. Given for an unpublished novel written in German, the prize takes its name from the Austrian woman writer Ingeborg Bachmann. The other prize was the 1993 Walter Hasenclever prize, given every year by the city of Aachen, where he was born, to honor the actor Hasenclever.

 Özdamar received another prize for her second novel, titled Haliç Köprüsü (Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn). This was the 1999 Adelbert von
Chamisso prize. This prize was different from the other two. It was awarded by the Robert Bosch Foundation to the child of an immigrant family of non-German origin or to those who wrote works in German having learned German in a different medium of language and culture.

Life is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went Out the Other
Through the eyes of a child narrator, the novel describes life in Turkey in economically and politically disturbed circumstances. Westernization, especially Americanization, has started, but people are unhappy and joblessness has become a big problem. So migration to another country for better conditions is a solution.

The narrator of the novel is an observant young girl of seventeen. Hence her language is an inventive language, which means it is also the language of someone learning German. She does not have a full command of the language and cannot understand the differences of register. For this reason, the incidents and details that affected her are focused on. In fact, the title of the novel, *Life is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went Out the Other*, also supports this language and style. It is too long for a title, it is given in sentence fragments rather than words, and the prepositions “in” and “out” add meaning to the title.

The novel focuses on source culture. The daily life of a six-member family in search of new lives in different parts of the country projects fascinating and lively insights into another culture. The narrator’s childhood and youth, which pass in Malatya, İstanbul, and Bursa, and her life until she moves to Germany confront the reader with the realities of Turkey.

Actually, the origin of the novel is not a life story. The writer wants to narrate people who lived and affected her during her childhood and beyond, but then the book turns into a novel that talks about Turkish culture. Turkey’s customs, traditions, superstitions, religion, idioms, expressions, myths, fairy tales, human relations, and the lives of women constitute the backbone of the novel. In fact, the writer wants to draw the attention of the Germans to the Turkish culture. In other words, she wants to talk about “the other,” as the Germans call it. She achieves her goal, because the novel receives two prizes and raises an echo in German literary circles.

The Translation of Life is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went Out the Other
First written in German and acclaimed by German readers, the novel was translated into Turkish by Ayça Sabuncuoğlu and published by Varlık Publishing House in 1992. Recently, the novel was translated from German into English under the title *Life is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came in One I Went Out the Other*. It was published by Middlesex University Press in London in 2000. The translator, Luise von Flotow, is an academic at Ottawa University in Canada. The novel is 380 pages in German, 264 pages in Turkish, and 296 pages in English. In Salih Paker’s words, “the novel is written in a German hybridized with Turkish: an intriguing case of self-translation” (2004: 11).

Flotow, in her article titled “Life as a Caravanserai: Translating Translated Marginality, A Turkish-German Zwittertext in English,” considers Özdamar a successful migrant writer who, contrary to migrant writers treating the themes of alienation, cultural loss, and exile, has focused on the problems of Turkey. Rather than adapting to a foreign-country source, the culture problems of Turkey are emphasized (2000: 68).

For Flotow, even though the novel is narrated through a child narrator who is learning German, when translated into English it does not create the same effect it does in German. In other words, the broken German language is not expressed in English. If the translation were given in broken English as it was written in broken German, would it create the same effect? To solve this problem, the translation is done literally. Especially the culture-specific features related to children’s jingles, songs, proverbs, superstitions, religion, are translated literally.

To give some examples to express superstitions:

Saniye lutschte und spuckte mit und erzählte mir, was ich nicht im Leben tun sollte, damit das Kismet unserer Familie sich nicht wieder knotet:

- Nicht in der Nacht die Fingernägel abschneiden
- Nicht im Stehen Wasser trinken
- Bei Vollmond keine Fremden besuchen
- Bei Vollmond nicht nähen, nicht stricken
- Nie zwischen zwei Männern laufen, sonst
bekommt eine Frau kein Kind
Keinen Löffel den Nachbarn leihen
Auf der Straße den Kopf nicht drehen
und zurückschauen.
Am Freitag keinen Staub rausschmeißen
Nicht in der Nacht das Spülewasser in
den Garten schütten. Die Geister hauen dir
eins ins Gesicht. (pp. 123–124)

The translation of this excerpt:
Saniye sucked and spit too and told me
what I should avoid doing in my life so that
our family’s kismet wouldn’t get tangled up
again:
Not cut my fingernails at night
Not drink water standing up
Not visit a stranger at full moon
Not sew or knit at full moon
Never walk between two men, otherwise
a woman would not
have a child.
Not lend a neighbour a spoon
Not get rid of dust on a Friday
Never spit at the moon or the stars.
Not throw the dish water into the garden
at night, the spirits would slap on your face
(p. 93)

As is understood from the excerpt, the word “kismet”
is left untranslated. The translator might have used
“fate” for it, but she did not choose that, and to reflect
the Turkish way of thinking, it is not translated. The
suffix “meme” at the end of the lines is translated as
“not” and “never.” The superstitions play a great role
in people’s lives, and the writer has given a long list to
underline these.

To give some examples from childhood jingles:

Sümüklü böcek
Suya düşecek
akşam olacak, eve gidecek
dayak yiyecek

Schleimige Schnecke
fiel ins Wasser,
Sie geht abends nach Hause
und wird geschlagen zu Hause.
(p. 151)

The translation:
Slimy snail
Fell in the water
She goes home in the evening
And gets beating at home. (p. 114)

The rhythm and rhyming are not achieved in the
target-language text. To reflect the childhood rhythm
and movement, the writer has used the jingles as a
technique in the novel.

Moving from the children to the adults, to give
some examples for the proverbs and idioms used by
the adults:

Bei denen gibt es Geld wie Sand am
Meer
Im Topf von Fremden kann man nicht
kochen
Bevor das Feuer das Dach erreicht, muß
ich Hilfe holen
Mit dem Seil der Reichen kann man nicht
den Brunnen runterklettern
Das Geld der Reichen macht die Zunge
der Armen nur nüde
Die Reichen werden ihr vieles Geld nicht
mit ihrem Sarg in die andere Welt
mitnehmen. (p. 77–78)

The translation:
They have money like sand at the seaside
You cannot cook in a stranger’s pot
I have to get help before the fire reaches
the roof
You can’t climb down into the well on
the rope of the rich.
The money of the rich just tires out the
tongue of the poor.
The rich can’t take all their money with
them into the other world. (p. 55–56)

Özdamar wants to point out how often the
proverbs are used in daily life. The statements also
reflect Turkish way of thinking as well as giving
advice.

As for the songs in which the feelings are expressed:

Bir dalda iki kiraz,
biri al, biri beyaz,
eğer beni seversen
mektubunu sıkça yaz
Sallasana, sallasana mendilini
akşam oldu
göndersene sevdiği mi (p. 87).

An einem Ast zwei Kirschen
acht, mein Geliebter,
eine ist rot, die andere ist weiß,
wenne du mich liebst, schreib der Briefe öfter
winke, winke, dein Taschentuch
es ist Abend geworden
Schick’ mir deine Geliebte (p. 129)
The translation:
Two cherries on a branch
oh, my loved one,
one is red, the other white
if you love me write your letters more often,
wave, wave your handkerchief it is evening
send me your loved one (p. 97)

The translation is done literally. The rhyming and rhythm in the source text are not reflected in the target language. A part from the melody and the rhythm there is a myth in the song. This is completely about Turkish life and culture. In other words, how lovers behave when they are in love are mentioned in the song. The way of communication in those times is achieved by sending letters very often. To wave a handkerchief means saying goodbye and its also reflects nostalgia. When evening comes the lover wants his loved one in return.

An excerpt from another song:
Nereden sevdim o zalim kadını?
Bana zehretti hayatın tadını (p. 87)

Warum habe ich diese
schwarzaugige Frau geliebt?
Sie hat mir den Geschmack des Lebens
vergiftet (p. 129)

The translation:

Why did I love that black-eyed woman?
She poisoned my taste for life. (p. 97)

In this excerpt also, the translation is done literally, and the rhyming is not preserved. The word “zalim” means “cruel” in English, but instead of using the adjective “cruel,” the translator has interpreted the meaning and used “black-eyed” for the word used, maybe thinking that black-eyed women are cruel. The male lover is so much in love that he cannot see anything except his lover, though she is cruel.

In addition to children’s jingles, songs, and proverbs, the concept of religion and how Islam is perceived is also emphasized in the novel. Prayers, to perform the namaz, tomb visits, fasting, ramadan, dawn breaking one’s fast, and the fasting table are the motifs related to religion.

To give examples for performing the namaz and praying to God:

Meine Großmutter legte zwei kleine
Teppiche auf den Boden. “Man betet
Richtung Mekka” sagte sie. Wir standen mit
großen Tüchern auf dem Kopf auf diesen
Teppichen in Richtung Mekka. (p. 79)
Mein Allah, bitte hilf, daß die Arbeit meines
Vaters auf einen Weg kommt, mein Allah,
bite hilf, daß meine Mutter, Großmutter,
Vater, mein Bruder Ali, mein Bruder Orhan
gesund bleiben und von bösen Blicken
geschützt sind. (p. 80)

The translation of this part:

My grandmother put two small rugs on the
floor. “You pray in the direction of Mecca,”
she said. We stood there on the rugs with big
scarves on our heads facing in the direction
of Mecca. (pp. 56–57)
My Allah please help my father’s work get
on the good path, my Allah, please help my
mother, grandmother, father, my brother Ali
and my brother Orhan stay healthy and
protected from the evil eye. (p. 57)

As is understood from the translation of the excerpts, the translator with her interpretation has translated the cultural features literally. Though the translated text preserves the translator’s subjective point of view, the translator has been loyal to the text and the style of the author. The Arabic version of the prayers is even preserved throughout the novel. Similar to this, the
Arabic words “inșallah” and “mașallah” are also not translated. The word “Allah” is again left untranslated. According to Flotow, it has been difficult to translate a literary work like this, full of culture-specific features. In addition, the language of the text is another obstacle. The reason is that this is a kind of Turkish-German based on the Turkish way of thinking and culture. This is the author’s way of reflecting the “other.” So the translator has left some Turkish culture-specific features untranslated to reflect the “otherness.” Among these, the prayers, namaz, minare, müteahhit, memur, rakı, yogurt, zumrut anka, luna park, sek sek, para, lira, kuruş, Hanım, Bey, Aga, Abla, Allah, can be cited. In addition, the cliches used in daily life, such as “hoşgeldiniz” and “nasılsınız,” are given with their English explanations. The translator has used this strategy so as not to erase the traces of the source culture.

**Conclusion**
Translating a text belonging to migrant literature written with a broken language is not easy. Since the broken language is chosen deliberately to reflect the concept of “the other,” it makes the translation even more difficult. On the one hand, there is the loyalty to the text, and on the other hand, there is the need to preserve the culture-specific features. Since the culture-specific features reflect “the otherness,” they are the second obstacle after the language barrier. So the translator has deliberately translated literally as a strategy to keep the language, the style, and the culture-specific features. In some places, the Turkish and the English versions are even given side by side to reflect this.

Despite the difficulties, a text belonging to migrant literature has raised an echo in literary circles. In addition to having received two prizes for her novel, Özdamar has constructed a bridge between Turkey and Germany, introducing the German reader to the Turkish life and culture that they did not know before. After reading the novel, some German readers who were prejudiced against the Turkish community, representing “the other,” have began to change their minds. The barriers between the two communities are going to be coming down, and with this globalization, the concept of “the other” will begin to be erased in the minds of the German community in the future. With the symbolic title of the book, Özdamar achieves this: *Life is a Caravanserai Has Two Doors I Came In One I Went Out The Other*. One door represents Turkey, the other door represents Germany.

**Bibliography**


MULTIPLE RECREATIONS OF A GERMAN TEXT

By Gary Brown

The English-speaking reader with some knowledge of German who has an interest in Friedrich Nietzsche, a reader able to consult German texts but who still thinks mostly in English, is fortunate today in having available several careful but differing translations of many of Nietzsche’s works. Such a reader, even though capable of checking the original, will greatly benefit by consulting not just one, but as many translations as possible. This strategy may seem strangely wasteful at first, but it is based on the experience that the benefits of reading a foreign language are not exhausted simply in being able to grasp the meaning of a foreign text from within. An even greater benefit can be derived from the effort of bringing that foreign meaning carefully back into English. This process requires a creative effort because difficult passages can be rendered in multiple ways into English, which forces one to look deeper into the resources of both languages for the best translation choices. Discrepancies and variances among multiple translations are sometimes the first welcome signs of incongruities between languages that warrant special attention. The wrestle with such ambiguities can open up new areas of meaning that at the very least can hone the reader’s or translator’s own sense of language, but may even require the introduction of new concepts into a culture or even the expansion and enhancement of the language itself. As a result, translation has a crucial role to play in the development and strengthening of the perceptivity not only of an individual but of a culture. To bring a foreign meaning back into one’s own language, to compare one’s own attempts with the results of others, and thereby stretch the resources of a language, allows one to participate in this creative effort of cultural building. I will go so far as to suggest that even a reader fluent in both languages can benefit immensely from this process of comparing multiple translations, because no fluency can eliminate the linguistic conundrums that may still harbor unexpressed creative possibilities.

I propose to demonstrate these theses by comparing my reading of Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy with selections from four different translations. I will try to bring the reader as far as possible into the translator’s workshop. My starting point is the first sentence of Nietzsche’s work in Francis Golfing’s translation, which was published in 1956. On first impression, this translation is quite readable.

Much will have been gained for esthetics once we have succeeded in apprehending directly — rather than merely ascertaining — that art owes its continuous evolution to the Apollonian-Dionysiac duality, even as the propagation of the species depends on the duality of the sexes, their constant conflicts and periodic acts of reconciliation.

As one begins to think, however, about what is said, one would likely pause at the opposition of “apprehending directly” and “merely ascertaining,” an opposition that seems rather obscure. The reader would have to ask himself, “What is ‘ascertaining’ as opposed to ‘apprehending’?” Perhaps such a reader would continue reading with the vague sense that Nietzsche was a bit muddle-headed and prone to making abstruse and probably useless distinctions. If this same reader looked at the German, he would be surprised:

Wir werden viel für die ästhetische Wissenschaft gewonnen haben, wenn wir nicht nur zur logischen Einsicht, sondern zur unmittelbaren Sicherheit der Anschauung gekommen sind, dass die Fortentwicklung der Kunst an die Duplizität des Apollonischen und des Dionysischen gebunden ist: in ähnlicher Weise, wie die Generation von der Zweiheit der Geschlechter, bei fortwährendem Kampfe und nur periodisch eintretender Versöhnung, abhängt.

The reader might be troubled that “esthetics” is a short form of “ästhetische Wissenschaft”; but he would be astonished that “zur logischen Einsicht” is translated as “apprehending directly” instead of as “logical insight.” The discursiveness of logical insight
would be, as Hegel might say, an indirect or “mediated” apprehension, not a direct one. The other side of the opposition, which Golfing translates as “ascertaining,” a word that in English sounds more compatible with logical insight, is in German “Anschauung.” This word is listed in the Oxford Duden as “experience,” and although it has come to mean in modern German an opinion or view, as in Weltanschauung, Nietzsche would more likely think of it in its Kantian or Fichtean usage as “intuition.” But in that case, how should “intuition,” or even “view,” both of which are immediate, be contrasted with “apprehending directly?” This is only the first sentence of what already looks like a philosophically problematic translation. We may already begin to wonder whether the translator’s attitude toward the text was one of mere careless disregard, insufficient knowledge, or simply a belief that the way something is said bears little relation to its meaning. At this stage, perhaps otherwise passable quibbles, such as the translation of “ist gebunden” [bound to] as “owes” may begin to trouble us.

Walter Kaufman’s translation of the same text is a welcome relief after Golfing’s. Kaufman renders this first sentence as,

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the Apollonian and Dionysian duality — just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.5

This is quite an improvement. Kaufman takes the philosophical ideas seriously, although “perceive by logical inference” and “with immediate certainty of vision” may be slightly heavy-handed, just as “perpetual strife,” which means strife without interruption, may not pair as well with “intervening reconciliations” as “continuing strife” might. But we have here at least a respect not only for what is being said, but the way it is said.

Ronald Speirs has published a more recent version:

We will have achieved much for the discipline of aesthetics when we have arrived not only at the logical insight but also at the immediate certainty of the view that the continuing development of art is tied to the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian: just as procreation depends on duality of the sexes, which are engaged in a continual struggle interrupted only by temporary periods of reconciliation.6

This version is in some places closer to the German, such as “come to” for “kommen” and “logical insight” for “logische Einsicht,” but it contains 25% more words than Kaufman’s (75 vs. 59) with no real gain in accuracy, and possesses some of the same weaknesses. Furthermore, the phrases, read aloud, do not go easily with the breath — we know that Nietzsche perfected the musicality of his phrases while walking. American English is perhaps more spontaneous and flexible than British English. Having used a complex tense such as “shall have,” Speirs feels compelled to continue with the cumbersome “have come to realize.” I would consider this translator’s attitude as careful but somewhat lumbering. I would tend to trust his philosophical alertness but worry about his style: “lumbering” is not a quality of Nietzsche’s electrifying German.

The fourth and most recent version is by Douglas Smith:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have come to realize, not just through logical insight but also with the certainty of something directly apprehended, the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the Apolline and the Dionysiac in much the same way as reproduction depends on there being two sexes which co-exist in a state of perpetual conflict interrupted only occasionally by periods of reconciliation.8

This seems to be the most accurate translation, despite its slight wordiness. It gets “logical insight” right, “tied to” renders “ist gebunden,” and “continual” is better than “perpetual.” But it is still a little long compared with Nietzsche’s brevity. I will hazard a fifth version of my own, drawing from the others:
We will have achieved much for the discipline of aesthetics when we have arrived not only at the logical insight but the direct intuition that the continued development of art is linked to the Apollonian and Dionysian duality — just as procreation depends on duality of the sexes, which are engaged in continual struggle interrupted only by temporary periods of reconciliation.

This is one word longer than Kaufman’s English and Nietzsche’s German, but it combines clarity with accuracy while still paring away excess. But word count is a low-level criterion and should be used only to combat wordiness. Apart from my own version, I vote Smith’s rendering of this sentence as the best.

Speirs appears not to realize how lapidary is Nietzsche’s style.

Finding the best translation out of many, however, is not always the proper task. Sometimes we should be glad for the multiplicity of available translations. If we jump ahead to the opening sentence of section 5, we shall find a variety of choices. Golfing has “We are now approaching the central concern of our inquiry.” Kaufman has, “We now approach the real goal of our investigation.” Speirs and Smith have, respectively, “We are now drawing closer to the true goal of our study,” and “We are now approaching the real goal of our inquiry.” Since Nietzsche says, “Wir nähern uns jetzt dem eigentlichen Ziele unserer Untersuchung,” I have no real complaint with any of these, although I might worry a little about Speir’s use of “true goal,” given Nietzsche’s extensive meditations on “truth,” and, for that matter, “goal” seems too final for an examination or search that is ongoing. But it is not until a few lines further on that alarm bells start really going off.

Golfing writes:

Homer, the hoary dreamer, caught in utter abstraction, prototype of the Apollonian naïve artist, stares in amazement at the passionate head of Archilochus, soldierly servant of the Muses, knocked about by fortune.

Although “hoary” is not yet obsolete in English, I wonder how many post-Freudian readers consider, at least subliminally and briefly, whether sexual fantasies are suggested by: “Homer, the hoary dreamer?” The translator seems willing to risk a vagueness of meaning for the thrill of alliteration. But “caught in utter abstraction?” Who could experience the palpable, sensual, pre-Socratic world of Homer and say, or think that Nietzsche would say, that Homer was likely to be caught in utter abstraction?

Here is what Nietzsche wrote in German:

Homer, der in sich versunkene greise Träumer, der Typus des Apollonischen, naïven Künstlers, sieht nun staunend den leidschaftlichen Kopf des wild durchs Dasein getriebenen kriegerischen Musendieners Archilochus….

Where is Homer’s “caught in utter abstraction?” Apparently, Golfing thought Nietzsche needed help and supplied a gloss, but what thinker could survive such help? And where is the soldier knocked about by fortune? For this phrase Kaufman says, “beholds with astonishment the passionate head of the warlike votary of the muses, Archilochus, who was hunted savagely through life.” This is closer to the German and still lyrical in English. Golfing seems to have accepted the first cliché that came to mind: “soldier of fortune.” But a soldier of fortune seeks adventure; he is not driven wildly through existence. Kaufman is more careful to follow the German. The other two translators are close enough to Kaufman and need not to be quoted here.

It seems clear to us today that to translate a philosopher requires knowledge of the philosophical concepts and themes of a particular historical moment. Translation of references to vital themes requires judgment and cannot always be tied mechanically to specific words. For instance, Kant, in the first Critique, uses Schein to mean illusion and Erscheinung to mean appearance,7 but Nietzsche, in the context of The Birth of Tragedy uses Schein to mean appearance.8 Two of the translators agree with me; Golfing and Speirs do not. Here is Golfing’s version of one of the key paragraphs in the book, in which Nietzsche describes the ancient merger of poet and musician, a passage crucial to understanding tragedy as Nietzsche sees it:

He is, first and foremost, a Dionysian artist, become wholly identified with the original Oneness, its pain and contradiction, and producing a replica of that Oneness as
music, if music may legitimately be seen as a repetition of the world; however, this music becomes visible to him again, as in a dream similitude, through Apollonian dream influence. That reflection, without image or ideal, of original pain in music, with its redemption through illusion (Schein), now produces a second reflection as a single simile or example.9

Let us look at the original:

Er is zuerst, als dionysischer Künstler, gänzlich mit dem Ureinen, seinem Schmerz und Widerspruch, eins geworden und produziert das Abbild dieses Ureinen als Musik, wenn anders diese mit Recht eine Widerholung der Welt und ein zweiter Abguss derselben gennant worden ist; jetzt aber wird diese Musik ihm wieder, wie in einem gleichnisartigen Traumbilde, unter der apollonischen Traumeinwirkung sichtbar. Jener bild- und begrifflose Widerschein des Urschmerzes in der Musik, mit seiner Erlösung im Scheine, erzeugt jetzt eine zweite Spiegelung, als einzelnes Gleichnis oder Exempel.10

In this passage, many of Golfing’s tendencies are apparent. “Zuerst” becomes “First and foremost,” that is, a cliché. He renders a version in English that does not lend itself to careful thought. How is it, for example, that music becomes visible to him again? How was it visible the first time? What is a dream similitude? How is dream similitude clarified through Apollonian dream influence? What sort of redemption takes place through illusion? Nietzsche is close to Schopenhauer’s metaphysics in this passage,11 and the point he is making is at the frontier of what is expressible, sounding a depth below where music and images, let alone words, merge and arise together. Nietzsche will plunge to these depths again when he speaks of tragedy. This section, and the later passage on tragedy, as well as the descriptions of the Dionysian and Apollonian, must cohere not only with each other but with the book as a whole throughout the translation as they do in the original. What Nietzsche says in the original German, unlike Golfing’s English, is thinkable.

Kaufman takes this passage seriously and renders a coherent version:

In the first place, as a Dionysian artist he has identified himself with the primal unity, its pain and contradiction. Assuming that music has been correctly termed a repetition and a recast of the world, we may say that he produces the copy of this primal unity as music. Now, however, under the Apollonian dream inspiration, this music reveals itself to him again as a symbolic dream image. The inchoate, intangible reflection of the primordial pain in music, with its redemption in mere appearance, now produces a second mirroring as a specific symbol or example.12

The reader is able to follow the above translation, although Kaufman’s phrase inversion alters the flow slightly. Music is an appearance as much as images are. Pain expressed in music is redeemed through the beautiful. As Dionysian, music reveals itself to the musical poet as the primal unity of the world, which at the same time displays itself in Apollonian images that mirror the music, a second mirroring because music already mirrors the primal unity. We can see that Kaufman, familiar with the philosophical tradition, is careful to make his version thinkable, whereas Golfing seems to translate the words and sentences as though they existed discretely without seeing their semantic unity with the overall context.

Is it possible to get closer to Nietzsche than the passages quoted? Once Kaufman produced his works of translation and argued that Nietzsche must be taken seriously as a writer and thinker, then works like Golfing’s were no longer acceptable. A previous translation in the now defunct Oscar Levy series, which was even more carefree, has been retired; perhaps Golfing’s will soon vanish also. The issue now, among careful translations, is interpretation. Can a more philosophically coherent and stylistically evocative version be produced? The differences between Kaufman’s version and Speirs’ and Smith’s are subtle. I chose this passage in the book specifically because its difficulty gave me the opportunity to expose interpretive stresses in all the versions.

As I look at this passage in Kaufman’s version more closely, I have the feeling that something is amiss, or at least problematic. What is the relation
between a repetition and recast of the world and a copy of the primal unity? Does this passage assert that music is a copy both of the primal unity and of the world? Isn’t this a contradiction, and not the one Nietzsche intends? In order to clarify what is bothering me and to find out whether I am misreading this or whether there is actually a problem, I will produce a working translation and use it in an effort to assess Kaufman’s and other versions. My first version actually suffers from a slight misreading, which I correct below. But, as such mishaps are part of the struggle of reconciling texts, I begin with the slightly off version:

He has first, as Dionysian artist, become completely at one with the primal unity, its pain and contradiction, and produces the likeness of this primal unity as music; even if this has been rightly called by others a repetition of the world and a recasting of it; but now this music manifests itself to him again as in an allegorical dream image under the effect of the Apollonian dream. That imageless and non-conceptual reflection of the original pain in the music, with its redemption in semblance, produces now a second mirroring, an individual likeness or example.

At first this seems to confirm my feeling that Kaufman made a mistake. But as I ponder more deeply the discrepancy between my version and his, my sense of the passage begins to shift, a bewilderment that ultimately leads to a richer version. When my uneasiness began, I wondered first whether Nietzsche, in his effort to reconcile Wagner’s practice of giving expression to the world through music (the Rhine river, the golden Ring, and even the rocks of the Rhine have voices) with Schopenhauer’s view that music was a copy of the primal One, had attempted to merge the two incompatible sources. As I began to read Kaufman, music would be a copy (repetition) of the world, which is itself already a copy of the primal unity. This would make music a copy of a copy, and the Apollonian likeness would become a third-level copy, or mirroring, not, as Nietzsche calls it, a second mirroring. At this point, as often happens, the passage becomes even more opaque.

Therefore, I should take my own advice and consider another translation. Speirs renders the passage in the following way:

In the first instance the lyric poet, a Dionysian artist, has become entirely at one with the primordial unity, with its pain and contradiction, and he produces a copy of this primordial unity as music, which has been described elsewhere, quite rightly, as a repetition of the world and a second copy of it; now, however, under the influence of Apollonian dream, the music in turn becomes visible to him as in a symbolic dream image. The image-less and concept-less reflection of the original pain in music, with its release and redemption in semblance, now generates a second reflection, as a single symbolic likeness or exemplum.13

Speirs specifically calls music a second copy of the world as well as a copy of the primordial unity, but only as described elsewhere. Is Nietzsche creating a juxtaposition between his description of music as a copy of the primal One and somebody else’s description of music as a copy of the world? I find my interpretation of this passage to be faltering. What is involved here is precisely the ontological status of the music as Nietzsche sees it. Since the extended title of the essay was to have been “The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music,” it is clear that this passage is crucial. What is music’s relation to the world? If we cannot understand this passage correctly, how can we understand the Dionysian substratum of Greek tragedy, to which this passage is building up?

I now turn to Smith and I am trying to think through the problem with the help of these translations in the process of writing about this passage. As a translator, I am struggling with the relation of music to the world and to the primal unity. Smith renders the passage as follows:

He has in the first place as a Dionysian artist become entirely fused with the original Unity, with its pain and contradiction, and produced the copy of this original unity in the form of music, assuming, that is, that it is correct to identify music as a repetition and cast of the world; but now this music becomes visible to him again, as in an
allegorical dream image, under the influence of the Apollonian dream. That reflection of original suffering in music, devoid of image and concept, with its redemption in appearance, now produces a second mirror image, as a single allegory or example.14

I am beginning to see that I may have misread the phrase in Kaufman’s translation, “repetition and recast of the world,” which very nearly recurs here. Perhaps there is a difference that I did not fully appreciate between “copy” and “repetition.” I think I now see how to recover from the aporia in which I involved myself.

Let us look at Schopenhauer, whom Nietzsche is drawing upon heavily here. Schopenhauer says, As our world is nothing but the phenomenon or appearance of the Ideas in plurality through entrance into the principium individuationis…, music, since it passes over Ideas, is also quite independent of the phenomenal world, positively ignores it, and, to a certain extent, could still exist even if there were no world at all, which cannot be said of the other arts. Thus music is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will, as the world itself is, as indeed as the Ideas are, the multiplied phenomenon of which constitutes the world of individual things. Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the ideas, but a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.15

We see that for Schopenhauer, music is a copy of the primal will, and as such, is on an equal par with the world itself, which is also a copy of the primal will. Music, then, could even be called an original recasting, in the sense of recreating, of the world. So, in Nietzsche’s passage, music copies the primal will, which is a parallel, or repetition, but not a copy, of the world, and it then produces Apollonian images as a dreamlike second copy of itself. Now I see that Kaufman’s version is right after all, with the proviso that one understands “repetition” in its philosophical meaning, which goes back at least as far as Kierkegaard, as a new and parallel instance, not as an ordinary language synonym of copy. Hence, Speirs actually goes wrong when he calls music a “repetition of the world and a second copy of it.” He has fallen prey to the very misreading that I mistakenly thought I saw in Kaufman. Smith is very close to correct, except that “cast” may mislead more than “recast,” which is closer to the German (ein zweiter Abguss). What needs to be avoided in this passage, above all, is the idea that one is making a cast from the world instead of freshly recasting an equivalent to the world, or, to put it differently, one is making a new world in a parallel creation through music.

The wavering and meandering struggle I presented in clarifying this passage is a dramatization of the difficulties of interpretation and translation of a complex work and the corresponding advantage of having multiple translations available to consult. Such difficulties are best viewed as creative opportunities, not as dismaying glitches that need to be bridged over with casual approximations, such as Golfing sometimes seems to do. A translation should recreate within the new context of a target language — with its differing phrasing, its vocabulary entwined with alternate traditions, its varying rhetorical devices — as much of the coherence, stylistic integrity, and meaning of the original text as possible. As we have seen, glitches in meaning, ambiguities in phrasing, and disagreements among translations are the best symptoms of the troublesome passages to which we should pay the most attention. In the passage we examined, Kaufman, with the use of the word “repetition,” is technically correct. But is a passage that a reader can easily misread adequately translated? Since translation of a culturally rich linguistic production is, and will always remain, an art form, there is no precisely correct answer.

As a translator of this passage, would I alter the wording in English to render more clearly the density of assumptions Nietzsche is making? Or would I risk the intrusion of a footnote to clarify the usage of a philosophical word? I might try rewording the phrase: …produced the likeness of this primal unity as music, if this has rightly been called by others a recurrence and fresh instance of the world…
This would capture the meaning but lose a philosophical context of historical importance.

Unbeknown to Nietzsche, but clear to us, Kierkegaard had previously established the importance for philosophy of the concept “repetition” that Nietzsche here independently develops. Those who come later than both thinkers, such as, but not only, Heidegger, have continued to use and develop the theme of “repetition.” In 1968, Gilles Deleuze published a book titled *Différence et Répétition*¹⁷ in which he distinguishes repetition from generality or copy by its being a singularity whose resemblance does not make it exchangeable or substitutable for what it is similar to, any more, he said, than one twin can be substituted for another. Hence, given the ongoing historical context, I feel that the word “repetition” should be retained and Nietzsche’s engagement with this theme preserved. Accordingly, I might render the passage as follows:

He has first, as Dionysian artist, become completely at one with the primal unity, its pain and contradiction, and produced the likeness of this primal unity as music, if this has rightly been called by others a repetition and fresh instance of the world; but now this music manifests itself to him again as in an allegorical dream image under the influence of the Apollonian. That imageless and non-conceptual reflection of the primal pain in music, with its redemption in appearance, produces now a second mirroring, an individual likeness or example.

By slightly glossing Abguss, bolded above for clarity but not for the hypothetical publication, I have removed the need for an explanatory footnote while retaining “repetition,” a concept crucial not only to the historical understanding, but also to Nietzsche’s argument that each tragic hero behind a dramatic mask is a repetition of Dionysus. I hope the reader feels better prepared by working through this rough spot, signaled to us by the unclear or contradictory renderings in various translations, for what may be even more difficult passages ahead in Nietzsche’s discussion of tragedy.

I think that any English reader should be grateful to have available so many translations of this, and other works, in English. Finding discrepancies between translations to quibble with can result in a deeper appreciation of the original text and of the matter itself.

Although in condensed passages, such as the one above, mistakes in meaning can be made, differences between careful translations are often matters of interpretation and not accuracy. I will finish with a quick comparison of one more passage, this from section 9.

Golfing, p. 64:
The tragedy at the heart of things, which the thoughtful Aryan is not disposed to quibble away, the contrariety at the center of the universe, is seen by him as an interpenetration of several worlds, as for instance a divine and a human, each individually in the right but each, as it encroaches upon the other, having to suffer for its individuality. The individual, in the course of his heroic striving towards universality, de-individuation, comes up against that for primordial contradiction and learns both to sin and to suffer.

This sounds all right in English, until I read Kaufman, then myriad questions arose.

Kaufman, p. 71:
The misfortune in the nature of things, which the contemplative Aryan is not inclined to interpret away — contradiction at the heart of the world reveals itself to him as a clash of different worlds, e.g., of a divine and a human one, in which each, taken as an individual, has right on its side, but nevertheless has to suffer for its individuation, being merely a single one beside another. In the heroic effort of the individual to attain universality, in the attempt to transcend the curse of individuation and to become the one world being, he suffers in his own person the primordial contradiction that is concealed in things, which means that he commits sacrilege and suffers.

Apart from the difference between tragedy and misfortune, which is not trivial in a book that seeks to define tragedy and not use the word loosely, I see that the metaphysical context — “the One world being” —
is totally missing in Golfing’s version: not good when the Dionysian unity of the One world being holds the book together. Golfing is apparently trying to read Nietzsche without all the troublesome metaphysics.

Speirs, p. 50:
The curse in the nature of things, which the reflective Aryan is not inclined simply to explain away, and contradiction at the heart of the world, presents itself to him as a mixture of different worlds, e.g. a divine and a human one, each of which, taken individually, is in the right, but which, as one world existing alongside another, must suffer for the fact of its individuation. The heroic urge of the individual to reach out towards the general, the attempt to cross the fixed boundaries of individuation, and the desire to become the one world-being itself, all this leads him to suffer in his own person the primal contradiction hidden within the things of this world, i.e. he commits a great wrong and suffers.

This, without looking yet at the German, has troubling aspects amidst its clarity. There is the apparent confusion of worlds: the world, and the divine and human worlds — which world has the contradiction? How is it heroic to reach toward the general? How is the primal contradiction hidden within the things of this world? There seems to be an aversion to philosophy here and to the idea that each phrase must contribute to the accumulated meaning of the whole book and not just fill local space.

Smith, p. 57:
The misfortune in the essence of things — which the contemplative Aryan is disinclined to interpret away — the contradiction in the heart of the world reveals itself to him as a collision of different worlds, for example of a divine and a human world, each of which individually has right on its side, but must suffer for its individuation as an individual world alongside others. In heroic impulse towards the Universal, and the attempt to step outside the spell of individuation and to become the single essence of the world, the individual suffers within himself the original contradiction hidden in things, that is, he commits sacrilege and suffers.

Here, what seemed a confusion of worlds, because of the comma separating them in Speirs, reveals instead a coherent meaning: the contradiction in one world is actually the clash of two worlds. The heroic impulse toward the Universal makes more sense here than an impulse toward an undefined generality. Which of these is closer to the German?

Nietzsche, p. 68:
Das Unheil im Wesen der Dinge — das der beschauliche Arier nicht geneigt ist wegzudeuteln — der Widerspruch im Herzen der Welt offenbart sich ihm als ein Durcheinander verschiedener Welten, zum Beispiel einer göttlichen und einer menschlichen, von denen jede als Individuum im Recht ist, aber als einzelne neben einer andern für ihre Individuation zu leiden hat. Bei dem heroischen Drange des einzelnen ins Allgemeine, bei dem Versuche, über den Bann der Individuation hinauszuschreiten und das eine Weltwesen selbst sein wollen, erleidet er an sich in den Dingen verborgenen Urwiderspruch, das heisst, er frevelt und leidet.

This example shows the difficulty of guessing at the original through a specific translation. “Unheil” is not tragedy, as only Golfing interpreted it. Kaufman and Smith get the clash of worlds right. Speirs seems not to think through his resulting text as a philosopher would. He translates pretty closely to the German words, but he does not recreate the living work in his interpretation. Kaufman has a sense of style in English, but Smith hews closer to the German syntax: both of them recreate a living work, despite their differences. Oddly, Kaufman, despite his claim to be a philosopher, seems more concerned with producing idiomatic English than rendering philosophical accuracy, but this is a stylistic choice in which there is no perfect answer. For “im Wesen der Dinge” Kaufman uses the idiomatic “in the nature of things,” whereas Smith uses the more philosophically accurate “in the essence of things.” As I say, this is a stylistic choice. I personally prefer more philosophical accuracy, especially with the ongoing debate in Continental thought about what “nature” means, but I
understand Kaufman’s motive. Such choices provide the possibility of multiple translations. Another example of choice is provided by the word “Bann,” which can be an excommunication or a spell, so that both Smith and Spears have support for their readings, although I like Smith’s better. From these few examples, however, it should be clear that it would be extremely unlikely for two people to come up with exactly the same translation for a source text longer than a sentence or two. But one hopes to find in every translation a refined degree of accuracy, coherence, depth, and resemblance of style to the original; in short, a living work. Such translations are a benefit even to those who can read the original source language but want to speak and work in the target language. For the struggle to carry meanings across the incorrigible incongruities between languages exposes more layers of embedded meanings than any simple and single reading itself could ever uncover. As Pierre Joris, translator of the German poet Paul Celan, has said, “translation…[is] the most demanding and active reading to which we can submit ourselves.”

**Notes**

2 Golfing, p. 19.
7 *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* (B 69ff) p. 90.
8 R. B. Farrell, *A Dictionary of German Synonyms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1963), p. 26. Farrell regards *Schein* as appearance, not as illusion, as does *The Oxford Duden*. However, *Warig Deutsches Wörterbuch* includes *Sinnestäuschung* and *Trugbild* toward the end of a list of synonyms of *Schein*. The meaning, which obviously could be either, must be judged from the context.
9 Golfing, p. 38.

11 See note 15.
12 Kaufman, p. 49.
13 Speirs, p. 30.
14 Smith, p. 35.
16 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993), 17, 234, 304f, 343, 385f, etc. The word “repetition” (*Wiederholung*) is mostly maintained in the John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson translation (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), which indexes many more instances than I have listed. In the more readable, but in this case less philosophically useful, Joan Stambaugh translation (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), “repetition” is systematically converted to “retrieve,” thus obscuring for the English reader an important contribution to contemporary issues of identity and difference in “repetition” and the historical engagement with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. This example supports the necessity and usefulness of reading more than one translation.
Modern Korean Fiction
An Anthology
Edited by Bruce Fulton and Youngmin Kwun
"A combination of fresh, new translations of old classics and a judicious selection of more recent writing makes this long-awaited anthology a most welcome publication for anyone interested in twentieth-century Korea."
—Janet Poole, New York University

Orphan of Asia
Zhoudiu Wu
translated by Ioannis Mentzas
"Orphan of Asia ambitiously and passionately articulates the emergence of what has come to be called 'Taiwanese consciousness.' Spanning the entire fifty years of Japanese rule, the novel presents an allegory of Taiwan's gradual coming into being with the intensification of colonial rule and its disillusion with Chinese nationalism."
—Leo Ching, author of Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation

Cold Literature
Selected Works by Gao Xingjian
Gao Xingjian
translated by Gilbert C.F. Fong and Mabel Lee
Gao Xingjian is the first Chinese Nobel laureate in Literature. The Swedish Academy summarized his achievements as follows: "An oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama."

The Chess Master
A Cheng
translated by William Jenner
The protagonist of The Chess Master undergoes a gradual transformation from "chess fool" to "chess master" - from an alienated young man obsessed with the material needs of life to a spiritually enlightened transmitter of the Chinese tradition. A Cheng has created in The Chess Master a radically new fiction that is both thoroughly modern and deeply imbued with the Chinese tradition.
In my exploration of ways to apply theory to the practice of literary translation, I will be giving examples from the works of contemporary Latin American authors I have translated. I am using the term “theory” in my own loose definition as the particular approach to translation that determines the decisions a serious translator must of necessity make. By serious translator I refer to one who would fulfill José Ortega y Gasset’s definition of a “Good Utopian.” To paraphrase Ortega, the act of translation is a utopian task, but, he says, so is the act of writing. Whether speaking or writing, it is utopian to think we are actually expressing what we mean. The English expression “we mean” is itself better said in Spanish: “lo que queremos decir” (what we want to say.) In his essay “La miseria y el esplendor,” Ortega places “the good Utopian” in contrast to the “bad Utopian,” the latter being one who thinks translation is easy and therefore gives it no thought. Ortega says the good Utopian knows it is impossible, and therefore he will expend every effort to refine the text to effect an acceptable result. Octavio Paz says in Literatura y literalidad that the translator will not so much produce a copy as a transformation or transmutation. By this he means an analogous text. Both Paz and Margaret Sayers Peden, in her essay “Building a Translation,” with her examples from Sor Juana’s translators, refer to literary translation as a process based on an analysis of a given text, which should result in one that is analogous to the original. They agree that to achieve an analogous text, the translator works in the reverse direction of the original author: The poet writes, and as the poem evolves, the poet comes to know the result. The translator has a fixed text and must dismantle it and determine what literary devices will create an analogous text in a different linguistic and cultural environment. Paz the writer and Peden the translator (Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Horacio Quiroga, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Ernesto Sábato, Juan Rulfo, Isabel Allende, and others) affirm that the translated text should be identifiable with the author’s original, in more than name only. Paz accuses most translator-poets of appropriating their own style to their translations rather than reflecting the style of the author. He counters those who state that poetry cannot be translated with the statement that they are excessively enamored of the verbal material or have fallen into the trap of subjectivity.

Theories regarding the role of translation have varied through the centuries from total appropriation of the text to serve the new tongue, to exegesis and between-the-lines translation, to bringing the foreignness of the author to the new language audience. The vestiges of each one can be seen in today’s translations. This is the case despite the fact that some literary translators do not consciously work from a theory, just as some writers write instinctively without having considered the process they are involved in, as process. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they do approach the text with different goals and in different ways. There are those translators who would dominate the text, take it over, make it their own linguistically and stylistically. Perhaps their work should be designated as “inspired by, say Neruda’s ‘Arte poética.’” Their particular intent seems to be to reflect not Neruda’s artistry, but their own. Others appropriate the text for its message, attaching no importance to the way the message is delivered in the original. Some only wish to explicate the message and assume that the way to do that is to deliver a close literal reading. Paz says this is not translation; it is a glossary. The wholeness of the text is violated by any of these particular approaches to translation.

The content-only approach is a fallacy in itself, because the meaning of a literary work of art is not embodied in the words alone but also in how those words are affected by the words around them. The dynamic relationships between them establish the tone, the images, and the clarity or ambiguity of the message in the text. The originality of a literary piece lies not in the denotative meaning of the individual words but in how they come to have a meaning. The
translator must grasp the resulting concepts and then recast those in another language within a different cultural tradition.

The analysis of how the words come to have meaning is the basis for the translator’s work. He must examine the levels of language employed in a text, the texture of the words (how harsh in sound, how broad or limited in denotative and connotative possibilities, whether concrete or abstract), and what images, metaphors, rhythms, and other literary devices the author has used to evoke the concepts and establish the tone. A poem becomes a poem as it is being written. The interpretation of a poem is not possible until the reading includes the last word and last punctuation mark. The translator must determine the inner logic that evolves within the whole of the original text. When the translator rather than the author dominates, the texture of the writing with respect to the level of language, the style, and the originality of the author’s work are disregarded.

Appropriation of the text for its message is often the intent of the translator whose motivation is the ideological inclination of the author. This approach has affected the translation of many protest poems. It has promoted as poetry in English what is merely verse, although the original in fact may have been poetry. On the other hand, if the poem can be spelled out adequately in a prose form in English, it was undoubtedly prose in the original text.

To make the assertion that a translation of a literary work should be identifiable with the original author’s work evokes an important question: How can this be accomplished in practice? We have to assert in the first place that a perfect translation does not exist. Every translation is a version of the original. As Gregory Rabassa states, “the quality of a translation depends upon how closely it approaches the original.”

The first task of the “ideal” translator is to accumulate the available knowledge of the work of the contemporary author, both personal and regional cultural information, literary milieu, and ideological persuasion. In short, the translator must establish for himself the literary and cultural context of the text itself and the author. Like a literary critic, he undertakes an analysis of the particular text to determine the characteristics of the diction, the images, the metaphors, ambiguities or directness that establish the emotional effect of the words. In this, the translator is examining the “how” of how the text came to have meaning and originality and importance. She is working from within the entire text itself and not imposing her own theory of interpretation.

The disconcerting fact is that although the translator may have what approaches a total comprehension of the original, he has accomplished only the first step of this impossible but necessary endeavor. The lack of equivalence between languages and cultures places a heavy burden on the translator. It requires his intuition, diligence, and skill in considering the options. The translator is a creative writer with boundaries imposed by an existing text.

Let us examine lines from poems by several poets to hear their voices and consider some of the challenges the selections present. We will begin with a seemingly simple, seven-line fable by the prolific Salvadoran writer David Escobar Galindo. Characteristics of the original are concision and rhythm and rhyme. As is typical of his work, the level of language is elevated: in this fable, the words “tozudez,” which could be “terquedad,” and “jumento,” which could be “asno,” for example.

Literally, the fable says: The stubbornness of the mule brought him countless beatings. The stubbornness of the man gave him tyrannical power. The luck of the vain vice that turns a human into a mule and makes a mule human. The Spanish of Galindo is: “La tozudez del jumento/ le acarreó palos sin cuento./ La tozudez del humano/ le dio poder de tirano./ ¡Ah suerte del vicio vano,/ que hace al humano jumento// y al jumento lo hace humano!” I, with my co-translator Helen D. Clement, attempt an analogous though not strictly rhythmic rhyme and retention of essential content. Our elevated language comes in the word “dour.” The translation reads: “While for stubbornness in a mule, the fate is dour./ Similar stubbornness in a man/ results in power.// A strange destiny for a vain vice/ that makes men mulish/ whereas mules become nice!”

Appropriate tone and voice are the major requisites for a successful translation. Writers vary their voices in their work, depending upon the theme. As an example, Nela Rio of Argentina is a lyric poet whose work is often harsh in tone. She writes poetry with themes ranging from erotic to testimonial, always within the feminist perspective. Her themes are related to womanhood: the experience of pain — torture, violation, abuse — and of sexuality — menstruation,
old age, erotic desire — and of death and absence — but always with the perspective of recuperation, self-value, and the celebration of the experience of a woman. The softness and fluidity in her expression on the one hand may become demanding and harsh on the other through poetic techniques that appropriately sustain those themes.

Her voice becomes a strong, driving voice in her opening line protesting torture and the “desaparecidas” in her book En las noches que desvisten otras noches/During Nights that Undress Other Nights: “Tengo estas palabras/ ahogándose/ apretujadas en mi pecho.” Attempting to capture the rage, my English version reads: “I have these words/ suffocating/ packed into my breast.”

As an example of her soft voice, we will consider a poem she wrote at the death of our friend Jacque Canales of Spain, a poet whose work as extraordinarily musical and poignant. The first lines capture metaphorically Jacque’s determination to embrace optimism in her own poetry despite negative forces. Nela Rio’s tribute begins “Con sandalias lentas/ luminosas/ caminarás la noche que harás día.” To simulate the ethereal, emotional resonance of the phrase “sandalias lentas/ luminosas” and the alliteration therein, I chose “light/ luminous sandals” rather than using “slow” for “lentas.” To mark the link between the future-tense verbs “caminarás” and “harás,” I chose an alliterated “t” and a parallel, contracted “you will,” as follows: “you’ll travel the night/ that you’ll turn into day.” The translation continues with “The hour/ marks/ an inexplicable sadness/ that nestles in the light/ touching my window.” In translating the poem, the particular concern was finding poetic measures that would set the poignant tone. The English poem concludes: “I will seek the smile in your verses/ and hand in hand/ we’ll browse the pages.// Time has the sound of bells./ Your going is a note/ beating in every heart.”

To continue our discussion of specific authors and unique stylistic characteristics, we consider the aesthetic of Carlos Ernesto García, exiled from El Salvador in 1980 at age 20, after the death squad assassination of his father at his home on a Sunday afternoon. García is now a citizen of Spain. The linguistic economy and concise images of this lyric poet require a translation consistent with those qualities. The bilingual edition Even Rage Will Rot of Hasta la cólera se pudre includes a brief poem, “Hamburgo.” In this poem and others, the intense emotion of the tragedy experienced by the poet in his native country is transferred in extraordinary, understated terms to other physical environments, in this case Hamburg. The images are projected by nouns and active verbs. The poem reads: “Las veintiuna y treinta/ de un día que no comprendo/ Una amplia avenida que no ven tus ojos:/ IDUNA RCA ranstad zeit-arbeit/ incrustados en un edificio que aún/ no conoce la guerra.”

García’s poem was carefully crafted in vocabulary and structure. The original text has three subjects, an implied “yo,” “tus ojos,” and a personified “edificio,” and active verbs. The parallelism and active verbs must be retained in order to produce a similar impact in English. We’ll consider my translation version and then other possible variations to see if that is the case. My version reads: “Hamburg: Twenty-one thirty hours/ of a day I don’t understand/ A broad avenue that your eyes don’t see:/ IDUNA RCA ranstad zeit-arbeit/ inscribed on a building that still/ hasn’t known any war.”

To illustrate the change that would result if the phrase “that your eyes don’t see” were translated into the perhaps more lyrical passive voice as “unseen by your eyes” and if the last phrase were drawn out from the sharp active to the progressive “Still not knowing any war,” we’ll make that substitution and consider the effect: “Twenty-one thirty hours/ of a day I don’t understand/ A broad avenue unseen by your eyes/ IDUNA RCA ranstad zeit-arbeit/ inscribed on a building still not knowing any war.” The result is a softer, more subtle, bland expression rather than the direct, forceful, but understated expression of emotion in the original text. Not following the process of the original text would be a failure to represent García’s aesthetics as reflected in the Spanish lines. The poem might still be a poem and might retain the content, but it would not emulate the original in understatement or structure or tone. Furthermore, if the time were changed from “twenty-one thirty hours” to “9:30 p.m.,” it would not change the time, but it would diminish the European ambiance. The translator who ignores texture violates the old taboo against dividing content from form — the unity of “fondo y forma” — and emphasizes one aspect of a work, such as plot, to the detriment of all others.

The final discussion centers on the fiction of Cecilia Urbina and excerpts from her fourth novel, La
imaginación de Roger Donal” (“The Imagination of Roger Donal”). This novel has several voices. The first example I am going to use demonstrates two diametrically opposing voices. The novel switches between the voice in the romance novel that the protagonist is reading and the voice of the protagonist as in the following example:

“His eyes travel over her, assessing this intermittent gift. The spirals of metal touching his skin open furrows of excitement; he is drawn into the eroticism of the harem evoked by that ring, an heirloom from Schaharazad. Slowly, gently, the tip of her tongue covers each of his fingers. Searching for words to frame the moment, she crosses a geography of silence. Her voice finds whispers to portray her desire and fuse with it. As the voice descends in scale, it becomes weaker, turning into a hoarse moan, and leaving her body to finish the sentence.

Like a siren going off, a shrill alarm makes him jump and feel a void in the pit of his stomach; suddenly all the coordinates intersect. Looming before him is a gigantic figure — Adela [his wife]. The chain, the ring, the voice. The ring. Adela has that ring, doesn’t wear it often. The chain, her habit of always playing with it. Her voice. Sexy hoarse, he describes it. He sits straight up in his seat, breathing heavily, the book shaking in his hands. You are crazy. Come on, calm down. Look, it’s a novel, the stupid story of a man obsessed. The man obsessed, and you out of your mind. Since you began to read that lunatic, everything has been crazy.

I will conclude the discussion of applying theory to practice with the next example. To reiterate, the translator’s work is the inverse of the author’s: the author builds, whereas the translator dismantles and reconstructs using poetic devices and figures similar to the author’s. Rabassa’s statement that a translation’s quality depends on how close it approaches the original is valid, but the translated text cannot, of course, be identical. Often, translators produce faithful analogues by drawing on their creative-writing abilities to compensate for the inevitable loss of the originals’ semantic and cultural subtleties. I want to explore this idea by looking at the translation issues in a whimsical section of La imaginación de Roger Donal.

Voice is not the challenge in this passage. It is the play on words, the central word being “caso,” which has many possible uses in Spanish. “Caso” can also be spelled “cazo.” “Caso” is “case, circumstance, instance, affair, medical case, subject, in case, in the event of, at best, at worst,” and part of the idiom “to pay attention to;” “hacer caso,” ad infinitum. “Cazo” with a “z” is a ladle. The selection follows:

“Hacerle caso a Adela no es fácil, porque casi nunca define el caso en cuestión. Y no hacerle caso también, por lo mismo. Ultimamente trae problemas con los términos; las palabras adquieren una especie de solidez, como piedras o troncos con los que se tropezara a veces. Caso; no es el caso, como no es pertinente: hacer caso, como prestar atención a los consejos de alguien; es un caso difícil, no tiene caso, el caso es que caso acaba por convertirse en cazo, uno enorme de cobre lleno de letras que se desbordan.”

My analogous translation follows. The cazo with a z becomes a briefcase rather than a ladle, which is appropriate because a briefcase is prominent at another point in the novel:

“It isn’t easy to pay attention to Adela, because she almost never defines the case in question. And, for the same reason, it’s hard not to pay attention; she’s a hard case to ignore. Lately he has been having difficulty with terms; the words acquire a kind of solidity, like rocks or tree trunks that you occasionally run into. In any case, it’s not a case to worry about; it’s not pertinent to the other case; though difficult, it’s not of importance as a case, the case is that… The case turns out to be a briefcase, an enormous leather one, with letters of the alphabet spilling out of it.”
Although this essay’s scope is limited, I have written elsewhere about the translation process.\(^{10}\) I have suggested what is for me a viable approach regarding translations’ legitimacy and the necessity of translators’ respect for the author. These ideas are contrary to the publishing world’s bottom-line mentality. It is not only utopian from the standpoint of success, but also from the standpoint of invested time. However, there remain diligent literary translators whose priority is to bring readers and authors together rather than to exploit authors’ work for other purposes.

Notes


7. Jacque Canales, *Eyes of Water (El niño de los ojos de agua)*, Elizabeth Gamble Miller, translator, Juan Ruiz de Torres, editor, colección Altazor de Poesía, Asociación Prometeo de Poesía, 1996. This bilingual edition of homage at her death includes poems by other poets, one of them “Sandalias lentas,” by Nela Rio. The translation of "Sandalias lentas" is in manuscript.


Further information is available on the web registry of the Association of Canadian Hispanists.

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NOTES TOWARD A HISTORY OF LITERARY TRANSLATION IN BRAZIL

By Paulo Rónai
Tr. Tom Moore

One who someday comes to write the history of literary translation in Brazil will note a phenomenon similar to that of the urbanization of the country. In the great European cities, there was a slow and progressive architectural evolution, which allowed the formation of central neighborhoods with aesthetic qualities and stamped each city with its own unmistakable character. The evolution of our Brazilian metropolises was feverish and excessively quick. Neighborhoods with a provincial aspect, unpaved streets, without drains, found their little houses replaced overnight with skyscrapers, without having passed through any intermediary stages. Elsewhere, buildings of four and five stories were demolished far before living out their normal span. Entire streets disappeared to make way for viaducts, tunnels, subterranean passageways. In the blink of an eye, we found that in the midst of these radical transformations, we had lost exactly that which in other times once justified the creation of a city: a safer and happier life among squares, tree-lined avenues, with newsstands, rambles for the flaneur, with space for living.

The publishing industry in Brazil is relatively recent. The first large publishers began to appear in the 1930s. Brazilian production was not very abundant, and various publishers included masterworks of world literature in their catalogs, in part through having noted that the language used in translations published in Portugal differed considerably from that used in Brazil, in part because there were no royalties to be paid on works in the public domain. A process thus began that in cultured countries had already come to a close: the incorporation and naturalization of the great works of fiction, especially those of the nineteenth century. This was the brief golden age of Brazilian translation. (In talking of gold, we are referring to the quality of the translations, not their remuneration, of course.) This was when publishers such as the Cia. Editora Nacional, Globo, José Olympio, Melhoramentos, Vecchi, Pongetti, and Difusão Européia do Livro launched collections of world-renowned works. The translators, though not very well paid, could take care with their translations, and many did so out of love for the art. This was when translations of Balzac, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Fielding, Maupassant, Manzoni, Flaubert, Proust, Tolstoy, Stendhal, and other appeared.

More than 20 years later, the growing influence of the media came to contribute to the growing abandonment of literary fiction for best-sellers, despite the fall in quality. After the first success in Brazil for an international hit (Gone With the Wind), the hunt for blockbusters began in earnest and has never stopped. The publishers try to guarantee a quick return on their investment, looking for works that will certainly sell out their press run, and to do so, they take advantage of international advertising, to strike while the iron is hot. It is crucial, then, that the work of the moment be published as soon as possible, and by any means necessary, including, in some cases, increasing the translator’s fee. The main victim is the book. You might say that for the majority of best sellers there is not a problem, since they do not deserve better treatment. Sometimes, however, there are among them items of real literary value, which, given the haste with which they are translated, are made useless for the Brazilian public. Even in the case of mediocre books, a correct version is to be desired, since the evolution of the vernacular is marked by the influence of both original works and translations.

And in the meantime, the publication of great works has come to a halt. Balzac’s Comédie Humaine and Dostoyevsky’s complete works were not reissued. And even sadder, a carefully prepared edition of the works of Dickens lies unpublished at Livraria José Olympio. Edições de Ouro, which for some time had republished in pocket editions the masterworks that other publishers had had translated, recently ended this project.

This means that at least these two factors push the translator to be hasty, here as elsewhere the enemy of perfection: the low remuneration, which forces him to
translate the maximum number of pages in a day, and the quick turnaround demanded by the client.

Not wanting to lay all the blame on the publishers, nor entirely exonerate the translators, we must recognize that translation done in a hurry cannot be good. An original work can sometimes be born in the white heat of inspiration, poured out in one stream, in a few weeks or days, and benefit from it; translation, however, is filigree work, and should not be done in a rush.

What should particularly be avoided is to do a translation directly from the text without having read it before: the translator who thinks that he will save time doing so is deceiving himself, since the reading allows him to get a perspective on the difficulties involved, and to do the necessary research as he sees fit. Once he has read the original in advance, marked the difficult vocabulary, understood the allusions, he will no longer have to interrupt his work and will be able to carry it out at a uniform tempo, being able to calculate the time required with reasonable precision.

It is not enough for the translator to attentively read the text he is to translate. He must verify its reliability, a task that simply does not occur to the publisher. I was working for Editora Globo when a translation of Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, which had been commissioned for the excellent *Biblioteca dos Séculos*, came to my attention. Luckily, I noticed in time that the translated text was one of the many adaptations for children and managed to prevent the translation from being set in type.

Another case, perhaps even worse, might have happened in the *Colecção dos Prêmios Nobel de Literatura*, which dedicates a volume to each prize-winner. This collection was modeled on a similar work published in French by a Parisian publisher, which provided to its Brazilian collaborator the illustrations that had been commissioned. In the case of Sienkiewicz, as there was no translator capable of translating directly from the Polish, the obvious choice was to have the famous *Quo Vadis?* translated from the French. And I would have delivered the text in question to a translator if the slimness of the volume had not made me suspect that something was amiss. A comparison with another edition confirmed that the original had been mutilated almost unimaginably, with cuts made not only in every chapter but on each page and every sentence. Seeing that the complete novel would require two volumes, when the collection had reserved only one for Sienkiewicz, I resolved the problem by replacing the novel with a collection of short stories by the author.

This case leads me to examine two problems in literary translation: the first, making use of an intermediary language which the translator does not know the language in which the original is written, and the second, adaptation.

Intermediary translation is a necessary evil, without which masterworks created in languages that are exotic or spoken by peoples that are small in numbers could never be disseminated. For a century, the monumental works of Russian literature were only able to come to the attention of the West thanks to translators who were almost exclusively French, whose translations were then translated into other languages. The great Hindu epics, the Chinese classics, the *Thousand and One Nights*, the *Tale of Genji*, Scandinavian literature … all of this was transmitted in second-hand translations. The disadvantages of the process are immediately obvious; and yet these are acceptable if the alternative is a complete ignorance of such important creations of the human imagination.

The quality of the indirect translation is logically dependent on that of the intermediary text. For this reason, the validity of the latter has to be most carefully established. However, even an intermediary text of real value can give rise to awkward or unreadable retranslations when the translator is not able to identify and counterbalance distortions resulting from the intrinsic nature of the intermediary text.

French, the preferred intermediary for world literature for centuries, is, paradoxically, a language that is one of the least appropriate for the task. Incapable of imitating the turns of phrase in other languages, without the possibility of constructing new words, and alien, in general, to neologism, with limited resources in derivation, it is a filter that is unable to transmit many characteristics of the original text. In his preface to his translation of *Hamlet*, André Gide complains of the intransigence of this language of strict grammatical and syntactical demands, clear, precise, and prosaic, “if not anti-poetic.”

I have spoken elsewhere about the problems produced by translating an Italian text through French.
Among the deformations caused by the interference of a third language are many monstrosities of spelling in the transcription of foreign names, especially Russian ones, where the majority of translators do not follow any rules, but simply carry over French or English practice.

Many other effects of this hybridization could be demonstrated. An interesting topic for study in courses on translation would be to examine how many English works arrived in Brazilian via Paris in the 19th century.4

In view of the dangers posed by indirect translation, would it not be preferable, in the case of originals in languages inaccessible to the translator, to make a “four-handed” translation? That is: in order to translate a Japanese story, one would ask a native of Japan, residing in Brazil, to translate it, orally or in writing, even though in a rudimentary way, into Portuguese, and then one would produce a carefully edited version, with artistic pretensions of the raw material.

In spite of having received extraordinary benefits from this method, to which I owe almost all that I now know of Portuguese, it seems to me that it can only be used in very exceptional cases, when the person invited to do the embryonic translation has a clear linguistic interest and some esthetic sensibility. If this is not the case, he tends to consider the limits of his knowledge of the target language as limitations of the target language itself, and without wanting to, impoverishes the original such that not even the most artistic collaborator would be capable of finding the riches lost along the way.

This being the case, one will prefer the use of an intermediary translation rendered by a professional capable of grasping the characteristics of the original and respecting them. I don’t need to say that the translator must then have a deep knowledge of the intermediary language in order to be able to perceive what it, by virtue of its own rules, has added to the text, and must take all possible precautions.

The famous translation of Fausto by Castilho confirms what we have said here. Though without a knowledge of German, he created an artistically valid work, much better than many translations done directly from the original, making use of an interlinear translation by Eduardo Laemmert, of another by his brother José Feliciano de Castilho, of the previous translation into Portuguese by Ornellas, and of four translations into French. “It seems irrelevant to me,” affirms the translator with some justification, “to ask whether the translator knows the language of his original or not; what is important, indeed, most important, is whether he expressed the ideas and affects of the author well in his own language, that is, with command of the vernacular, with clarity, felicitously, and as elegantly as possible.”

It is appropriate here to note a curious phenomenon that will not escape those who some day may come to write the history of literary translation in Brazil. This is the fact that frequently, less-than-scrupulous professionals have chosen as an intermediary language not French, nor even English, but Portuguese. Invited by a publisher to translate a classic novel, it is common for them to search in libraries or antiquarian bookshops for a translation done in Portugal. And so the task is made considerably easier: all one needs is to change the placement of the pronouns, avoid Lusitanian practice in spelling, replace some Portuguese habits of syntax with Brazilian ones, and a half-dozen Portuguese words with their Brazilian equivalents. God knows how many such translations there have been. Paradoxically, the plagiarizing translator admits that his predecessor did excellent work, and thus goes ahead with his pillage without concern, and at the same time gives the impression that this work is unworthy of respect, since he fails to give the name of the previous translator. And thus volumes appear in which on the title page, beneath the name of the author, one simply reads: “Translation revised by So and So.” It happens, however, that even in Portugal there have been ignorant or hurried translators, who in the haste imposed by a deadline or by poverty, have simply chosen to leave out those passages with an above-average level of difficulty.

A comparison of the Brazilian and Portuguese translations of many classic works would give us a sense of the superiority of the former, as they are better adapted to our linguistic habits; but a comparison of both with the original will make evident the theft, though for now such theft goes unpunished, since until now a translator has no rights in his translation.

We saw, in the case of Quo Vadis?, the abuse committed by the translator who mutilates, cuts, and disfigures the original. One would think that there would be a penalty for such a crime, since the rights
of the author are generally recognized; but in the case of works that have entered the public domain there is no applicable sanction. Many times the alteration is done in the name of the supposed demands of the target language; details judged useless are eliminated, paragraphs are shortened, sometimes entire chapters suppressed, to the point of altering the dénouement, and often even the deeper meaning of the work. One hopes that this practice, entirely to be condemned, will gradually disappear with the development of the translator’s sense of professionalism: in demanding respect for his own work and the recognition of his rights, he will have to become the defender of the rights of the author.

Often these arbitrary changes are disguised through being self-indulgently labeled as adaptation. One cannot affirm *a priori* that all adaptations are to be condemned. There are genres in which this is more admissible than in others. It can be more easily defended in works for the theater than in fiction. At any rate, the cover of a book that is an adaptation should identify this fact unequivocally, as is done with theatrical posters.

Where adaptation has a special role is in literature for adolescents. For a long time, condensations have been made for young people of such important and serious books as *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Don Quixote*. But at the moment, there seems to be an excess of these works in the market. Sometimes we see works originally written for young people being abbreviated, where the adaptation was unnecessary; sometimes more tragic, adult works (such as those of Kafka) are weakened and domesticated, and the adaptation is an absurdity. In both cases, the publishers have an eye toward simplifying the works for readers with small vocabularies and minimal culture. And if they don’t, how can they compete with the crushing competition from comic books and television? And the works thus adapted no longer belong to the author and come to belong to the adapter, often a writer of merit, and who seeks thus to add to his meager income. Perhaps when the translator’s rights to his work are acknowledged we will see the plethora of adaptations of dubious merit decrease.

In general, it is to be preferred that the translator consider himself the proxy of the author, rather than his collaborator. Opinions differ as to the extent of his collaboration. All will agree that he can and should correct the typographical errors of the original, mistaken words and confused names. But, according to Valery Larbaud, he should go no further than this: “One who calls himself a translator calls himself a servant of the truth: the text to be translated may seem specious to us, filled with errors in judgment or wrong ideas, but inasmuch as it is a text to be translated, a verbal edifice that has a precise meaning, it is truth, and deforming it or mutilating it is offending against the truth.”

One must be extremely cautious, even in the case of the most obvious corrections. Robert W. Corrigan recalls that various characters in Chekov’s plays misquote passages from Shakespeare. Translators with the best of intentions, in translating these dramas into English, charitably restore the correct quotations — a mistake on their parts, since the mistakes were intentional. Does this mean that a good translation cannot be better than the original? Elsa Gress will allow exceptions. Softening the tone of a pretentious text, or adding a touch of irony to another text that would be insufferably serious if faithfully translated into Danish — a language, it seems, that is muffled, hushed, full of understatement and irony — would simply be to obey the unwritten laws of the language and thus to serve the original.

Elsewhere, I will speak of a recent trend that favors poetic translation that is almost entirely free and might better be called adaptation or imitation. Ezra Pound is an exemplar of this approach. Here, I will limit myself to discussing alterations undertaken for non-aesthetic reasons, as for example that of Richard Francis Burton, one of the translators of the *Lusiads*. He does not hesitate to insert into the poem an entire strophe of his own devising, in order to vent his displeasure on a polemic on the sources of the Nile, which he claimed to have found!

In the history of adaptations for the theater, the case of Brecht is noteworthy because he adapted a large number of works and presented them under his own name. But when he learned that a theater company was to make an alteration in his text, Brecht was the first to squeal, to invoke the sacred rights of the author, and to threaten those responsible with protests.

What is to be done when the text, which is insufficiently clear for readers from another country, demands explanations? One can make use of footnotes, either at the foot of the page or at the end of
the volume. At present, such notes are discouraged in works of fiction, where, it is often said, they break the illusion and prevent the reader from identifying with the work. For this reason, some recommend that the translator find a way to incorporate these in the text without overloading it.

However, they seem desirable even in classic works that are distant from us in time, place, and spirit; I found them indispensable in the Brazilian edition of Balzac’s Comédie Humaine. At any rate, one must distinguish between the notes by the translator and those of the author, by following them with the appropriate abbreviations.

In works of a nonliterary nature, footnotes do not arouse resistance. It is important, however, that they be explanatory. In my work as an editorial assistant, I have already come across a translator who allows himself to argue with the author, or to openly contradict him. This sort of collaboration recalls the well-known fable of La Fontaine in which the Bear, in order to swat a fly that has landed on the nose of his friend the Man, mashes both with a paving stone.9

The famous adage “To err is human” is abundantly and picturesquely exemplified in the work of translation. Because of haste, distraction, poor knowledge of one language or the other, lack of culture, absence of good sense, lack of imagination, the translator lives to make mistakes, and his mistakes are pointed out with irony and sarcasm. Many publishers, having been burned in the past, have made use of a system of copy-editing, especially in the case of technical translations. As a general practice, it is desirable that every translation be seen by someone who reads it as an autonomous work and experiences its impact before it goes to be typeset. But, on the other hand, and above all in literary translations of artistic value, such modifications must not be made without the permission of the translator himself. There have been cases in which the collaboration of a professional editor introduced mistakes, pedanticisms, and absurd alterations in works of high quality. An excellent Italian translator of Hemingway complains that the editor eliminated all the repetitions (i.e., he said, she said) so characteristic of the author. In the Brazilian translation of Les Liaisons Dangereuses of Laclos, by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, an exemplary work, the copy editor improperly punctuated all the à’s in the addresses of the letters that make up the novel.

Until it is shown to be otherwise, the translator who signs his work is a responsible professional, and his work is already beginning to be protected by law. The standard contract, which the Brazilian Association of Translators (Associação Brasileira de Tradutores) is working to make mandatory, will contain a clause prohibiting this type of revision.

Notes

1The Balzac was republished and is currently available; the Dostoyevsky is not. (Translator’s note).
2Various professionals at the International Colloquium on Translation (Nice, May 1972) were of the same opinion. They underlined a difficulty inherent in French, “an excessively precise language, but particularly inabalavel, the vocabulary of which is not very open to flexibility, invention, neologism. More literary than most languages, it avoids the natural vernacular diction, oscillates between jargon and precisioity, and gives a very poor idea of verbal play to be found in the majority of other languages. The birth of Franglais clearly demonstrates the almost total incapacity of our language to reproduce the practical (and even theoretical) notions that a civilization in a state of accelerated evolution produces every day. (Babel: Revue International de la Traduction, no. 4, 1972).
3Escola de Tradutores, cap. “As Traduções Indiretas.”
4In this respect, the thesis by Onêdia Célia de Carvalho Barbosa, Byron no Brasil, Traduções, São Paulo: Editora Ática, deserves special mention.
9The topic of translators’ notes is examined in an illuminating manner in the article by Agenor Soares dos Santos, “Problemas da Tradução,” Abrates: Boletim da Associação Brasileira dos Tradutores, no. 1, 1979.
Minor Angels  
BY ANTOINE VOLODINE  
Translated and with a preface by Jordan Stump

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BY MARIE NDIAVE  
Translated by Tamsin Black

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Translated by Alberto Hernández-Chirolides and Lauren Yoder  
Introduction by Isabel Castellanos

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BY ANA MARÍA MOIX  
Translated by Sandra Kingery

Through the long hours of one sleepless night, twenty-year-old Julia sorts through the story of her life so far.

Woman to Woman  
BY MARGUERITE DURAS AND XAVIERE GAUTHIER  
Translated and with an afterword by Katharine A. Jensen

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GARY SNYDER’S SEVENTEEN T’ANG POEMS: AN ANTI-CLIMAX AFTER HIS “COLD MOUNTAIN POEMS”?

By Ling Chung

Gary Snyder has published two clusters of renderings from classical Chinese poetry — one while in his twenties, the other in his sixties. The “Cold Mountain Poems” were published in the Evergreen Review in 1956, and his renderings of seventeen T’ang poems were published in The Gary Snyder Reader in 1999. The reception of these two renderings varied greatly: the “Cold Mountain Poems” became a phenomenon because they were immensely popular among the Beats as well as the Hippies and have been canonized as classics of English translation from Chinese literature, whereas his seventeen T’ang poems have aroused neither general public nor critical attention. Interestingly, both groups of renderings are based on Snyder’s homework in Professor Shih-hsiang Chen’s seminar course on T’ang and Sung poetry from 1953 to 1955, when he was enrolled in the Oriental Language Department as a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. In Susan Kalter’s article “The Path to Endless: Gary Snyder in the Mid-1990s,” the impact of the “Cold Mountain Poems” on Snyder’s own poetry is discussed in detail, whereas his seventeen T’ang Poems are not even mentioned. Why have these two renderings been received so differently by the public and the critics? How valid do the seventeen T’ang poems seem as poetry and translation?

The popularity of the “Cold Mountain Poems” in the 1950s and 1960s in the United States owes much to their timeliness and to the publicity of Jack Kerouac’s The Dharma Bums.1 The carefree loner’s lifestyle and the Zen philosophy of Han-shan (Cold Mountain), an enigmatic T’ang poet who probably lived in the 7th century, coincidentally met the spiritual need and the imagination of the Beats, the Flower Children, and the Hippies. In addition, in his autobiographical fiction, The Dharma Bums, Jack Kerouac describes in detail how Japhy Rider (an assumed name of Gary Snyder) translates the Cold Mountain poems and how both Cold Mountain and Snyder became gurus of the younger generations in the late 1950s and the 1960s. Since then, the “Cold Mountain Poems” have been selected in several important anthologies of classical Chinese literature in translation.2 Thus, Han-shan is canonized in the United States and enjoys the fame of a major poet, a status he did not attain in China during the course of a millennium. Snyder revised the 17 T’ang poems almost 30 years after their drafts were written. Therefore, they should bear the mellowness of time, for Snyder’s poetic skill is finer, his understanding of Asian cultures more profound, and his grasp of Chinese poetic forms and English poetic language more thorough. However, there is no large audience awaiting them as there was for the “Cold Mountain Poems.” Furthermore, the 17 T’ang poems were written by 11 different poets, so the renderings lack the focus of a single author, whereas Cold Mountain, a crazy and wise Buddhist and Taoist demi-god, is such an attractive and legendary figure. When Snyder published the “Cold Mountain Poems” in 1956, it was the first time Cold Mountain had been translated into English. On the other hand, these 17 T’ang poems, written by Tu Fu, Po Chü-I, and Wang Wei, have been translated into English over and over through the 20th century. Therefore, their diverse reception was foreseeable.

Many critical responses to the “Cold Mountain Poems” focus on their linguistic and artistic achievements. Critics such as Herbert Fackler, Jacob Lee, and Bartlett Lee compare Snyder’s renderings with those by Burton Watson and/or Arthur Waley. As far as artistic superiority goes, Snyder’s 17 T’ang poems have their merit and uniqueness, too. Compared with the “Cold Mountain Poems,” they exhibit more thoroughly some modes of classical Chinese poetry, including the omission of subject, article, and verb, the imitation of some syntactical traits of the Chinese original, such as the word order and the repeated words tieh tzú, the caesura, and the use of punctuation and typographical space. Apparently, Snyder is again experimenting with English poetic language. The most obvious Chinese poetic modes in these 17 renderings are the word
order and caesura, the frequency of which is simply too high to be ignored. The mode of word order could be illustrated by Snyder’s translation of two lines in the “Autumn Evening” (The Gary Snyder Reader 541) (“Ch’iu hsi,” Chüan T’ang Shih 524, chüan 6602) by Tu Mu (803–852). A verbatim translation of these two lines is provided here:

\[
\begin{align*}
t’ien & \text{ chieh } \text{ yeh sê } \text{ liang ju } \text{ shuei} \\
\text{Heaven staircase night color cool like water}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
ts u & \text{ k’an } \text{ ch’ien } \text{ niu } \text{ chih } \text{ nü } \text{ hsing} \\
\text{Sit watch Herd Boy Weaving Maid stars}
\end{align*}
\]

Here is Snyder’s rendering (The Gary Snyder Reader 541):

On the stairs of heaven night’s color  
Cool as water;  
She sits watching the Herd-boy,  
the Weaving-girl, stars.

Other than the phrase “the stairs of heaven,” which is arranged according to English grammar, these four lines follow exactly the word order of the Chinese original. For example, yeh sê (night color) is rendered as “night’s color,” which is different from the English usage of “the color of night”; the original phrase yeh sê actually connotes “evening scene.” Therefore, Snyder’s “night’s color” is a distortion as well as an etymological restoration. Another imitation of the Chinese word order is the phrase “the Herd-boy, / the Weaving-girl, stars.” Here the word “stars” is placed at the end of the poem like the original and functions as an apposition. This word order stores a surprise for an English reader, for not until reading the very last word, “stars,” would she realize that she is visualizing two stars (Aquila and Vega) in the sky instead of two persons, the Herd-boy and the Weaving-girl. The rendering of the last line can be extolled as both ingenious and faithful.

In Snyder’s “Long Bitter Song,” there are lines that follow exactly the word order of the original. For example, Shu-chiang-shuei-pi-shu-shan-ch’ing is rendered verbatim by Snyder into “Shu river waters blue / Shu mountains green” (The Gary Snyder Reader 551). These two lines totally subvert English grammatical rules: the verb to be, preposition, and punctuation are all omitted, for the English sentence should read something like: “The river waters in Shu are blue / [while] the mountains in Shu are green.” Fortunately, Snyder did not render the entire poem this way; otherwise it would be a disaster. Another such line is hsi-tien-ying-fei-szu-ch t’ao-jan, which Snyder quite faithfully reproduced in its word order: “Evening, palace, glow-worm flight / his thoughts were soundless” (The Gary Snyder Reader 552). The only deviation in meaning is the rendering of the compound hsi-tien (literally “dusk palace hall”), which envisions a palace hall in the evening twilight; Snyder’s “evening” becomes a general time word, not exclusively attached to the image of the palace hall. However, even though Snyder’s rendering of these two lines closely follows the Chinese word order, they are grammatically sound because “Evening, palace, glow-worm flight” can be seen as dangling words. I think these two examples evidence Snyder’s attempt to experiment with how far he can stretch the English poetic language by employing Chinese syntactic modes. The latter case is a success, for “his thoughts are soundless” is an ingenious metaphor, a synesthesia, not spelled out in the original, and, together with this metaphor, the imagery of “Evening, palace, glow-worm flight” can generate a mysterious ambience and a sense of solitude that can be a foreground for the emperor’s mental state.

In these 17 renderings, Snyder overtly adopts the caesura scheme of Chinese classical poetry. In the preface to his “Long Bitter Song,” he explains this scheme: “This poem is in the seven-character line, which gives it (in Chinese) the sort of rhythm: tum tum / tum tum: tum tum tum. I have tried to keep to this beat as far as possible in my translation” (The Gary Snyder Reader 547). Snyder is quite right — this scheme in Chinese classical poetry, with four characters in front of the caesura and three characters after it (or two characters in front and three after if it is a five-character verse), actually divides the line into two metrical parts as well as two semantic units. He mainly employs two formal devices in English to denote the caesura: the first is a lineation, and the second is an additional typographical space. In “Long Bitter Song,” Snyder employs the lineation scheme throughout the poem to denote the 4/3 character caesura in the Chinese original. A juxtaposition of four lines from Snyder’s “Long Bitter Song” and a verbatim translation of their Chinese original will
show how closely Snyder follows the Chinese caesura scheme.

**Snyder’s translation:**

The Yang family had a girl
just come grown;
Reared deep in the inner-apartments,
men didn’t know of her.

*The Gary Snyder Reader 549*

**Verbatim translation:**

Yang chia yu nü // ch’u chang ch’êng
Yang family has daughter // just grow up
yang tsai shên kuei // jên wei shih
rear in deep women’s quarter // people not get know

In other renderings, Snyder shows the caesura with an additional typographical space. For example, “Ch’un wang” (Chiian T’ang Shih 224, chüan 2402) by Tu Fu (712–770) is a five-character poem in which the caesura is situated right after the second character; in “Spring View” (The Gary Snyder Reader 542), Snyder employs the scheme of typographical space, following the pattern of “two characters // three characters” by placing an additional typographical space between the two units.

**Verbatim translation:**

kuo p’o // shan ho tsai
nation broken // mountain river remain
ch'êng ch’un // ts’a mu shên
city spring // grass woods deep

**Snyder’s translation:**

This nation is ruined, but mountains and rivers remain.
This spring the city is deep in weeds and brush.

While one is reading Snyder’s translation, the breaking of the line or the additional typographical space will prolong the pause and as a result create a strong sense of rhythm. As free verse has been the major English poetic form since the beginning of twentieth century, many English and American poets also attempted experiments, notably e. e. cummings and William Carlos Williams, among others, but there has never been one who adopts the Chinese metrical patterns so thoroughly as Snyder does.

When Snyder translated the “Cold Mountain Poems,” he already retained the Chinese linguistic / poetic mode of repeated words. These 17 renderings of T’ang poetry also make such an attempt, but with more moderation. In the following couplet of “Long Bitter Song,” Snyder presents the repeated words ch’ih ch’ih (literally “slow slow”) while changing kêng kêng (literally “bright bright”).

**Verbatim translation:**

ch’ih ch’ih chung ku ch’u yeh ch’ang
slow slow bell drum beginning night
long
kêng kêng ksing ho yu shu t’ien
bright bright star river about breakingday

**Snyder’s translation:**

Slow, slow, the night bell begins the long night,
Glimmering, fading, the Milky Way, and day about to dawn. *(The Gary 532)*

If Snyder reproduces the repeated-words pattern while translating kêng kêng — the phrase “glimmering, glimmering” being juxtaposed with “glow, glow” in the same syntactical position — the English couplet would sound rigid and awkward. Here, Snyder replaces one “glimmering” with “fading”; this alteration adds to the dynamism and logicality of the imagery, for at dawn the stars in the Milky Way always blink and fade. From this example, we learn that Snyder sometimes refrains from going too far in his experiments, and the effect of dynamism and the logicality of English poetic language often act as censor in his mind.

In these 17 T’ang poems, Snyder, following the Chinese syntax, often omits the subject, verb, and article. However, he already adopted these Chinese grammatical modes in the “Cold Mountain Poems” and in his own poetry. What is worth noticing is one among the seventeen poems that presents an ingenious usage of punctuation and typographical space: the quatrain “River Snow”(Snyder, *The Gary 543*) (“Chiang-hsüeh”) (Chiian T’ang Shih 352, chüan 3948) by Liu Tsung-Yüan (773–819). Snyder’s rendering of the last two lines reads:

A single boat — coat — hat — an old man!
Alone fishing chill river snow.
Here, the word order accords well with that in the original; in addition, Snyder so deftly employs punctuation and space that the visual effect is stunning. The three consecutive dashes transform the “boat,” the “coat,” the “hat” and the “old man” into four frames of imagery that appear one after another in the reader’s vision. After the reader visualizes the boat, then the coat, the hat, and eventually the image of the old man, the exclamation mark would bring a surprise to him: indeed, it is an old fisherman! In the second line, between every two words, there are three typographical spaces, which can draw the reader’s attention to every single word. Snyder says, “The placement of the line on the page, the horizontal white spaces and vertical white spaces are all scoring for how it is to be read and how it is to be timed” (The Real Work 31). This spacing device would slow down the reading speed considerably; the reader’s focus will be placed on each word, creating a mood of isolation. This is the only line to which Snyder applies such a spacing device; the aim is obvious: while the grand, panoramic landscape is depicted by the two images in the first two lines, “these thousand peaks” and “all the trails,” the “old man” line focuses one’s vision on a single spot in the vastness. As a result, the spacing device could strengthen the sense of desolation and the idea of the relative insignificance of humans.

In these translations, Snyder adheres more to the formalistic aspects of classical Chinese poetry, whereas the “Cold Mountain Poems” pay less attention to the rules and thus read more fluently. Snyder’s deviation in the second of the “Cold Mountain Poems” is renowned: “Go tell families with silverware and cars / ‘What’s the use of all that noise and money’?” The couplet should be rendered: “go tell the family with bells and caldrons in its dining hall / ‘What is the use of vain fame?’” Snyder’s contemporized version has become a showcase of translation. There also appears to be a drastic departure from the rules in the T’ang translations, although it is controversial: his interpretation of a word in the “Deer Camp” written by Wang Wei (699–759) (Snyder, The Gary Snyder Reader 539). The last two lines of the original quatrain “Lu ch’ai” (Chüan T’ang Shih 128, chüan 1300) should read:

```
fan ching    fu  sên  lin
return  shadow  enter deep woods
```

Jerome Ch’én and Michael Bullock’s translation is by and large accurate: “At an angle the sun’s rays / enter the depths of the wood, / and shine / upon the green moss” (Minford 704). Shang is a preposition, and thus the phrase ch’ing-t’ai-shang should be rendered as “on the green moss.” However, Snyder renders the word shang as an adjective “above” to modify the “moss”:

```
Returning sunlight
enters the dark woods;
Again shining
On green moss, above. (The Gary 539)
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Some sinologists told me that this misreading is unthinkable. However, there must be a reason for Snyder’s deviation, because he certainly knows shang is a preposition. When I visited him on July 18, 2001, at Kikiditizze, his homestead in northern California, I found the answer. As I brought up this issue, we were walking in the wild wood that surrounded his Ring of Bone Zendo. He recited the two lines in “Deer Camp” that he had rendered and then pointed to the high tree trunks of pines and oaks nearby, saying, “You see that sunlight shining on green moss above?” Indeed, there were reddish-brown mosses high above on the trunks, some as high as four meters. He said, “After it rains in the fall, it gets green again” (Snyder, Videocassette). Thus, Snyder interpolates his life experience in the wild into these two lines written by Wan Wei, a poet who lived 1,200 years ago in his mountain hermitage in China. Snyder also revises the title of this poem in the same vein. The original title “Lu ch’ai” literally means an humble fenced residence that deer frequent—a reclusе’s home in the mountains. Ch’ai, “firewood,” a euphemism for modesty, could be translated into “thatch” or “hut”; Ch’én and Bullock’s “enclosure” (Minford 704) can connote the fence image. Byner’s title, “Deer-park Hermitage” (189), is quite accurate. But Snyder’s “Deer Camp” is clearly an interpolation of his own experience, because camping is his favorite activity; he was already camping alone in the deep, wild wood near his home in Washington State when he was only nine (Snyder,
The Real Work 93). On the other hand, Wang Wei lived in a well-built country estate.

Snyder often alters or even purposely distorts the original. He says, “I must take full responsibility, however, for idiosyncratic aspects of the translation — cause of both stripped-down literalism, and occasional free flights” (The Gary Snyder Reader 548). But in fact, his “free flights” are by no means “occasional,” and there are sufficient reasons, such as strengthening his imagery, behind most of his “free flights.” A drastic revision appears in the ninth of the “Cold Mountain Poems:” “Whip, whip — the wind slaps my face / whirled and tumbled — snow piles on my back.” A more faithful rendering of these lines should read: “The light, cool wind blows my face. / The snow descends thickly, covering my body.” The distortion must be due to Snyder’s own experience full of hardship working as a lookout on an icy peak of Crater Mountain, California, in 1953; “Snyder has substituted Han Shan’s tranquil and composed mind with a mental state of antagonism between man and nature which he must have derived from his own life experience in the mountains” (Chung 102). Other deviations in these T’ang poems are driven by Zen meditation and Freudian theory. Snyder makes the changes when he renders “Ch’un hsiao” (Chüan T’ang Shih 160, chüan 1667) by Mêng Hao-jan (699–740). For comparison, Witter Bynner’s rather accurate rendering is cited here:

I awake light-hearted this morning of spring,  
Everywhere round me the singing of birds —  
But now I remember the night, the storm,  
And I wonder how many blossoms were broken.  
(108)

Snyder’s rendering reads like a totally different poem:

Spring sleep, not yet awake to dawn,  
I am full of birdsongs.  
Throughout the night the sounds of wind and rain  
Who knows what flowers fell.  
(The Gary Snyder Reader 538)

The persona in the Chinese original must have wakened already, because he could hear “the singing of birds,” whereas Snyder’s persona is still asleep. In the original, the birds’ singing is an objective reality, whereas in Snyder’s, it becomes a subjective one — the birdsongs are internalized and become part of the persona’s subconscious. Here, the clause “I am full of birdsongs” shows evidence that Western practices of psychology and psychoanalysis have found their way into the translation of a Chinese poem. Furthermore, it seems that Zen meditation and the discourse of koan also affected Snyder’s rendering. The most obvious evidence is the last line of “Spring Dawn:” “who knows what flowers fell.” In the Chinese original, hua-luo-chih-tuo-shao (How many flowers have fallen?), the persona questions the quantity of fallen flowers; but, in Snyder’s rendering, the persona wonders about the kinds of flowers that appear in his dream. Furthermore, the persona does not even know his own identity. Here is a quest for identity, and the question is posed in the discourse of Zen koan. The persona is not yet awake but asks questions of someone who searches for enlightenment. Since around 1950, Snyder has studied Zen diligently. By 1993, he had studied and practiced it for more than forty years; it is no wonder that Zen discourse would emerge in his rendering.

In his rendering of Po Chü-i’s famous “Long Bitter Song” — a romance between Emperor Xuan-zong (685–762) and imperial concubine Yang Kuei-fei (719–756), Snyder considerably changes the image of Yang and the emperor’s life story. The distortion could be due to Snyder’s conviction that it is necessary to conform to and to compromise with Western readers’ views of the Oriental. Po Chü-i portrays Yang Kuei-fei as a captivating beauty — lively, artistic, as well as sexy, languorous, and physically buxom. During the last millennium, Yang Kuei-fei became a stereotype of buxom beauty, and the imperial consort Chao Fei-yen (circa 1st century BCE) in the Han Dynasty represented the ideal of slim beauty. In the “Long Bitter Song,” Snyder unexpectedly transforms Yang Kuei-fei into the body type of Chao Fei-yen. He portrays Yang Kuei-fei as a small, elegant lady by reading her “beauty by birth” (li chih) as “elegance,” her “jade-like face reveals loneliness” (yü-jung chi-mo) as “Her jade-like figure small and alone,” and her “congealed lard-like skin” (ning-chih) as “her cold, glowing skin.” Thus, Yang Kuei-fei becomes smaller, more elegant, and cooler in temperament. Furthermore, Snyder remodels her personality to be introverted, reticent, and temperate. According to the legend, Yang, after her death, becomes a fairy in the Mountain of Immortals; when
she asks the Taoist, an envoy from the Emperor Hsüan Tsung, to bring back her message, “her eyes, with much love, fixed, and she expresses her gratitude to the Emperor” (han-ch’ing-ning-t’I-hsieh-chün-wang). The original depicts her sincerity and attentiveness, but Snyder remodels her into a composed woman who by nature can fully control herself: “Restraining her feelings, cooling her look, / she told him to thank the Emperor” (The Gary Snyder Reader 554). Snyder purposely remodels her into someone small and delicate in appearance, elegant and temperate in personality. It is likely that the distortion is for the purpose of conforming to the Western perception of Oriental beauty. We can find plentiful examples of such Oriental beauty in twentieth-century Hollywood cinema. The film “Sayonara” (1957) tells how a delicate, small Japanese girl falls in love with a tall, handsome, white American officer. “The World of Suzie Wong” (1960) depicts how a Hong Kong prostitute falls fervently in love with a tall American writer, and the heroine played by Nancy Kwan is a Chinese American who is only five feet tall. Both heroines are lovely, small and delicate, and vowed profound love to their white lovers. This stereotypical image of the Oriental girl fabricated by Hollywood suggests the psychology of a conqueror — the psychology of a colonist. It seems that Snyder, though a fervent student of Oriental cultures, cannot steer clear of Orientalism.

Snyder also alters the story of Emperor Hsüan Tsung’s life during the An-lu Shan Rebellion (A.D. 755). In Po Chü-i’s original, when the Emperor fled from the capital Ch’ang-An, he was escorted by a large army, and thus the line should read, “A thousand chariots and ten thousand horsemen march southwest” (ch’ien-ch’êng-wan-ch’I-hsi-nan-hsing); in Snyder’s revision, the army becomes all disbanded: “Thousand of chariots, ten thousand horsemen / scattered southwest —” (The Gary Snyder Reader 550). In Po Chü-i’s original, when the Emperor reaches his haven, the Szechwan region, and passes through the mountains, there are very few other travelers on the road: “There are very few people walks on the paths under O-mei Mountains” (O-mei-shan-hsia-shao-jên-hsing). But Snyder changes the story drastically, so that when the emperor arrives at the region, only very few escorts remain by his side: “Under Omei Shan / the last few came” (The Gary 551). His distortion seems to emphasize the plight of the Emperor. Could this distortion of the Emperor’s lot be due to Snyder’s knowledge of European history? European monarchs, if defeated by a rebellious army, often end rather pathetically, sometimes driven out of their palaces without escorts — Louis XVI was beheaded, as was Mary Queen of Scots; Napoleon died alone on the Island of St. Helena. Snyder’s revision of the emperor’s fate is either a misinterpretation or a distortion to meet the Western imagination. In Snyder’s “Long Bitter Song,” the distorted image of Yang Kuei-fei and the changed story of the emperor’s life are likely imprints of Orientalism.

Snyder’s T’ang poems are published in The Gary Snyder Reader, a thick volume of more than 600 pages. Their appearance was not as highly anticipated as “The Cold Mountain Poems,” which were published in the Evergreen journal before appearing as Riprap and the Cold Mountain Poems (1999). However, there are other reasons for their relatively low visibility. They did not echo any contemporary literary or countercultural movement, nor do they have the focus of a single author. Also, their language is more formal and less dynamic because of Snyder’s strict adherence to the metric and linguistic modes of classical Chinese poetry. However, as a superb poet and master of English language, Snyder’s renderings of the 17 T’ang poems are fascinating, especially when they yield such images as this line in the “Long Bitter Song” describing the beauty of Yang Kuei-fei: “Hair like a flooding cloud, flower face, / ripple of gold when she walked.” The phrase “ripple of gold” distorts the original ch’in-pu-yao (gold / walk / wavering), which is a kind of hairpin made of gold with dangles that swing as one walks. Snyder’s revised poetic imagery, “ripple of gold,” denotes not the hairpin but Yang’s mien. How radiant, light, and swaying is she, walking toward you!
Notes


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PASSING THROUGH LANGUAGE(S): TRANSLATING A POEM BY EDITH BRUCK

By Philip Balma

Born on May 3, 1932, in Hungary (Tiszabércel), author Edith Bruck has experienced a significant amount of success in the Italian literary world. A victim of the Holocaust, she survived the concentration camps and was forced to bounce around from country to country after the war, in search of work, stability, and a place to call home; a space of her own. In 1954 she moved to Rome and has been living there ever since. In an endnote to her first book, the autobiographical text Chi ti ama così, she informed her audience that she had begun writing the story of her family’s misfortunes during World War II back in 1945 in Hungary, in her native language. When she eventually escaped to Czechoslovakia, she lost her manuscript, and then started it again many times. Only during her first few years in Italy did she find an environment that allowed her to complete it, in a language not her own. Since then, she has published several novels, two collections of short stories, and three books of poetry. Although she has never published anything that she wrote in Hungarian herself, her work been translated into many languages (Dutch, German, Swedish, and one book in English). In fact, she even allowed someone else to translate a selection of her poetry (from the volume Tatuaggio) into her own mother tongue. Italian has become her principal creative language, and Italy her adoptive country. Such a shift has afforded her some form of distance from the terrible experiences she discussed in her writing, effectively enabling her to discuss the unspeakable.

One unique aspect of Edith Bruck’s poetry is that it reflects the culture and experiences of a Hungarian-born Jewish author who chooses to publish in Italian. Her first volume of poetry, titled Tatuaggio, was published by Guanda (Parma, Italy) in 1975. The majority of her works have not yet been translated into English. This study is meant, in part, to explore the inherent difficulties in submitting her writing to another linguistic filter and to begin the process of making her poetry available to an English-speaking audience. In the poem “Solo solo solo,” the text travels from a poor Hungarian village to the comfort of a small apartment (presumably in Rome), while implying the sense of physical, geographical instability caused by the persecution and forced deportation of Jews by the Nazi regime. The process of translation inevitably alters some features of the poem, bringing out others that the original Italian cannot produce. It allows for another small step in the literary journey of a novelist and poet who crosses national, political, religious, and linguistic borders with only her words.

From: Tatuaggio. Parma: Guanda, 1975. (65)

Solo solo solo Only only only

Tutto quello che ho ho All that I have
tutto quello che ho voluto the all that I have wanted
è qui: is here:
una stanzetta a small room
le lenzuola gialle the yellow sheets
un colore a color
come un altro like any other
non la stella not the star
da cucire sul cappotto to sew on my coat.
L’immagine del passato The image of the past
è ricca d’itinerari is rich with itineraries
e porta alla scoperta and leads one to discover
che la vita è vita that life is life
anche da soli even alone
e del pane ci sarà and there will be some bread
in un mondo in a world
dove ora hai un posto where you now have a place
senza tradire te stessa without betraying yourself
con atti vendicativi with vindictive acts
che feriscono that cause injuries
come un boomerang. like a boomerang.

One of the many aspects of the Italian language that is difficult to render in English is the notion of gender implied in the spelling of nouns, adjectives, and past participles. The poem in question is an apparently simple text that lends itself to a discussion
of the linguistic intricacies of Italian and the inherent complexity of transferring them into another language (65). The title of this work by Edith Bruck poses a particular problem because it could be interpreted as the repetition of either an adjective (alone or lonely) or an adverb (only). The text appears to support either choice, depending on which elements one chooses to focus on. The first seven lines address the simple wishes of the speaker, who would be content to have only “a small room / the yellow sheets.” The poem drastically changes tone when the sheets are associated with the yellow star of David worn by Jews in Europe during the second world war. This notion introduces the underlying theme of this piece: the solitary and uncertain condition of a Holocaust survivor in modern society; a person whose unique experiences clearly distinguish and separate her from most of humanity. In the introduction to this volume of poetry, Giovanni Raboni discusses two distinct voices that come to life within its pages, the second one belonging to a woman who has been left alone (vii). Nevertheless, the title should not be translated as “Alone alone alone” or “Lonely lonely lonely,” because the Italian adjective solo can only be understood as masculine and singular, and such an interpretation cannot be reconciled with the (first person) female voice adopted by the author. In fact, almost all indications of gender in the titles of the poems from the collection Tatuaggio are feminine and singular: “Paralitica,” “Non sono la bambina,” “Perché sarei sopravvissuta?” and “Sto rannicchiata” (83–84). The English language is unfortunately ill-equipped to properly express the distinctions of gender and number embedded in many common Italian idioms.

In the final portion of the poem, the speaker addresses herself directly, switching from first to second person: “where you now have a place / without betraying yourself” (17–18). The word “yourself” unfortunately cannot imply gender the way the original text “te stessa” does, nor is it possible to do so without adding to or modifying the intended meaning (18). The adjective “alone” (line 14) is a translation of the Italian “da soli,” which could appear to be a mistake, as it is both masculine and plural. However, this expression is used in a general and impersonal fashion, not dissimilar to the English saying “on your own.”

Upon completing a rough draft of this translation of “Solo solo solo,” I was faced with the fact that I had not been able to transfer any textual evidence of the speaker as a woman. In truth, I don’t expect I will ever find a way to convey this notion effectively without compromising the integrity of the translation. The fulfillment of the desire for “a small room / the yellow sheets” is the only concrete piece of information the poem offers before a series of reflections on the past and the future. The only other choice I made in hopes of clarifying the femininity of the speaker was perhaps too subtle to achieve its purpose. The words “da cucire sul cappotto,” which refer to the yellow star, indicate the fact that one was to wear this symbol on his or her coat (9). The verb “cucire” means “to sew,” but the expression “da cucire” could reasonably be translated in two ways: 1) to be sewn and 2) to sew.

By opting for the second, more active form of the verb, I wanted to call into question the notion of who would have done the actual sewing of these symbols. I felt it safe to assume that, in the average Jewish household in the 1940s, most if not all of the sewing was done by women, who would traditionally have been more likely to acquire (and pass on) such a skill. To describe the star as something “to be sewn” might have conveyed the sense of forced urgency associated with this act, but it would have done nothing to help the reader ascertain the sex of the voice that dominates the poem. Proponents of a literal approach to translation might object to the words “sul cappotto” being rendered with a possessive adjective (“on my coat”), but a word-for-word version of the original text does not make for an accurate translation in this case. Standard modern Italian allows one to imply the notion of possession when discussing personal items and body parts. This tendency is exemplified in such statements as “mi sono rotto il braccio” (I have broken my arm) or “ti metti la giacca” (you put on your jacket). A literal translation would make use of the definite article in this case (“il braccio” as “the arm” / “la giacca” as “the jacket”), producing an ineffective line of poetry: “to sew on the coat.”

In order to stay true to the original text, I tried to adhere to the original meter whenever possible. This was only feasible in five cases, lines 3, 11, 12, and 21:
è qui is here (3)
é ricca d’itinerari is rich with itineraries (11)
e porta alla scoperta and leads one to discover (12)
che feriscono that cause injuries (20)
come un boomerang like a boomerang (21)

The choice to stray from a literal rendition of line 12 (“and leads to the discovery”) was dictated by a conscious desire to avoid associating the terms “itineraries” and “discovery” through assonance, since Bruck’s poem clearly links the noun “scoperta” with “vita,” the Italian word for “life” (13).

The use of italics in line 15 was intended to emphasize the positive nature of the guarantee that “there will be some bread.” The structure of the Italian phrase “del pane ci sarà” carries an implied meaning that cannot be communicated in English by simply rearranging the logical order of the clause. Normally, one would say “ci sarà del pane” (literally, “there will be some bread”), unless the statement was designed as a rebuttal or confirmation of a fact. The connotation hidden within the text is that the speaker had previously doubted or denied the availability of bread, a generic symbol for food and nourishment. In English, one would commonly stress this availability verbally (there WILL be some bread), but for the purpose of transferring this emphasis onto the page a visual cue was essential.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of any translation is the inevitable alteration of the features or the original text. The poem in question is no exception, as it loses certain phonetic and orthographical features while gaining others. In terms of assonance, the first two lines (Tutto quello che ho / tutto quello che ho voluto) lost the repetition of the O and U vowel sounds in favor of the vowel A (All that I have / all that I have wanted). Lines 5, 6, and 7 have maintained the repeated use of the vowel O with minimal variation, but the same cannot be said for the insistence on the vowel A shown in lines 12, 13, and 14 of the original (e porta alla scoperta / che la vita è vita / anche da soli). In terms of consonance, the repetition of the T sound in lines 12 and 13 has been lost, as well as the marked recurrence of the consonant C in the three final lines of the poem (con atti vendicativi / che feriscono / come un boomerang). In turn, three other lines (17, 18, and 19) are now associated through alliteration (where you now have a place / without betraying yourself / with vindictive acts). The unexpected result of this alliteration is that the final couplet of the poem is now phonically detached from the preceding tercet. On a textual level, one could say that the consequences of the “vindictive acts” mentioned in the poem are now standing alone, emphasized because of the new linguistic shell they inhabit. In conclusion, it is important to remember that many poetic texts do not allow for a single, perfect translation but rather lend themselves to many different interpretations based on the understanding of the individual translator. The text analyzed here is merely one of many possible renditions of the poem “Solo solo solo,” one that aims primarily to stay true to the originally intended meaning.
Index on Censorship
New to Routledge for 2005

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Saint Glinglin is the yearly festival of Home Town in a world that is composed solely of Home Town, the countryside, and Foreign Town. (Home Town and Foreign Town are Sallis’ translations for Ville Natale and Ville Étrangère, which could easily have been translated as Native Town and Foreign Town, to point up their resonance with langue natale and langue étrangère.) In normal French usage, of course, Saint Glinglin’s Day stands for something that will never take place; à la saint glinglin means never. In this contradictory, reduced world, Home Town is governed by the Mayor, whose children the novel focuses on, each in turn. It never rains at all in Home Town, because they have a cloud-chaser, which brings the inhabitants perpetual good weather.

The novel is divided stylistically: some sections are narrated by the mayor’s son Pierre in diary-like prose and some in a disturbingly naïve stream-of-consciousness by the Mayor’s daughter, Hélène. A section that focuses on their brother Jean is written in near-biblical verse, and others, which deal with their other brother, Paul, and the other inhabitants of the home town, are written in a comparatively standard third-person narrative, though they are still filled with Queneau’s characteristic serious examination of the world cloaked in hilarity and word-play.

Queneau writes in his introduction that for symbolic reasons, he excluded the letter “x,” except in final position, from every word in the book except the last, replacing it sometimes with punning, sometimes with phonological, spellings. The readership for this, as for most of Queneau’s novels, has been changing recently. For a long time, he was regarded either as frivolous and unworthy of scholarly attention or as a writer for writers, of interest only to literary geeks and masochists. Fortunately, this oxymoronic criticism has begun to break down, and the accessibility and depth of his writing is being acknowledged, to the point that some of his novels are now being taught in high schools in France. As for his purpose, Queneau always seems to be writing something that affords him great amusement, and at the same time working out philosophical, psychological, historical, linguistic, and mathematical ways of understanding the world.

In the excerpt analyzed here, Pierre, who has been given a grant to study in Foreign Town for a year, talks about the incomprehensible life of insects and aquatic life forms. James Sallis is aware of the extraliterary preoccupations of Queneau’s novel, and his translation takes them into account. His introduction, for example, discusses the way Pierre’s forays into aquatic philosophy mimic Hegel. Sallis also attempts to retain Queneau’s humor and linguistic playfulness. He has excised the letter “x” from the translated novel, which, as in the original, serves purposes both deeply serious and ludic.

Sallis writes that his aim as a translator is “not so much to translate as to re-create the book in a second language” (Sallis xiii). His translation of Saint Glinglin was published by an academic press, and its readership is probably primarily literature students, which is not so very different from its French readership. Sallis reviews science fiction and fantasy and writes poetry, essays, and crime novels, of which the latter are themselves being translated into French. The scope of his works is similar to Queneau’s in that it spans rarefied academic literature and quasi-popular fiction, and his translation has been marketed as both. One cover for Saint Glinglin’s American version features a stark but comical black and white drawing of a fish and the announcement that it is a translation, complete with translator’s name — that’s for the scholarly; another is a lurid pink and blue illustration of the naked torso of a girl floating above an ocean at sunrise, with a crown and necklace of fish, tiny braids flowing in the wind, and enormous roses hovering improbably in the air, suggesting and concealing the portions of her anatomy that convention and publishers say require such treatment — that’s for the readers of fiction. Sallis adheres closely to Queneau’s sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling, while attempting to “re-create” his puns and other wordplay.

The excision of the letter “x” from Saint Glinglin is a simple but curious example of the sort of metalinguistic operation that, according to linguist
Roman Jakobson, allows existing vocabulary in one language to be revised and redefined and transposed into another. In writing “âcresistence” (33), “aiguesistence” (11), and “eggzistence” (13) instead of existence, Queneau comments on his language, as well as the nature of life. As Jakobson notes, “A faculty of speaking a given language implies a faculty of talking about this language.” (234) By creating words deprived of the letter “x” in an analogous way in his own language, Sallis continues the dialogue.

But where Queneau, temporarily abandoning his program of “x” purging, writes plain, standard “excellence,” “existence,” and “inexplicable” (30), Sallis has chosen “eccellent,” “eksistence,” and “ineksplicable,” adding to them “eggzample” (15). Queneau was a meticulous writer, and it is exceedingly unlikely that he would have forgotten to remove the letter “x” from this passage, though he insists in the introduction that he has replaced the letter “partout” (Queneau 8). The passage comes after one in which Pierre declares he has made no progress in two days, ends with a shock of discovery, and precedes one in which Pierre details, once again without the letter “x,” the ideas that have vertiginously occupied his brain. Perhaps the reinstatement of the “x” symbolizes a standstill here, a blockage of ideas. If so, Sallis has missed an important element of the novel’s meaning by continuing to do what Queneau’s introduction seems to instruct him to do. He has failed, temporally and at one level of meaning, to perform the essential task of translation according to Jakobson: to transmit an equivalent message in a different code (233). Perversely, he has done this not by failing to overcome deficiencies in the target language but by adhering to the author’s stated strategy rather than the actual details of his work.

By omitting or smoothing over a discrepancy found in the original, Sallis exaggerates the fluency of the text, reinforcing his own transparency. At the same time, what he omits is normal vocabulary; what he inserts wars with customary usage. He thus disallows an opportunity for “confrontation with the alien nature of a foreign text” (Venuti 190) by obscuring the original’s contradictions but continues to allow it by eccentric word choice.

The question of fluency in Saint Glinglin is problematic. From the title onward, Queneau’s language is consciously, playfully idiolectic. Lawrence Venuti argues that fluency as a translation strategy reflects commitment to consumability and belief in individualism, or what he calls the transcendency of the individual. But he also argues that moments “when the language skips a beat” are when the translator and her work become apparent to the target-language audience (202). In Saint Glinglin, however, the moments when Queneau’s language skips a beat are the moments when the influence of Queneau’s personality and scholarship are most evident. In this case, fluency would bury the author, while resistance makes him more evident as a personality. The translator in either case is left transparent. On the other hand, when Sallis closely follows the French syntax, the result suggests academic, perhaps philosophical, writing (Sallis notes in his introduction that this passage can be construed as Hegelian). Many such academic or philosophical texts were translated some time ago into a vernacular that is no longer vernacular and just barely foreign, in Venuti’s sense of the term.

When one compares, in fact, the oyster and the snail, one oceanic, the other terrestrial, well, the latter’s an animal lacking any mystery, its bearing by no means incomprehensible (Sallis 15).

Retaining so completely the original structure does not mean retaining the original meaning; as Venuti observed, the act of translation involves the creation of a new social context for the source message, by which it is inevitably transformed. Que l’on compare, en effet, l’huître et l’escargot, l’un océanique et l’autre terrestre, eh bien, ce dernier n’est pas un animal tellement mystérieux ni d’un aspect tellement incompréhensible (Queneau 31).

Queneau’s version does not carry quite the same syntactic heaviness that Sallis’ does. Sallis transforms the message from an educated, possibly neurotic speech that is on a strange topic, but whose flow is more ordinary than not, into a speech whose quirkiness applies not only to its topic but also to its structure. The grammatical clunkiness of Sallis’ “in fact” and “well” indicate a more pedantic speaker than does the original. I have tried to capture more of the everyday flavor of Paul’s idiolect in my translation:
Indeed, if you compare the oyster and the snail, the one oceanic and the other terrestrial, well then, the latter isn’t such a mysterious animal, nor does it look so very incomprehensible.

Haroldo and Augusto de Campos would approve of Raymond Queneau. His writing in many ways corresponds to their ideal of a translator. This translator would view poetry as a technical craft and approach it unemotionally. He would create neologisms, stretch the boundaries of his language by transposing foreign elements into it, and eschew dated ways of writing, choosing instead to find a style that belongs to his own time (Milton 126–128). Queneau uses most of these strategies in his own writing, frequently bending standard written French to admit idioms, grammar, and spellings that normally belong exclusively to spoken language, naturalizing German and English words and expressions, and above all constructing his novels and poems according to complex mathematical, psychological, and scholarly schemas.

Translating Queneau, then, poses a special challenge. When all these strategies are present in the original, any rendering of it into another language must take them into account, either enfolding them in another layer of similar strategies, translating them as smoothly as possible without obliterating them, or just conceivably ironing them out as if they had never been. Sallis seems to have chosen the second way, though he does translate into modern, informal American in which academic language is not called for: “this sticky little mess whose collective stupidity clings to piers and boardwalks” is eminently colloquial without being slangy.

Sallis translates Queneau with an impeccable delicacy. He sticks as close to each sentence as the American language will bear: “[j]e reviens à l’insecte” becomes “I return to the insect,” “[e]lles meurent même, bien atrocement!” “[t]hey even die — horribly!” (Queneau 30, 31; Sallis 15). His prose is fluid and clear. But as erudite and careful as his translation is, and despite his obvious understanding of Saint Glinglin’s inner workings, Queneau has not translated the original’s vibrancy.

Whereas the oyster…a kind of catarrh, the rude nature of its disinterest in the eksternal [extérieur] world, its absolute isolation, its malady: the pearl…if I give it much thought at all, my terror starts up again. (Sallis 15)

“Catarrh” is a lovely word to have used, but it doesn’t produce the visceral reaction that “crachat” does. Perhaps this is a function of a knowledge gap; perhaps there is a large proportion of the reading public that experiences a tiny shudder when they read the word catarrh, but I am not among them. Why not use “gobbet”? It easily turns the gray quivering of oyster flesh to a stomach-turning dome of spat-out phlegm, the double image that Queneau constructs with “crachat.”

The plight of the poor oyster suffering from “its malady: the pearl…” seems flat and uninteresting. But “cette maladie: la perle…” has drama. It makes the reader sit up and take notice: the pearl it is! “That disease: the pearl” isn’t much better. I do not know what strategy would have helped to produce a similar sense of excitement in the American text. “Playfulness” is woefully inadequate as a practical instruction to translators, and deliberately foreignizing the text as Venuti or the Campos brothers would do, while bringing the fact of translative transformation to the surface of the text, might or might not inject liveliness into the tone of the prose. Jakobson contends that “all cognitive experience … is conveyable in any existing language,” but that poetic art is fundamentally untranslatable because of its reliance on phonemic and paronomasian features (234, 238). I don’t want to agree with him, but when I read translations of Queneau, they don’t engage me the way the originals do, and translations of his work that I attempted to create fell equally flat. Queneau is (usually) highly exciting in French, and his books are (usually) rather arid in English. In order to convey most of Queneau’s meaning, and such carefully constructed books surely deserve this, the translator must strive to create a text that is very close to the original on the sentential level, and this is what Sallis has done. But in these texts, the tonal spark that made me want to share Queneau with anglophone friends in the first place has gone missing. Through what avenue did it escape? How can one reconstitute the sound of an individual authorial tone of voice in another language, when every language has its own tonal qualities built into its structure and vocabulary?

Having accused Sallis (and Queneau’s other translators) of the equivalent of failing to perfectly
imitate a particular performance by a particular actor of Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* while standing in the middle of a stage currently being used for a performance of a Nōh drama, I must acknowledge that his translation is in fact pleasantly readable and multi-faceted. For Jakobson, translation and original are two equivalent messages in two different codes, and Sallis has achieved this equivalence handily.

Roman Jakobson would have no trouble agreeing that a lively, humorous, layered book by a major contributor to letters is worth re-presenting in another code. Queneau in the original influenced James Sallis to the point that he aspires to emulate his literary life (Sallis xii). If Sallis’ translation were to inspire a few more writers to step back from realism, dull modernity, and shrilly political fiction to try out some more playful ways of transforming the world they inhabit into the worlds they create, it would be a literary success. But as far as I can tell, almost no one reads Queneau in English. I’m still and always looking for the translation or translator that can make him beloved of the anglophone world.

**Works Cited**


Contemporary translation studies reflect a growing recognition of, and interest in, those elements of literary translation that fall beyond the bounds of fluency and transparency, once esteemed as hallmarks of acceptability. As Susan Bassnett, well-known writer on translation and culture, points out: "Just as postmodernist literary theory subverted the tyranny of authorial intention by celebrating a notion of plural reading, so Translation Studies rejected the dominance of the original and sought instead to explore translation as a creative act of interpretation." Whereas formerly, the success or value of a translation could then be measured only reductively, by figuratively weighing the translation against the original and accounting for what had been "lost"; as if a perfectly rendered translation paired against its original might strike an exact balance on a scale of linguistic equivalence, implicit to this understanding of the field is the concurrent exploration of cultural and literary, as well as linguistic, criteria. Susie Jie Young Kim, translator of Asian poetry, equally rejects this traditional "discourse of equivalence" in terms of both its mechanistic view of the translation process and its perception that translation is inherently reductive. These writers express a postmodernist critical perspective that translation may in fact be expansive, a creative and interpretive act in itself. As Kim exhorts in her reproach of assumed linguistic equivalence, the expectation is absurd that a translator might be able to "suppress all the experiences she would normally bring to a text so as to be a sterile medium through which this mechanical process can take place.” Arguably, such sterility would be no less artistic in the work of a translator than in that of the author, given the developing critical stance that in many ways, literary translation parallels the writing process itself. Literary translator Peter Bush notes: “Translation is a continuation of what Jean Genet called the adventure of writing as opposed to the familiar and prosaic bus journey, and it cannot but include subjective, imaginative transformation.”

One obvious difference between writing and translating, however, is that rather than striking out across virgin territory, the translator must follow a path forged by the author. Nevertheless, as is the case in any journey, the nuances of the experience may differ even among companion travelers. In discussing the obligations and contributions of the translator, Bush asserts: [translation] is a subjective process, but hardly a runaway or irresponsible one, because it is driven by a desire — its raison d’être — to initiate a form of communication between the forceful voice of the original, and an unknown potential readership that simply lacks the language in which that original is written. Personal resonances, aroused by the words of the original text, remain embedded in the process of translation and largely hidden in the finished — translated — work. (11)

The processes of translating Rut, la que huyó de la Biblia, maintaining and recreating the voices of the Spanish-speaking characters presented the greatest source of creative satisfaction in bringing this novel to an English-speaking audience. Literary translator David Constantine articulates the nature of this interpretive and artistic process beautifully as he reflects on the relationship between translator and text:

… “dialogue” is not an adequate word for the dealings that go on between you and the text in any translation. Every word in the passing over comes with a penumbra or, better, a whispering, of associations, and every word from your own tongue is similarly laden, or much more so. There is a most peculiar interdealing of times, languages and places. You are where you are, a text on your left, a white sheet of paper on your right, a pen in your hand to effect the transfer, acutely and precisely you are there. And yet you are not there, you are elsewhere, in another human being’s foreign language, questioning him, answering him with your own. (15)
It is in this connotatively rich dialogue with the characters of *Rut, la que huyó de la Biblia*, that the English translation seeks to express the message of the author.

This fifth novel by Cuban author Josefina Leyva, laden with striking metaphor and haunting lyricism, is an exquisite tapestry woven of multiple narrative voices, perceptions of and reactions to oppression. The reader is introduced to Ruth by means of an interior monologue voiced by Amelia, a neighbor who sees through the image projected by the protagonist, yet whose apparent intimacy with her leads to more questions than answers.

Ruth, you who fled from the Bible. Walking so briskly to the cemetery, like you do each and every day of your eccentric life. It’s your unfailing routine. You pass silently beneath my balcony. Your skin is as white and radiant as a votive, as if you’ve stolen a candle from church and bathed yourself in its wax. Your eyes are as black as death itself. I’ve had to look carefully to see how beautiful you are. Those thin, tight lips that look as if someone had cleaved them to your face with a kiss. Why so secretive, Ruth? Why this black mystery surrounding your life? It casts a pall over your soul, just like your mourning garb, complete with long sleeves and high collars. You are as stark as an old Spanish house. As barren as a stone castle. Ruth, so stunning, so self-possessed, so full of yourself.

Amelia’s assessment of her neighbor is piercing. The monotony of Ruth’s routine, the starkness of her beauty and the unmistakable solitude of her existence are punctuated with vocabulary charged alternately with religious and violent associations. References to piety are quickly eclipsed by impressions of deceit and latent sexuality. The underlying ambiguity of Ruth’s relationships with others is likewise presented in terms echoing physical conflict and internal uncertainty.

You’re as rigid as a lance when you walk. Ruth, so arrogant. Ruth, as provocative as a whisper. I wonder if you’ve ever made love, if you’ve ever slept with a man, if you’ve ever slept with anyone. And if anyone has ever melted the ice in your veins. Who could sway you, garner a caress from you, undress you for your pleasure and his own? Ruth, you, with a black dress covering your alabaster body. You’re not thirty-five. Another of your brazen lies. You’re toying with forty, like a nun with her rosary. And now, that man you say is your uncle is coming out to the balcony to watch as you disappear into the distance. He keeps tabs on you. He’s secretive, too. Him, with his chivalric airs, wearing that suit, spent by the poverty that curses the bowels of this country. A player. He used to risk his life playing Russian roulette just to thrill you with the terror of death. Then he would hold you on his knees and shoot you between the eyes with a kiss. Ah, Ruth, you’re the mysterious one! And that man you say is your uncle, he’s surrounded by your same aura; his lips are pressed tight like yours, he shares your silence. You say he’s capable of risking his last breath on a card, a bet, a duel. When there’s nothing left to bet, he’ll gamble his body, his soul, himself. He’d bet his very existence on the wheel of fortune. Is he really your uncle? Could he be your lover? Could he be your uncle and your lover? You hate him and admire him, that man you live with, alone in your suffocating house. You, Ruth, who lulls me to sleep and shares my insomnia. You, a survivor of the world before, the world destroyed by the Great Protector and his cocky revolution.

Amelia also introduces Pablo here, the mysterious uncle inexorably linked to Ruth — dictator of her past and future and casting a shadow of oppression over her life, as does the Great Protector over the unidentified island on which the story takes place. This first monologue presents the fundamental tensions of the novel: Ruth’s loneliness and inability to relinquish a lifestyle lost to a tyrannical political regime, an obsessive bond with her dead mother, the ambiguity of her relationship her uncle, and a latent sexuality that is the source of both her fragility and her power.

Additionally, Amelia’s voice sets the tone for the reader’s developing sense of Ruth as a profoundly complex character. However, the omniscient narrative voice relates a vision of Ruth in which the strength and self-possession so evident in Amelia’s monologue is but the thinnest of veils behind which she hides. Offered a ride on a horse-drawn cart, Ruth replies:
“Actually,” in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible, “I’m not going very far.” She says this both to hide the lack of money with which she would pay the exorbitant fee demanded by such wagon-drivers, and out of fear that some old friend might see her aboard such a pre-historic conveyance. The latter, in her mind, would signal the forfeiture of her well-attended extrinsic elegance. (Dougherty 3)

It is in this third-person voice that are expressed the internal conflicts and ambiguities of which the characters themselves seem unaware. As in reality, the voices heard in internal monologues or dialogues between characters present but single threads in the weft and weave of the narrative fabric. The principal tensions of the narrative diverge from the ill-fated relationship between Ruth and Pepe, a successful black marketeer. Their trials parallel in miniature, as do the stories of the secondary characters, frustrated attempts to cope with the endless monotony of daily existence in the oppressive society of the Great Protector, grasping at hopes represented by life as it exists in the North.

This ambivalent struggle between hope and resignation characterizes Ruth and Pepe’s first meeting. Having saved her from an accident in the street and then accompanied her during her ritual visit to the cemetery, Pepe’s presence shakes Ruth’s feigned self-reliance. “Ruth recedes behind the barriers of her most intimate defenses, like a warrior who in spite of himself retreats from combat. He accompanies her, he protects her, and without wanting it to, the relief of knowing herself to be cared for soothes her, like a bandage applied to a wound” (Dougherty 53). Sheltered by the optimism and success of this working-class suitor, Ruth undergoes a remarkable transformation that astounds her neighbors.

The expression on Ruth’s face, never losing its aristocratic air, has sweetened thanks to a certain underlying benevolence, born perhaps of the satisfaction that has completed her being. … In sum, watching her pass before them with her head held high and her proud aristocratic carriage, the neighbors discover, much to their surprise, something they never would have guessed: Ruth is an exquisitely beautiful woman. (Dougherty 78)

The body of the novel explores Ruth’s life, past and present, uncovering ambiguous, compelling, and at times disturbing glimpses of her psychological defenses against the multiple oppressors that haunt her existence, until finally the narrative circle is closed as Amelia once again watches her set out for the cemetery.

The remainder of this article will discuss how the structural and thematic elements of Leyva’s novel are reiterated linguistically throughout, and choices made, at first unconsciously, then with greater intentionality, during the translation process to sustain the lyricism of the original prose.

At its most functional level, the myth of linguistic equivalence, although enticing to novice learners of a second language, is routinely disproved in translation through transference, transposition, modulation, insertion/omission, compensation, synonymy, and functional or descriptive equivalency, techniques vital to the rendering of a text that sounds as if it was originally written in the target language. Given the inherent lyricism of Leyva’s prose, maintaining and recreating the sound, the rhythm, and the musicality of the text was a fundamental goal. Therefore, the myriad choices made and techniques employed in rendering an English version of this work were guided by this principle of authentic voice and resonance.

The following examples will perhaps lend insight into the process, sometimes conscious and other times less so, of echoing the multiple voices of this rich narrative. Among the standard techniques employed, there are multiple examples of transference, the appropriation of a non-target language word, in this case Spanish, in my English translation of Ruth. The names of the characters, the intersection of Principal and Apóstoles streets in Havana, the titles of don and doña are obvious examples of linguistic elements that, while technically translatable, are better left alone. Correspondingly, some words and phrases benefit from the use of a functional or descriptive equivalent rather than a literal translation. Religious exclamations, frequent in Spanish dialogue, can sound stilted, or even blasphemous, in English if not finessed a bit. “¡Ay, Dios mío! ¡Virgen María!” (Leyva 156), rather than “Oh my God! Virgin Mary!”, became “God help me! Jesus, Mary and Joseph!” (Dougherty 140), thereby expressing the context of the exclamation while reflecting differences in the way
English speakers phrase exhortations for divine intercession.

On many occasions, the rendering of the original requires more than finesse, it requires a change in perspective. Modulation refers to a reverse substitution such as “Be quiet” rather than “Don’t speak,” or the substitution of a concrete for an abstract term and vice versa. In a description of the neighbor Amelia’s changing facial expressions, Leyva writes: “Esas dos expresiones se persiguen y se derrotan sucesivamente, como las fichas de un juego de damas expuestas sobre un tablero desplegado junto a la esquina de un rincón muy íntimo” (Leyva 26). The ladies’ game becomes bridge in the English translation to retain a level of sophistication lacking in the North American conceptualization of checkers, and the successive changes of expression are expressed with jargon from the game, to discard. Thus, the image is rendered: “These two expressions overlap each other successively, as if discarded by ladies playing bridge at a table tucked into a private corner” (Dougherty 9).

A second description of Amelia incorporates the adjective “engalanada” (Leyva 32), for which no good English equivalent exists, and then describes her hairstyle as “con el largo cabello recogido hacia lo alto de la cabeza” (Leyva 32), which can simply be expressed more directly through English idiomatic expressions. In this case, synonymy is seen working in both directions as the passage becomes: “Amelia appears, dressed to the nines … her long hair in an up-do” (Dougherty 15).

Frequently, the poetic license taken during translation is purely syntactic. Transposition refers to the manipulation of syntax rather than vocabulary to ensure realistic utterances in the target language. Common examples in the translation of *Ruth* include the suppression of relative pronouns used in Spanish but omitted in spoken English, as well as the placement of prepositions. In each case, however, the degree of manipulation varies according to the voice of the character speaking. Whereas Pepe, an unpretentious man from the working class, would undoubtedly speak in English allowing his prepositions to dangle at the end of sentences or questions, Ruth would not.

Last in this series of common translation techniques is compensation. In the case of *Ruth*, most examples are cultural rather than linguistic. One occurrence is found in a passage referring to Christmas gift-giving traditions that vary between Hispanic and North American cultures. Referring to Pepe’s happiness, Ruth compares him to a child at Christmas: “¡Qué contento estaba Pepe! Así nos poníamos de chiquitos a esperar a los Reyes Magos” (Leyva 157). Although North American children eagerly await Santa Claus on Christmas Eve, the cultural authenticity of the original comparison could be maintained by simply highlighting the parallel between the Wise Kings and Santa Claus as gift-bearers. “Pepe was so happy! Like when we used to wait for the Three Wise Men to bring us gifts at Christmas when we were little” (Dougherty 141).

In addition to employing these standard techniques in the translation of the novel, I found myself extending with increasing intentionalidad Leyva’s recurrent metaphors for oppression and isolation, typically expressed throughout the work in military terms and through images of water and islands. One passage in particular, a description of Colonial Havana in which Ruth is overcome by the disrepair of the city’s former splendor under the current regime, plays on the water imagery of Leyva’s metaphors. Fantasies spill from grottos to reach into the swell of the city. Dilapidated balconies are shored-up, garbage overflows and Pepe is buoyed by privilege (Dougherty 79 - 80). Of the multiple ways in which each of these phrases could be expressed, the choice of water-referent vocabulary seemed most suitable and in keeping with the lyricism of the original language. In much the same way as David Constantine refers to Hölderlin’s assessment of lyric poetry as “a continuous metaphor of one feeling,” Leyva’s lyrical prose to me embodies in both structure and expression a feeling of isolation heightened by water-inspired vocabulary connoting insurmountable barriers and monotonous, wave-like repetition.

Ultimately, little has changed and nothing has been resolved at the conclusion of the novel. The illusion that Ruth might escape the oppression of the Great Protector and her own past is dashed by Pepe’s death. And she returns to her daily pilgrimage to the cemetery, as steady as the tide. The closing passage of the novel, again voiced by the neighbor Amelia, recalls the opening.

“Ruth, you who fled from the Bible. You walk as if you’re devastated. You’re walking toward the cemetery, to fulfill your unappealable ceremony before you’re too dead. There you go,"
stitching your silence over the street. You go covered in your skin as white as a church candle. It’s as if your skin announced death. As if death, because it’s in your eyes, is also in your destiny. And now, only I can tell that your face is beautiful. Pablo and I. The two of us. That face with lips as thin as a sword cleaved to your face with a kiss. Ruth, so secretive. With the black mystery of your life. With your soul, now doubly in mourning. Again, you look as severe as a Spanish house, like a stone wall. So beautiful and so self-possessed. So terribly full of yourself. Now I know that you’ve made love many times. That a man’s hands have cut through your icy aura. With your alabaster body under your black dress. You wear your pain like a nun wears her rosary. I don’t know if you’re innocent or guilty. I don’t believe you’re ever innocent. And there’s that man you say is your uncle, watching you go by, as if he gave you a deadline to have you again. As if only the mornings were yours, because he’s awaiting your return. That man that looks like the night. The player who’s always bet his life on a pistol shot or a card. I don’t know if he’s innocent either. He, who survives wrapped in your same aura, walking in your same silence. Always playing with life and death. Is he really your uncle? Is he your lover? Is he your uncle and your lover? That man you’ve loved and hated, feared and desired. Your god and your demon. I wonder if you’ll accompany me in my insomnia again. You, the survivor of another world. You, who has murdered life. You walk wrapped in your love of death. That’s all that’s left for you: your love of death. Your love of the things you possess. Your disdain for all that is human. Your attachment to a dead mother who, after all, who knows if she was your rival, and if you hated her and that’s why you sit with her every day at the cemetery in your loneliness. Now only you and he know that. Both of you tempting God with your enormous sins. You, Ruth, the one who fled the Bible.

Although hauntingly similar, this passage is not an exact replica of the first. On the surface it appears nearly untouched: repeated structure, equal tone, familiar words and comparisons. But much like a translation, at its core it is different. Not better, not worse. Just different. As if Amelia, given what she’s witnessed, is compelled to acknowledge her new perspective in the selection of elements included or omitted and attempt to compensate in some way for Ruth’s continuing ambiguity.

Notes

1Fluency is viewed as the coupling of vocabulary and grammar most appropriate to the communication at hand, leading in turn to Transparency, which allows the reader of a translated text to embrace the illusion that he or she is reading the original itself. (Venuti, Lawrence, The Translator’s Invisibility. London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
3Ibid.
Notes on Contributors

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