

Unsettling Translation

Studies in Honour of Theo Hermans

Edited by MONA BAKER



UNSETTLING TRANSLATION

This collection engages with translation and interpreting from a diverse but complementary range of perspectives, in dialogue with the seminal work of Theo Hermans. A foundational figure in the field, Hermans's scholarly engagement with translation spans several key areas, including history of translation, metaphor, norms, ethics, ideology, methodology, and the critical reconceptualization of the positioning of the translator and of translation itself as a social and hermeneutic practice. Those he has mentored or inspired through his lectures and pioneering publications over the years are now household names in the field, with many represented in this volume. They come together here both to critically re-examine translation as a social, political and conceptual site of negotiation and to celebrate his contributions to the field.

The volume opens with an extended introduction and personal tribute by the editor, which situates Hermans's work within the broader development of critical thinking about translation from the 1970s onward. This is followed by five parts, each addressing a theme that has been broadly taken up by Theo Hermans in his own work: translational epistemologies; historicizing translation; performing translation; centres and peripheries; and digital encounters.

This is important reading for translation scholars, researchers and advanced students on courses covering key trends and theories in translation studies, and those engaging with the history of the discipline.

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Edited by Mona Baker

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The rather smooth, unruffled picture of translation that I have just painted has an 'other' to it, a more unsettling but also a much more interesting and intriguing side. The smooth, unruffled picture may be part of the conventional perception and self-presentation of translation, but it papers over the cracks. I want to try and poke my finger into at least some of these cracks. And the reason for doing so lies in the recognition that translation, for all its presumed secondariness, derives its force from the fact that it is still our only answer to, and our only escape from, Babel.

*Theo Hermans, 'Translation's Other', Inaugural lecture,
University College London, 1996*



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1

ON THE FOLLY OF FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A journey with Theo Hermans

Mona Baker

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Like most people of my generation, I first came across Theo Hermans's work when I read *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, the widely celebrated and agenda-setting volume he edited in 1985. Routledge's reprint of the volume in 2014 seems to be based on a scan of the original, which was typed by his late wife Marion, probably on an electric typewriter, and probably on the kitchen table. Despite the publisher's apology on the copyright page for the 'imperfections' of the volume, the unpolished look and the rather antiquated typeface of the old-fashioned typewriter are part of its charm and history. They provide a feel for the era, something of the sense of excitement and adventure that the group represented in the volume must have felt as they set out to articulate a bold new vision – a new paradigm as Hermans refers to it in his introduction – for a discipline that was only just beginning to emerge. Although Hermans insisted in the introduction to the volume that "this group is not a school, but a geographically scattered collection of individuals with widely varying interests" (1985a:10), it quickly became known as the Manipulation School, a designation that stuck and continues to have much currency today. In revisiting and reassessing the theoretical legacy of this 'school' some fourteen years later, Hermans tells us that the designation was coined by Armin Paul Frank in 1987 and given wider currency by Mary Snell-Hornby in her account of the approach a year later "as one of the two main schools of thought in translation studies in Europe in the 1980s" (Hermans 1999b:8), the other being the so-called Leipzig School in Germany (Snell-Hornby 1988:14).

According to Hermans (1985a:14–15), the Manipulation group had been "meeting and publishing for close on a decade"; they had come together through "a series of symposia on literary translation" at the University of Louvain in 1976, the University of Tel Aviv in 1978, and the University of Antwerp in 1980. Being an outsider to the discipline and to the group myself at the time (in the early 1990s), and seeing this 'school' so idolized in the literature and at the conferences I was beginning to attend, I must admit that I wrongly took Hermans to be the cheer leader of an elite academic clan that dominated the field, that saw the world mostly through the privileged eyes of a jet-setting European, and that was only interested in literary translation – itself being the elite end of a discipline I envisioned

as much broader in scope. It wasn't long before I discovered that first impressions can be very misleading. In the years that followed, I came to realize that Hermans was one of the most fiercely independent, non-elitist, principled and culturally aware scholars in the field. Among other things, it was Hermans who pointed out as early as 1996 – long before Maria Tymoczko, Martha Cheung and others began to question the dominant Eurocentric conceptions of translation – that we inevitably translate concepts of translation that are radically different from ours in our own terms, “by making use of our own categories of translation” (1996b:46–47). And it was he who first exhorted scholars of translation to be wary of

a form of rashness that ignores its own ethnocentricity and translates all translation into ‘our’ translation, instead of patiently, repeatedly, laboriously negotiating the other’s terrain while trying to reconceptualize our own modes of representation and the commensurability of cultures.

Hermans (1997a:19)

In a two-volume collection he edited in 2006 that went beyond what he called “prevailing disciplinary hegemonies” to feature contributions on translation in Asia, Africa and the Middle East (a revolutionary intervention at the time), Hermans reminded us again that however intercultural translation studies aspired to be, “its disciplinary history poorly prepared it for radical difference, the particularity of the local, the sheer variety of phenomena coming within its purview” (2006:9). A cornerstone of his vision for the discipline has thus been to “create a vocabulary at once more imaginative and self-critical” than what was available in the field at the time (2003a:380), and to “interrogate translation studies as currently constituted in a language such as English” in order to make the Western academy “a province of a larger intellectual world, not its centre” (2009a:104). This was a vision I could identify with, and that inspired me and many others to follow his lead in conducting research that engaged with the world at large and required the analyst to reflect critically on their own position within it.

As I read more of Hermans’s work and interacted with him in a variety of contexts, it also became clear to me that far from being confined to what appeared to be his immediate areas of expertise (literary translation and European history), or to a particular theoretical school such as descriptivism or polysystem theory, his vision was much more ambitious, critical and wide ranging than that of any other scholar of his generation. In the years that followed the publication of *The Manipulation of Literature*, he engaged with a wide range of theories – from poststructuralism to relevance theory, and from Luhmann’s systems theory and Bourdieu’s field theory to Gadamer’s hermeneutics and Goffman’s symbolic interactionism. Each allowed him, in its own way, to address various limitations of descriptive studies and polysystem theory. Resorting to Bourdieu, for instance, allowed “a shift of emphasis from texts and repertoires to the more amenable concept of the individual translator’s agency” (Hermans 2011:14), a concept that is central to his own unique approach and is evoked repeatedly in his reorientation of the notion of norms to accommodate the complexity of individual and institutional dynamics (Hermans 1991, 1996b, 1999a, 2012a). Allowing “abstract actors” to become “human agents operating in institutional contexts” (2011:14) also supported historical studies of the type he has devoted much of his career to promoting (1997b, 2009b, 2012b, 2015).

Reflecting back on this early period in 2007, Hermans stressed the key role that *The Manipulation of Literature* played in introducing descriptivism to Anglophone readers, and consequently in the development of the discipline. Nevertheless, its limitations within the broader landscape of theoretical offerings of relevance to the study of translation at the time also had to be acknowledged, for while “descriptivism was cultivating its structuralist lineage, post-structuralism [had by then] passed it by” (2007c:89). Hermans had already written a detailed critical assessment of the paradigm he helped establish in 1985 (Hermans 1999b). *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-Oriented Approaches Explained*, which quickly established itself as the definitive reference on this theoretical strand, gained much of its authority from being recognized as the account of “an informed insider”, and specifically one whose position as a key player in developing the field did not prevent him from acknowledging its limitations where he felt it necessary to do so (von Flotow 2001:2). It offered a critical, nuanced but fair assessment of descriptive translation studies and poly-system theory; while highlighting their strengths and achievements, it concluded that “[t]he structuralist-inspired model of empirical-descriptive translation studies as it was elaborated in the 1970s and ‘90s, new and exciting as it once was, is now a thing of the past” (1999b:160). But *Translation in Systems* also gained wide popularity because of the quality of Hermans’s writing. Unlike “the convoluted syntax and scientific jargon” typical of Gideon Toury’s writing in particular (Hermans 1995:215), it is highly accessible and engaging. In a review of the book published a year later, Candace Séguinot commented: “If there is a prize for the most literate of English-language writers on translation, there has never been any doubt in my mind that Theo Hermans would be a strong contender. ... His language is a delight” (2000:198). The ability to explain complex theoretical interventions through lively and varied examples of real-life instances of translation and interpreting, and to do so in a language that skilfully balances intelligibility with terminological rigour, and with a bit of characteristic dry wit, is a hallmark of Hermans’s writing, and – as anyone who has listened to him speak will know – of his lecturing style.

Having started his career as a key member of a particular group of scholars with a distinctive approach to (literary) translation, Hermans never remained stuck in any ‘school’ or theoretical strand. He quickly moved on to articulating his own unique research agenda, continually working across groups, continents and sub-disciplines. While this rich research agenda clearly cannot be summarized in a few words, it would be fair to say that whatever lines it followed, it ultimately consisted of blowing apart the many illusions surrounding the concept of translation, of showcasing its “hybridity and plurality” and “its cultural force” (Hermans 1996a), irrespective of who undertook it, where and when it took place, and what domain or genre it fell within.

A web of interlocking concepts: norms, voice, metaphor

It was only as I revisited some of Hermans’s many publications in the past few months that I began to appreciate the extent to which his work has influenced my own thinking and writing about translation. In what follows, I will acknowledge my debt to his work where I can as I attempt to trace the evolution of his thinking about translation after the 1985 phase and until the present, focusing on some of the key interventions that have come to define his approach to translation.

An important strand of Hermans's work focuses on the translator's voice and subject position, and highlights the active, pervasive presence of translators in the text. A second strand details some of the ways in which translators can nevertheless be written out of the picture, spirited away to allow a text to function as an original; the focus here is on questions of authority and the phenomenon of authentication. The two strands do not, by any means, account for the wide range of themes addressed in Hermans's prolific output, even without taking into consideration his many publications in languages I am unable to read, primarily Dutch. But they do allow me to group together diverse interventions into the debates about the translator in the text, and the processes by which translation functions within the wider social system. As will become clear, there is a productive tension in this body of work between, on the one hand, acknowledging the numerous ways in which translators' subject positions are written into every text that is presented and received as a translation (Hermans 2007a:59), and on the other, capturing some of the processes by which translators are made to disappear without a trace, as if by magic, in order to allow a text to function as an original. Both themes have their roots in Hermans's sustained engagement with the concept of norms, which is central to the descriptive paradigm that constituted the bedrock of his early career. In order to trace their gradual articulation from the early 1990s to their most extended treatment in *The Conference of the Tongues* (Hermans 2007b), a good starting point might thus be to follow his various attempts to nuance and extend the concept of norms beyond the abstract, structural account offered by Gideon Toury.

Toury's work on norms revolutionized the discipline in the 1980s and early 1990s, but as Hermans explains, it theorized norms "mostly as constraints on the translator's behaviour", offering "only a brief indication of [their] broader, social function" (Hermans 1996b:25). By contrast, Hermans's approach focuses on the social function of translation and its imbrication in networks of power and ideology, on norms as integral to socialization, and as "mediat[ing] between the individual and collective sphere" (ibid.:26). What is interesting about norms is not that they allow us to compare source and target texts but that they "implicate values in translation", and hence remind us that translation cannot be neutral or transparent, nor can the translator's subject position be totally erased (2002:17). Throughout his sustained engagement with this concept, Hermans's emphasis therefore remained on the agents involved in the translation process rather than on the relation between source and target texts (1996b:27).

For Hermans, unlike Toury, "[t]he operation of translational norms is ... not a matter of texts, or of textual relations, but of acting, thinking, feeling, calculating, sometimes desperate people, with certain personal or group interests at heart, with stakes to defend, with power structures to negotiate" (1997a:110). Translators are guided or constrained by norms, but "they are not so much hemmed in" by them "as actively negotiating their way through them and taking up a position in the process" (2009a:96). They have agency, a voice that can be traced in the text, and a subject position. At the same time, the fact that norms are an integral part of the socio-cultural system (1991:166) requires the analyst to engage with social relations that are both material (economic, legal, etc.) and symbolic. The latter "have to do with status, with legitimacy, and with what confers legitimacy" (1997a:9), and hence with the institutional setting of translation.

Norms are about the textual choices translators make, but these choices are relevant because they profile a subject-position "which is primarily ideological" (2009a:97). Picking up

on a theme I highlighted earlier and that runs through much of his work, Hermans goes on to suggest that this has implications for our own analysis of translation norms, that scholars too occupy a subject position in their writings. For “if translating is not an ideologically neutral activity, how can the study of translation be?” (ibid.:103). The study of translation is itself a social practice which is “always overdetermined” in the sense of being “shot through with interferences stemming from the concept of translation inscribed in our own language and culture, and from our ‘social persona’, our position and position-takings ... in an institutional context” (1996b:48).

One of Hermans’s most widely cited and influential articles remains ‘The Translator’s Voice in Translated Narrative’ (Hermans 1996c). We can see the origins of his thinking about the positioning of the translator and the subject position he or she occupies clearly in the series of questions he poses early in the article (ibid.:26):

Does the translator, the manual labour done, disappear without textual trace, speaking entirely ‘under erasure’? Can translators usurp the original voice and in the same move evacuate their own enunciatory space? Exactly whose voice comes to us when we read translated discourse?

These questions were revelatory for scholars of translation at the time, myself included. They inspired me to investigate the issue of translator style in an article that later spawned several studies by other scholars (Baker 2000), in direct response to Hermans’s questions. His examples were restricted to cases where the nature of the text is such that the translation “is caught blatantly contradicting its own performance” – as when a text declares that it is written in a language other than that of the translation (Hermans 1998:19) or a conference speaker says “This is me speaking and not the interpreter” (2002:12). But he did point out that “we can and should postulate a translator’s voice, *however indistinct*, in all translations” (1998:19; emphasis added). He insisted in the 1996 paper and went on to assert a couple of years later that the translator’s voice is always present in every word of the text (1998:20). I therefore attempted to complement his focus on instances where the translator’s voice “breaks through the surface of the text speaking for itself, in its own name” (Hermans 1996c:27) with a methodology for capturing the translator’s largely subconscious linguistic habits and characteristic use of language.

Picking up this important thread from Hermans, then, my 2000 study focused on linguistic patterns, to unearth aspects of the translator’s voice that he insisted was always there. The study however failed to engage with the wider claims Hermans was articulating. For one thing, my exclusive focus on linguistic patterning in the translation of novels implied that style was an issue specific to literary translation, although Hermans had stressed that the model he elaborated can be extended from translated narrative to any translated text, in any genre (1996c:45). Referring to this study years later, Hermans (2009a) also makes an argument that I failed to articulate at the time but came to appreciate and pursue in later studies, in large part – as I have come to realize – as a result of reading more of his work. As he astutely observes, the relevance of patterns such as those I captured in my study “does not lie in the mere recognition of the translator’s linguistic tics being strewn around a text” but in demonstrating that “the translator’s own position and ideology are ineluctably written into the texts he or she translates”, and this in turn raises questions of responsibility, accountability and ethics (2009a:97).

For Hermans, moreover, raising the question of voice is intended to alert us to a much more important issue, that of the widespread perception of translation as transparency and duplication (1998:20). These pervasive metaphors reveal a set of societal expectations that require the translator to be completely self-effacing to ensure the original's integrity and confirm its status as original. Ideologically, the "loyal self-abnegation" of the translator "guarantees the undisputed primacy" of the translation and the author (ibid.). The metaphors a society deploys in speaking about translation are not ideologically neutral, and throughout his extensive body of work on metaphors (1985b, 2004),¹ Hermans reminds us that "translation has been hedged in by means of hierarchies strongly reminiscent of those employed to maintain sexual power relations" (1998:20–21). Drawing attention to the historical parallels between the way gender and translation are conceptualized in our societies, he explains that they are both culturally constructed categories that are embedded in structures of unequal power, hence the importance of asking "whose interests are being served by these hierarchies, and why it is that translation apparently needs to be so tightly controlled and regulated" (Hermans 2001).

From voice to positioning: translation as quotation

In his later work, Hermans replaced the concept of voice with that of positioning, to highlight the fact that "the translator's subject position is continually being constructed as the discourse unfolds" (2014:286). Positioning is part of a dialogic, collaborative process that places both the translator and the reader in "jointly produced story lines, shared narratives that shape collectives, maintain distinctions and secure values" (2007b:81). The switch from voice to positioning allowed Hermans to argue that when a translator makes choices that either conform to or diverge from prevalent expectations (i.e. from prevailing norms of translation), he or she necessarily adopts a position in relation to the existing body of translations in his or her society, and in so doing "marks not only a discursive presence but also *a critical viewpoint*" (ibid.:51; emphasis added). In this sense, "[a]ll translating is translating with an attitude. It could not be anything else, since all translations contain the translator's subject-position" (ibid.:84–85).

It follows that translations are always self-referential, "they speak about themselves, with more or less emphasis" (2007b:51) because they both encode a subject position and respond to other translations that circulate in their social space, whether in compliance or defiance of established norms. Each translation "invokes, not just another translation, but other translations, and, by extension, translation as a generic and historical category" (2007a:61). To be able to account for this aspect of translation and of the translator's positioning, Hermans argued, it is necessary to view translation as a form of reported speech (2014:286). Translation is second-order discourse in the sense that it is a discourse that represents another discourse (2007a:67), and hence can be regarded as an interpretive utterance in relevance theory terms: an utterance that represents another utterance rather than one that makes direct statements about the world. But just as quotations are never simply verbatim repetitions of the words uttered by the person being quoted, translation involves much more than direct speech (2007b:70). The model Hermans goes on to elaborate theorizes translation as a mixture of direct and indirect speech and posits that the ambivalence resulting from the overlap "creates the space in which a translator's critical attitude towards what is being translated can be profiled and the concept of irony comes into its own" (ibid.:65).

Adopting Sperber and Wilson's approach to irony as a case of distancing oneself from the words or opinions being quoted, and hence as an echoic utterance (ibid.:76), Hermans then suggests that echoic translating is "translating with a dissociative attitude" (ibid.:83). Translations that are explicitly marked by this attitude – as when a translator signals his or her disapproval of the author's views in a preface – are a special case. However, given that all translation is translation with an attitude, and since it is neither possible nor productive to establish clear lines between the different types of attitude a translator might adopt in relation to a text (dissociative, neutral or associative), all translation is ultimately echoic. Importantly, Hermans argues (ibid.),

Approaching translation as a complex form of quoting makes it clear that translation matters, socially and historically, not only because it transmits cultural goods but because it transmits them under a certain angle, with evaluation attached.

Conceptualizing translation as quotation and as echoic reminds us that a translator's subject position is inscribed in every word of the text, even when he or she is not aware of it, and that this has important ethical and ideological implications.

Equivalence, authentication and the spiriting away of translators

However perverse it may seem in the context of understanding translation as a social practice, I should like to sketch a sociological perspective on translation that chooses to write translators out of the picture.

(Hermans 2007a:57)

Equivalence has been central to both public and scholarly debates about translation since time immemorial. Hermans's engagement with the concept does not follow the usual pattern of specifying conditions for attaining it, nor of attempting to define it or creating typologies of it as others have done. For him, "[s]peaking of translation in terms of equivalence means engaging in an elaborate – if perhaps a socially necessary – act of make-believe" (1998:18). He thus accepts Toury's pragmatic approach to equivalence as "any target-language utterance which is presented or regarded as such within the target culture, on whatever grounds" (Toury 1985:20). Acknowledging the bold and liberating nature of this move on Toury's part (Hermans 1999b:49), however, he goes well beyond it by theorizing equivalence, like norms, within a social context and constantly shifting, dynamic fields of power. Failure to live up to the ambition of attaining full equivalence is part of the social definition of translations; it is what allows us to recognize them as translations (2007a:59). Translations can only be recognized as such when they are not regarded as definitive, in the sense of being fully equivalent with their source. It is this falling short of achieving equivalence that allows for the proliferation of retranslations. Recognizing a translation as a definitive version of a prototext thus "spell[s] the end of translation" (2007a:61), whereas the potential for retranslation "undermines any claim an individual translation may have to be the original's sole representative" (ibid.). All translations are therefore always provisional and repeatable (ibid.:59). And it is because translations are repeatable that they have their translators' subject positions written into them (ibid.). There are always alternative ways of representing an original text in translation (ibid.:61).

Equivalence, moreover, is not a textual feature; it is “primarily a matter of status and only secondarily a matter of semantics or use value” (2007b:9). The illusion of equivalence comes about through complex social processes that are firmly embedded within structures of power. Equivalence is thus to be understood as “equality of value and status” (ibid.:6), and can only be declared by an institution or an individual with a certain level of authority rather than extrapolated by comparing source and target texts (ibid.). In other words, it is “proclaimed, not found” (ibid.). A proclamation of equivalence is subject to the same rules that govern performative speech acts: to effect a change in the world – in this case, the illusion of equivalence that allows a change in the status of a text – the conditions have to be right. Drawing on examples as varied as the story of the Septuagint, the Book of Mormon and the United Nations Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Hermans focuses on cases where translations are authenticated, in the sense of being deemed equally authentic in two or more languages, on a par with each other (ibid.:8). In the case of the Vienna Convention, “authentication is a pronouncement that carries legal force” (ibid.:9), whereas in the case of self translation or where authors work with their translators and in so doing “control and authorise” the resulting translation (ibid.:22), the authentication process is weaker. It is “authentication in a minor key” (ibid.). The more strongly institutionalized the environment, the more effective the process of authentication. Literature is an example of a “weakly institutionalised field, in which pronouncements about the status of a text may be contested” (ibid.:21) and authentication remains open to challenge. Authentication in a strongly institutionalized field like law, on the other hand, “makes equivalence a reality rather than an illusion”, albeit a reality that is “no more than a socially binding legal or institutional fiction” (ibid.:27).

An important consequence of the type of authentication that operates in strongly institutionalized environments like law is that it erases the memory of translation (2007b:10), and hence of the translator, for in doing away with translation we also do away with the translator (2007a:59). Once a translation has been authenticated, once it has been declared and accepted as equivalent with its source text, it can no longer function as a translation (2007b:59). It “self destructs as translation and takes away the translator with it” (ibid.:27). This spiriting away of translators is accounted for in Hermans’s work on translation as a social system in which translators would merely be “presupposed as would be all sorts of material preconditions” (2007a:62). In Luhmann’s systems theory, on which Hermans draws heavily in several publications, ‘translator’ is a discursive identity not an actual person of flesh and blood (ibid.:69). As a discursive identity, rather than a physical presence, the translator can be spirited away through different types of institutional interventions that Hermans describes in detail, especially in *The Conference of the Tongues* (2007b).

Hermans’s interest in norms, equivalence, positioning and authentication connects directly with his vision for a broadly conceived, self-questioning discipline that is culturally and politically aware and cognizant of its own place in the world. The function of this discipline’s object of study (translation) is meta-representational: translations produce “representations of representations, ... verbal re-enactments for pre-existing discourses”, and hence participate in constructing social reality (2007a:57). Every concept he patiently dissects and exemplifies through numerous examples from very different genres is developed from this overarching perspective. The significance of highlighting agency by fleshing out the details of the translator’s voice and positioning is that it raises issues of ethics and accountability:

demonstrating that a translator occupies a subject position in the text rather than acting merely as a mouthpiece for the author means that they are accountable for their textual and non-textual choices (2014:294–295), and this in turn demonstrates that translation is socially relevant (ibid.:299). Likewise, far from “an arcane legalistic procedure” (2003b:39), the relevance of authentication lies in the fact that it confers authority (2007b:11), with concrete, ethical consequences. The choice of language versions considered authentic in bilateral or multilateral agreements reflects the political power and prestige of the language communities in question rather than any inherent qualities of the authenticated texts (ibid.:14). Authenticating here privileges a specific version and the speakers of the language in question, alerting us to the imbrication of our object of study in broader questions of power and justice.

The real value of Hermans’s work is that it invites us to recognize the significance of translation as consisting not in its “instrumental role as a channel for the importation of foreign goods” but in the value judgements it attaches to those goods and the ideological filters it applies to them before they enter our social spaces as translations (2014:297–298).

Postscript

As I was struggling with various issues during a rather trying period in the early 2000s, I came across Hermans’s ‘Paradoxes and Aporias in Translation and Translation Studies’ (2002) and was intrigued by a passing reference to narrativity. Hermans discusses narrativity briefly in this article as one of three suggestions for infusing our discourse about translation with critical self-reflexiveness, but even this brief reference was rich enough to inspire me to begin reading widely on narrative theory, and eventually write *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* in 2006. The idea of narrative and the emphasis on critical self-reflexiveness spoke to me at a human level, beyond the scholarly context of Hermans’s argument. I acknowledged this particular debt in a footnote to Chapter 1 of the book (Baker 2006:173), as I acknowledged the source of my work on translator style earlier. However, having reread some of his prolific output more recently, I now realize that all along I have been merely picking the crumbs off his table of rich and varied scholarly offerings over the years, and that my debt to him exceeds these specific, direct influences.

What I ultimately find inspiring in Hermans’s work is not this or that theoretical concept, this or that innovative line of research, but a vision that is inclusive, self-critical, human even in its most abstract arguments, conscious of the scholar’s position in a particular culture and in the world at large, and much wider in scope than the specifics of any genre or historical moment. Like many others (see, for instance, Guldin, this volume), I also find his openness and lack of defensiveness empowering. For rather than a streamlined, structured discipline dominated by a few themes and approaches, not to mention a particular clique or ‘school’ of thought, Hermans’s vision of translation studies is of a field that is mature enough to pursue many lines and models of investigation, a “splintered”, “de-centred” and “perhaps ex-centric” discipline that “must learn to speak several tongues, recognizes the contingency of theory and seeks to make its own uncertainties productive” (2006:9). More than anything else, it is this confident, self-reflexive, critical and inclusive vision which constitutes the hallmark of his legacy as a scholar and mentor to all the contributors featured in this volume, and to numerous others not represented here.

Note

- 1 Hermans's seminal article (1985b) initiated what was to become an enduring concern with metaphors of translation. As Guldin (this volume) demonstrates, Antoine Berman, among many others, drew very heavily on it. Practically all work on metaphors of translation is a direct response to this and later work on metaphors by Hermans.

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PART I

Translational epistemologies



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2

TRANSLATION AS METAPHOR REVISITED

On the promises and pitfalls of semantic and epistemological overflowing

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In the spring of 2015, I was working on a book about the metaphor of translation (Guldin 2016) for the Routledge series *Translation Theories Explored* edited by Theo Hermans, who was also my very first reader. In an initial draft of the introduction, I pointed to the questionable side of metaphors, their tendency to proliferate¹ and to obscure the object they are supposed to describe. In the version I received back from Theo with his comments, I found a short revealing question next to the relevant passage: “Why such a defensive attitude?”. As I will argue, Hermans’s question is central for a discussion of the epistemological relevance of metaphors in translation studies. At the same time, it points to a pervasive attitude towards metaphors in the Western tradition² that focuses more on its pitfalls than its promises. Despite the radical re-evaluation of the cognitive potential of metaphors in the wake of the work of Max Black (1954), Paul Ricœur (2003), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999), there is to this very day a persistent distrust of metaphors across the disciplines, and naturally also in translation studies. An example will illustrate this.

A keynote speaker at the second symposium on Research Models in Translation Studies, held at the University of Manchester in April 2011, pointed out that translation studies had recently become “a source discipline in its own right”, quickly adding “but I do not mean this in a *merely* metaphorical way”. The first part of the observation is very much to the point. It refers to the metaphorical use of the notion of translation in cultural and post-colonial studies and other disciplines, what has recently also been called the ‘translational turn’. The second part of the observation, however, clearly distances itself from the use of metaphors. The word *merely* suggests their inferior, secondary nature, a secondariness, incidentally, that metaphor shares with translation. Interestingly, the first part of the statement – “a source discipline in its own right” – uses the notion of *source*, which together with *target* is one of the two central spatial metaphors in both translation studies and metaphor theory, reminding us that metaphors pervade our writing and shape our thinking even at the very moment we disavow them.

The German philosopher Hans Blumenberg proposed an interpretation technique that focuses on metaphorical subtexts, which he called *Latenzbeobachtung*, the observation of

latent meaning (Heidenreich 2020:15–17), a mode of reading I recently applied to Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens/On the Different Methods of Translating* (Guldin 2020:121–127). Sommer describes this method with the help of a spatial metaphor (1998:137; emphasis added):

below the surface of the text manifest to the reader there is an *imaginary sub-stratum*. And the metaphors are the *places* where this sub-stratum *projects out* into the text and becomes *visible*. Thus, metaphors scattered through the text are not to be understood as occurrences. Instead, one has to conceive of them as *indications* and *parts of a whole pictorial structure*. The metaphors are *interconnected underground* ...

Two points are worth highlighting here: that single metaphors stand out from the rest of the text, and that they are part of a subaqueous, submerged network of metaphors. The implication is that texts know or reveal more than their authors intend them to do.

Antoine Berman's work provides a telling example of the theoretical ambiguities of translation scholars with regard to metaphor in general and the metaphor of translation in particular. In what follows I draw on Blumenberg and Sommer to reinterpret his writings on translation and metaphor, including his understanding of translation itself as metaphor. I begin with two of his essays, written in the second half of the 1980s and included in a collection of his works which appeared posthumously in 2012 under the title *Jacques Amyot traducteur français. Essais sur l'origine de la traduction en France*.³ The two essays are 'De la translation à la traduction' (Berman 2012a), which was first published in 1988 (Berman 1988) in a slightly different version, and 'Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore' (Berman 2012b).⁴ They provide a useful starting point because the metaphoric subtext I wish to examine is much easier to grasp in its entirety in these works, whereas *The Experience of the Foreign* (Berman 1992), which I go on to discuss later in the chapter, does not explicitly address the subject of metaphor *per se* nor that of translation as metaphor. This conspicuous absence adds a further layer of meaning to the interconnected metaphorical subtext that I want to reconstruct here.

'De la translation à la traduction'

In his unpublished inaugural lecture 'Translation's Other', delivered at University College London on 19 March 1996, Hermans outlines a theoretical approach to translation that emphasizes the necessity of adopting a critical stance towards supposedly unproblematic accounts of translation. Any "smooth, unruffled picture of translation", he argues, "has an 'other' to it, a more unsettling but also a much more interesting and intriguing side". Specifically, he points out that the "conventional perception and self-presentation of translation papers over the cracks" and declares: "I want to try and poke my finger into at least some of these cracks" (Hermans 1996:4). One of these cracks is unquestionably the relationship between translation and metaphor, epitomized in the metaphor of translation. The question I wish to pursue here is: How can metaphor, more specifically the metaphor of translation, unsettle a certain understanding of translation?

In 'De la translation à la traduction', Berman elaborates on the concept of translation that emerged in France during the Renaissance. For the first time in Western culture, translation became a clearly defined activity based on the differentiation between a 'first' and a 'second'

text. This, Berman adds, is evident to us moderns, “pour nous” (Berman 2012a:79), ignoring thus all the disputes surrounding the complex relationship between original and translation which were already being discussed at the time. The new understanding manifests itself in the use of the word *traduction* across all Romance languages and the development of a specific discourse on translation. *Traduction* designates translational activity – “activité traduisante” (ibid.:78). Together with *traducteur*, this new unitary word – “mot unitaire” (ibid.:83) – will quickly supplant, in France at least, the earlier *translation* and *translateur*.

This new view of translation implies a different understanding of language and the relationship that single languages entertain with each other. In the metaphorical subtext, languages – as well as culture and translation – are conceived as individuals with a name, a character, a profile and a face of their own. This notion, which accompanies and upholds the formation of national languages (Guldin 2020:13–26), seems to precede and confirm the new definition of translation as the transfer of a text from one language to another (Berman 2012a:78). Although Berman does not explicitly reflect on the importance of national languages and the essential role they play in the development of the new concept of translation, he clearly proceeds from this assumption when he discusses the French, German and English words for translation. And yet, as we shall see, each national language has its own unique understanding of translation, which is encoded in the very word it uses to describe the process.

In the Middle Ages, several words were being used, the most common being *translation*, which is still used in English today. There was a “multiplicity of denominations” (ibid.:78) at the time that coincided with a wide variety of intertextual processes involving many types of relationship between different texts. Berman describes this situation as a scriptural network – “réseau scripturaire” (ibid.:79). Under these circumstances, it was difficult and meaningless to attempt to isolate and extricate the act of translation from all others. The medieval lack of definition – “indéfinition” (ibid.:79) – was connected to an absence of stable linguistic frontiers. This suggests that the new notion of translation was directly linked to the creation of the linguistic borders of national languages, something that Berman, strangely enough, does not comment upon.

In the medieval context, certain genres were written in certain languages, other genres in two, sometimes even in three different languages. Berman describes this situation as the linguistic network – “réseau langagier” (ibid.:79) – of the *translateur*, the medieval translator that he opposes to the *traducteur*, the new translator figure of the Renaissance and of modernity. The notion of *réseau* resurfaces in the second essay, this time in connection with the proliferating multiplicity of metaphors for translation during the Renaissance. I will come back to this metaphor shortly. Even though Berman traces this paradigmatic shift to the rediscovery of the writers of Roman and Greek Antiquity and the invention of the printing press, his analysis remains predominantly within the linguistic domain, aiming for a purely terminological explanation of the change.

In the Middle Ages, the act of translation did not possess the uniqueness (*unicité*) of the “concept de ‘traduction’” (ibid.:79). Caught in this double, linguistic and scriptural network, it had no face of its own, and no proper name – “pris dans ce double réseau, il n’avait ni visage propre, ni nom unique”. The original lack of definition – “indéfinition originelle” (ibid.:80) – is an absence of delimitation – “absence de définition (de délimitation)” (ibid.:80). However, looked at from another perspective, the medieval situation was not so much an absence as an overabundance of intermingling definitions and textual practices. Instead of the later unicity

of the “nom unique de la traduction” (ibid.:81), the medieval notion of *translatio* was characterized by a “pluralité de sense” (ibid.:81). In addition to linguistic translation, it also meant physical transportation of objects and people, transfer of law, jurisdiction and ideas, as well as metaphoric and symbolic transfer. The medieval view of translation was thus characterized by a double multiplicity: it referred to a series of overlapping textual practices and pointed beyond a purely linguistic understanding of the word *translation*.

Berman’s definitional essentialism is accompanied by linguistic determinism. *Traduction* imposes itself mainly because of its close linguistic ties to related words composed with the suffix *duction*, which all play an essential role in modernity: *production*, *induction*, *reproduction*. It is the destiny of the modern word-family to which it belongs – “le destin de la famille moderne des mots auxquels ils appartient” (ibid.:83). The ontological metaphor of the face with a proper name is reinterpreted here in terms of genealogical family ties (Guldin 2020:89–94). As we shall see, the metaphor of kinship (*parenté*) is also used to describe the relationship between metaphor and translation (Berman 2012b:96, 97).

Berman compares the different words used for translation in French, English and German. Each great western language can reveal how a culture *thinks* about this operation and determines at the same time its nature, he argues – “Chaque grande langue occidentale peut nous révéler comment une culture *pense* cette opération et détermine à la fois sa nature” (Berman 2012a:86; emphasis in original). National languages develop a deterministic force, influencing the very way a culture and its members conceive of translators and translations.

Contrary to the unity and uniqueness of the French *traduction*, the English *translation* has at least four different meanings: the act of translating and its results, the transport of objects, transformation and the transfer of law. The verb *translate* has even more meanings. That the English language retained the word *translation* is no surprise, argues Berman, when one considers the fundamentally communicational character of the language. English is a communication language – “langue *communicationnelle*” (ibid.:86) – a translative (ibid.:87) language committed to the universal circulation of signs – “mise en circulation universelle de signifiés” (ibid.:88).

The German *übersetzen* and *übertragen* come from two different semantic domains, both moving beyond the Latin *translatio* and the English *translation*. For German translation, Berman argues, is neither a translational movement of signifiers, nor the energy that presides over this movement – “Pour l’allemand la ‘traduction’ n’est pas un mouvement de translation des signifiés, ni l’énergie présidant à ce mouvement” (ibid.:88; emphasis added) – as is the case of the French *traduction*. *Übersetzung* suggests a twofold movement that Berman interprets as the reciprocity of the domestic and the foreign: the essence of this double movement (is) inscribed in the very word *Übersetzung* – “l’essence de ce double mouvement (est) inscrit dans le mot même de *Übersetzung*” (ibid.:88). No wonder then that the German culture attributed such an overwhelming importance to translation processes. The tyranny of etymology pervades each individual language. The double meaning of *Übersetzung* is expressed by shifting the accent – crossing the river (*übersetzen*) and translate (*übersetzen*). Contrary to Berman’s assertion, the word itself does not automatically imply a crossing of the river in both senses. Most probably, Berman projects Schleiermacher’s (1992) conception of translation – moving the original towards the reader or the reader towards the original – back onto the German *Übersetzung*.

Finally, the French *traduction*, which is more delimited, that is, limited – “plus délimitée (voire limitée)” – than the English *translation* and the German *Übersetzung*, stresses the very

act of translating – “ductivité” (ibid.:88). No surprise then that the French culture developed the concept of *la belle infidèle* – the ‘freest’ form of translation – “la forme de traduction la plus ‘libre’” (ibid.:88).

An Anglo-Saxon, a German and a French cannot have the same in-depth understanding of translation – “ne peuvent pas *penser*, en profondeur la ‘traduction’ de la même manière” (ibid.:89). Despite these cultural differences, however, the fundamental question for Berman remains whether there is a way to define translation on its own, to define it as a specific activity – “Existe-t-il une manière de définir la traduction à *partir d’elle-même*, de la définir comme une activité spécifique?” (ibid.:91; emphasis in original). The new definition of translation goes hand in hand with the new figure of the *traducteur* who emerges in the course of the sixteenth century. Unlike the medieval *translateur*, the *traducteur* has a “profil propre” and a “*psyché propre*” (ibid.:93). The new figure of the translator is thus linked to the personifications of national languages and translation through their names, their character and their circumscribed nature. The *traducteur* is someone whose task is to transfer a text from one delimited language to another delimited language without threatening this delimitation – “transférer un texte d’une langue délimitée dans une autre langue délimitée, sans menacer cette délimitation” (ibid.:93). This translator operates in a world where languages are firmly bounded – “fermement *délimitées*” (ibid.:93). However, her/his activity always *risks blurring* the mutual delimitations of languages – “*risque toujours ... de brouiller les délimitations mutuelles des langues*” (ibid.:93; emphasis added).

In Berman’s vision, translation follows the institution of national languages and puts it at risk. However, as Sakai (2009:76) has argued, interlingual translation actually precedes the existence of national languages:

Strictly speaking, it is not because two different language unities are given that we need to translate ... It is because translation articulates languages so that we may postulate the two unities of the translating and the translated language as if they were autonomous and closed entities through a certain representation of translation. ... it is extremely difficult to comprehend what we perform in translation outside the discourse of the modern nation-state, and this difficulty only teaches us how massively we are confined within the discourse regulated by the idea of the national language and what I call the schema of cofiguration.

The final part of Berman’s essay creates a thematic bridge to the following chapter. Berman laments the theoretical poverty of the discourses of the sixteenth century about translation, which is counterbalanced by a great richness in metaphors – “la pauvreté théorique des discours sur la traduction au XVI^e est contrebalancée par une grande richesse métaphorique” (Berman 2012a:94). It is as if the Renaissance could only identify translation and the translator through a disconcerting multiplicity of images, he argues – “Tout se passe comme si la Renaissance ne pouvait cerner la traduction et le traducteur que par une multiplicité déroutante d’images” (ibid.:94); far from constituting itself in the mode of conceptual knowledge, it can only grasp translation in the rhetorical mode ... of metaphor – “loin de se constituer sur le mode du savoir conceptuel, (elle) ne peut saisir la traduction que sur le mode rhétorique ... de la métaphore” (ibid.:95). The twofold opposition between concept and metaphor on the one hand, and singularity and plurality on the other, is also at the centre of the second essay.

'Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore'

In 'Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore', Berman offers a theoretical vision of metaphor and its relationship to translation that is conspicuously absent from *The Experience of the Foreign* and deeply influences his view of translation as a metaphor. The title alludes to the unsettling force of metaphors that represent a plurality of dangerous nets (*filets*), in which the translator risks being hopelessly entrapped. Metaphorical views of translation are stereotypical, he argues: "La perception métaphorique de la traduction est ... une perception stéréotypée" (Berman 2012b:114).

As Berman points out at the beginning of the article, all definitions are conceptual: "toute définition est conceptuelle". Concepts *encircle* their object firmly – "*cerne fermement*" – and tightly stick to it. Metaphors, on the other hand, are always loose (*flottants*), like a baggy dress, and because of this can always be replaced by other metaphors, "*ad infinitum*" (ibid.:96). This garment metaphor re-emerges in connection with translation, in an approving comment on Walter Benjamin's "royal robe with ample folds" (2000:19). The coat of translation has wide folds – "de 'larges plis'"; it does not hug the body tightly like the skin of a fruit – "il ne *serre* pas le corps comme la peau le fruit" (Berman 2012b:99). The oppositions of definition and metaphor on the one hand, and definitional tightness and metaphorical looseness on the other, are reinterpreted here in positive terms. This goes to prove that metaphorical subtexts also allow for internal tensions and contradictions.

By contrast with Berman, Blumenberg (1998) convincingly argued that concept and metaphor are not simply opposites but intricately interwoven. They can be transformed into each other, or to use one of Berman's own metaphors, they can overflow into each other. In this sense, metaphors are not simply pre-conceptual or pre-scientific,⁵ and cannot be completely retranslated into conceptual terms (see also Haverkamp and Mende 2009), as Berman suggests. Metaphors represent an inexhaustible catalytic sphere in which concepts can constantly revitalize and enrich themselves (Blumenberg 1998:11). Each metaphor, moreover, possesses a structure of its own, and a specific, if not unique way of mapping inferences from a source onto a target (Black 1954; Lakoff and Johnson 1999), which makes a simple substitution by another metaphor practically impossible.

According to Berman, it is nearly impossible to perceive translation other than in metaphorical terms. Translation can never quite extricate itself from the net of metaphors, which is also true for the Renaissance. This is due, above all, to the profound kinship and structural identity of metaphor and translation, that is, the metaphorical structure of translating and the translational structure of metaphor (Berman 2012b:116). Because of this, metaphor itself is generally defined in metaphorical terms and tends to become a metaphor in its own right (ibid.:97). Berman's vision of the close terminological proximity of metaphor and translation is very much to the point. However, I would argue here that it is not so much the structural similarity of metaphor and translation that reveals the need for their metaphorical explanation, but the fact that both notions evade unambiguous conceptual definitions. Furthermore, Berman's insightful comment on the close terminological connection of metaphor and translation could also be interpreted as a possibility to conceive of a different history of the two interlinked terms (Guldin 2016:18–23).

Metaphors are translatable into each other – "*traduisibilité réciproque*". The metaphors of translation used during the Renaissance are no exception; they are perfectly permutable – "*parfaitement permutable*s" (Berman 2012b:114). Interestingly, Berman refers in a footnote

to the existence of a different form of metaphor that he calls poetic, to distinguish it from the purely rhetorical form of metaphor that is endlessly permutable. The poetic beauty of these metaphors is intimately linked to their veracity, and because of this they are able to convey the very nature and essence of translation – “l’être de la traduction”. Poetic metaphors escape the serial logic of resemblance – “échappent à la logique sérielle de la ressemblance” (ibid.:265n13). Tucked away in another footnote about Walter Benjamin’s metaphors of translation, Berman points out that some very rare metaphors are not translatable into concepts (ibid.:258n53). However, despite the introduction of the restricted form of poetic metaphors, metaphor as such does not escape its status as a fundamentally disqualified terminological form, incapable of ever being a viable way of interpreting reality, a view which denies its epistemological and systematic nature.

Berman’s argument is also based on the implicit assumption that metaphor is a pre-scientific tool and therefore belongs to the early stages of translation theory (Guldin 2016:26–27). This would explain the importance of metaphor in the Renaissance, which represents in Berman’s view the first stage of a new scientific understanding of translation still to come. In these early stages of theory building, the curse of resemblances – “la malédiction des ressemblances” (Berman 2012b:99) holds sway. Metaphor multiplies meaning endlessly and rhetoric does not leave any space for true theory. This impinges directly on the self-understanding of the translator: the translator never gets his bearings – “le traducteur n’arrive jamais à se cerner”; he or she becomes the prey of metaphors – “la proie des métaphores” (ibid.:100). The reflexive forms *se cerner*, to define oneself by drawing a circle around oneself, and the earlier *cerner*, to encircle, to surround – referring to the functioning of conceptual thinking – link the two domains to each other.

In the list of metaphors that Berman discusses in the essay, negativity, as he calls it, prevails. The new translator perceives him or herself above all in negative terms. The medieval translateur, on the other hand, was far removed from the translator’s self-deprecation – “auto-dépréciation du traducteur” (ibid.:106). Berman uses the notion of net (*réseau*) in the singular to describe interconnected clusters of metaphors. However, this metaphor is reinterpreted in negative terms and connected to the title of the essay, where the net features in the plural form: “Le traducteur dans les filets de la métaphore” (emphasis added). The connecting net of metaphors (*réseau*) turns out to be an ensemble of stifling nets (*filets*) entrapping translation and the translator in a descriptive straightjacket. The network is actually a net that falls heavily, with all the weight of its rhetoric, onto translation and the translators – “Le réseau est vraiment un filet qui s’abat lourdement, de tout le poids de sa rhétorique, sur la traduction et les traducteurs” (ibid.:114).

Berman quotes altogether ten examples of metaphors of translation from Hermans’s ‘Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation’ (1985), mainly to bolster his own view of the negative incidence of metaphor. The quotations are repositioned in a new context where they generally serve a different interpretative agenda. The digestive metaphor is reinterpreted in negative terms: Translation digests badly and always risks being indigestible – “la traduction digère mal et ... risque toujours d’être indigeste” (ibid.:104). In the section ‘Figures de la servitude’ (Figures of bondage), Berman explores the translator’s unambiguously submissive, if not slave-like status. Hermans interprets the metaphor in much more ambivalent terms, pointing to the restricted freedom of the translator it implies (Hermans 1985:109). The metaphor of the rough jewel in a casket, which “can serve several purposes” (ibid.:119), is in Berman’s view above all an example of

“dévalorisation” (Berman 2012b:110). The same holds true for the garment metaphor that Hermans does not perceive as “necessarily disparaging in itself” (1985:115). The metaphor of translation as a pouring of a liquid from one vessel into another does not imply total loss (Hermans 1985:121). Berman, however, focuses on the possible evaporation of the poured liquid, a radicalization of the negativity of the image – “radicalisation de la négativité de l’image” (Berman 2012b:111).

In the essay on metaphors of translation in the Renaissance, which was written at about the same time as Berman’s texts, Hermans highlights several aspects of the theoretical relevance of metaphors for an understanding of translation that is clearly at odds with Berman’s own understanding. Hermans’s focus is on different ways of describing translation and the way this impinges on our perception of it. Metaphors have an epistemological aspect to them, they “are not just incidental ornaments; on the contrary, they carry the burden of the argument” (Hermans 1985:105) and are part of the metalanguage of translation at a given time (ibid.:106). Contrary to Berman’s mainly dualistic view – positive versus negative metaphors, and rhetorical versus poetic metaphors –, metaphors can both highlight the problematic side of translation and “upgrade the translator’s achievement and projected self-image” (ibid.:106). Hermans mentions laudatory metaphors that celebrate the translator’s freedom. Other metaphors “invert the hierarchy between original and translation” (ibid.:110). Finally, shifts in the perception of translation are generally “signalled by a change in the metaphorical apparatus” (ibid.:105).

The Experience of the Foreign

Berman first published *L'épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* in 1984, at a significant juncture in the history of translation studies, and in a way anticipated the cultural turn of the 1990s. In this respect, the juxtaposition of culture and translation in the subtitle is highly significant, if not programmatic. According to Venuti, who quotes from *L'épreuve de l'étranger*, Berman questioned “‘ethnocentric’ translating that ‘deforms’ the foreign text by assimilating it to the target language and culture”. “Bad translation is not merely domesticating, but mystifying”, he continues, as it “performs a systematic negation of the foreignness of the foreign work”. “Good translation”, on the other hand, “shows respect for the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text” by “developing a ‘correspondence’ that ‘enlarges, amplifies and enriches the translating language’” (Venuti 2000:219). In this sense, also thanks to Venuti’s intervention, Berman might be considered in retrospect as one of the founding fathers of a new vision of translation that tried to extricate itself from the simple opposition of original and translation. However, as the previous reflections have shown, this truly innovative and provocative way of looking at translation is accompanied by profound theoretical ambivalences. One of the main problems being – together with an essentialist stance – his defence of a primarily linguistic understanding of translation processes.

Berman’s discussion of the notion of translation in German Romanticism is animated by a wish to open up the traditional linguistic understanding of translation to a broader definition that would also include cultural and historical aspects. At the same time, however, he holds on to the primacy of a purely linguistic understanding of translation and shies away from any form of linguistic overlapping and mixing. In his view, the borders between different languages are not porous and open to osmotic exchanges. Each (national) language is a self-confined unit existing separately, next to other linguistic units.

Throughout the book, Berman painstakingly avoids using the term *metaphor* even when it would be the most obvious terminological choice. Instead, he uses *model* (*modèle*) and *archetype* (*archétype*) (Berman 1992:183, 1984/1995:291–292) without elaborating on the implications of these concepts. Metaphor represents a terminological threat to a purely conceptual definition of translation, and the terminological integrity of translation proper (the ‘restricted’ form) is constantly menaced by any metaphorical use of it (the ‘generalized’ form). In the same way that national languages are clearly separated from each other, the notions of metaphor and translation, and the restricted and generalized understanding of translation, have to be kept apart. To differentiate restricted from generalized forms of translation, Berman resorts to distinguishing between *traduction* and *translation*. This terminological choice is meticulously applied throughout the French text.

Berman uses *translation* for pre-modern times and for metaphorical uses in the present, implicitly suggesting a terminological connection between the two. *Traduction* is set apart from both the earlier medieval understanding of translation and the new metaphorical uses of translation. In the book, *traduction* is used in the singular and *translation* in the plural, in line with the opposition between conceptual singularity and metaphorical multiplicity advocated in the two essays discussed previously. The *acte de la traduction* is opposed to the *multiplicité de translations*.

Silvia Heyvaert, who translated the book into English, opted for *translation* in the case of *traduction* and *trans-lation* for the metaphorical cases. Since Berman does not explicitly focus on his terminological choices and their implications for the book as a whole, the absence of a comment by the translator in her initial note is understandable. This also explains the fact that there is only one mention of this terminological choice in the index of the English translation. Under the heading ‘translation’ are listed ‘restricted’ and ‘generalized’ translation, followed by “see also trans-lation”, without, however, specifying any page numbers (Berman 1992:250). Comparison of the use of *translation/traduction* and *translation/trans-lation* in the French and English text respectively reveals some differences. In the English translation, the singular *traduction* is rendered as *translations* on one occasion; on several other occasions the French *translation* is not translated as *trans-lation* but as *translation*. These asymmetries are not simply mistakes. In my view, they are an ironic comment on Berman’s attempt to keep the purely linguistic and the metaphoric meaning of translation distinct from each other. It is the very act of translation that inadvertently reveals the inherent instability of meaning and the shifting character of the notion of translation.

To illustrate these inner tensions, I will first discuss some of the main metaphorical uses of translation in German Romanticism and then move on to the conclusion of the book, which sketches a traductology that explores the ways in which the notion of translation can be used across the disciplines and what this means for translation studies.

Translation is primarily an agent of *Bildung*. The notion of *Bildung* covers a large semantic field; it means education, formation, but also self-education, and both cultural and personal maturation. Neither *Bildung* nor translation is a form of appropriation or conquest, but presuppose the experience of the foreign. Translation is at the same time an aspect and a metaphor of *Bildung*. Conversely, *Bildung* is a metaphor for translation. Berman (1992:46) argues that *Bildung* “is closely connected with the movement of translation – for translation, indeed, starts from what is one’s own, the same ... in order to go towards the foreign, the other ..., and starting from this experience, to return to its point of departure”. The “circular, cyclical and alternating nature of *Bildung* implies in itself something like *trans-lation*, *Über-Setzung*,

a *positing of oneself beyond oneself*” (ibid.:47; emphasis in original). The notion of Grand Tour, which belongs to the experience of *Bildung*, is the second important metaphor for translation. *Bildung* and the Grand Tour, which as forms of self-education both presuppose the experience of the foreign and the idea of a homeward journey, also imply the notion of *Begrenzung*, limitation. “Limitation”, Berman argues, “is what distinguishes the experience of *Bildung* from the purely erratic and chaotic adventure where one loses oneself. The *grand tour* does not consist of going just anywhere, but there where one can form and educate oneself, and progress towards oneself” (ibid.:48; emphasis in original). Translation (*traduction*) is

the action *sui generis* that incarnates, illustrates, and also makes possible these exchanges without, to be sure, having a monopoly on them. There is a multiplicity of acts of translation⁶ that assure plenitude of vital and natural interactions among individuals, peoples and nations, interactions in which they construct their own identity and their relations to the foreign.

(Berman 1992:54)

Before embarking on his analysis of a generalized use of the metaphor of translation in German Romanticism, Berman points out that Goethe insisted on keeping a “*théorie de la traduction généralisée*” – interlinguistic translation – clearly separated from a “*théorie de la translation généralisée*”, of which interlingual translation would only be a particular case (Berman 1984/1995:110; emphasis added). Within the general narrative of the book, Goethe plays the role of an alter ego of the author insofar as he stands for a clear separation between restricted and generalized forms of translation, which breaks down in German Romanticism.

Despite the fact that the ethnological discourse on the foreign “constitutes a kind of translation (*traduction*)” (Berman 1992:178), implying a possible interpenetration and overlapping of the two meanings (restricted and generalized translation), Berman insists on a spatial distinction. Commenting on Roman Jakobson’s tripartite subdivision of translation, he argues that this understanding of “generalized translation” covers reformulation, translation properly speaking, and transmutation as distinct domains, in an “effort to *dominate the unmasterable* (*immaîtrisable*) concept of translation” (ibid.:179; emphasis added). Metaphor and translation not only share a similar structure and the same terminological origin, they are also both slippery notions that are difficult to pin down. In this sense, metaphor in general and the metaphor of translation in particular tends to unsettle translation by reactivating its own inner terminological instability.

In chapters 5 and 9, the focus is on the Romantic notion of total translation, the will to translate everything, what Berman calls “*versabilité infinie*” (Berman 1984/1995:125): infinite versability. The Romantic will to translate everything, “*la volonté de tout traduire*” (ibid.:205), is grounded in the idea that all poetry is translatable; “*But if all poetry is translatable, one can now translate everything, get started on a program of total translation*” (Berman 1992:135; emphasis in original). In the overall narrative of the book, the Romantic will to total translation and the notion of generalized translation, which Berman discusses in more detail in the conclusion, are connected to each other.

Versability articulates a need for plurality – “*exigence de pluralité*”; ibid.:127). The term *Versabilität* was first introduced by Novalis (Berman 1992:78), who compared it to

the voluptuous movement of liquids – “mouvement ‘voluptueux’ du liquide” (Berman 1984/1995:125). Versability comes from the Latin *versabilitas* and the verb *versare*, ‘to turn, capable of being acted upon’, hence *versabilis*, ‘capable of being turned, changeable’. The associated French *verser* means ‘to pour’, so that *versabilité* also implies the possibility of pouring a liquid, which links it to one of the metaphors of translation discussed earlier. The phonetically and semantically associated *versatility* comes from the Latin *vertere*, ‘to turn’. *Versatile* from French, or from Latin *versatilis*, from *versat-* ‘turned about, revolved’ and the verb *versare*, an iterative form of *vertere*, ‘to turn’, is also used in the sense of ‘inconstant and fluctuating’. Both terms thus emphasize plurality and fluidity.

The conclusion of the book deals with the potential of elaborating a ‘traductology’. One of traductology’s main aims is to explore the ways in which the notion of translation can be used across various disciplines and its theoretical consequences for translation studies. Berman’s argument is based on his earlier analysis of *trans-lation* in German Romanticism. In ‘Translation as a New Object of Knowledge’, the second subsection of the conclusion (Berman 1992:181–191), he defines translation as a “carrier of a knowledge *sui generis* on languages, literatures, cultures, movements of exchange and contact” that must be confronted “with other modes of knowledge and experience concerning these domains. In this sense, translation must be considered rather as *subject* of knowledge, as origin and source of knowledge” (ibid.:181–182).

To describe the relationship between the domain of traductology and other domains Berman employs spatial metaphors. The space of traductology is “a space of reflection” that “will cover [*couvrira simultanément*] the field of translation within other fields of interlinguistic, interliterary and intercultural communication, as well as the history of translation and the theory of literary translation ... encompassing [*englobant*] literature ... philosophy, the humanities and religious texts. ... this field, by its very nature, intersects [*croise*] a multiplicity of domains”, and because of this, “there will necessarily be some interaction between these and traductology” (ibid.:182). In the same way that the field of translation is contained within other fields, the generalized version of translation is contained within the restricted theory. Berman defines their relationship as a “mutual envelopment” (ibid.:183). Instead of envelopment, which implies folding and wrapping up, the French original uses “*emboîtement réciproque*” (reciprocal nesting; Berman 1984/1995:292), that is, boxes containing each other. This metaphor, which at first sight seems to imply a balanced symmetry between a restricted and a generalized theory of translation, is however disavowed by the very denomination chosen for the endeavour: ‘traductology’ is a linguistically centred theory of translation, not a ‘translatology’. Furthermore, Berman’s spatial metaphors all do without osmosis or porosity. The existing borders between the interacting self-contained units remain in place, recalling the spatial metaphors of containment and circumscription discussed so far.

“Any type of ‘change’ (of ‘trans-lation’)”, Berman argues, can be “interpreted as a translation, not only in the aesthetic domain, but also in that of the sciences and, finally, in human experience in general”. However, this “peculiar extension of the concept of translation” can “result in *depriving* it of all content”. Much “would be gained in the development of a restricted theory of translation. Still, it remains a fact that the concept of translation *continues to overflow* [*ne cesse de déborder*] *any limited definition it can be given*”. “This semantic – and epistemological – *overflowing* [*débordement*]”, he continues, “seems inevitable”. This calls for the articulation of a restricted and a generalized theory of translation, “without *dissolving*

[*dissoudre*] (as is the case for German Romantics) *the former in the latter*. ... the restricted theory should function as the *archetype* of any theory of ‘changes’, or of ‘trans-lations’” (Berman 1992:183; emphasis added). Linguistic translation is the “*model* for any process of this kind” (ibid.). The specificity of a restricted theory of translation is its uniqueness, “*son unicité*” (Berman 1984/1995:292):

The relation that links a translation to its original is unique in its kind. No other relation – from one text to another, from one language to another, from one culture to another – is comparable to it. And it is precisely this uniqueness that makes for the *significant density* of translation; to interpret the other exchanges in terms of translation is to want (rightly or wrongly) to give them the same significant density.⁷

(Berman 1992:183)

In the metaphorical subtext, overflowing limits and dissolving distinctions are opposed to density and self-containment.

In his analysis of the use of the metaphor of translation in other disciplinary domains, Berman does not take into consideration the fact that the different disciplines generally use the metaphors they borrow from other disciplines to suit their own ends, even if the choice of a specific metaphor clearly also introduces a new point of view. In the case of the metaphor of translation, this generally led to a use that ignored the specific understanding of translation in translation studies itself. The examples of molecular genetics and translational medicine on the one hand, and postcolonial studies and Freudian psychoanalysis on the other, show that understanding what a translation actually is can vary greatly from discipline to discipline and that these different readings of the notion can be at odds with each other. The spectrum extends from translation as a form of transcriptive replication (genetics) to translation as a transformative power (postcolonial studies) (Guldin 2016). These processes of borrowing and appropriation do not simply drain translation of its meaning; they also recast it in new terms. Translation scholars should not attempt to safeguard the one true meaning of translation – if there ever was one – but open up to the different ways in which the term is used in other disciplinary domains in order to reach a better understanding of the notion within translation studies itself. Instead of an essentialist stance aimed at protecting the supposed integrity of the concept, one could engage in a cross-disciplinary dialogue that can help unsettle questionable terminological certainties and further the development of a more encompassing and differentiated understanding of processes of interlingual translation. This would also imply a systematic reflection on the predominant metalanguage of translation studies, especially on the metaphoricity of its key terms.

Concluding remarks

I wish to conclude with a brief overview of the metaphorical subtext that structures Berman’s vision on metaphor, translation, and translation as metaphor, and a few considerations on possible alternative metaphors.

The subtext operates with a series of interlinked dualistic assumptions: concept/metaphor, poetic and rhetorical metaphors, negative and positive metaphors, restricted and generalized translation, singularity/multiplicity, solidity/density versus liquidity/fluidity, fixity/mutability, tightness/looseness, clear-cut borders/porosity. These oppositions do not allow

for intermediate solutions but rather call for a series of closely interrelated delimitations that echo each other throughout the texts. Berman uses spatial metaphors that emphasize circumscription, distinction and separation. The metaphor of reciprocal nesting, for instance, emphasizes spatial separateness at the expense of porosity, overlapping and mixing, and the metaphor of overflowing presupposes a rigid conceptual container that recalls the box in *emboîtement*. Another layer of related metaphors connects unicity and uniqueness to the metaphors of the face, the profile, the proper name, the character and psyche of the translator and the personification of national languages. The metaphors of the close and loosely fitting terminological garments connect the metaphors of overflowing and dissolving to the metaphors of unicity and closeness. Finally, the metaphor of the net that turns out to be a trap suffocating the true meaning of translation and hindering its conceptual emancipation could be linked both to the notion of unchecked multiplicity and to the garment metaphor insofar as it does not really fit its subject but covers it up with a smothering blanket.

To counteract Berman's dualistic approach and to escape the Scylla of fixity and the Charybdis of fluidity, I would like to introduce a metaphor that has been used by scholars of both metaphor and translation, and which moves beyond the oppositions described here. In Max Black's interaction view of metaphor, the extension of meaning implied by metaphor is brought about by a "system of associated or related commonplaces" that project a "corresponding system of implications" (Black 1954:288) about the source domain onto the target domain. Lakoff and Johnson described this exchange as 'mapping' and 'cross-domain mapping'. The source domain of a metaphor is mapped onto a target domain, and "[t]he main function of conceptual metaphor is to project 'inference patterns' from one conceptual domain onto another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:82). Mappings represent systematic sets of correspondences between constituent elements of the source and the target domain. The target domain influences the sets of correspondences that are activated in the source domain. Systems of implications, inference patterns and sets of correspondences highlight the dialogical relationship that links the source and target domains and the many strands connecting the two like the weaving shuttle in a loom. These threads are like a dense mesh of filaments that can be followed in both directions. In a similar vein, the translation scholar Sarah Maitland argues that the source and the target text are not reified binary opposites but intertwined "threads of textual possibility" (Maitland 2016:17) linked to each other by the subjective work of the translator.

Notes

- 1 For alternative discussions of the use of the metaphor of translation in other disciplinary fields, see Trivedi (2007) and Bennett (2012).
- 2 By which I mean European and North American tradition.
- 3 Antoine Berman died in Paris on 22 November 1991. He chose the content and decided on the order of the chapters between 1990 and 1991, as he states in his preface to the volume.
- 4 This text was most probably written after 1985, as Berman quotes abundantly from Hermans's 'Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation' (Hermans 1985).
- 5 In a similar vein, Koller (1972) describes metaphors as a useful pre-scientific tool that can only pave the way for more systematic terminological reflections. They can reproduce vividly – but only in a simplified and condensed way – concepts that have already been clearly formulated or help to illustrate that which is not yet clear, difficult to explain or just intuitively perceived. As pre-scientific images, metaphors can only initiate thinking. This is also their main function in translation theory.

- 6 In the French version, Berman uses *translation* (Berman 1984/1995:89), which in this case should be rendered as *trans-lation*.
- 7 In the original, Berman uses *épaisseur* (thickness) rather than density (1984/1995:292–293).

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3

THE TRANSLATIONAL IN TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSDISCIPLINARY EPISTEMOLOGIES

Reconstructing translational epistemologies in *The Great Regression*

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Epistemology is a strand of philosophical theories of knowledge. Transdisciplinary, transnational and translational epistemologies are those strands of theories of knowledge that deal with the influence of transnational thinking, transdisciplinary knowledge-making and translational knowledge, respectively. My understanding of the translational dimensions of transnational and transdisciplinary epistemologies is derived from key characteristics assigned to the prefix *trans* in general, and more specifically to the concept of transculturality. *Trans* may refer to movements across (as in *transatlantic*), or may mean through, beyond; it may also include change of matter, form or mode (as in *transformation*, but also *transgender*). However, in contrast to relationships described with the prefix *inter* or *multi*, the *trans* prefix transcends binaries. It does not designate transfer taking place *between* separate entities, but rather emphasizes intricacies and transformations from within (Cambridge Dictionary 2021). Nonetheless, *trans* relationships are not necessarily devoid of tensions. Such tensions are particularly apparent in conceptions of transculturality, which have been developed to counter normative, universalistic or totalizing concepts of culture (Reckwitz 2004:11). In postcolonial theory, Pratt (1992), Rama (2012), Spitta (1995) and many others have developed understandings of transculturality that shed light on the connectedness of transformations and the power struggles that characterize these sometimes violent processes, especially with respect to cultural production in South America. Born out of a postcolonial encounter, processes of cultural transformation – and thus transculturality – are then described as a never-ending cycle of taking in, spitting out and adapting, a cycle where dominated subjects may absorb certain influences but at the same time constantly resist and negotiate these influences in ways that travel back to their ‘origins’ and in turn influence their colonial masters. When discussing *trans*-epistemologies I am thus focusing on assumptions, beliefs and practices of knowledge-making that reject binary thinking and the overemphasis on national, disciplinary or linguistic boundaries as particularly relevant in creating knowledge.

In what follows I argue that even though translation is already present in transnational and transdisciplinary knowledge-making, an epistemology based on translation as a practice of knowledge-making needs to go beyond its apparent ubiquity. To support my argument,

the intricate relationship between translational, transnational and transdisciplinary epistemologies will be discussed in three steps. After a short introduction to the political anthology *The Great Regression*, which will serve as a case in point, the first step will be to examine transnational epistemologies, paying special attention to their translational dimensions. This will be followed by a discussion of transdisciplinary epistemologies, again focusing on translation as an integral part of the elaboration of such knowledge-making ideologies. I conclude with a discussion of types of translational epistemologies and the potential characteristics of translational knowledge-making.

Translation, transdisciplinarity and transnationalism in *The Great Regression*

Conceived by an in-house editor of the German publishing house Suhrkamp, *Die große Regression* (Geiselberger 2017a–m) is a multilingual collection of essays that address current societal and political developments, ranging from recent political events such as Brexit, the election of Donald Trump and the rise of (right-wing) populism to more theoretical topics such as (de)civilization, (neo)liberalism and democracy fatigue. The authors are intellectuals, scholars and political journalists who address these issues in the hope of sparking a transnational debate: as the project's website puts it, "Against the 'Nationalist International', ... *The Great Regression* builds on the power of a transnational public sphere" (TGR Web 2021). Published simultaneously in English, French, German and Italian and shortly after translated into Bulgarian, Catalan, Czech, Dutch, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish and Turkish, the collection offers transdisciplinary perspectives on a range of issues, with contributions from a series of global – and some more local – intellectuals and scholars. In alphabetical order the contributors are Arjun Appadurai, Zygmunt Bauman, Donatella della Porta, Nancy Fraser, Eva Illouz, Ivan Krastev, Bruno Latour, Paul Mason, Pankaj Mishra, Robert Misik, Oliver Nachtwey, César Rendueles, Wolfgang Streeck, David van Reybrouck and Slavoj Žižek. They offer analyses of regressive societal, political, economic and cultural developments. The Spanish and Catalan versions feature additional contributions by Santiago Alba Rico and Marina Garcés that are not available in the other languages.

The editor of the volume, Heinrich Geiselberger, is professionally affiliated to the Suhrkamp publishing house, which has a long history of publishing transdisciplinary work in the social sciences and humanities and is conscious of its quite unique position on the German-speaking literary and intellectual book market. Translating any of the authors featured in the collection is not particularly remarkable since their books and articles have all been translated and published in different languages and countries before. Clearly, *The Great Regression* contributes to further increasing the transnational visibility of these scholars and intellectuals. However, it does not substantially enhance their international reputation, as it could have done with a yet untranslated set of intellectuals. Rather, the editorial choice of authors reveals an interest in a cohort of intellectuals already present in transnational debates and scholarly discourses. The innovation lies in the way these authors are brought together and in the choice of publishing format. First, the authors were allowed to write their contributions in their preferred language. This resulted in translations being featured in every version of the book and, importantly, in undermining the power of any language to shape the discourse or the contours of argumentation. Second, the publisher arranged for an

almost simultaneous launch of all language versions, which required a massive coordinating effort usually reserved for best-selling titles in popular literary genres.

Translating academic books is not part of the usual business practices of scholarly book publishers. Economic constraints, scarce time resources and lack of adequate translator-publisher networks are among the factors that have been identified as hindering scholarly book translation in the social sciences and humanities (Sapiro et al. 2014). Publishers therefore tend to rely on external financial support and to require evidence that the book will sell well before taking on such translation projects. They consequently favour retranslating canonized classics and translating authors who have already made an impact internationally in this very restricted market. For instance, Pierre Bourdieu had to achieve international fame as public intellectual before substantial parts of his oeuvre were translated into a larger variety of languages (Sapiro and Bustamante 2009). *The Great Regression* follows this pattern to some extent: most authors are well-known beyond their national and linguistic borders; for some translations financial support was obtained from the German Federal Foreign Office; and the prospect of healthy sales was enhanced through a coordinated web presence that also publicized events involving the authors featured in the book. Geiselberger could moreover rely on Suhrkamp's prestige and – with the involvement of Polity, Gallimard, Feltrinelli and many other well known publishing houses – he succeeded in uniting reputable publishers with a similar profile throughout Europe and beyond.

The Great Regression is a product of translation in every respect. All language versions of the book include translated contributions, and the promotional material and website accompanying the book were also made available in multiple languages. A twitter account (@tgrdebate) with an international following supports all its activities. The aim of sparking a transnational debate relied on a simultaneous availability of the texts in diverse languages, which could only be achieved through translation. Nonetheless, translation – as a practice, a form of knowledge-making, a process of decision making – is not addressed, represented or reflected upon, neither in the book(s) nor in the peri- or epitextual materials that accompany them. No particular importance is given to the translators either, beyond the fact that they are named on the first pages of the book and/or at the beginning or end of the contributions they translated. For the Catalan, Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish and Turkish versions, a total of 48 translators participated in the project. They were responsible for translating 160 contributions based on 16 source texts written in English (10), German (4), French (1) and Spanish (1–3).¹ Of the 48 translators, only 13 are women – the remaining 35 are men.² The translational labour is divided very differently among language versions. Whereas in the Portuguese version only three translators were involved, the German version – which includes 3 texts written in German – features 11 translators. These raw figures highlight the strong presence of translation in the project, as well as variation in processes adopted to produce the different language versions.

Transnational epistemologies

Translation is a prerequisite to the development of transnational epistemologies in terms of enabling the circulation of knowledge, and the politics of translation determines who can participate in transnational knowledge-making and who cannot. In thinking about the transnational, we are reminded that national boundaries were not always particularly important in delimiting political power, economic relationships or, for that matter,

epistemologies of knowledge-making. Unthinking the nation state as a boundary for scholarly work has a long tradition. Anderson's (1983/2006) quasi-deconstruction of the nation state conceptualized as a powerful, albeit imagined, community summarizes the entire debate and is a classic in the field: national boundaries influence social and cultural life but these boundaries draw their power only from shared collective imaginations.

Transnational epistemologies focus on those forms of knowledge-making that transgress and question national borders. In the field of cultural studies, a certain canonization of transnationalism is already evident: the *Trans/National Study of Culture* (Bachmann-Medick 2014) has been proclaimed the norm in thinking about cultures; a few years earlier Szeman (2007) had described cultural studies as globalized (Nünning 2014:37). In the history of the social sciences, Heilbron et al. (2008) called for the adoption of a transnational perspective, to demonstrate that transnational knowledge-making is deeply embedded in these disciplines at the level of transnational institutions, transnational mobility of scholars and transnational knowledge exchange between the scholarly and non-scholarly realms. Specific theoretical perspectives are likewise proclaimed as transnational: Go and Krause (2016:6) refer to approaches such as Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory to illustrate the existence of enduring traditions that have sought transnational explanations of our social realities. They further argue that global fields of cultural production may emerge through transnationalization, as in the case of the arts or sciences (*ibid.*:12), but others, like international law, may have been transnational or even global from the beginning.

What, then, are transnational epistemologies? On the one hand, transnational epistemologies comprise efforts to denationalize, decentralize and dewesternize scientific and scholarly thought. Intellectual discourses supporting such views are often centred on the present and might focus, for instance, on decolonizing the university (Bhambra et al. 2018) or promoting approaches that adopt multiple perspectives in research. Refocusing our epistemic gaze also involves looking back, as Baer (2020) does when he proposes to revisit the founding myths of translatorial knowledge, which have long neglected conceptualizations of translation in the 'Eastern' world. In that sense, the national may also already refer to wider geographical areas that are decentred in such transnational perspectives. On the other hand, transnational epistemologies are closely connected to transnational methodologies and the kind of questions researchers ask themselves. From the perspective of a transnational epistemic paradigm, national borders are not a particularly relevant factor in explaining social change or continuity.

Although not the sole means of negotiating epistemic power, translational practices strongly influence epistemic struggles within transnational epistemologies. At present, dominant translation policies and practices in academia principally support the reproduction of well-established strands of knowledge that are enshrined in longstanding and prestigious Western institutions.³ It may even be argued that our current organization of scholarly knowledge-making follows a transnational neoliberal epistemology, and that within such an epistemology "[w]hose knowledge is seen as central and 'translatable' ... is not independent from inequalities rooted in colonial exploitation, maintaining [thus] a 'knowledge hierarchy' between the Global North and the Global South" (Bacevic 2019:9). The translational within these transnational epistemologies thus merges with tensions that define knowledge beyond national borders. It is important to stress here that transnational knowledge-making does not result from mere cooperation or complementarity. Rather, historical and contemporary accounts of transnational knowledge-making practices highlight that such

epistemologies are dominated by tensions between North and South, but also between the global and the local. Claims of global validity of an argument are often at odds with local forms of meaning-making. In this respect, Jasanoff (2010:239) argues that transnational knowledge-making may lead to a decoupling of expertise and local meaning-making, and points out that a “nation’s citizens are acculturated into relatively settled ways of public knowledge-making”. These “civic epistemologies”, moreover, strongly define “how, in different societies, knowledge is recognized as reliable” (ibid.). To make sense of transnational or globally decoupled knowledge within the realms of these civic epistemologies, Jasanoff (2005) suggests strengthening participatory forms of knowledge-making, which necessarily include various forms of translation. In that respect, translation practices can be key in connecting globalized expertise with local forms of meaning-making. Cronin (2017:2) addresses this issue in his call for the development of an eco-translation in the time of the Anthropocene. He argues that communities using minority languages have a right to be heard and translated in a globalized knowledge- and policy-making environment. This includes “all forms of translation thinking and practice that knowingly engage with the challenges of human-induced environmental change” (ibid.). Eco-translation thus involves promoting a translational epistemology which is not limited to producing knowledge but sets out to question and reflect upon prevailing conditions of transnational ecological knowledge-making epistemologies.

First and foremost, however, translation is a means by which an arena for transnational knowledge-making can be created. This is particularly true for the social and human sciences, which rely less heavily on English as lingua franca than the natural sciences (Ammon 2012), and where social and political discourses and cultural interpretations of shared collective realities build upon a specific language and the political, social, economic and cultural contexts prevailing within a certain time and space. The transnational space is dominated by global intellectuals, those figures that reach audiences beyond their specialized peers and are visible in mass and social media. Translation is as much a measure by which we define global intellectuals (Sapiro and Bustamante 2009) as it is a practice that creates them. The French economist Thomas Piketty, for instance, “had international visibility among his peers long before the publishing of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*” (Brissaud and Chahsiche 2017:2). The fierce transnational debate sparked by his 1000-page analysis of contemporary capitalism could not be foreseen. To a certain extent, however, his visibility may be explained by his prior public intellectual engagements in mass media and his ability to self-translate economic ideas to reach beyond academic circles. One strategy he used consisted of referring to popular literature and film – such as Disney’s *The Aristocats* – to explain economic mechanisms (ibid.). Finally, his book – initially written in French – was translated by a prominent scholar-translator, Harvard-based Arthur Goldhammer, and released within months of the publication of the French version (ibid.:12–13), allowing for a simultaneous reception in interested circles. Following an intense media response in the USA and France, publication of the German and other language versions was accelerated.

It almost seems as if Heinrich Geiselberger had read the script to Piketty’s transnational success story prior to publishing *The Great Regression*. As editor he chose authors of high repute, of different disciplinary backgrounds, age, gender and ethnicity to articulate the progressive message he wanted to convey through the book. He included both journalists and scholars in order to reach a wider audience and carefully planned a rapid translation of

the anthology into a wide variety of languages. The mediatized framing of the book further highlighted its claim to transnational importance by presenting short interviews with the authors and a world map depicting places where the book was published (Map 2021). The authors featured in *The Great Regression* – who were well aware of this particular context of production – also used various discursive and textual strategies to connect their interpretations of local developments with global trajectories and to position themselves within a transnational epistemic paradigm. One strategy involved referring to phenomena and events that were transnational from the beginning, to recall Go and Krause (2016), such as the world climate conference COP21, the World Social Forum movement, the Global Justice Movement and an abstract reference to LGBTQ movements (see, in particular, della Porta 2017; Latour 2017). Although single events such as the COP21 may be localized in one geographical place, they simultaneously constitute references to past, ongoing or recurring events that together imply a transnational reach. A second strategy involves basing an argument on similarity and referring to local singularities that are then connected to singularities elsewhere to create a transnational argument. When Robert Misik refers to “a folk trade-union official from Upper Styria” (Misik/Livingstone 2017:120),⁴ he carefully elaborates his argument to connect it to the dilemmas of the Labour Party in Britain after the Brexit vote. Appadurai chooses a similar strategy when he asks “[w]hy did some Muslims in India and the United States vote for Modi and Trump?” (2017:2). Interestingly, however, the prominence of translation in this publication project has not led to a more explicative approach to cultural specificities. No explanation is provided of associations to the working class, industrial traditions of Upper Styria or the political weight of trade union officials from that region within the Austrian system of *Sozialpartnerschaft* (social partnership) in the past.

A more nuanced approach to elaborating transnational discourses consists of developing an interpretation of transnational or global developments in ways that mirror the global in the local, instead of deducing the global from local singularities. Eva Illouz (2017) adopts this strategy when she “consider[s] this process of internal radicalization from a tiny corner of the globe, that of Israel” to explain the tensions of political liberalism, secularism and various forms of fundamentalism. Finally, the authors draw on transnationally established concepts, and often concepts that are familiar across disciplines, to convey a transnational perspective. All authors in this anthology rely on this strategy. Most notably, Oliver Nachtwey (2017) builds his argument on a transnational terminology: first referring to Norbert Elias’s civilization theory to explore processes of decivilization, and then proceeding to discuss social disintegration along the lines elaborated by Talcott Parsons and Axel Honneth.

In sum, scholars engaging in transnational epistemologies work on research questions and methodologies that are not constrained by national boundaries. Here, translation is a prerequisite to gathering transnational data, but also to creating arenas of intellectual exchange that go beyond one language. Researchers focus on phenomena such as poverty, capitalism and ecology that transcend social and national borders. For social and political thought to transcend national boundaries, scholars have to connect global developments with local phenomena. As evident in *The Great Regression*, this can be achieved through the choice of issues to discuss and illustrating the argument based on geographically divergent material; or it can be rooted in conceptual abstraction. This brings us to the translation and transformation of concepts at the centre of transdisciplinary epistemologies.

Transdisciplinary epistemologies

The question defining transdisciplinary knowledge-making and hence transdisciplinary epistemologies is whether or not trajectories of disciplinary knowledge-making have led to incommensurable hypotheses, concepts or theoretical perspectives. Patterns of institutionalization, but also the deinstitutionalization of disciplines – that is, their loss of autonomy and epistemic authority (Fleck et al. 2019) – vary widely. For most disciplines, however, their birth (or retrospective birth-myth) is linked to processes of evolution out of several other disciplines. Whether interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, these transgressions of boundaries aim to integrate different disciplinary elements or epistemologies (Nünning 1998:237). This is particularly visible in translation studies, which “shares many of its topics and tools with other disciplines” (D’hulst and Gambier 2018:1) and is often referred to as a trans- or interdisciplinary.

Transdisciplinary epistemologies, however, are more than shared topics or methodological approaches. Such epistemic paradigms are not the mere result of knowledge transfer relationships, but further require reflexivity and critical exchange of ideas, concepts and methodologies. Like translation, a transdisciplinary epistemology is defined by its provisionality and procedurality. Translation is a driver of transdisciplinarity in several ways: translating can help create new strands of thought, translations can be used as a springboard for reshuffling disciplinary boundaries, and translation agency is a means of dealing with conceptual incommensurabilities. A case in point where new transdisciplinary epistemological premises were created based on translation is the methodological developments in the field of empirical social research in Germany after the Second World War. Not only was translation from English, albeit often based on texts written by exiled German scholars in the USA (Ploder 2017), key in (re-)establishing and institutionalizing methods of empirical social research in various fields of the social sciences, but in some instances these translational transformations of knowledge transcended disciplinary boundaries to create new ways of looking at social realities. One example is the methodology of *Objektive Hermeneutik* – a method of hermeneutical text interpretation – developed by Ulrich Oevermann, which drew heavily on ideas from US-American linguistics, but also “philosophy of language, philology, and sociology of language” (ibid.:130), before establishing itself as an important strand of research within German sociology, an importance it continues to assume. Similar transdisciplinary translation processes took place in Bielefeld at the same time, where symbolic interactionist writing was translated from US-American sociological traditions into more philosophical strands in Germany, not least by highlighting how these US-American approaches were influenced by earlier German philosophical traditions (ibid.:145f.). The circularity and ecology of transdisciplinary knowledge-making in these instances are easy to trace.

Publishing houses can also be drivers of transdisciplinary (and transnational) thought as their publishing strategies create and deconstruct disciplinary boundaries. Very often such re-figurations of boundaries are connected to publishers’ translation policies. In the 1960s and 70s, German publishing houses such as Luchterhand, Suhrkamp and S. Fischer contributed significantly to the creation of new strands of scholarly thought, new epistemologies and interpretations of social reality in German-speaking academia. Newly created book series such as Luchterhand’s *Soziologische Texte*, Suhrkamps *Theorie* and later *Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft*, as well as S. Fischer’s *Äthenäum* (Schögler 2020:676), depended on

translations to create a recognizable programme within a short space of time. Indeed, almost 50 per cent of books were translated into German, sacrificing profit margins in favour of accumulating symbolic capital (Schögler 2019). Publishers' selection of titles from a wide variety of theoretical literature published in the USA, Great Britain and – to a lesser extent – France meant that disciplinary boundaries were widely ignored, redrawn or questioned in the programmatic presentation of their series.

Finally, a third translational dimension of transdisciplinary epistemology emerges in the translation of so-called untranslatables. Rejecting a normative approach to the translation of concepts and claims of untranslatability, Hermans observes that translation, as a mediated form of communication, is a process that does not necessarily end at a specific point in time. Rather, he argues, translation “must remain forever provisional” (2019:37), and when so-called untranslatables are translated, the renderings in question remain tentative and provisional. Provisional or otherwise, translation (re-)creates new ways of interpreting concepts and allows them to travel in hybrid spaces of transdisciplinary thinking and knowledge-making. In that sense, emerging from tensions between the translated and the untranslated (Grbić et al. 2020), translatorial agency is a prototypical expression of a translational transdisciplinary epistemology through which translation unavoidably transforms and reframes meaning.

In terms of the translational dimensions of transdisciplinarity in *The Great Regression*, three types of transdisciplinary concepts can be differentiated to exemplify how the transdisciplinary constitution of concepts interacts with translatorial agency and reveals the knowledge-making potential of translation practices. A simple mechanism through which translatorial agency is restricted concerns how well established or novel certain concepts and the respective terms associated with them are in scholarly (or intellectual) discourses. Translators are most restricted in their terminological choices when dealing with well-established concepts. However, single terms might still acquire different meanings depending on the (disciplinary) context in which they are then used. In *The Great Regression*, concepts such as *globalization*, *liberalism*, *neoliberalism*, *democracy*, *class*, *class identity*, *nation*, *civilization*, *habitus*, *race*, *people* (*Volk*), as well as *totalitarianism* or *civilization process* (in Norbert Elias's sense) fit into this category of well-established concepts. In these instances, translatorial agency is restricted by pre-existing translations, theoretical treatises on the translation and circulation of these terms (e.g. the *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies*, Cassin 2004) and the expectations of readers who may be aware of existing renditions. Although translators may decide to diverge from existing translations and expectations, this usually calls for explanations in footnotes or commentaries and leads to an explicit re-positioning of a concept or term in the target academic discourse.⁵ Furthermore, translators can decide how to deal with discrepancies and overlaps in the meaning of terms such as *liberalism*, which may be known to potential/imagined readers. Explicating specific conceptual understandings of particular terms in a discipline (or language), or refraining from commenting on these incommensurabilities, equally have the potential to reposition the source author and their narrative, intentionally or otherwise. The term *race* and its translation into German as *Rasse* illustrate how translatorial agency co-constructs transnational and transdisciplinary thinking. Whereas *race* in English is not always restricted to biological traits but may also encompass socially constructed attributions, in German *Rasse* – without further elucidation – does not signal a critical position towards *race*, being restricted to the biological sense (von Rath and Gasser 2021).

Nancy Fraser (2017:43) uses two strategies to emphasize her critical appraisal of the term (and concept) of *race*. She places *race* within scare quotes and adds *ethnicity* to supplement its meaning:

In this context [capitalist developments of 1960s and 70s] progressive new social movements, aiming to overturn hierarchies of gender, '**race**'-**ethnicity** and sex, found themselves pitted against populations seeking to defend established lifeworlds and privileges, now threatened by the cosmopolitanism of the new financialized economy. [emphasis added]

The German translation by Frank Jakubzik (Fraser/Jakubzik 2017:82) follows the same strategy. No further commentary or emphasis is deemed necessary to draw attention to a divergence in German and English discourses on *race/Rasse*.

In diesem Kontext entstand eine Gegnerschaft zwischen den Neuen Sozialen Bewegungen, die auf den Umsturz der alten Hierarchien in den Bereichen Gender, »**Rasse**«/**Ethnie** und Geschlecht abzielten. [emphasis added]

In other instances, where the term *race* is used in a context where it can have no racist connotations, the translation follows the original in refraining from highlighting or supplementing the term (Mishra 2017:113):

Religion and tradition have been steadily discarded since the late eighteenth century in the hope that rationally self-interested individuals can form a liberal political community which defines its shared laws, ensuring dignity and equal rights for each citizen, irrespective of ethnicity, **race**, religion and gender. [emphasis added]

The enumeration of ethnicity, race, religion and gender clearly refers to scholarly categories of identity building and makes it clear that *race* is not used in a racist/biological sense. In the German translation by Michael Bischoff, the same list of categories is presented, with *Rasse* appearing without emphasis, comment or contextualization (Mishra/Bischoff 2017:190):

Seit dem späten 18. Jahrhundert hat man Religion und Tradition ständig kritisiert in der Hoffnung, rational eigennützig Individuen könnten eine liberale politische Gemeinschaft bilden, die ihre gemeinsamen Gesetze bestimmt und die Würde wie auch die gleichen Rechte ihrer Bürger ohne Ansehung der ethnischen Zugehörigkeit, **der Rasse**, der Religion und des Geschlechts sichert. [emphasis added]

The unqualified use of *Rasse* could be read as an approval – on the part of Pankay Mishra – of biological race theories. But not necessarily, provided readers are aware they are reading a translation and conscious of potential discrepancies in conceptual use. A third context of rendition of *race* in this anthology concerns racist narratives used by regressive social movements. Here, there is no need to signal the author's distancing from racist theory and ideology for the benefit of German readers (Appadurai 2017:5):

For the first time, a message about America's power in the world has become a dog-whistle for making whites the ruling class of and in the US again. The message about

the salvation of the American economy has been transformed into a message about saving the **white race**. [emphasis added]

In Arjun Appadurai's text and in other similar cases *race* is used as in reported speech, and the German text thus simply renders it as *weißen Rasse* (e.g. Appadurai/Engels 2017:24).

A second set of concepts – such as *post-factual age* (Streeck/Livingstone 2017:160–161), *grassroot processes* (Bauman 2017:16) and *family wage* (Fraser 2017:42, 43) – are less established and in some cases not restricted to the academic sphere. In these instances, translatorial agency is less restrained by pre-existing terminology. The impact of translators' choices is less pronounced than in the first category, but the choices still contribute to transdisciplinary knowledge-making. For instance, Zygmunt Bauman's *grassroot processes* is translated quite literally as *graswurzelartige-Prozesse* (Bauman/Jakubzik 2017:42) in German. Alternative renditions could have highlighted the conceptual core of grassroot movements and stressed its focus on the agency of (local) communities, as in *Basispolitik* (community politics) and *basisdemokratische Bewegung* (community-based-democratic movement) in German. How translators and scholars decide to frame terms that are not well established in the intellectual discourses of a particular language community demonstrates the extent to which transdisciplinary and transnational scholarly communication is entangled with translation practices.

The third category covers concepts that remain underdefined, allowing translation and transdisciplinary exchange to co-create new meanings and contribute to developing new conceptual frameworks. The central narrative unfolding in *The Great Regression* revolves around recent political and social upheavals, increasing economic inequalities, as well as the transnational spread of regressive and/or progressive social movements. For most arguments the authors draw on established concepts from sociological, political and cultural theory to explain divergent factors of political unrest and dissatisfaction with the economic and political situation. Moreover, several authors engage with emotions and affects as relevant factors in explaining the impetus of regressive movements. Emotions such as rage, anger, fear or hatred are not part of an established repertoire of social and political thought and thus differentiations among these feelings and types of affect are not theorized as is the case in fields such as psychology. The versatility and openness of these terms is also visible in the variety of translational choices adopted. The key terms used to highlight the affective dimension of regressive social movements in English are *rage* (18 instances), *raging* (2) and *enraged* (1), in addition to *anger* (13), *angry* (5), *unsettled* (1) and *hatred* (6). In the German version, *rage* and *anger* are mostly translated using different forms of *Wut* (16 instances) or the adjective *wütend* (3) as well as *Zorn* (5) and *Hass* (6). No particular reasoning for the one or the other rendering is given. Looking at the immediate context in which *rage* and *anger* appear we can observe a clearer attempt at conceptualization, an effort to link these terms to social and political theory. For instance, *rage* is used in phrases such as *movements of rage*, *popular rage*, *(rightist) populist rage* and *majoritarian rage*. There is less effort to conceptualize *anger*, which features once as *popular anger* and once as *anti immigrant anger*.

The translational dimension of this transdisciplinary and transnational work is more evident in larger excerpts. Writing in English, the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek conceptualizes both *rage* and *anger* as follows (Žižek 2017:191):

Each of the two positions has a point: good manners should never be underestimated in politics, and a vulgar public speech by definition indicates a deeper political

disorientation; it is also true that the rightist **populist rage** is a distorted form of class struggle, as was already the case in fascism. However, both positions are also fundamentally flawed. Liberal critics of the new populism fail to see that the **popular anger** is a sign not of the primitivism of ordinary people but of the weakness of the hegemonic liberal ideology itself, which, since it can no longer manufacture consent, must have recourse to a more ‘primitive’ functioning of ideology instead. [emphasis added]

Translated into German by Frank Born (Žižek/Born 2017:302), this becomes:

Jede der beiden Positionen hat etwas für sich. Einerseits sollte man gute Manieren in der Politik nie unterschätzen; eine vulgäre öffentliche Rede deutet per definitionem auf eine tiefer liegende politische Orientierungslosigkeit hin. Andererseits ist es richtig, dass die **rechtspopulistische Wut** eine verzerrte Form des Klassenkampfes darstellt – wie dies schon im Faschismus der Fall war. Allerdings enthält auch jede der beiden Positionen grundsätzliche Fehler: Die liberalen Kritiker des neuen Populismus erkennen nicht, dass der **Volkszorn** kein Zeichen der Primitivität der einfachen Leute ist, sondern ein Indiz für die Schwäche der hegemonialen liberalen Ideologie selbst, die es nicht mehr schafft, »Konsens zu fabrizieren«, so dass man Zuflucht zu einer »primitiveren« Funktionsweise von Ideologie nehmen muss. [emphasis added]

In this short excerpt, Žižek uses both terms, *anger* and *rage*. Whereas *popular anger* is translated as *Zorn*, more specifically as *Volkszorn* (anger of the people), in other instances Born opts for *populistische Wut*, or *rechtspopulistische Wut* (right-wing populist anger) as in the above stretch. In so doing the translator highlights a difference between *anger* and *rage*, while leaving *popular* and *populist* undifferentiated.

Conceptualizing the affective dimension within existing political and social thought does not rely so much on the immediate context; instead, it relies on the contextualization of the relevant concepts in established theoretical discourses. In the already quoted example from Žižek, emotional outbursts of anger are embedded into the “weakness of the hegemonic liberal ideology itself” (2017:191). Another example where *rage* is conceptualized as a factor within political theory occurs in the contribution by Ivan Krastev, who relies on a reference to political scientist Ken Jowitt to connect *rage* with social movements (Krastev 2017:69):

We live in a world that is more connected but also less integrated. Globalization connects while disconnecting. Jowitt warned that in this connected/disconnected world we should be prepared for explosions of anger and the emergence of ‘**movements of rage**’ that would spring from the ashes of weakened nation-states. [emphasis added]

Two conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. First, by translating terminology on rage, anger and other affective behaviour – albeit inconsistently – and connecting these concepts to political, sociological and other disciplinary narratives, the development of a conceptual vocabulary for this dimension is advanced simultaneously in different languages. Rage, fear and hate are conceptualized as relevant factors for political, economic and cultural actions and thus social and political theory. They are also used to further deconstruct assumptions of a purely rational human agent (economically). Second, transdisciplinarity is inconceivable without translation, and translation, in turn, participates in shaping

disciplinary connections. Bourdieu (1990/2002:4) famously argued that a translated text does not travel along with its entire context. This is only partially true when concepts are developed in several languages simultaneously and interventions by different scholars and intellectuals are co-created in a transnational (textual) space.

The Great Regression fulfils expectations of transdisciplinary epistemologies on many levels. Transdisciplinary epistemologies are reflected in the choice of authors contributing to the volume, suggesting a desire for transdisciplinary positioning. They are also reflected in the assumption that by combining philosophical, political, sociological, linguistic and journalistic perspectives a deeper understanding of global regressive developments can be achieved. The translational dimensions of these transdisciplinary epistemologies are inherent in the transdisciplinary contact zones in which they emerge.

Translational epistemologies

Translational epistemologies emerge as a result of increased interest in and a growing use of translation by scholars working in a range of scholarly domains, “as a trope through which the local concerns of the appropriating discipline may be addressed” (Baker and Saldanha 2009:xxi). Błumczynski (2016) provides examples of the ubiquity of translation across disciplines; Weigel (2019) elevates the concept of translation to a master trope of theory building; and Bachmann-Medick and Sturge (2009) identify what they call a ‘translational turn’ in cultural studies. The epistemics of translation, however, may develop in at least three directions. First, translation is considered a heuristic concept on which different theories draw. Second, translation is treated as a practice accompanying or supporting scholarly and scientific knowledge-making. A third approach to the epistemology of translation – not yet sufficiently developed – could elaborate on the entire spectrum of knowledge-making involved in translation practices in all their variety.

The first approach to translational epistemology reflects on how different groups of scholars – whether they operate within a specific discipline or form communities of thought across disciplines (*Denkkollektive*; Fleck 1935/1980) – use the concept of translation for their own agendas of knowledge-making. These understandings focus on translation as a concept, but not so much on the epistemic potential of translation as a social practice. Given its conceptual impact on different disciplinary cultures, translation has been termed a ‘traveling concept’ (Bachmann-Medick 2017), that is, following Bal (2002), a concept used and transformed over time and across the boundaries of institutionalized knowledge-making. When translation travels as a concept, transformations tend to follow a specific pattern. First, scholars resorting to translation identify it as a (mostly linear) process of transfer of linguistic utterances from one language into another, often considered the sole research object of the discipline of translation studies. Next, conceptual appropriation takes place by suggesting a more metaphoric understanding of translation and reclaiming this understanding for a disciplinary context other than translation studies. For instance, in ethnography and anthropology, cultural translation is understood as a discursive as well as non-discursive institutionalized process by which ethnographers “uncover the implicit meanings of subordinate societies” in the course of transforming knowledge for a (Western) academic audience (Asad 1986:163). In ANT (actor-network theory), translation is defined as a means of negotiating social relationships and redistributing agential properties across the human/non-human divide (Callon 1984). At the same time, terms other than translation, such as

globalization, cosmopolitanism (Bielsa 2014), hybridization, creolization and transculturation include translation as a clear part of the terrain they cover; Bielsa (2021:5) makes a similar argument. These and other conceptualizations of translation are presented as distinct from what is usually termed interlingual translation. It is possible to argue that such widely metaphorical uses of translation cannibalize a concept that is central to translation studies and detach it from translation practice as a mediated social activity. I would follow Hermans, however, in suggesting that as scholars of translation we “should drop the idea that what we are aiming for is a full and accurate representation of foreign concepts of translation”, and instead “accept that what we are about is the creation of vocabularies which will enable us to do certain things” (2018:385).

In the second approach, translating is framed as an epistemic practice of scholarly knowledge-making in itself. Ghosh (2001) argues that the translation of scholarly knowledge is a conceptual act that inevitably transforms knowledge. And yet, as I argue elsewhere (Schögler 2018a), translators are only occasionally acknowledged as contributing to the process of knowledge-making in scholarly realms. Thus, translating as an epistemic practice – a practice capable of ‘making’ knowledge – is only construed as such in specific instances. These include fields in which translation practices are inextricable from processes of knowledge-making, as is the case in the Classics, and contexts where translation assumes a visibly interpretative role, as in the re-translation of canonized authors (Schögler 2018a). In the latter case, translators are able to actively position themselves in paratextual materials. Scholars who are forced into self-translating to make their own and others’ work available in transnational intellectual, literary or political arenas occupy a more ambivalent position. The epistemic violence involved in such instances of self-translation is evident in the case of scholars, poets and thinkers who were hounded by the Nazi regime in the first half of the twentieth century. Displaced and exiled in the USA, Great Britain, France and other territories around the globe, these intellectuals had to choose between (forced) self-translation, where they were capable of it, and losing their voice. Hawkins (2020) argues that exiled scholars were well aware that their choice of language(s) was important, strategic and had consequences for how they might interact with and what they can communicate to their respective readerships. Self-translation acquired an epistemic value for these displaced scholars, as it was impossible to translate everything they had produced and even less possible to translate all the material they referred to implicitly or explicitly in their work. The epistemological dimension of translation in this context emerges in practices of selecting relevant fragments of a text, selecting the dimensions of meaning to be communicated, and selecting the contexts to be explained to readers. Current practices of transnational scholarly and intellectual communication continue to uphold systemic forms of forced (self-)translation by negatively impacting the careers of those scholars who refrain from publishing in English, the current lingua franca of transnational exchange. Translational epistemologies thus do not necessarily support equal relationships in knowledge-making practices and may even contribute to perpetuating hierarchies of knowledge or contribute to the eradication of knowledge in the name of globalization – an epistemicide as Bennett (2007) terms it, drawing on Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

The third strand of translational epistemologies, which calls for conceptualizing the entire spectrum of knowledge-making inherent to translation practices in all their variety, is what remains largely untheorized. Implicitly, such epistemologies are already inherent to various translation theories, for instance in assumptions about the (relative) stability of

the relationship between signifiers and signified and the (im)possibility of neutrality. Key concepts in the discipline, such as translatorial agency (Kinnunen and Koskinen 2010) and translation cultures (*Translationskulturen*; Prunč 2008), are informed by assumptions about the potential ability of translational acts to participate in effecting social change and are therefore highly relevant to understanding and developing translational epistemologies. Compared to the first two approaches to translational epistemology, this third, under theorized strand could elaborate – in a more self-reflexive manner – on how translations, translators and translating create, transform and transgress processes of knowledge-making. It could reflect on translation policies that are negotiated explicitly and implicitly in knowledge-making cycles. Translational epistemologies are not to be misunderstood as negotiating translatorial norms or deciding on specific wording in a translation. Rather, they arise from deliberation and reflection on translation practices and policies in specific disciplinary or situational research contexts. Translation practices emerging out of such a translational epistemology would enhance the visibility of the transformative power of translation.

To go back to *The Great Regression*, what we see clearly in this case is translation being adopted as a defining characteristic, undertaken in a strategic manner to enhance its visibility and potential to spark a transnational debate within a transdisciplinary intellectual discourse. And yet, as I have already shown, the analysis of textual and paratextual material does not reveal a clear translation policy informing translation practice or translatorial agency. Translators are named more or less prominently, depending on the language, but otherwise there is no reflection on translation (as a process), translations (as products) or translators (as social agents). In other words, reflections on transnational and on transdisciplinary epistemologies have so far failed to attend to the role of translation practices within cultures of knowledge-making.

Concluding remarks

I have argued that translation has the potential to become a key *trans*-epistemology alongside already established transnational and transdisciplinary epistemologies. Although the translational dimensions of transnational and transdisciplinary epistemologies are evident in projects such as *The Great Regression*, they have not been theorized in their own right, in a way that can inform a comprehensive translational epistemology capable of reflecting critically on translatorial knowledge-making.

Scholars who engage with transnational epistemologies tend to focus on phenomena that are not bound to the nation state. To transcend the confines of national boundaries, they connect global developments with their local manifestations and rely on translation to create arenas of intellectual and scholarly exchange. How these arenas of exchange are structured – who gets translated, what texts are available in how many languages, which issues receive attention within scholarly and intellectual communities – influences the extent and intensity of the transnational circulation of certain types of knowledge. Dominant patterns of translation in academia currently reinforce the reproduction of well-established strands of knowledge and the power of already prestigious institutions.

In terms of transdisciplinary epistemologies, I argued that these are based on the premise that scholarly knowledge offers better explanations of various phenomena when different (disciplinary) perspectives are taken into account and that such transdisciplinary work is defined by transformations in practices of knowledge-making. However conceptualized

in its own right, translation allows concepts to travel more easily between disciplinary contexts where those contexts themselves are not usually part of the journey. I also suggested that whenever new concepts are negotiated – as in the example I gave of translation being involved in introducing the conceptualization of the anger/rage dimension of political theory – translation may contribute to connecting transnational and transdisciplinary knowledge-making.

Finally, translation may be ubiquitous in the circulation of thought, in transdisciplinary and transnational epistemologies, but the epistemic conceptualization of translational knowledge-making has only just begun. Today, translation is a heuristic concept central to processes of theory building, a practice accompanying or supporting scholarly and scientific knowledge-making, but it is not yet elevated to the level of an epistemology, where the knowledge-making potential of translation practices is recognized, and where researchers drawing on the assumptions that underpin such an epistemology can engage with translation in a self-reflexive manner to frame their (scholarly) knowledge-making practices.

Notes

- 1 Three translations from Spanish were included in the Catalan version; these include the contributions by Santiago Alba Rico and Marina Garcés (2017), which do not feature in the other language versions.
- 2 These numbers are based on an analysis of translators of *The Great Regression* by Martina Schmiechlechner discussed in a seminar given at the University of Graz during the summer term of 2019. The Bulgarian, Chinese and Korean versions could not be taken into account in the analysis due to my own language limitations and non-availability of other studies I might have been able to draw on.
- 3 Heilbron's (2000) centre-periphery model, which focuses on book translations in the literary field, provides a good indicator of the mechanisms at play in the academic book translation market.
- 4 Names of translators are included in references to differentiate the language versions and give the translators visibility for their work.
- 5 For a long time, Max Weber's *stahlhartes Gehäuse* was rendered as *iron cage* in English, following Talcott Parsons' translation in the *Protestant Ethic*. Only much later were new solutions suggested by the translators of this classic of sociological and economic theory – *shell as hard as steel* and *steel-hard casing* made it into subsequent translations, always accompanied by a detailed commentary laying out the reasons for this change in terminology, deemed by the re-translators to be necessary to grasp the conceptual metaphor Weber was apparently elaborating (Schögler 2018b).

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4

TRANSLATION AS COMMENTARY

Paratext, hypertext and metatext

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Some years ago, I was writing a book for the Translation Theories Explored Series, of which Theo Hermans was then the Series Editor. Mid-way through, I wrote to Theo to ask if I could increase the word count. He responded with his usual dry wit – “I’m delighted that you find so much to say about translation thresholds” – and gave the green light. ‘Translation thresholds’ was the working title of the book that became *Translation and Paratexts* (Batchelor 2018), and this chapter represents a further contribution to that research. For even with Theo’s generous agreement, I was unable to fit everything that I wanted to say about translation thresholds into that book. In particular, I was unable to explore, except in a rather cursory manner, the idea that translations may themselves be thresholds, in the sense of providing commentary on an original text. This is an idea that Genette (1997a:405) evokes in the final pages of *Paratexts*, the English translation of *Seuils*, where he suggests that translations have a “paratextual relevance” that is “undeniable”.

As I note in *Translation and Paratexts*, Genette’s suggestion that translations can be conceived of as paratextual is one that has had a cool or indifferent reception within translation studies (Batchelor 2018:185–188). This is undoubtedly in part due to the limited role that Genette accords to the translator, generally conceiving of translations as further editions of the same text. However, the idea that translation can serve as a form of commentary or literary criticism is by no means alien to the discipline. John Felstiner (1989:94), for example, in his reflections on translating Paul Celan, posits that

translating Celan – translating any poet, in fact – appropriates all the resources of interpretive criticism. Even more than that: in translating, as in parody, critical and creative activity converge. The fullest reading of a poem gets realized moment by moment in the writing of a poem. So translation presents not merely a paradigm but the utmost case of engaged literary interpretation.

Numerous other scholars have pointed to the nature of translation as an intense form of reading: the recently published *Histoire des traductions en langue française*, for example, describes

the translator's role as being that of a reader *par excellence* ("lecteur par excellence"; Banoun et al. 2019:1765);¹ similar sentiments have been expressed by literary translation scholars and translators, including Gregory Rabassa (1989:6), Marilyn Gaddis-Rose (1997), Michel Morel (2006) and Maïca Sanconie (2007).

Furthermore, the closeness between reading and translation has been a prime motivator for at least three recent academic literature translation initiatives. Kate Briggs (2020:50), translator of two volumes of Roland Barthes's lecture notes, writes that she saw her translation as "one way – one drawn-out, especially attentive way – of *taking* [the lecture course] such a long time after the fact" (emphasis in original). Chantal Wright (2018:2), translator of *The Age of Translation*, an English translation of Antoine Berman's French commentary on Walter Benjamin's famous and enigmatic German essay 'The Task of the Translator', states that she was "primarily motivated by the thought that reading and translating Berman's commentary would offer an unparalleled intensity of engagement with Benjamin's text". Silvia Kadiu (2019:3), in *Reflexive Translation Studies: Translation as Critical Reflection*, explores translation theory via translation practice, translating essays by Lawrence Venuti, Susan Bassnett, Henri Meschonnic and Antoine Berman from English into French or vice versa, stating that her translations are conceived as "a creative and critical form of engagement" with their theories.² Coming from another angle, proponents of translation in both the US and the UK have campaigned to have translation recognized as scholarship (Porter 2009; Harrison 2015). These campaigns are once again premised on the idea that a translator is "the most intimate reader of a text, sort of the consummate interpreter, the ultimate comparatist" (Howard 2010).

In this chapter, I would like to open up a fresh discussion of the connections between translation and critical reading, interrogating Genette's (1997a:405) fleeting suggestion at the end of *Paratexts* that "translations must, in one way or another, serve as commentary on the original text" by placing it alongside his reflections on commentaries, translations and other types of textual transcendence elsewhere in his oeuvre. While Genette himself immediately constrains his suggestion by insisting that the commentary function is most relevant when the translation has been "more or less revised or checked by the author" (*ibid.*), I hope to show that the seeds for conceiving of a commentary that is more open-ended and independent of the author are to be found within Genette's oeuvre itself.

Commentary in Genette

Ideas about the nature and purpose of commentary and literary criticism vary significantly from one place, time or disciplinary context to another (Kusch 2016:6–22; Gallagher 1997). If we are to understand Genette's suggestion that translations serve as commentary on the original text, we must therefore first seek to understand what he is taking *commentary* to be. In *Palimpsests*, Genette (1997b:1) includes commentary in his overview of the "five types of transtextual relationships" that in his view form the subject of poetics, labelling it "metatextuality" (*ibid.*:4), and setting it alongside intertextuality, architextuality, paratextuality and hypertextuality. However, whereas he devotes entire monographs to the latter three types of textual transcendence (*Introduction à l'architexte*, Genette 1979; *Seuils*, Genette 1987; and *Palimpsestes*, Genette 1982, respectively), metatextuality is described only in brief terms as "the relationship most often labelled 'commentary'... the *critical* relationship par excellence" (1997b:4, emphasis in original). To glean what Genette understands by the "*critical*

relationship” (ibid.), we must therefore examine the various mentions of metatextuality and commentary that Genette makes in other publications.

The clearest indications of what Genette takes commentary to be are found at moments in which he compares ‘real’ commentary with other forms of purported commentary. In *Paratexts*, for example, in the context of a discussion of prefaces, he distinguishes “real commentary” (Genette 1997a:290) from contributions which are “testimonial-biographical”, or “modestly editorial and strictly academic” (ibid.). The latter encompasses “technical composition of the manuscript, chronology of composition ... note about variants” (ibid.); it is not until the preface writer “asserts the importance of his own commentary for an understanding of the poem” (ibid.) – or in other words, moves towards interpretation of the text – that we find “real commentary” (ibid.). Similarly, in a discussion of the “social game” (ibid.:362) of the authorial interview at the time of a text’s publication, Genette suggests that such occasions create a “need for information” versus a “need for true commentary” (ibid.), and are thus dominated by “description (summarizing the plot of a novel or the thesis of a work of ideas and quoting some phrases to ‘give an idea of the style’)” (ibid.). Description, summary, quotation: none of these thus constitute commentary. Readings by authors of their own works, in contrast, are “already quite obviously an ‘interpretation’” (ibid.:370), and thus “indirectly convey commentary” (ibid.). For Genette, then, commentary is interpretation: it is an effort by either the author or a third party to specify or emphasize the meaning of a text (ibid.:157), or find meaning in a text (ibid.:276).

Like commentary, however, views about what interpretation does – or should do – and about how meaning is to be found in a text vary radically from one literary critic to another, as Umberto Eco (1994:24) neatly explains:

all along the course of history we are confronted with two ideas of interpretation. On one side it is assumed that to interpret a text means to find out the meaning intended by its original author or – in any case – its objective nature or essence, an essence which, as such, is independent of our interpretation. On the other side it is assumed that texts can be interpreted in infinite ways.

Eco characterizes these two extremes as “instances of epistemological fanaticism” (ibid.) and argues in favour of a middle ground, whereby texts are open to multiple but not unlimited interpretations.³ Genette’s view appears to be broadly similar: in *Paratexts*, he suggests that prefatorial commentary can “[bring] to light ‘deep’ meanings” (1997a:270) of a text (note his use of the plural here), and in *L’Oeuvre de l’Art/The Work of Art*, he argues “we can no more look at the same painting ... twice than we can bathe in the same river twice” (1997c:236); “a work ... never produces exactly the same effect twice” (ibid.:237). Elsewhere, however, he disapproves of a textual hermeneutics that accords readers unlimited power (ibid.:9):

I could decide that Rousseau’s *Confessions* is an up-to-date remake of the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine ... after which there will be no dearth of confirming details – a simple matter of critical ingenuity. I can also trace in just about any work the local, fugitive, and partial echoes of any other work ... this attitude would invest the hermeneutic activity of the reader ... with an authority and a significance that I cannot sanction.

Like Eco (1994:42), who (citing Richard Rorty) confesses himself uncomfortable with “free reading” in which the “will of the interpreters ... ‘beats ... the texts into a shape which will serve their own purposes’”, Genette suggests provocatively here that critical ingenuity can find allusions to previous texts anywhere it wishes, and cautions against following interpretive criticism too far along this “verdant but slippery path” (1997b:53). In a later essay, however, Genette (2003:136) appears less perturbed by the way in which the critic – whom he now compares to a *bricoleur*:

‘fait parler’ les oeuvres, c’est-à-dire la manière dont il leur fait dire *autre chose* que ce qu’elles voulaient dire, faisant sens de tout signe et signe de tout sens, le critique met toujours, lui aussi, et même si tel n’était pas son projet conscient, ‘quelque chose de soi’. [“makes works talk”, that is, how he makes them say *something other* than what they wanted to say; making meaning from each sign and sign from each meaning, the critic always – even if this wasn’t his conscious objective – inserts “something of himself”]; emphasis in original]

This statement opens up a very different perspective for conceptualizing translation as commentary. Far from presenting translation as subservient to the original and committed to reproducing (as it were) its (singular) meaning, the analogy opens the way for seeing translation as “inscribing an interpretation” (Venuti 2012:180), thereby aligning Genette’s suggestion with commonly accepted views in translation studies. However, there is an important caveat to this interpretation of Genette’s analogy: for it to operate in this way, the commentary must be one that arises out of translation’s hypertextual, rather than paratextual, relationship to the original. In the next section I shall explain the distinction between these two types of textual transcendence in Genette’s work.

Genettian hypertextuality

As we saw above, paratextuality and hypertextuality are two of the five types of transtextual relationship identified by Genette in the opening pages of *Palimpsests*. The concept of the paratext covers a number of “verbal or other productions” which “surround” and “extend” the text, “in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*” (Genette 1997a:1), for example by “enabl[ing] a text to become a book” (ibid.). Among the examples of paratext that Genette provides are titles, prefaces, notes, epigraphs and book covers (ibid.). The paratext is often, but not always, physically appended to the text. A hypertext, on the other hand, is a separate literary text (made present as a separate book by its own paratext) that is derived from another text by some kind of process of transformation (Genette 1997b:5); among the examples of hypertext that Genette provides are parody and pastiche (ibid.:24).⁴ Crucially for our purposes, he includes translation as one type of hypertext, suggesting that it is both “the most widespread” and most visible form of “transposition” (ibid.:214), one of two basic processes through which a hypertext is derived from a hypotext.⁵

Both paratext and hypertext are distinct from metatext, which has the primary function of commenting on another text and is typically “descriptive or intellectual” (Genette 1997b:5) rather than “properly literary” (ibid.). However, both paratext and hypertext are able to serve as commentary on the text to which they stand in paratextual or hypertextual

relationship. It is worth noting, at this point, that Genette (ibid.:7) stresses that the five types of transtextuality are not to be viewed as “separate and absolute categories” (ibid.:8):

The architextual appurtenance of a given work is frequently announced by way of paratextual clues. These in themselves often initiate a metatext (“this book is a novel”), and the paratext, whether prefatory or other, contains many more forms of commentary. The hypertext, too, often acts as a commentary: a travesty such as Paul Scarron’s *Virgile travesti* is in its way a critique of the *Aeneid*, and Marcel Proust says (and demonstrates) that a pastiche is “criticism in action”.

There are, nevertheless, important distinctions to be made between paratextual and hypertextual commentary. First, while paratexts almost invariably convey some kind of commentary on the text,⁶ hypertexts do so only when read alongside their hypotext: “every hypertext, even a pastiche, can be read for itself ... it is invested with a meaning that is autonomous and thus in some manner sufficient” (Genette 1997b:397). Second, the direction of commentary is unidirectional in the case of the paratext (the paratext comments on the text), whereas in the case of the hypertext, it is bidirectional: the hypertext can serve as commentary on the hypotext, as seen in the example of Scarron’s *Virgile travesti* cited above, but equally the hypotext can serve as commentary on the hypertext.⁷ Third, paratextual commentary always conveys authorial or author-sanctioned interpretations of the text, in line with Genette’s (1997a:407) insistence that “the main issue for the paratext is ... to ensure for the text a destiny consistent with the author’s purpose”; see Batchelor (2018:12–17) for an extended discussion of the connection between paratext and authorial intention. Hypertextual commentary, on the other hand, is interpretation that is put forward by the author of the hypertext and works independently of – and in some cases against – interpretations that might have been favoured by the author of the hypotext itself. In the case of satirical pastiche, for example, the hypertext author goes so far as to subject the author of the hypotext to ridicule (Genette 1997b:20).

A view of translation as paratext, at least in Genette’s definitions of the term, would thus likely entail a narrow understanding of the kind of commentary to which it might give rise: the critic’s role would be to identify and explain the author’s intention ‘correctly’, as it were, based on the epistemological premise that meaning is there to be found in the text, having been set there by the author. Indeed, it is presumably for this reason that Genette (1997a:405) suggests that the potential for seeing translation as paratextual commentary on a text is greatest when the translator is also the author, or when translator and author work closely together. Commentary that arises from the translation’s hypertextual relationship to the original, in contrast, is explicitly designed to bring something new to our understanding of the hypotext. This point can be extrapolated from Genette’s argument in *The Work of Art* that “‘variation’ or parody often accentuates features that would be *otherwise imperceptible*, and imitation, as we know at least since Proust, is ‘criticism in action’ and thus *an invaluable revelation*” (“la ‘variation’ ou parodie accentue souvent des traits *autrement imperceptibles*, et l’imitation, on le sait au moins depuis Proust, est une ‘critique en acte’, et donc *un précieux révélateur*”; 1994:251, emphasis added).⁸ A hypertext-based conceptualization of the metatextuality of translation thus accords the translator a far more active and open critical role and is likely to be more palatable to contemporary translation studies scholars than one that is based on a view of translation as paratext.

Before we explore this Genette-based conceptualization of translation as commentary further, it is important to note that Genette himself does not acknowledge the considerable productive potential to which it gives rise. Instead, he insists on the negative, deforming nature of translational hypertexts, classing them among “transpositions that are in principle (and in intention) purely *formal*, which affect meaning only by accident or by a perverse and unintended consequence” (Genette 1997b:214; emphasis in original). They thus stand in contrast with transpositions “that are overtly and deliberately *thematic*, in which transformation of meaning is manifestly, indeed officially, part of the purpose” (ibid.; emphasis in original). While Genette would therefore have no trouble according a hypertextual transformation such as Joyce’s *Ulysses* the potential to be a precious enlightener of the *Odyssey* itself, it is unlikely that he would accord this privilege to, say, a French translation of the English *Ulysses*. Although there is no doubt a distinction to be made between the hypertextual relationship that obtains between a conventional translation and its original and that which obtains between Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Homer’s *Odyssey*, the clear-cut nature of Genette’s distinction between deliberate and accidental transformation of meaning rapidly reveals itself as problematic,⁹ not least when read in the context of other assertions made by Genette about hypertexts and meaning. For example, when discussing digests, another transposition that is supposedly formal rather than thematic, Genette (1997b:243) notes that “no reduction can ever be a reduction pure and simple, can ever be transparent or insignificant – and thus innocent. Tell me how you summarize, and I’ll tell you how you interpret”. While he glosses the interpretations that are introduced through summaries in relatively positive terms – it is perhaps no coincidence that the material that he is discussing in this instance is a summary by canonical French author Balzac of a novel by Stendhal – the acknowledgement that “every act of translation affects the meaning of the translated text” (ibid.:241) is accompanied by an evocation of the Italian adage *traduttore traditore* and a reference to the “inevitable flaws of translation” (ibid.:215). Genette (ibid.:217) goes on to suggest that “the wisest thing for the translator would no doubt be to admit that he can only do badly”, and, in *The Work of Art* (1994:207), describes translations as making do or compromise (“des pis-aller ou des compromis”), placing them alongside reductions for piano as things which arise out of practical necessity.

To a certain extent, this negativity can be explained by Genette’s views on the modes of existence of works of art, and more specifically his view that a translation and its original are two texts of the same work (thus having what he terms “operal identity”), rather than two separate works. This position is elaborated in opposition to the American philosopher Nelson Goodman (Genette 1997c:177; emphasis in original):

To be sure, the operal identity of a text and its translation is not granted by everyone ... Goodman, faithful to his principle that a (literary) work is absolutely identical with its text, categorically rejects this identification: for him, a translation cannot but be a new work, since, by definition, it takes the form of a new text.

But this straightforward and, for a nominalist, philosophically convenient position hardly conforms with common usage ...

It is quite artificial to consider the French and English versions of *Molloy* as two distinct *works*, rather than as two *texts* (and thus two objects of immanence) of the same work. The criterion for the latter judgement is plainly not faithfulness to the original, which we rarely verify ... Rather, the criterion is clearly the authorial source as such. ...

if a *text* is surely defined by literal identity (sameness of spelling), a literary *work* is defined, from one text to the next, by semantic identity (sameness of meaning, as one might put it), which the passage from one language to another is supposed to preserve – not totally, to be sure, but sufficiently well and accurately enough for the reader to have a legitimate sense of operal identity.

As we can see, Genette bases his criticism of Goodman and others who would see translations and originals as separate works on the assertion that such an idea is “quite artificial” (ibid.). By this he means that it does not concord with what he terms “common usage”, whereby readers can state that they have “read *War and Peace*” (Genette 1997c:176) when what they have read is the French translation of the Russian original. While Genette acknowledges that these assumptions can and should be questioned, his overall position, throughout *The Work of Art*, is that “ordinary usage is also a fact, and it lays down certain requirements quite as much as other facts do” (ibid.:203).

It appears to be this position which leads Genette, like many others before him, to his negative view of translation: since the text and its translation(s) are immanences of the same work, they should convey the same meaning; however, they never do, since, as Genette himself observes, “every act of translation affects the meaning of the translated text” (1997b:241); *ergo*, translations always fail. Even though Genette nuances this position somewhat – speaking, for example, in the citation above, of a “sufficient” rather than absolute degree of sameness of meaning – it is at heart a repetition of what Rosemary Arrojo (1998:26) terms “essentialist approaches” to translation, portraying difference as “an annoying obstacle” rather than “inevitable and meaningful” (ibid.:42).

However, Genette’s readiness to accept culturally conventional views of the mode of existence of translations and their supposedly inherently flawed nature sits uneasily alongside other elements of his discussions around the nature and modes of existence of works of art. In particular, as noted above, Genette argues in *The Work of Art* that a single object of immanence inevitably produces a plurality of interpretations and thus of works by virtue of the changing circumstances of its interpretation and variations among readers. Following this line of reasoning, Genette develops a reception-oriented definition of works according to which “the work, as its name partially indicates, is the *action* performed by an object of immanence”; a work is thus “an object of immanence *plus* a certain, potentially infinite, number of functions” (ibid.:256; emphasis in original). He terms this the “operal plurality” (ibid.:230) of works of art. If we follow the logic of this later section of Genette’s argument, then a translation of a literary work can never be a translation of a work; instead, it must be a translation of one of the many operal pluralities to which the original text gives rise. Genette’s theorization of the modes of immanence and transcendence of works of art thus contains all of the elements necessary for a more productive and positive conceptualization of translation as interpretation, and when it is placed alongside his view of hypertext as precious revelation (“*précieux révélateur*”; Genette 1994:251), it has the potential to open up a powerful space for translation within literary criticism.

In the next section, I shall explore this space by reflecting on Jacques Derrida’s use of translation in *Les Spectres de Marx*. While Derrida does not himself adopt Genette’s terminology or framework, and indeed might be seen as a somewhat unlikely bedfellow for Genette,¹⁰ his mode of writing is both intensely hypertextual and intensely interested in translation. Before I explore the confluences between Genette’s notion of hypertextual commentary and Derrida’s use of translation, I would stress that I am not arguing in favour

of discarding the common usage-based conceptualization of translation completely. On the contrary, if it is to function as commentary on its hypotext, we must retain a conceptualization of translation that has in mind its ‘paradoxical’ nature, as outlined by Lance Hewson (2011:1), among others:

A published translation is a paradoxical object. It is a substitute for an existing, original text and yet it is a text in its own right. It is commonly perceived as being the same as the text it replaces, yet it is inevitably and irreducibly different.

In a sense, retaining this paradox is about retaining the link between translation as hypertext and the original text as hypotext, without which the notion of hypertextual commentary would become null and void. For example, if the many translations of Apollinaire’s poem ‘Les Fenêtres’ in *One Poem in Search of a Translator* (Loffredo and Perteghella 2009) are to be seen to be “refracting Apollinaire’s text” (Matthews 2009:42) in ways which “always reveal something different about it” (ibid.), as Timothy Matthews claims in his introductory essay to the volume, then those translations must in some respect be representations of Apollinaire’s poem. If they are not simultaneously representing as well as commenting, then there is nothing to guarantee that they are commenting on Apollinaire’s poem. More than this, if they cannot be compared in some way to Apollinaire’s poem, then their refractions do not become apparent at all. Derrida, as we shall see, maintains this paradox and puts it to work.

Four translational hypertexts in Derrida’s *Les Spectres de Marx*

Derrida wrote *Les Spectres de Marx* in response to an invitation to give a keynote conference speech at the University of California on the theme ‘Whither Marxism?’ in 1993. Taking place in what the editors of the English edition of *Spectres* describe as “the wake of the orgy of self-congratulations which followed the 1989 crumbling of the Berlin Wall” (Magnus and Cullenberg 1993:vii), the conference organizers opted for a deliberately ambiguous title, asking both ‘Where is Marxism going?’ and ‘Is Marxism dying?’ (ibid.:xiii; see also Peeters 2010:566). On the surface, *Spectres de Marx* would appear to have everything to do with Marxism and little to do with translation, but, as Martin McQuillan suggests in an interview with Peggy Kamuf, the English translator of *Spectres*, it is a book that is “entirely wrapped up in the questions and contradictions of translation” (Kamuf 2001:48).¹¹

As is common practice for Derrida, he addresses the topic announced by his title (*Les Spectres de Marx*) in an indirect manner, opening the first chapter with six words from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*:¹² “the time is out of joint”. These words are spoken by Hamlet to his friends after the Ghost of his father tells Hamlet that he was murdered by Hamlet’s uncle. The Ghost instructs Hamlet that he is to “revenge his foul and most unnatural murder” (Shakespeare 1994:661). The six words are cited by Derrida (1993:19) in their original English formulation before being presented as part of a longer citation in both English and in a French translation by Yves Bonnefoy. After this extended epigraph, the chapter opens with the enigmatic statement “Maintenant les spectres de Marx” (Now/maintaining the spectres of Marx; Derrida 1993:21), an ambiguity to which I shall return below. Derrida explains that he had chosen the words *spectres de Marx* for his title before rereading Marx’s *Manifesto* and realizing that the first noun of the Manifesto is *spectre*. He cites the opening sentence of the *Manifesto* first in French and then in German, the language in which it

was originally written: “Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa – das Gespenst des Kommunismus” (Derrida 1993:22). From the outset, Derrida thus places two works, and three languages, alongside each other, and as the lecture continues, the network of transtextuality grows ever more complex. Derrida adds, among others: three further French translations of *Hamlet*; ‘La Crise de l’esprit’ by Paul Valéry; Maurice Blanchot’s ‘Les trois paroles de Marx’; and ‘Der Spruch des Anaximander’ by Martin Heidegger. The complexities of the network thus established blur the boundaries between text and textual transcendence: is Derrida using Marx, or perhaps the occasion of the question ‘Whither Marxism’, to read *Hamlet*? Or is Derrida illuminating Marx through *Hamlet*, drawing on Shakespeare hypertext to cast new light on the *Manifesto*? The answer is surely a ‘both, and’ – and more. To set some constraints around this discussion, however, I will focus here solely on the way in which Derrida uses translation to generate hypertextual commentary in the first part of his discussion.¹³ In particular, I will focus my remarks on how these translation hypertexts can be a precious revelation (“précieux révélateur”) of features that would be otherwise imperceptible (“traits autrement imperceptibles”), to return to Genette’s (1994:251) assertion cited above.

Having foregrounded Hamlet’s declaration “the time is out of joint” in English in the epigraph, and having initially satisfied himself with citing the French version of Hamlet’s words by Yves Bonnefoy, Derrida returns to the question of translation as part of his examination of the “logic of haunting” (Derrida 2006:10). This is the idea that a spectre – such as Marx – is present in the present in the manner of an inheritance that is “never one with itself” (ibid.:18); always disparate and itself disjointed, this inheritance comes to us as an injunction requiring us to “choose and decide” (ibid.). When Derrida (ibid.:14) declares that “there is no future ... without the memory and the inheritance of Marx”, he thus insists that “there is more than one of them, there must be more than one of them” (ibid.). In the discussion that follows, I shall argue that translations – crucially, translations in the plural – offer a way of bringing to light the “same-ly disparate demands” (ibid.:21) of our inheritance, showing up as they do the different ways in which readers – in this case, translators – have responded to it.

For Derrida, the memory and the inheritance of Marx are intimately tied up with the memory and inheritance of Shakespeare,¹⁴ and it is this connection between Marx and Shakespeare that leads Derrida to cite four different French translations of Hamlet’s words “the time is out of joint”: “le temps est hors de ses gonds” (ibid.:43); “le temps est détraqué” (ibid.:44); “le monde est à l’envers” (ibid.); “cette époque est déshonorée” (ibid.). Derrida touches briefly on the different emphases that are brought by each translation, but not in order to weigh them against each other or against a particular interpretation of the original. Rather, he suggests that the value of these translations lies precisely in their “apparently disordered plurivocity” (ibid.:25), the way in which they underline the “radical and necessary heterogeneity of an inheritance, the difference without opposition that has to mark it” (ibid.:18). We might therefore argue that the evocation of these four translational hypertexts becomes a way of undoing the violence that has been wrought by each individual translation: where a translator is forced to choose, and thus, in Derrida’s memorable words in ‘La pharmacie de Platon’, “produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of analysis* that violently destroys it” (Derrida 2013:101; emphasis in original), the juxtaposition of the four translation hypertexts restores (some of) the discarded choices and reverses to a certain degree the process of analysis.

The adjoining of the translations thus generates a commentary that is not destructive but unfurling, allowing Derrida to attribute to Hamlet a plurivocality of declarations inhabiting these six small words (Derrida 2006:20; emphasis and brackets in original):

“The time is out of joint”: time is *disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down [traqué et détraqué], deranged, both out of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, times is off course, beside itself, disadjusted. Says Hamlet.

Furthermore, the fourth translation, “cette époque est déshonorée” (Derrida 1993:44) (“this age is dishonoured”; *ibid.*:22), prompts Derrida to open up an extended commentary on the connections between spectres and justice. The impetus for this commentary appears to be the sense of surprise that the translation choice generates, giving as it does an ethical or political meaning to Hamlet’s declaration (*ibid.*). Derrida (*ibid.*:23) notes that Hamlet is not so much cursing the corruption of his age as the fact that *he* was born “to set it right” – a mission that involves “punishment that consists in having to punish” (*ibid.*). Hamlet’s inheritance thus involves “castigating, punishing, killing” (*ibid.*:25), and is accompanied by a yearning for a justice that “one day ... a quasi-messianic day, would finally be removed from the fatality of vengeance” (*ibid.*). Derrida returns to the multiple alternative translations of Hamlet’s words in order to suggest that this quasi-messianic wish finds its fulfilment in some sense in the very phenomenon of the adjoining of translations:

Voici le coup de génie, l’insigne trait d’esprit, la signature de la Chose «Shakespeare» : autoriser chacune des traductions, les rendre possibles et intelligibles sans jamais s’y réduire. Leur ajointement reconduirait à ce qui, dans l’honneur, la dignité, la bonne figure, la bonne renommée, le titre ou le nom, la légitimité attirante, l’estimable en général, le *juste* même, sinon le droit, suppose toujours l’ajointement, le rassemblement articulé avec soi, la cohérence, la responsabilité.

(Derrida 1993:47)

This is the stroke of genius, the insignia trait of spirit, the signature of the Thing “Shakespeare”: to authorize each one of the translations, to make them possible and intelligible without ever being reducible to them. Their adjoining would lead back to what – in honor, dignity, good aspect, high renown, title or name, titling legitimacy, the estimable in general, even the just, if not the right – is always supposed by adjoining, by the articulated gathering up of oneself, coherence, responsibility.

(Derrida 2006:25)

Parsing and therefore interpreting the second sentence in this citation – whether in French or in its English translation – is an uncertain process: is Derrida specifying that what is always supposed by adjoining is “coherence, responsibility”?; or are “coherence, responsibility” a part of the adjoining process (by the articulated gathering up of oneself, (by) coherence, (by) responsibility), with the outcome of that adjoining left unspecified? I would err towards the former reading, not least because the theme of responsibility is crucial both to *Spectres de Marx* and to Derrida’s work of this period.¹⁵ Adjoining translations thus becomes a way of *maintaining* the spectres of Marx, to return to the opening line of *Les Spectres* and present it in its less obvious English rendering. Maintaining spectres “without conjuncture”

(Derrida 2006:2) – that is, in their disparity – is at the heart of an ethics and politics “that ... recognize[s] in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born” (ibid.:xviii). This respect for others is intimately tied up with justice, since, for Derrida (ibid.:xvii), there is “no justice ... without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present”. Adjoining translations is one way – perhaps even a privileged way – of “reckon[ing] with” (ibid.:xx) the “more than one” (ibid.) of those others, and thus of behaving in a just manner. While adjoining insists on maintaining disparate demands rather than discarding or disregarding those demands, it is not a bland ‘anything goes’ mode of reading. On the contrary, the disparate demands are seen as “untimely specters that one must not chase away but sort out, critique, keep close by, and allow to come back” (ibid.:109). This mode of reading thus rejects any teleological assumptions around retranslations: translations may appear untimely, but they remain part of our present and, like any other spectre, always carry the possibility of return. These translational hypertexts – to return to Genette’s conceptualization – are thus not to be superseded but to be held as an ever-present possibility; their potential to serve as precious revelation (“*précieux révélateur*”; Genette 1994:251) will not be exhausted on one reading, in one temporal moment.

Conclusions

I have suggested that there is value in conceiving of translation as hypertext, focusing on the commentary that it can thus be seen as producing on the hypotext. I have also endeavoured to show that there is a potentiality within Genette’s framework that he himself refrains from opening up, apparently constrained by popular views of translation as plural immanences of the same underlying work. Rather than arguing that this view of translation needs to be discarded, I have suggested that it is crucial to hold it in paradoxical connection with Genette’s own argument that a work is “the *action* performed by an object of immanence” (1997c:256; emphasis in original). Derrida’s discussion of multiple translations of “the time is out of joint” is anchored in this paradox: each translator responds to Hamlet’s words differently, yet each translation is, in Derrida’s terms, “authorized” by “the Thing ‘Shakespeare’”; each translation thus opens up “different possibles that inhabit the same injunction” (2006:18). The key to enabling translations to generate hypertextual commentary in the manner exemplified by *Spectres de Marx* – in other words, as *précieux révélateur* rather than as *traduttore traditore* – rests on two conditions. Firstly, the work on which they are seen to comment must be envisaged as active, open, uncertain – or even, as in Derrida’s view, secret¹⁶ – rather than as something whose contours are fixed, known and thus able to serve as evaluative measure. As Derrida and many others have observed, this openness does not mean that translation dispenses with constraints; the words of translation are “not dispersed at random” but address the “same-ly disparate demands” of “the Cause that is called the original” (ibid.:21). Secondly, the process of “relational reading” that Genette (1997b:399) describes must be a mode of reading that adjoins, rather than conjoins. Adjoining celebrates the “irreducible heterogeneity” of texts (ibid.:40), seeing that heterogeneity not as weakness but as something which “opens things up, ... lets itself be opened up by the very effraction of that which unfurls, comes, and remains to come – singularly from the other” (ibid.). Adjoining thus allows the demands of the

original to remain as demands rather than fixing them as “substance, existence, essence, *permanence*” (ibid.:39; emphasis in original).

This emphasis on seeing translation as an open-ended process yet one that is anchored in the paradox of sameness-in-difference is in many respects not new: it echoes arguments formulated by Hewson (2011), as noted above, and also forms the basis for Hermans’s (2007) conceptualization of translation as reported speech. More recently, it is at the heart of Matthew Reynolds’s (2019:3) suggestion that translation be viewed metaphorically as “prism” rather than “channel”. What this paper has shown is that another route towards conceptualizing this paradox, and – crucially – connecting it with translation’s commentary-releasing potential, can begin with Genette and his extensive theorization of modes of textual transcendence. This has involved reading Genette deconstructively, prowling around the aporia and contradictions that emerge particularly clearly when his later and earlier work are read together, or when read alongside Derrida’s practice of adjoining translations. Begin – but not end. Like translations, critical readings are a response to a demand that is not fixed; a commentary that is open, not closed; a living thing.

Notes

- 1 Here and throughout, all translations that are not specifically attributed to another source are my own.
- 2 It is no coincidence that the primary inspiration for Kadiu’s approach is Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionist reading – which Kadiu (2019:3) terms an “intralingual translation” – of Walter Benjamin’s ‘Des tours de Babel’ (where Derrida comments in French on a French translation of Berman’s essay). The connections between the idea of translation as commentary and the writings of Derrida will form a key component of the later part of this essay.
- 3 See, for example, Eco (1994:41): “even though interpreters cannot decide which interpretation is the privileged one, they can agree on the fact that certain interpretations are not contextually legitimated”.
- 4 It is important to note at this juncture that Genette’s model is developed in the pre-internet era, and that while the sense in which he uses hypertext has clear connections to the modern-day sense of text connecting to other text via links embedded in electronic documents, it is not the same.
- 5 In Genette’s model, hypertextuality is divided into two principal types: transformation and imitation. He views imitation as the more complex of the two, since it involves “a supplementary stage and a mediation” (Genette 1997b:6), necessitating “mastery of that specific quality which one has chosen to imitate” (ibid.).
- 6 Paratexts always either comment on the text, or present it, in Genette’s model. See, *inter alia*, Genette (1997a:345); and for discussion of the functions of Genette’s paratext, see Batchelor (2018:10–14).
- 7 Genette (1997b:398) argues that the relationship of the hypertext to its hypotext, however ambiguous, “cannot be overlooked without voiding the hypertext of a significant dimension, and we have often seen that authors went to great trouble – at the very least by means of paratextual clues – to guard against such loss of meaning or of aesthetic value”.
- 8 I have provided my own translation here, as the published translation (Genette 1997c) does not bring out the highlighted points. Genette does not provide a reference to Proust’s notion of “criticism in action”, but according to Coyle (2015:116), it can be traced to a 1919 correspondence between Proust and the novelist Ramon Fernandez.
- 9 To some extent, this criticism of Genette may be unfair, since Genette’s structuralist poetics often proceeds by drawing up clear-cut typologies (often in tabulated form) before subsequently blurring and complicating the boundaries. His approach is neatly illustrated elsewhere in *Palimpsests*, where he presents a chart and states that what follows is “a long commentary on this chart, a commentary whose primary effect will be, I hope, not to justify the chart but rather to blur, dissolve, and eventually erase it” (Genette 1997b:28).

- 10 Genette (1997b:393–394) mocks Derrida in *Palimpsests*: “I shall recall footnote 17 of Jacques Derrida’s *Pharmacie de Platon*, where he was discreetly indicating – to the yokels’ stupefaction and acute discomfort – that the bulk of that essay was ‘in itself nothing but a reading of *Finnegans Wake*, as was clear enough from the start’. It is my turn now to confess what many a reader may have guessed long ago: that the present book – not *Finnegans Wake* but that which thou, indefatigable Reader, art supposedly holding in hand – is nothing other than the faithful transcription of a no less faithful nightmare, stemming from a hasty and, I fear, sketchy reading, in the dubious light of a few pages by Borges, of I know not what Dictionary of Works from All Times and All Countries”. However, the distance between Genette and Derrida may not be as great as one might assume: in *The Work of Art*, as we have seen, Genette moves towards a more constructivist notion of work, and, like Derrida, finds inspiration in Levi-Strauss’s notion of *bricolage*; he even speaks of the “play” (Genette 1994:185) between a work and its object of immanence.
- 11 Indeed, as Kamuf (2010:88) argues in a later publication, “there are innumerable places in [Derrida’s] work ... where questions of translation ... are brought to the fore”; she even goes so far as to argue that “from ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ on, such questions are never left out of account” (ibid.).
- 12 The book itself opens with a dedication to Chris Hani and is followed by an exordium reflecting on the words “je voudrais apprendre à vivre enfin” (Derrida 1993:13), an expression that would take centre stage in an interview conducted by Jean Birnbaum shortly before Derrida’s death in 2004 (Derrida 2007). I will leave these elements to one side here, but a fuller reading of translation in *Spectres* would call for their inclusion.
- 13 There is a second, similarly important use of translation to generate commentary in the second part, where Derrida (2006:49) muses “if Marx had written his *Manifesto* in my language ..., I am sure he would have played on the word *conjuración*”, but we do not have space to explore that here.
- 14 “Blanchot does not name Shakespeare here, but I cannot hear ‘since Marx,’ since Marx, without hearing, like Marx, ‘since Shakespeare’” (Derrida 2006:20).
- 15 From 1991–2001, Derrida delivered a series of seminars entitled ‘Questions de responsabilité’ (Questions of responsibility), encompassing discussions of testimony, hospitality, and the death penalty, among other topics (Michaud 2018); see also <http://derridaseminars.org/seminars.html>.
- 16 “One always inherits from a secret – which says ‘read me, will you ever be able to do so?’” (Derrida 2006:18).

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PART II

Historicizing translation



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5

CHALLENGING THE ARCHIVE, 'PRESENT'-ING THE PAST

Translation history as historical ethnography

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Since the turn of the century, interest in translation history has grown very considerably, with special issues of journals devoted to mapping its contours (*Translation and Interpreting* 2019; *The Translator* 2014; *Translation Studies* 2012), and book series created in which scholars can explore methodologies and research themes (*Translation History* 2019, Palgrave Macmillan; *Routledge Research on Translation and Interpreting History* 2019). The resulting discussions have been marked by two persistent and closely related questions: one interrogating finality – what exactly is the purpose of translation history? – and the other concerning location – where is the disciplinary home of translation history? For Bandia, the main objective of what he terms a “serious history of translation” is “to enhance knowledge in and about the field of translation studies” (2014:114). As Pym suggests (2009), this might be achieved by moving attention away from texts towards the translators themselves, their lives and professional networks, and the intercultural contexts in which they lived. With this sort of focus, it is possible to draw comparisons between translators from different historical eras (Adamo 2006:91), with the implicit goal of understanding and preferably improving current practices of translation. For Rundle on the other hand (2020), such an intention is fundamentally ahistorical in that it substitutes the diachronic perspective which he sees as fundamental to historical inquiry with a synchronic approach aiming to draw overall conclusions on the basis of a variety of historical cases. The purpose of translation history, he contends, should be to look towards specific historical contexts in order to make a distinctive contribution to historiographical debates in these areas. The key, in his words, is not to ask what “Italian Fascism tells us about the history of translation but what translation can tell us about the history of fascism” (Rundle 2012:237). The two book series are in many ways standard bearers for these sharply opposed views of the purpose of translation history. The Palgrave Macmillan version claims to be “the first to take a global and interdisciplinary view of translation and translators across time, place, and cultures” (*Translation History*), while the Routledge series describes its rationale as “the treatment of translation and translation practice as social and historical events” (*Routledge Research on Translation and Interpreting History*).

This controversy on the finality of translation history inevitably raises the related issue of its positioning within the academy, and hence of its status and credibility. Translation historians, prone to a type of “epistemological hypochondria” (Comaroff 1991:xiii), are acutely self-conscious of methodological rigour: “translation scholars who labour to document a history of translation in any given context have to think like historians” (Malena 2011:88). There is often though an anxious fear that they could be perceived as simply ‘masquerading’ as historians (Bandia 2006:46). For others observing this angst, it is unclear that such efforts devoted to history will be of much benefit to translation itself: “what is in it for Translation Studies?”, as Bandia acerbically puts it (2014:114). It is after all acknowledged that there is a marked asymmetry between the respect which translation pays to history and the relative lack of interest in the reverse direction: “most historians think of language and translation as incidental and peripheral to their work” (Rundle and Rafael 2016:28). This much discussed debate about the relationship between translation studies and history however implicitly assumes that both disciplines are conceptually reified, that they are not subject to the constant challenge and redefinition which is the norm within all academic fields. To this extent, as Hermans concluded, the apparent argument between disciplines – translation studies on the one hand and history on the other – is essentially predicated on something of a “false opposition” (2012:244).

Thus far, attempts to escape from this persistent binary divide have taken two forms. In the first place, apparently entrenched positions on both sides could be voluntarily softened in order to discern productive meeting points between them. Bandia, for instance, urges the adoption of analytical categories derived from translation studies which could then engage with the relevant historiography: “Translation historians can thus define their research paradigms based on terms related to Translation Studies, while drawing on historiography for relevant themes and tropes” (2014:117). Rundle looks towards a transnational space with “a more bilateral and flexible understanding of interdisciplinarity in translation history – and, by extension, in translation studies” (2014:4), an approach which might incidentally encourage historians to recognize the presence and implications of multilingualism in their own research (Malena 2011:105).

The second strategy involves a conscious paring down of the objects on which translation history focuses. Following in the steps of Ginzburg (1980), some translation historians have adopted a micro-historical perspective, closely investigating the particular and the specific. By studying small, relatively well-defined objects in this way they seek to respect historical specificity while also contributing broader insights about the practices of translation (Adamo 2006; Batchelor 2017). Approaches derived from *histoire croisée* (Werner and Zimmermann 2006) similarly encourage translation historians to reconcile the synchronic with particular historical contexts by focusing on selected moments, instances of transfer and intercrossings as perceived through the lens of transnationalism (Batchelor and Harding 2017).

Both of these strategies however – the softening of positions, or the turn towards specific and well-defined objects of research through micro-history or *histoire croisée* – arguably operate within the same conceptual boundaries in which finality and disciplinary identity remain the key issues of concern in translation history. One way of thinking outside such frames, and thereby changing both the focus of our research and our sources, would be to engage with the materiality and spatiality of translation over time. The spatial turn, common to many academic disciplines, calls on us to look away from pre-determined agents, selected texts, social networks and theories of global capital, and instead “include

the performances, rituals, affect(s), practices and ways of being that are produced by, and simultaneously constitute, space(s)" (Smirl 2015:11), in all their materiality. As Haraway puts it, "all of the actors are not human and all of the humans are not us" (1992:67). Recent research in linguistic landscapes has moved beyond investigating visible language displayed in public places to explore instead the "images, photos, sounds (soundscapes), movements, music, smells (smellscapes), graffiti, clothes, food, buildings, history, as well as people who are immersed and absorbed in spaces by interacting with LL [linguistic landscapes] in different ways" (Shohamy 2015:153–154). Pennycook argues that linguistics should begin to question the "boundaries between different modes of semiosis ... Developing the idea of spatial repertoires and assemblages" (2017:270) on lines pursued by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Cultural geographers describe the importance they attach to "hybrid geographies ... travelling through the heterogeneous entanglements of social life" (Whatmore 2002:3), while non-representational theory directs our attention to "the geography of what happens" (Thrift 2008:2) to materiality and practices on the ground.

On the whole, however, with some notable exceptions (Littau 2016; Simon 2019; Constanza Guzmán 2020; Inghilleri and Polezzi 2020; Ciribuco and O'Connor, forthcoming), translation studies has tended to be less interested in exploring the material and the spatial. But as Hutchings (2020:84) argues in his plea for a realignment between modern languages and area studies, understanding humans as "spatio-temporally embodied beings rooted in specific circumstances" directs our attention to translation itself, involving as this does "the mediation of diffuse symbols, experiences, narratives and linguistic signs" (Baker 2016:7). A translation history which engages with spaces, with physical material relationality, would be practised from the ground up, a translation history from below as it were which would be as democratic in intention as Thompson's iconic "History from below" (Black and Macrauld 2007:113).

In what follows I argue that a translation history which explores the material relationality of translation can help to move us beyond questions of finality and disciplinary identity. By adopting an ethnographic approach to these spaces of encounter – "contact zones" in Pratt's terms (2008:8) – translation historians will be "present-ing the past" of translation (Denning 1992:5), and in so doing they will be challenging traditional historical notions of what constitutes the archive, and potentially writing translation histories in new and innovative ways.

Challenging the archive

Over time, notions of the archive have of course been subject to a variety of challenges. Creative re-readings of the archive have come most importantly from postmodern philosophy – Foucault's seminal framing of archives as constructs of power (1981) – and from new historicists like Gallagher and Greenblatt (2000) with their claim that primary sources are discursive representations. The previously sacrosanct relationship between historian and archive has attracted mounting criticism. Specifically, the traditional historical respect accorded to the archive is now characterized as excessive, a "Freudian romance" of loss and nostalgia, hemmed in by academic disciplinary regulations (Steedman 2008:2, 3) which are implicitly founded on the entrenched Western belief that "history requires a linear and cumulative sense of time that allows the observer to isolate the past as a distinct entity" (Trouillot 1995:7), temporal assumptions which Baer (2020) incidentally sees as deeply entrenched in translation studies. Readings influenced by cultural and decolonization history urge us

to see the archive not as a container of passive sources of evidence which we can utilize to investigate the past, but rather as a site of doubt and uncertainty. This approach, described variously as “reading along the archival grain” (Stoler 2009:53), or of “dwelling in the archive” (Burton 2003:143), implies what Stoler terms a “subjunctive” stance to archival work (2009:106), a search for those elusive non-events deemed to be historically irrelevant, a quest for fiction in the archives as a way of uncovering how people have actually told their own stories (Zemon Davis 1987).

From this perspective, the archive is not an object to be used by us, but rather the subject itself. As researchers, our relationship with the archive will necessarily change – our investigations are no longer “an extractive exercise but an ethnographic one” (Stoler 2009:47). Anxieties which translation historians have sometimes exhibited about hierarchies of evidence are replaced here by a new focus on process: the constitution of a deliberately heterogeneous range of resources, and with these, the employment of a variety of analytical techniques. This history “in the ethnographic grain” (Darnton 1984:3) is dependent on the integration of widely different types of data in order to produce, as Stapp (1990) suggests in his historical ethnography of a Chinese mining community in Idaho, a holistic portrayal. Uribe, writing the history of a road, the so-called trampoline of death in the southern Andean–Amazonian region of Putumayo (Colombia), brings together historical documents and photographic material, travel writing, material from the press, oral histories and interviews in order to situate characters, events and exchanges within relational practices. His aim is not to assemble these myriad voices and fragments into a single narrative, but rather to place them “in the spatial and historical process of frontier-making in the Amazon” (Uribe 2017:211). In both cases, the resulting ethnographic archive positions historiography and later accounts side by side with contemporary voices so that past and present can be seen to be in conversation. In ethnographic history, the frontiers between past and present are deliberately blurred: “what is at stake in pastness is the future, the process of becoming” (Trouillot 1995:xiii). Sebald speculated on this more fluid and uncertain encounter between past and present: “it does not seem to me that we understand the laws governing the return of the past, but I feel more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces between which the living can move back and forth as they like” (cited in Steedman 2008:8). Cheung (2012:162) memorably used the Chinese metaphor of pushing-hands to characterize this process of dialogic engagement:

For scholars in translation studies, the pushing-hands approach provides a fruitful mode of engagement with translation history and historical research on translation. It allows them to think of past and present in a relation of interdependence, with past events informing the present and present perspectives illuminating the past, the two alternately pushing and yielding.

Ethnographic historians are by definition “as much concerned with space as they are with time” (Burton 2003:143), with what Satia terms “the whereness of time” (2020:285) in its material and spatial forms. Ethnographic translation histories which take as their focus material spaces will explore how translation is lived from the ground up in a particular historical context, and also how the afterlives of these spaces legitimate or challenge subsequent hegemonies of political and societal orders.

Self-reflection on the subjectivity of the researcher is of course an essential element of any ethnographic approach: "To be an ethnographer ... means being forced to question the premises of one's own practice" (Verdery 2014:7). The archive we construct as translation historians will be the result of our own positionality – I speak, for example, as a "bandita" researcher (Singer 1993:22) who has tended to operate on the fringes of different disciplines and departments. By creating this archive, we will necessarily become conscious too of how our relationship with the custodians of resources can generate surprising re-evaluations. Janine Struk records how she ended up constructing her final project in clear opposition to prevailing official notions of what constituted archival respectability. When she visited the Imperial War Museum in London and asked to see original photographs taken by ordinary soldiers, she recounts, "My ... request to gain access and study the large collection of albums deposited at the archive was greeted with incredulity ... My competence as a researcher was questioned" (2011:xvi). Rather than a static quality, the subjectivity of the translation historian practising ethnographic history is an ongoing conversation between resources and investigator.

In such an ethnographic archive, documents gathered and brought together are in dialogue with each other, available for transversal reading. Guattari suggests that "transversality is a dimension that strives to overcome two impasses ... [and] tends to be realized when maximum communication is brought between different levels and above all in terms of different directions" (cited in Brunner and Rhoades 2010:i). Brunner describes it as seeing a map that refuses to trace a firm boundary "but becomes populated by the traces of experience that occur through each encounter with it" (ibid.:ii).

The variety of voices we hear in our archive will condition how we begin to develop what Stoler calls "grids of intelligibility" (2009:37). Ghosh comments on the stories of her own engagement with the archive as follows: "[these stories] were informative to the project because they demonstrated the ways in which the people I encountered attempted to discipline me into writing a history that resonated for them" (2005:39). The subjectivity of the translation historian is, like the archive itself, a process in creation.

Translation history practised as historical ethnography

As an example of what translation history practised as historical ethnography might look like, my ethnographic subject in this chapter will be the space of encounter and relationality between Allied troops and French civilians in northern Normandy during the early Liberation period from June to October 1944, in the first weeks of fighting on the ground (June–July 1944), and in a brief post conflict lull (Cherbourg, late June–October 1944). The archive I have assembled to examine this space is hybrid, both in terms of the genre of documentation and the time frame explored. Thus contemporary 1944 voices – written documents produced by official Allied sources and by French and anglophone participants, oral interviews, visual material like photographs, paintings, and maps – will be set alongside post hoc analyses and representations in historiography, remembrance practices and creative works. By reading the archive transversally, I am seeking to see the space of translation between foreign military and French civilians both at a specific historical moment, and also in subsequent reimaginings as regulated by wider social and political practices.

In the early days of fighting in Normandy, contemporary material in my archive uncovers a space which is restricted in scope and largely bereft of dialogic encounter. Both sides view each other uneasily from physically distanced vantage points. Translation between soldiers and civilians is material and sensory – it consisted of the bartering of food and drink, the long-remembered smell of local liqueur, or the pungent smells of war. Soldiers exist in a zone limited in size and highly mobile: “The front is on the move everywhere” (IWM Crawford); “A typical scene would be our infantry advancing slowly in arrow formation, across a field of corn. ... We would move slowly forward, eventually pass our burning tanks and find ourselves in the village, with the infantry and the dead” (IWM Dewar). Interviews in national newspapers suggested a field of vision which seemed brutally circumscribed: “This was a big battle, but in this kind of country it doesn’t seem like much when you’re in it. All you see are a few men ahead of you and a few men behind you. Most of the time you’re too busy dodging mortars and shells to know what’s going on elsewhere” (Stacey, in *The Standard* 1944).

In this space, the ‘other’, French civilians, are perceived by Allied soldiers as a mass of humanity, lines of straggling refugees, groups undifferentiated save by gender and age; women, and the very young or the very old are in the majority. Official Allied photographs of the time reproduce these images over and over again: Anglo-American troops with crowds of largely female civilians as in Figure 5.1, a photograph taken on 10 June 1944 by Captain Knight with the supporting information: “Many of these French refugees had not eaten for three or more days. They are seen receiving food from our troops”.

The medium of exchange is silence, and a wary spectatorship. Active male troops speed through throngs of passive dumb crowds: “we looked at French peasants – they stared at us –



FIGURE 5.1 French refugees fed by Civil Affairs

they had no feet under their thoughts" (IWM Rex). In testimonies, French civilians position themselves as distanced observers, looking up from below as troops suddenly appear, or as they rush by on their tanks. One civilian's first sight of the soldiers is from the bottom of the ditch in which she has hidden: "a soldier in khaki jumped at us. ... 'We're French civilians' we all shouted, raising our arms" (quoted in Herval I 1947:69).¹ Other French people watch as soldiers set up camp in the ruins of their former homes: "A house had just finished burning, and the Tommies, practical people, had put some big pans on the still flaming debris, and were boiling up tins of food" (quoted in Herval II 1947:64).

British Government records show that before the landings in Normandy the authorities had assumed that their troops would be encountering French civilians at close quarters. Every soldier was therefore given a pocket handbook prepared by the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), designed to provide "(a) a guide to the soldier on what he would find in a foreign country; (b) a guide to behaviour, and (c) a vocabulary and phrase book" (NA FO 898/478, September–December 1943). The booklets contained seven standard foreign language sections, with Hugo's system of phonetics to aid pronunciation. Communicating in the foreign language was presented as a way in which soldiers could treat French civilians with courtesy, avoiding regrettable incidents of misbehaviour on the ground: "Don't drink yourself silly. If you get the chance to drink wine, learn to 'take it'. The failure of some British troops to do so was the point made against our men in France in 1939–40" (NA FO 898/478, September–December 1943).

In practice, however, it is difficult to hear the voices of language exchange in this mobile space. Certainly French Canadian newspapers mentioned the fact that their detachments spoke French in order to develop good local relations (*Le Jour* 1944), and civilians describe how Canadian soldiers gave out biscuits and cigarettes, shaking hands as they spoke French to them (Herval II 1947:179). However, in the diaries anglophone soldiers kept, and in the letters they wrote home, there are very few references to personal language-mediated exchanges, apart from occasional allusions to tourist-like behaviour, such as being given local guidebooks and trying out schoolboy French (IWM Hutchings; IWM Rex).

Within the archive, the space we see is one of material translation – the exchange of food and drink. A military cinema projectionist mounting a show for local villagers described civilians turning up for the entertainment and leaving vegetables as a means of paying. Encounters on the ground involve the bartering of food and goods – "From time to time we would barter tins of bully-beef or such items for fresh eggs from the local farmers"; "as much tobacco, cigarettes and soap (the latter seemed to be very scarce in France) as we could spare and in return received milk, some eggs and cream" (IWM Charters; IWM Gardiner; IWM White). Inevitably this sort of economic translation is a highly unequal one – "it was not unusual to see hungry people begging for food ... In the circumstances, a Tommy with a packet of 'hard tack' biscuits or a tin of bully beef to spare was a lord and master" (IWM Lane).

The materiality of translation remains a dominant memory of British veterans some sixty years after the events:

Me and my one mate ... got together, he was a lot older than I was and at night time I would spare some rations and go knocking on people's doors selling these rations. Can you believe that? ... They'd do anything for a tin of fruit or a tin of corned beef. There was a black market going on all over the place. Selling this, selling that.

(*Tinker* 2012:161–162)

Sensory impressions are translated across the years, most frequently the smell of local food and drink; one veteran for example removes the stopper from a bottle of Calvados liqueur in his drinks cabinet to evoke the memory of place:

I'll give you a smell of Normandy. ... It's a liqueur, Calvados. But that is Normandy. That smell, probably if I smelt that anywhere (removes stopper and offers bottle to sniff) ...

(Tinker 2012:204–205)

For other ex-soldiers, the space of northern France is translated over the years through the very particular scents associated with battle, the smell of dust, trenches and dead cows: “If the wind is blowing quietly through the trees, and everything is still, I physically feel what it was like to be in a field in Normandy at the end of a day. Not mentally, just physically” (IWM Brownlie).

In contrast to the mobility of the Normandy battle zone, the Americans established a longer-term base in Cherbourg in June 1944 so that they could rebuild the port as a communication hub for their future advance on Germany. In this shared zone of relative peace, liberating soldiers and local civilians lived side by side for nearly five months. My archive shows Cherbourg to be a space taken over materially, occupied and renamed by the foreign military presence. French civilians are displaced from the space or marginalized within it.

A map of the physical presence of the Americans in the urban centre of Cherbourg demonstrates the extent to which the town was remade in the liberator's image. Buildings previously used by the Germans for administrative purposes were now appropriated by the US Military, their offices lining the main thoroughfares in exactly the same way as the previous occupiers had done. To accommodate the constant passage of army lorries driving to and from the port, the urban landscape was visibly modified. One way street signs in English were erected on the main roads, pointing in many cases in the opposite direction to the previous French signage (NA CA Detachment A1A1, June–August 1944). Given that the streets of Cherbourg were never designed to carry such a volume of traffic, buildings at street corners had to be knocked down and main arteries widened. Outside the centre of the town, the Americans commandeered and renamed departmental roads, marking them out with large signs in English – the “Green Diamond Highway” (Cherbourg/St Lô, Cherbourg, Dol), and the “Red Ball Highway” (St Lô/Vire).

As well as buildings appropriated for operational purposes, it is clear from Civil Affairs reports that American soldiers initially lodged themselves in empty private houses, to the considerable consternation of returning Cherbourgeois who found their homes occupied by foreign troops. The urban space, taken over by the US liberators, was no longer available for repossession by the French. Translation between military and civilians becomes centred on the economics of space itself, the disputed present and future of key buildings. Thus, for example, the Mayor of Cherbourg argued with the US authorities that the town's most prestigious department store, the centrally located Rattis, ‘the pride of Normandy’, had to be returned to the townspeople and reopened as a matter of urgency for the sake of local inhabitants. The Americans however intended to reuse the site as a Red Cross Club for their black troops and refused to transfer the shop to civilian French use (Thomson 1996:84). At the heart of the town, this department store, a potent symbol of the identity and future commercial viability of the local community, was designated by the military as an empty shell to be repurposed into a social club for their soldiers.

The letters that French civilians wrote to family and friends (found in the records of American censors) complained loudly that their local space was an unrecognizable foreign camp: “We have more and more Americans in this region and it is a catastrophe for the country because they occupy the pastures, thus there is no more grass for the animals; the farmers are obliged to sell everything” (NA WO 219 1792B, 9 October 1944). Bridging this widening gap between the two sides, American occupiers and marginalized French locals, required a conscious effort of linguistic and cultural translation which seemed to have been impossible. The distance between the two groups indeed developed a temporal as well as a spatial dimension: the Cherbourg town newspaper noted that there were two time zones operating in the town, ‘American time’ in the port, ‘French time’ outside (*La Presse Cherbourgeoise* 26 September 1944). The Americans were present in the space of Cherbourg, but this presence was essentially one which looked forward to the future, to moving on and leaving the town. The local cultural exchange circle lamented what it discerned to be a lost opportunity of cultural translation: “In a few months time you may be back in the States. What do you know of France and the French people? What are you going to take home with you? The taste of Calvados? The photo of a couple of French girls?” (Bibliothèque Prévert n.d.). The Cherbourg painted by the war artist Anthony Gross (Figure 5.2) is a large open vista down which American military personnel are seen to travel. The only signs of French inhabitants in the painting are the *tricolore* flags, but these are flying from windows which remain totally empty.

Using an ethnographic approach to explore five months of conflict in northern France demonstrates the ways in which materiality and space condition the experience of translation on the ground as lived by participants at the time. Distance and separation, the materiality



FIGURE 5.2 Anthony Gross: the quayside and Fort du Roule, Cherbourg, 28 June 1944

of food and drink and the smells of war mark early experiences. In the brief post conflict lull, an apparently shared space is taken over and repurposed by the military, with French civilians displaced from their own town. Separation is replaced by domination, and the space itself becomes the unit of translation between the two sides.

Given that ethnographic history brings past and present into conversation, my archive contains examples of historiography, commemoration practices and later creative representations (Footitt 2012). Post-war historiography relating to the early fighting in Normandy presents some of the same characteristics observed in the contemporary space of the war: the marked separation and distance between protagonists, liberators and civilians. For some forty years after the events, two distinct national narratives were to be written, geographically and temporally far removed from each other. Thus Allied historians concentrated on what they contended was an Anglo-American war, fought on the northern coast of France in June 1944, one in which strategic and operational details assumed major importance. Classic British historical artefacts like the Portsmouth Overlord Tapestry, commissioned in 1968 (the original paintings now hanging in the Pentagon in Washington DC), display in stark visual terms the marginality of the French in this narrative – French civilians make a physical appearance only in the last of thirty-four panels, depicted as wounded victims in the lower right-hand corner, watching as victorious Allied soldiers advance on to Germany (Lawrence Overlord Embroidery). French historians on the other hand focused on what they understood to be national issues located beyond Normandy: the story of Resistance movements over the whole country, polemics around the passing of powers in August 1944, and the post war failure of an anticipated revolution. When, after 1968, the hitherto hegemonic narrative of French Resistance at last came under serious historiographical challenge in France, the Allies continued to be largely invisible. Between 1949 and 1975, the key French journal on Second World War history, *Comité d'Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale*, published only five articles in which the Anglo-Americans appeared, while the official thirtieth anniversary conference of the Liberation offered just one paper on the Allies out of the nineteen presented.

Remembrance practices too were translated as a space dominated by one side. Thus the cartography of Normandy's post war commemoration landscape was anglophone and monolingual. On the coast, a ring of Allied *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) – twenty-one cemeteries for war-dead, museums focused on Anglo-American exploits (Arromanches and Cherbourg) – were the setting for regular British/American/Canadian memorial events in which, as judged by national and regional media coverage, French public and governmental interest was minimal. In time, however, as post war political Gaullism developed, this anglophone space of remembrance was disputed, and a rival French memorialization map was superimposed upon the Anglo-American cartography. This French remapping involved a substitution of standard Allied chronology – D Day (6 June 1944) as the beginning of the Battle of Normandy – with a French-themed narrative starting on 14 June 1944, the date on which General de Gaulle returned to France, and centred on Bayeux, the place in which he gave his first speech on liberated soil.

By the late eighties and early nineties, this historic Normandy map of commemoration would be gradually enlarged by a process in which the two principal protagonists were submerged within a much broader international space. The remembrance museum in Caen, opened in 1988, thus aspired to place the historic space of 1944 Normandy within an expanded time frame of twentieth-century peace and human rights, displaying in its exhibits

a 'failure of peace' journey which conducted visitors physically from the beginning of the twentieth century towards the Cold War. The separate Anglo-American and French presences in the Liberation were subsumed within an international space of conflict, symbolically commemorated through thirteen stones which represented all the nations now said to have been originally involved in this space.

Historiographically, too, there were changes. By the millennium, the space of 1944 Normandy began to be re-imagined, translated forward into the language of later conflicts which post-dated the Second World War, most notably those of the Coalition invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. The aftermath of 9/11 had brought with it a new focus on twenty-first century allied concepts of the 'just war', and hence by extension of that just war which was assumed to have been waged in 1944. The Anglo-Americans, after being wholly invisible in French scholarship, now found that their actions in the 1944 Liberation were being re-examined, held up against the mirror of their professed liberal values, with particular interest being paid to the alleged immoral behaviour of soldiers in 1944, and the effects of racial segregation within their armies. Interlingual translation between English and French was key in creating this newly contested space, with critiques of the Allies rapidly translated between the two languages. In a classic example, the American historian Lilly, unable to secure a contract with an anglophone publisher for his detailed and distressing study of GI rape cases in the Second World War, published the book first in French, prefaced by a distinguished French historian who underlined the clear relevance of 1944 Europe to the contemporary post 2000 Coalition record (Lilly 2003). A later book written by another US historian on the related theme of sex and American GIs in Second World War France was also speedily translated into French, appearing within a year of its original English edition (Roberts 2013, 2014).

The only recreation of the 1944 space with interlingual translation at its core, Guilloux's *OK Joe!*, was also translated into English during the same period, twenty-seven years after its original publication (Guilloux 1976, 2003). In Guilloux's space of relationality, the translator is central. The author, a translator and fluent English speaker, based his novel on notebooks kept while he was working for the American authorities who were prosecuting GIs for alleged crimes against French civilians. The novel is interspersed with the American speech patterns with which the translator lived at that time – "*Ask the witness ... Demandez au témoin*", "*Take it easy!*", "*s'exprimant in his own words, c'est à dire dans son propre langage, don't spoil my dinner! Ne me gêchez pas mon dîner!*" (1976:162, 166, 253) – so that it is always clear that this is a space in which encounters between foreign authorities and local civilians are mediated through linguistic translation. The narrative, while sympathetic to the Americans with whom the hero works, underlines the racism he observed in the US Army – the accused are almost always African-American troops. The translator in the novel occupies a space which brings the two sides together, US troops and French civilians, but does so within a setting of violence and extreme tension which the language mediator himself personifies: "My role as interpreter made me feel important, of course, but equally embarrassed, worried and distressed" (Guilloux, *Memory from Age Fourteen*, cited in Kaplan 2005: epigraph). In her introduction to the English version, Kaplan, the translator, argues that it is precisely through the figure of a translator that some kind of dialogue between the hitherto separate national anglophone and French constructions of the space of 1944 can at last take place: "Although the American presence in France has been romanticized in countless books and themes, *OK Joe!*

offers us something exceedingly rare: a French perspective on post D Day GI culture” (Kaplan, in Guilloux 2003:x).

By practising translation history ethnographically, it has been possible to see some of the continuities and discontinuities in the afterlives of these spaces of conflict in 1944, the ways in which past and present meet. In post hoc recreations, remembrance practices and historiography, the protagonists are as nationally separated and distanced from each other as they were in the original space. Translation between the two sides occurs by internationalizing the space or by reimagining it in terms of contemporary political spaces. In this projection, linguistic translation is a critical actor, and the translator figure becomes a signifier of those problematics, hitherto hidden, which are assumed to have been characteristic of the original meetings in 1944.

‘Presenting the past’

Ethnographic translation history provides a snapshot of translation from below at a particular moment in time, as lived on the ground in its materiality, silences and asymmetrical dominations. The space is replicated in post hoc analyses, and subject to processes of disruption and subversion in which interlingual translation plays a role. By apprehending historical encounters as spaces of ongoing relationality in this way, ethnography brings past and present together, highlighting the shifting historicity of later accounts. In this sense, the material practices of translation in a specific time and place have afterlives which reveal broader issues about the role of translation. An ethnographic approach of this type thus serves to reframe translation history as simultaneously synchronic and diachronic.

Writing this ethnographic history challenges us to adopt a democratic perspective as we engage in translation history from below, with a particular emphasis on the settings and praxis of encounters. The archive we assemble as translation historians is one filled with voices. As Thompson argues, “the historian has got to be listening all the time ... then the material itself will begin to speak” (cited in Decker 2013:159). For translation historians, paying attention to words, silences and gestures, what Denning calls “the poetics of detail”, is key to empathetic understanding: “we have to enter into the experiences of those actors in the past who, like us, experience a present as if all the possibilities are still there” (1996:xvi). A characteristic of ethnographic translation history will be its effortful attention to these voices from below, ensuring that they are clearly audible in our accounts so that we can both render ethical respect to those who lived before us, and enable contemporary readers to feel directly for themselves a little of the experiences of these periods. As Inghilleri has argued, conscious efforts are needed in order to represent as carefully as possible “the voices of those involved, even when relying on secondary sources” (Inghilleri and Polezzi 2020:28).

The fact that these ethnographic accounts necessarily cross genres and media, placing the visual and the material alongside the written word, encourages us too to explore imaginative ways in which to record what we find; Zemon Davis called it an “adventure with a different way of talking about the past” (1983:vii). To fully engage our potential readership in the translation experiences of the past, we may need to think carefully about how we express this narrative. Denning suggests that we could see ourselves as storytellers: “we never know the truth by being told it. We have to experience it in some way” (1996:101). For her book on the history of black women in the USA, for example, Hartman employed what she called “a mode of close narration”, “a style which places the voice of the narrator and

character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape and arrange the text”, allowing the story to be told “from inside the circle” (2019:xiii, xiv). Zemon Davis pictured herself in the shadows of the three seventeenth-century women she had been following as they debated with each other and with her whether they should have been brought together in the first place (1997:4). Blackledge and Creese chose to represent their ethnographic research on the inner city through a drama, showing rather than telling the world of a Chinese community centre in Britain (2021).

Although this sort of multilevel and experimental mode of writing has established itself to some extent in the canon of historical research, albeit with criticism from more empirically traditional historians (as evident, for example, in how the epithet ‘radical’ sticks closely to Zemon Davis), it has generally been less common in translation studies. But an engagement with the *how* of writing translation history is surely as important now as the questions of finality and identity with which this chapter started.

What is gained if historical ethnography – the assemblage of a heterogeneous archive and a narrative methodology which reflects the nature and excitement of the material – were to be a method for translation historians? In the first place, translation history would become more clearly rooted in the material and the spatial. It would promote a dialogue between past and present, spatially and temporally contextualized, but also looking beyond the historic events themselves to embrace later translations and reinterpretations.

Denning argues that “to write the history of men and women one has to compose them in place and in their present-participled experience” (1996:17). In this sense, practising translation history as historical ethnography is in itself an act of empowerment, and that is surely an exciting path to propose to future translation historians.

Note

- 1 All translations from French are mine unless otherwise indicated.

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6

FRIEDRICH WILHELM IV'S TAILOR AND SIGNIFICANCE IN TRANSLATION HISTORY

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That translation historians should think of themselves as historians as well as translation scholars is not a new idea, but the theoretical and methodological implications of this idea still need to be fully explored. In particular, translation historians have much to gain by considering the theoretical discussions that have already taken place within historical studies and the philosophy of history because, if we set aside the *a priori* importance that translation historians accord to language and cultural exchange, there is no significant difference between translation historians and other historians in terms of the theoretical issues and methodological choices they face; or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that there shouldn't be.¹

Some interest among translation historians in the theoretical discussions within history is already apparent: translation historians have taken an interest in microhistory (Adamo 2006; Malena 2011; Wakabayashi 2018); in *histoire croisée* (Batchelor and Harding 2017; Milani 2017); there have been discussions on the role of archives and on research into oral history (Kujamäki and Footitt 2019; Paloposki 2017); and work has been done on using images in historical research (Fernández-Ocampo and Wolf 2014) – to cite just a few examples.² In what follows I draw on a classic theoretical discussion within history and the philosophy of history which began towards the end of the nineteenth century and stretched to the end of the twentieth, and will consider its implications for translation historians and the methodological and theoretical approaches they adopt.

Friedrich Wilhelm IV's tailor

On 3 April 1849, after a year of revolution, the parliament in Frankfurt am Main offered Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia the imperial crown of Germany in the hope of finally achieving a unified German state. The Kaiser had been expecting the offer; he was attracted by the idea of being Emperor but deplored the democratic associations that came with being given the crown by the liberal parliament. So he refused, saying (so the story goes) that he could not accept “a crown from the gutter” and would only accept it if offered to him by

the German princes. This refusal effectively put an end to the revolutionary movement in Germany, and the parliament in Frankfurt was expelled by the Prussian army and had to take refuge in Stuttgart, where it was eventually shut down by the Württemberg troops (Robertson 1952:165–167; Taylor 1945:86–87).³

In his *Die grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen begriffsbildung. Eine logische einleitung in die historischen wissenschaften* (1896), translated into English by Guy Oakes as *The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science. A Logical Introduction to the Historical Sciences* (1986), the philosopher Heinrich Rickert remarked that while this was a significant historical event, no one was interested in the tailors who made Friedrich Wilhelm IV's uniforms (Rickert 1986:71):

That Friedrich Wilhelm IV declined the German crown is a 'historical' event, but the question of which tailors made his uniforms remains a matter of complete indifference for political history, even though we could probably acquire precise knowledge of this too.

The historian Eduard Meyer (1902) responded to this argument in *Zur Theorie und Methodik der Geschichte* (On the Theory and Methodology of History), where he suggested that the tailor who made Friedrich Wilhelm's coat was an insignificant detail in political history, though he could be construed as important in a history of fashion, tailoring or prices. Rickert (1986:71–72), in turn, responded to Meyer's objection as follows:⁴

This is, of course, true, but it proves nothing about the general principle at issue here. It is rather the case that the objection even admits the necessity of a principle of selection for political history. Moreover, facts can easily be cited that are inessential to every conceivable historical representation.

Rickert then continues to elaborate on this point with the example of how historically insignificant any study would be of the distribution of the ink in Friedrich Wilhelm's letters. Perfectly feasible, and filled with indisputable facts, but it would not qualify as 'historical science': "Thus the 'historical concept' of the King cannot consist of everything that might be reliably established about him" (ibid.:72). The situation, Rickert says, is different when there is only a little information about something. This can cause relatively minor details to acquire a greater significance by virtue of the general lack of information on a subject. But, even in this case, the historian must proceed by a process of selection (ibid.):

Thus even when history knows *too little* about its objects, it still knows *too much* about them. For this reason, it can never confine itself to narrating 'what really happened' or to proceeding 'idiographically'. On the contrary, it always has the task of separating the essential from the inessential. For this purpose, however, there must be governing perspectives.

Weber's response

This discussion, conducted at a distance between Rickert and Meyer over Friedrich Wilhelm's tailor, was then taken up by Max Weber in an essay published in 1906 under the title 'Kritische Studien Auf Dem Gebiet Der Kulturwissenschaftlichen Logik', translated into English by Edward Shils and Henry Finch as 'Critical Studies in the Logic of the

Cultural Sciences' (1949).⁵ The essay is presented as a critique of Meyer's methodological ideas;⁶ in it Weber addresses a variety of issues, which can be summarized very briefly as follows: methodology in historical research, which he argues "is no more the precondition of fruitful intellectual work than the knowledge of anatomy is the precondition for 'correct' walking" (1949:115); the difficulty of attributing causality and motives to historical events; the inappropriateness of value judgements in the 'science' of history and the danger of blurring the "sharp distinction between historical knowledge and ethics" (ibid.:124); and the implications of selecting the defining details of a historical event out of a potentially limitless number of factors. Weber then asks the question, quoting Meyer, "which of the events on which we have information are 'historical'?", and agrees with Meyer that "the 'historical' is that which is causally important in a concrete individual situation" (ibid.:131). The problem is that even with this general criterion of selecting only events which have produced an 'effect', the number of historical events is still potentially infinite. Therefore, the historian must make a selection based on historical interest and, Weber reports Meyer as stating, "there are no absolute norms of historical interest" (ibid.:131).

This brings us back to Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his tailor, in relation to which Weber accuses Meyer of renouncing the effect principle that he has just established. Weber (ibid.:132) agrees with Meyer that, although Friedrich Wilhelm's tailor might not be of interest to political history, he may well be of interest to historians of fashion or tailoring; but he argues that Meyer is overlooking the fact that the kind of "interest" that we can take in these two cases

involves quite considerable differences in logical structure and ... the failure to bear these differences in mind leads to the danger of confusing two fundamentally different but often identified categories: the *ratio essendi* [reason for being] and the *ratio cognoscendi* [reason for knowing].⁷

The distinction that Weber is making here is between, on the one hand, facts which can merely be considered pieces of evidence used heuristically to reconstruct the generic character of certain epochs or historical processes, and, on the other, events which are real causal links in a historical sequence, events which, to reprise Meyer's earlier criterion, have had a historical 'effect' – one which can be established objectively, or scientifically, as Weber would have it.

Weber likens Friedrich Wilhelm's coat to the clay fragments used to reconstruct the history of ancient societies, or to the names of 'insignificant persons' which appear in historical documents or on old inscriptions; although we can infer from these something about the actual causal processes of history, they did not themselves have any causal effect within them. Weber thus essentially accuses Meyer of confusing the *historically interesting* with the *historically effective*, of confusing "the real causal links in historical interconnections (rejection of the Kaiser's crown) with those facts (Friedrich Wilhelm IV's coat, the inscriptions) which can become important for the historian as heuristic instruments" (ibid.:136). If, on the other hand, it were to be established that the tailor had produced a causal effect, then Weber acknowledges that he too would, like the Kaiser, become historically significant (ibid.:135–136):

The fact that a certain tailor delivered a certain coat to the king is *prima facie* of quite inconsequential causal significance, even for the cultural-historical causal interconnection of the development of fashion and the tailoring industry. It would cease to be

so only when as a result of this particular delivery historical *effects* were produced, e.g., if the personality of this tailor, or the fortunes of *his* enterprise were causally significant from some standpoint for the transformation of fashion or industrial organization and if this historical role had been causally affected by the delivery of that very coat.

To this we might object that the standpoint we adopt in order to measure the effect of an event is not an objective or scientific one. Even if the fortunes of the tailor's enterprise had transformed only his life and that of his descendants, and did not produce any effects on a more macro scale, on fashions or industry, it would still be historically significant if the tailor and his firm played a prominent role in the perspective *we had chosen to adopt*. This is something Weber acknowledges when elaborating further on historical significance using the example of Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen's experiments on X-rays. If one's purpose is to understand how X-rays work, then the significance of the actual rays which Roentgen saw in his laboratory lies only in the extent to which they allowed him to infer a law of natural occurrence, not in their immediate effect at that moment or what happened to them afterwards. But, if one's interest lies in the history of physics, then the logical status of these specific rays would change as they would become a causal link in the process by which modern physics developed, a process rooted in a set of *values* which we can call "the progress of science" (Weber 1949:134 n.10).

So, logically speaking, from whatever perspective (standpoint) we adopt, there will be events that have a causal *historical effect*, and there will be events that are of *historical interest* due to the insight we can infer heuristically from them. Weber insists on the importance of this distinction (*ibid.*:136; emphasis added):

These are absolutely fundamental logical distinctions and they will always remain so. And however much these two absolutely distinct standpoints become intertwined in the practice of the student of culture – this always happens and is the source of the most interesting methodological problems – no one will ever succeed in understanding the logical character of history if he is unable to make this distinction in a clearcut manner.

However, Weber argues that Meyer's ideas on what constitutes historical effect are misguided. For, if we are to select events on the basis of their historical effect, then we must establish which 'final outcome' we see as having been fundamentally affected by those events. Equally, we must also decide whether or not we are to exclude from our history all events that are seen as historically inconsequential. According to Weber, Meyer is not just confusing historical *interest* with historical *effect*, but he is also confusing two different types of historical facts: those which we value for their own sake, as objects of our interest, and those which we seek to understand in terms of their causal value. The former are historical 'individuals' and the latter are historical 'causes'; what Rickert called primary and secondary historical facts. It is only possible, Weber suggests, to confine oneself to historical causes, or effects, as Meyer suggests we do, if it is unambiguously clear which individual(s) these effects are to be related to (*ibid.*:155).

But, in Weber's opinion, the real reason for considering something as historical is not its effect, but the interest we identify in it. To make this point, Weber proposes a different example, that of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's letters to Charlotte von Stein, a married woman with whom he maintained a long and intense friendship that is considered to have played

a fundamental role in his artistic and intellectual growth (Vincent 1992:ch.2). Weber first hypothesizes five different logical types of historical interest which these letters could in theory be the object of, summarized very briefly here: (1) if we consider these letters to be part of an event which had a significant impact on Goethe's life and personality, then there is no doubt about their historical significance; (2) but, if we hypothesize that these letters had no significant impact on Goethe and his work, no causal historical effect, then they might prove to be of interest as a heuristic means for understanding the man and his life; (3) or, the letters might not tell us anything about Goethe, but function as a heuristic paradigm, a typical fact which helps us to understand the particular cultural and social *milieu* in which he moved; (4) or we might decide that the letters can tell us nothing about German or nineteenth-century culture specifically, but are merely the typical manifestation of a certain set of social and cultural circumstances which are common to all cultures, in which case we might use the letters as a "genetic class-concept" with which to reconstruct the specific conditions which produce these common cultural circumstances; (5) or, finally, we can hypothesize that the letters are of no interest at all, and that they are not characteristic of any social context or period, but that we find some interest in the insight they provide us into the psychology of love and the way in which they are representative of a certain state of mind (Weber 1949:140–141).

According to Weber these are all logically distinct approaches, even though they may be combined and co-exist. But, Weber says, more important than these types of interest is a sixth: one where Goethe's letters become an object of valuation, without us having to know anything about Goethe, but purely because of their characteristics, on the basis of which they become the object of our interpretation, or what Weber calls our "value-analysis". So, rather than consider objects historical because of their effect (like the Kaiser's refusal), as Meyer argues, or consider them as historical because of their paradigmatic and heuristic value, their value as a class concept (like the Kaiser's coat), we consider them historical because of their significance based on our *interpretation*; and any object can generate a potentially infinite range of interpretations, depending on the standpoint of the historian (ibid.:147):

Value-analysis deals with facts which are neither (1) themselves links in an historical causal sequence, nor (2) usable as heuristic means for disclosing facts of category (1). In other words, the facts of value-analysis stand in none of the relations to history which have been hitherto considered.

So, our historical inquiry is made up of two parts: a *subjective* identification or delimitation of the object, based on our interest, our value-analysis, followed by the *objective* reconstruction of causal historical events based on a scientific examination of the available evidence, the actual historical research.

Veyne's application of narrative

Nearly seventy years later, the French archaeologist and historian Paul Veyne also discussed the case of Friedrich Wilhelm's tailor and Weber's analysis in his book *Comment on écrit l'histoire: Essai d'épistémologie* (1971), translated into English by Mina Moore-Rinvuluceri as *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology* (1984).⁸ In this book, Veyne proposes a marked narrative

approach to history, one in which history “has no method” (ibid.:ix) and “historians tell of true events in which man is the actor; history is a true novel” (ibid.:x). Veyne discusses Weber and Friedrich Wilhelm in a chapter that deals with historical specificity. Interestingly, he presents the question as if the example of Friedrich Wilhelm’s tailor had been posed by Weber and does not mention that it was originally posed by Rickert, or that Meyer had responded to it.

The first point he makes is that the difference between a “value fact” (a fact of historical interest) and a “document fact” (an element of historical causation) depends on the point of view chosen by the historian; what Weber called the historian’s standpoint but which Veyne calls his/her “chosen plot” (Veyne 1984:50). The same historical object can mean very different things depending on how it is plotted. Therefore, he argues, there is no real difference in the nature of a bit player or a main player in a history; it is the plot that makes them so, and a different plot could reverse these roles (ibid.:50; emphasis added):

That being said, it is with that potsherd [the clay fragment we mentioned above] as with any other event: It may play, in the plot of which it is an event, the most important parts or be only part of a crowd scene; but, in spite of what Weber says, there is no difference of nature between the main parts and the figures in the crowd – mere shades separate them, *one goes gradually from one to the other, and in the end sees that Frederick William IV himself is basically one of a crowd.*

Veyne agrees with what Rickert, Meyer and Weber have all argued before him (albeit in different terms), that if the plot of one’s history is the evolution of fashion then Friedrich Wilhelm’s tailor might play a main role. The importance of the tailor is determined by the plot that the historian chooses *a priori* (ibid.:51):

If the evolution of fashion is taken as the plot, that evolution is made by the tailors who upset it and also by those who keep it in the old ruts; the importance of the event in its series decides the number of lines the historian will devote to it, but does not decide the choice of the series.

As will be apparent, this is something of a simplification of Weber’s much more complex and articulated argument, but the essential point agrees with his. Veyne then develops his argument along new lines when he elaborates on his idea of historical specificity.

The key point Veyne makes concerns the difference between the singular and the specific, or between the individual and the individualized. A singular or individual event is individualized and made specific by being framed within a plot; or to adopt Weber’s terminology, its specificity is derived from the value-interpretation which we give it, based on our standpoint. History, Veyne argues, does not interest itself in the individual life of someone, be they king or tailor, but in what that life represents for us. History, as he puts it, “is not a vast collection of biographies” (ibid.:56): Instead (ibid.:57; emphasis added):

The lives of all the tailors under Frederick William are very much alike, so history will relate them as a whole because it has no reason to be interested in one particular one; *it does not deal in individuals, but in what is specific about them. ... Whether the individual is an outstanding figure in history or a crowd figure among millions of others, he counts historically only for his specificity.*

A historical figure or event, then, acquires historical significance to the extent that it corresponds to our interest, an interest which was formed *a priori* and on which our historical account is predicated; that figure's life acquires specificity in the sense that it has certain qualities that have meaning for us in terms of the story that we have chosen to tell. And, according to Veyne, Weber's discussion about values missed the real point of the issue: his "argument about the king's tailors and the relationship to values hid the true position of the question, which is the distinction between the singular and the specific" (ibid.:57). The logical extension of this argument is that, as history is made up of specific events, which are all distinguishable by their differences, there can be no universal history (ibid.:59):

The historical is that which is not universal and not singular. For it not to be universal, there must be a difference; for it not to be singular, it must be specific, it must be understood, for that sends us back to the plot.⁹

Significance in translation history

What implications can we draw from this discussion for translation historians? Weber and Veyne both convincingly argue that significance and meaning in history are entirely subjective. One implication of this with respect to any potential interdisciplinary dialogue between historians of translation and other historians is that if the plot we use to frame our history is defined in terms that belong exclusively to translation studies, the likelihood is that it will carry little significance or meaning for those situated outside the discourse of that field. If we want to encourage an interdisciplinary dialogue with non-TS historians (something I personally seek to do), then we need to define our plot in terms that are shared with those historians. I will return to this point later.

Related to this is the issue of selection, or, to use Weber's term, the delimitation of our historical object. The question is whether we should consider any and all translation events to be potentially significant, or whether we should accept that some events are simply not significant, however one plots them. If the latter, then we must ask how we define these 'inconsequential' events. This is more a practical (or strategic) issue than a theoretical one. In theory, as we have seen, any event is potentially significant; I can think of no logical criteria for excluding a certain category of events. But, in practice, as scholars we take part in a discourse and seek to share our insights with others. We will therefore always be influenced to some extent by what others find interesting as well as our own preferences. Depending on who we choose to address, which discourse we seek to engage with, and the extent we wish to innovate within our chosen discourse, it is likely that there will, in practice, be translation events that have no conceivable historical meaning and are not worth spending time on. In Weber's terms, it depends on which set of values we relate our history to. I would argue that the nature of translation studies as an interdiscipline means that it encompasses a wide range of values – in Weber's terms – which are not necessarily in sympathy with each other. This is true even within translation and interpreting history. The interpreting historian who studies the Nuremberg trials in order to examine the techniques used by the interpreters, and whose value-analysis is the birth of the interpreting profession, will tell a very different story to, say, the historian whose interest is in the political impact of the trials and their function in the establishment of the post-Second World

War world-order, even if this historian acknowledges the important role that the language services played.

This point can also be illustrated with an example on translation, one related to my own field of interest. If I am researching the role played by translators who worked for certain key Italian publishing houses during the Fascist period, and I am seeking to foreground their role as cultural gatekeepers, as translation agents who promoted a boom in translated fiction, then I will not be particularly concerned with how they actually translated or with their working conditions. But, if I am looking at those (few) Jewish writers who, when they found themselves unable to publish their own work after the introduction of official anti-Semitism in 1938, were able to publish some translations under a pseudonym, then clearly the minutiae of their working conditions take on a whole new significance. Or, if I wish to document the self-censorship practices of translators at that time, and the way in which they adapted to the restrictions imposed by the regime, then clearly the way they translated becomes significant for me. And, finally, if I want to reconstruct the attitude of the regime towards translation and how this changed as the regime's ideological priorities evolved and became increasingly hostile, then I will not be interested in almost any of the above, for the simple reason that the regime was not interested in them; I will not find significance in the individual translators, or the individual texts and how they were translated.

Moreover, as I have already argued, establishing criteria which allow us to exclude certain events as historically inconsequential is theoretically complex; it all depends on what we find interesting, and anything we find interesting can be understood as historically significant. This issue is at the heart of Croce's distinction between chronicle and history mentioned earlier, in note 9: if an object from the past has meaning for us in the present it becomes part of our history; otherwise it is relegated to the chronicles of dead events (Croce 1919:pt I, ch.1). This is what Veyne means when he distinguishes between the singular, which has no meaning for us, and the specific, which does. Translation studies is a relatively young discipline whose intellectual endeavours are motivated to a significant extent by a desire to reveal/foreground the unacknowledged role that translation plays in the present and has played in the past. While this is understandable, it is worth considering the effect that such a dominant value-analysis can have on translation history. Are we in danger at times of anachronistically projecting an importance that we feel in the present onto a historical period in which this importance was not felt?

If translation is our main object and theme of our research, then the issue does not arise; our research is focused on translation and anything related to translation is potentially significant if we find it to be so. But if we want to relate our research on translation to broader issues, such as literary, cultural, social or political history, then the question becomes more complex. There is potentially a danger that our set of values may condition the way we interpret the documentary evidence and induce us to exaggerate its importance. This is, of course, a risk that all historians face; the difference for translation and interpreting historians lies in the fact that the *a priori* standpoint they adopt is, to a greater extent than in the case of other historians, the very justification of their work as researchers. How easy is it for a translation historian to acknowledge that, in fact, in this or that particular respect translation was not particularly significant in the historical theme they have chosen to research? I will return to this point after discussing a few more examples.

Another issue which is analogous to that discussed above is the danger of succumbing to the *myth of translation*. Here the issue is not one of significance or interest, but of not

allowing our pre-conceived interest to distort our reading of the evidence. In other words, adapting what Weber says slightly, we must be wary of confusing historical interest with historical effect; we must not allow our value-interpretation to interfere with our objective reading of the evidence. One of the main points of Weber's argument is that a historian must be able to draw a distinction between what is objectively documented and what is subjectively considered interesting. Or, to put it in Veyne's terms, a historian must not allow value-facts to distort his or her interpretation of document-facts. To illustrate this point, I will refer briefly to my own area of research: translation in Fascist Italy. Two key figures in twentieth-century Italian literary life were Cesare Pavese and Elio Vittorini. They are principally remembered as novelists, but they were also essayists and translators. During the 1930s, when they were both young and up-and-coming writers, Pavese and Vittorini were very active translators, both as a way of earning some extra money and as an expression of their passion for foreign literature. Pavese famously wrote that the 1930s were the *decennio delle traduzioni*, the decade of translations, a label which has stuck and which conditions many people's perception of the period and the role that translations played in it. According to this narrative, these young writers sought refuge from the stultifying cultural atmosphere which prevailed under the Fascist regime by translating foreign literature, especially American novels, which, again according to this narrative, allowed them to access more challenging and innovative forms of artistic expression. The culmination of this activity was an anthology of translated American literature, titled *Americana* (1941), which Vittorini edited and to which many of the most prominent members of the Italian literary establishment contributed translations.¹⁰

Americana acquired an almost legendary status after the war, as did the story of its censorship by the regime. It was, so the legend has it, an anthology which the regime blocked because it contained innovative foreign literature that did not chime with reactionary Fascist values. This notorious act of censorship also encouraged a widely held idea that to translate American literature in Fascist Italy was an act of courage, a form of resistance. The idea provided a nice way of tying the translation activities of these two writers to the Resistance movement which rose up in Italy after the armistice with the Allies was signed in August 1943, and which ensured a degree of political credibility for Italy after the war, despite over twenty years of Fascism.¹¹ This is a legend that is bound to appeal to many translation scholars: translation as an act of courage, translation as a form of anti-Fascist resistance.

It is quite feasible, however, to reconstruct a different story, one in which translation is still significant but it does not acquire the same mythical status. First, it is true that the *Americana* anthology was censored; the first edition of 1941 was blocked and was never distributed. However, thanks to the collaborative approach of the Minister for Popular Culture (the state censor) – Alessandro Pavolini, a man with his own literary interests – a revised edition was later authorized and published late in 1942, once Vittorini's introduction and commentary had been replaced with less enthusiastic and celebratory substitutes. In other words, by agreeing to a piece of paratextual camouflage (one that was proposed by the censor, note, who was certainly not stupid or naive), Vittorini was able to publish his paean to American literature; this when Italy was already at war with the USA. The question, then, is whether it is historically more accurate to consider this to have been a notorious episode of Fascist censorship, or a striking example of the censor's flexibility? What is certain is that the former is the narrative that has become enshrined in the myth of the decade of translations.¹²

It is equally possible to contest the idea that translating American literature was an act of courage and/or resistance. First, there is no evidence of any language-specific policy against translations on the part of the regime. Despite its undoubted hostility towards Britain and the United States, the regime never targeted translations from English specifically.¹³ Secondly, there is no evidence that there was any serious risk attached to translating either American literature or any other. While it is true that if a translated book was banned this was financially damaging for the publisher, there is no evidence of there being any form of retribution as a result of any mistakes. Quite the opposite: the state censor, the Ministry for Popular Culture, maintained a generally cordial and collaborative relationship with most publishers, and this meant in many cases that rather than ban a book (translation or otherwise), the regime would agree to strategic cuts, thereby enabling the publisher to publish after all, and reducing the financial damage. There are even examples of the Ministry offering to compensate publishers for the damage suffered when a book was banned. This is not to say that the Fascist regime was not repressive or that some publishers did not face serious difficulties. Any kind of open opposition was certainly not tolerated, and Jewish publishers faced serious difficulties after the introduction of official anti-Semitism in 1938. But most publishers were perfectly happy to align themselves publicly with the regime, whatever their private convictions might have been, in order to pursue their business. I know of no instance, moreover, in which a translator suffered directly as a consequence of translating a book that the regime disapproved of. The reality was therefore very different from, or let us say more nuanced than, the image that is promoted in the more mythical narratives about this period, inspired by the experiences of Pavese and Vittorini.

Translation as a part of history

I started this discussion with a brief reflection on interdisciplinarity, and it is appropriate to conclude with a reflection on the way in which translation can succeed in permeating historical studies. I will refer again to Italian Fascism as it would not be possible to conduct this kind of analysis without an in-depth familiarity with the relevant historiography. The question I want to consider is how both historians and historians of translation have come to adopt a standpoint, a plot as Veyne would put it, which has allowed them to effectively participate in a common discourse and start producing a common history of Fascism, one which includes translation. This is not a translation history with a focus on Fascism, but a history of Fascism in which translation is part of the narrative.

Up until the end of the twentieth century, if translations were ever referred to in reference to the history of the Fascist period, it was almost always in terms of the ‘decade of translations’ and the mythical status of American literature, as I illustrated above. In other words, translation existed within the narrative of Italian literary history of the inter-war years, but it was viewed through the prism of the experiences of an elite group of writers, like Pavese and Vittorini, and was almost entirely absent from the political and social history of Fascism. Since the turn of the century this situation has changed. The change has occurred around three main research areas which I summarize very briefly below: censorship, publishing history, and the reception of foreign literature.

Historians interested in censorship under the Fascist regime were among the first to take note of the research being undertaken on this topic by translation scholars. As an increasing amount of research was done on the documentary evidence on censorship in general, and in

particular on the consequences of official anti-Semitism, it became clear that although the regime intervened relatively late against translations, it was concerned about their impact and did eventually impose restrictions on them. Around the same time, book historians were beginning to show an increasing interest in popular literature and its impact on the publishing industry, and it became clear that translations played a fundamental role in the birth of modern industrialized models of publishing in Italy and in the birth of a market for mass popular fiction. Again, this was a field in which historians and translation historians found themselves working on the same documentary evidence and engaging in the same historical discourse. Finally, as the idea of including translations in any historical reconstruction of Italian culture in the twentieth century became increasingly accepted, a new generation of literary historians began to do research on the Italian literary field during the inter-war period which included translated literature as a matter of course. Here too, historians and translation historians found much common ground, and a shared narrative has since evolved where the distinction between cultural historian, language area specialist, comparatist and translation scholar has become much less significant. A final question to consider is one I already raised above: is this increasing presence of translation in our understanding of the Fascist period accurate, or is it a distortion derived from a current interest in translation as a historical object, one which provides a fresh perspective through which to examine what is, after all, a very heavily researched field?

Based on my experience working on the primary sources of the period, I would argue that in this case the increasing presence of translation is not a distortion. The sources indicate incontrovertibly that translation became a bone of contention in what today we would call a culture war over the impact that foreign literature was having on the Italian literary field. It was also an issue which the cultural arm of the regime was concerned about, as the documentary evidence clearly shows.¹⁴ The fact that translation has become widely included in the historiography on Fascism, I would therefore argue, is a historically valid reflection of the reality of the Fascist period. That said, we should still be on our guard against any distortion or exaggeration which may be prompted by our enthusiasm for translation as a research object – such as the myth of translations of American literature as a form of anti-fascist resistance, which I discussed above. Translation could be justifiably seen as a form of resistance in the Fascist period when it was used to give work to ostracized Jewish authors; when it introduced literature that proposed social, gender and sexual models that were in clear contrast with those promoted by the regime; and when it offered Italians a glimpse of different, often more glamorous lifestyles. But one should not exaggerate the impact of these subtle forms of resistance; they did not amount to anti-fascism and there is no evidence that they affected the loyalty that Italians felt towards the regime. In other words, rather than seeing them as a form of resistance, it is more accurate in my opinion to see the first example as a means of survival involving a handful of authors and as an example of the disorganized way in which the regime imposed its anti-Semitic policies,¹⁵ and the second and third examples as part of the modernization of Italian society, a process that was taking place all over the industrialized world, against similar reactionary prejudices and borne up by the same irresistible economic and cultural forces.

To return to the terms of the theoretical discussion with which I began this essay, a historical plot has developed on the history of the Fascist period in which the Kaiser and his tailor are part of the same narrative; or, to put this in translation terms, history and translation are part of the same narrative. I am not in a position to judge reliably whether a similar

blurring of the disciplinary boundaries between history and translation history is occurring in other areas of historical research; but logically, I would expect this to be so, and my more superficial familiarity with themes other than Fascism in translation history would appear to confirm this. The reader will be in a position to reflect on their own area of historical interest and consider whether a similar process is taking place there.

Notes

- 1 Throughout this chapter I will use *historian* to mean a historian whose primary concern is not translation; and *translation historian* to indicate a scholar whose historical research is premised on an interest in translation.
- 2 For a more detailed engagement with the historiography and metadiscourse of translation history, see Rundle (2019).
- 3 Robertson quotes a letter that Friedrich Wilhelm wrote on 13 December 1848 to his friend and advisor Baron Bunsen which shows how reluctant he was to accept the crown: “What is offered me? Is this birth of the hideous labor of the year 1848 a crown? The thing which we are talking about does not carry the sign of the holy cross, does not bear the stamp ‘by the Grace of God’ on its head, is no crown. It is the iron collar of servitude, by which the heir of more than twenty-four rulers, electors and kings, the head of 16,000,000, the master of the most loyal and bravest army in the world, would be made the bondservant of the revolution” (1952:165, n.6).
- 4 Rickert’s book first came out in 1896, four years before Meyer’s study, so his response to Meyer’s comments must have been added in successive revisions. This is borne out by the way in which Weber (1949) reports the exchange in his essay on Meyer and by the fact that Rickert was known to have worked on the same two books for most of his life, continually updating and revising them, also in response to comments and criticisms that previous versions had received.
- 5 There is a more recent English translation of this essay by Hans Henrik Bruun in the volume *Max Weber: Collected Methodological Writings* (Weber 2012).
- 6 In his discussion of Meyer’s ideas, Weber refers mainly to *Zur Theorie und Methodik der Geschichte*, mentioned above, but also to Meyer’s introduction to his most famous work, *Geschichte des Altertums*, published in a number of volumes between 1884 and 1902.
- 7 Longuenesse (2001:67) explains that “Kant himself, in the pre-critical text that discusses this principle, distinguishes at least four types of reason, and therefore four specifications of the corresponding principle – *ratio essendi* (reason for *being*, that is, reason for the essential determinations of a thing), *ratio fiendi* (reason for the *coming to be* of a thing’s determinations), *ratio existendi* (reason for the *existence* of a thing), and *ratio cognoscendi* (reason for our *knowing that* a thing is thus and so)”.¹⁰
- 8 More recently, Anton Zijderveld (2006:277–278) has also discussed Friedrich Wilhelm’s tailor in his monograph on Heinrich Rickert, but he does not add anything new to the discussion.
- 9 Veyne makes the interesting point here that his distinction between the specific and the singular “recovers in part that made by Benedetto Croce between history and the chronicle” (1984:298, n.10), by which he means that a chronicle is made up of singular events which have no meaning or relevance to us today, while a history is made up of specific events that have a meaning for us, one which is expressed in the way in which the events are narrated. See chapter one, ‘History and Chronicle’ (Croce 1919). See also Rundle (2012:234–235), where I discuss this passage in more detail.
- 10 For more details on the myth of America during the Fascist period, see Dunnett (2015). For more details on the censorship of the anthology *Americana*, see Rundle (2010:ch.5).
- 11 Vittorini did take an active part in the Resistance, an experience documented in his novel *Uomini e no* (Men and not Men, 1945), the first novel to be published on the Italian Resistance. Pavese did not take part in the resistance and was not particularly active politically, although he was arrested in 1935 during a round up of suspected anti-fascists. He was sentenced to internal exile because the police found some letters between communist activists who were using his home as a safe address (Smith 2008).
- 12 For the idea of paratexts as a form of discursive camouflage in contexts of ideological repression, see Tyšš (2017). For an in-depth critique (in Italian and in four installments) of the myth of the

decade of translations in current interpretations of cultural life in 1930s Italy, see Petrillo (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b).

- 13 There is one exception that I am aware of. Francesca Nottola (2010) has found evidence that the regime adopted a policy of denying the publisher Einaudi permission to publish translations of American literature in the late 1930s. However, this was clearly intended as a means of obstructing a publisher who was considered hostile to the regime rather than a general anti-American policy, as authorization was being given to other publishing houses at that time.
- 14 For a full reconstruction of these translation culture wars, see Rundle (2010).
- 15 The most informative and thorough study of the impact of the regime's anti-Semitic policies on Italian publishing is Fabre (1998), unfortunately only available in Italian.

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PART III

Performing Translation



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7

FROM VOICE TO PERFORMANCE

The artistic agency of literary translators

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The relationship between a text and its translation is arguably one of the most basic questions addressed by translation theory. It is this relationship that defines translation and governs the value norms that emerge around a definition. Having exhausted attempts to explain translation as equivalence in meaning across languages, translation theory has focused on the conditions that enable communication across languages, discourses and cultures, as well as the effects of translation at the social, cultural and political levels, thus broadening the scope and addressing possibly more immediate, if less fundamental, questions. Against this background, Hermans's proposal of authentication instead of equivalence as the defining feature of translation is the most important development in translation theory since Toury's proposal of the notion of assumed translation and the subsequent disciplinary shift in focus from prescription to description. Hermans's understanding of translation as metarepresentation highlights the inevitable presence of the translator's voice, thus facilitating a disciplinary shift away from fidelity as the key parameter for evaluating translation and promoting a self-reflective and ethically aware stance towards translation as social action.

The argument presented here shares Hermans's theoretical foundations and develops his model with particular reference to literary translation and social action at the personal, rather than societal, level. I also argue that, in the context of literary translation, the notion of performance captures more aspects of the translator's art than that of voice. In particular, it enables the location of literary translation within a wider theory of art in a way that does better justice to its artistic nature. My claim is that in quoting another literary text, translators give rise to a *new* work of art which, authenticated or otherwise, takes on a life of its own, beyond the control of authors and translators. The illusionary – but pragmatic and legal – effects of authentication disguise the nature of translation as a work of art with a social life of its own.

Having acknowledged my debt to Hermans for 'un-paving' the ground for my own ideas to grow, I should also acknowledge my own theoretical agenda, built on the

analysis of translator style and an anthropological theory of performance. This agenda may well take Hermans's thinking in directions that are neither justifiable nor fruitful in his own view. For that I can only take responsibility, as such is the nature of metacommunication.

The irony of authentication

Employing a series of examples that range from religious translation – the *Book of Mormon* and the Septuagint – to the law on the interpretation of multilingual treaties as established in the Vienna Convention, Hermans claims that once a translation comes into existence, equivalence, understood as “equality in value and status”, is not “a feature that can be extrapolated on the basis of textual comparison” but is “imposed on [texts] through an external intervention in a particular institutional context” (2007:6). Religious and legal translation offer particularly relevant examples because the external intervention – a law, the revelation of an angel, divine inspiration – is sufficiently authoritative to put the relationship of equivalence beyond any reasonable doubt.

In literary translation, the level of authentication is relative to the authority of the external source making the claim: self-translation offers an example of authority close to full authentication; translations authorized by the active participation of the author also inherit some of the authority bestowed on the original. In cases where authenticity is not declared by law, God or, at the very least, the author, the claim “remains much more vulnerable because it is based on convention and expectation only, on a tacit agreement to maintain the fiction” (Hermans 2007:24). This form of authentication is much more prevalent than other types, and more interesting because, despite its weak basis, it brings about the same illusion of transparency that enables the texts to circulate as if they were not translations.

Hermans's observations on equivalence and authentication have parallels in philosophical discussions of the nature of artistic representation. Goodman, for example, discussing realism in the visual arts, echoes the view that equivalence is nothing but an illusion, that “[i]mitation is impossible because there is no free and innocent eye” (1976:7) and “[r]eception and interpretation are not separable operations, they are thoroughly independent” (ibid.:8), concluding that “a picture is realistic just to the extent that it is a successful illusion” (ibid.:34). Like Hermans, Goodman argues that the basis for evaluating fidelity is nothing but convention (ibid.:37):

Realism is relative, determined by the system of representation standard for a given culture or person at a given time ... in this period and place we usually think of paintings as literal or realistic if they are in a traditional European style of representation.

A couple of decades or so after Goodman, Danto (1994:66) declared that “[i]t is by now a commonplace that the concept of imitation cannot be explained solely in terms of likeness or resemblances”. Resorting to, among other examples, a widely cited text in translation studies, Borges's ‘Pierre Menard, Autor del Quijote’, Danto explains that while Cervantes's and Menard's versions of *Don Quijote* may share the exact same external and perceptual

properties, and look identical to all intents and purposes, they nevertheless require different interpretations because “works are part constituted by their location in the history of literature as well as by their relationships to the authors” (ibid.:35). It is ironic that Danto (ibid.:33) does not consider the same issues in relation to his own reading of Borges’s text, cited in English as ‘Pierre Menard, Symbolist Poet’; but, then again, the pragmatic effect of the illusion of equivalence is such that it “make[s] everyone forget its origin” (Hermans 2007:23).

The power invested in the declaration of equivalence is crucial to Hermans’s theory, who compares it to miraculous processes such as the transubstantiation of the host into Christ’s body during the Christian ritual of the Eucharist. The doctrine of the Real Presence claims that during the Eucharist, the host consecrated by the priest and offered to Christians changes in substance, despite maintaining the same physical and perceptual characteristics. Some theologians, like Calvin, view the Eucharist as a symbolic ritual and the bread and wine as metaphors for a spiritual truth. Transubstantiation is different, more radical even than transformation: if transformation involves a change in accidental qualities while nevertheless retaining the same substance, transubstantiation involves a change of substance that does not require a change in accidental attributes. This is precisely what we want from a theory of translation, argues Hermans, because it provides ground for “burying the idea of translation as involving the transformation of an original text”, the assumption that there is “an invariance, an essence or identity that remains the same despite different manifestations and changes in form and language” (2007:103). Rather than transformation, the original comes to inhabit the translation, as Christ inhabits the host, and the literary work continues to be the same work, despite the visibly different forms that it takes.

Another advantage of the doctrine of the Real Presence, according to Hermans, is that it “stresses the idea of *communities of believers*” and the need for an institutional context for the act of consecration to work (2007:104; emphasis added). Danto also adopts a religious metaphor to describe the changes brought about by the interpretation of an object as an artwork: “[a]s a transformative procedure, interpretation is something like baptism. Not in the sense of giving a name but a new identity, *participation in the community of the elect*” (1994:126; emphasis added). In the section ‘Translation as Performance Art’ below, I come back to the requirement of an institutional context for art or translation to be accepted as such; at this point, I want to stress that, like Hermans, Danto insists on the metaphysical nature of the process. The ‘is’ of artistic identification, he explains (ibid.:126; emphasis in original),

is an *is* which is of transfigurative kin to *magical* identification, as when one says a wooden doll is one’s enemy ...; to *mythic* identification ...; to *religious* identification, as when one says that wafer and wine are flesh and blood; and to *metaphorical* identification, as when one says that Juliet is the sun.

Neither Danto nor Hermans seem themselves fully converted by their own argument, however. Hermans declares himself a non-believer (2007:88) and Danto (1994:126) describes the difference between artistic and metaphorical identification on the one hand, and religious and magical identification on the other, as pragmatic, arguing that “the identifier had better not believe in the literal falsehood in the nonartistic cases”.

While there may be room for questioning the real or metaphorical nature of the processes of authenticating translations or identifying works of art, Hermans makes an important point: the legal consequences of the act of authentication are real. The theory of the Real Presence, in both its Roman Catholic and Lutheran versions, notes Hermans (2007:105), “can readily be accommodated by the Berne Convention on copyright. If a translation in effect changes into another work the moment it becomes a translation, then at that instance it is appropriated by whoever owns this other work”. This is true as far as it concerns intellectual property rights; what Hermans does not question openly is: should this be so? Should we believe in transubstantiation? In authenticating a translation, the author has the power to appropriate the translator’s voice, but not to erase it. By the time he formulates his theory of translation as substantiation in chapter four of *The Conference of Tongues*, Hermans has already made it evidently clear in chapters two and three that the translator’s voice is always present and is to the essence of translation as metarepresentation. Should we therefore view Hermans’s insistence on the miraculous power of authentication with a certain degree of irony, which, by his own definition, involves a certain degree of distance from the opinion voiced (2007:76)?

Translation as metarepresentation

The case I will use to illustrate the irony in Hermans’s notion of authentication is rather ordinary in comparison to mythical revelations and controversial books such as *Mein Kampf*. It concerns the English translations of Mercè Rodoreda’s *La plaça del Diamant* and is helpfully summarized by Peter Bush in his article ‘Memory, War and Translation: Mercè Rodoreda’s *In Diamond Square*’ (Bush 2013). The article reveals the complex play of voices that come to inhabit Rodoreda’s novel in the English translations and defends them against scholarly criticism suggesting they are not true to one or another aspect of Rodoreda’s work. Bush’s article is dismissive of academic, critical distance, with its “almost puritanical repression of the subjective”, and explains that subjective choices are not “wilful narcissism on the part of the translator” but part of making the translation into a “work of art” (2013:38). In Hermans’s words, in making choices among several alternatives, “each translation flaunts its identity through the difference with other translative interpretations” (2007:31), either in existence or imaginary. In adopting a position, translators cannot help but comment on all other positions previously or potentially adopted, thus offering their own commentary not only on the source text but also on the genre at large. In the act of deselection of potential interpretations, translators establish what Hermans calls, after Borges’s description of the translators of *The Thousand and One Nights*, a “hostile dynasty” (ibid.:35).

The English dynasty of *La Plaça del Diamant* (1962) consists of three translations: Eda O’Shiel’s *The Pigeon Girl* (1967), David Rosenthal’s *The Time of the Doves* (1986), and Peter Bush’s *In Diamond Square* (2013). Bush’s discussion of his own version does not frame it as a hostile succession but as the kind of prismatic refraction discussed in Lefevere (1992/2017), Henitiuk (2012) and Reynolds (2020), where each translation reflects a different perspective on the text. Bush explains that he read the existing translations only after having sent his manuscript to the publishers, and it is only in retrospect that he observes, for example, the Irish overtones in O’Shiel’s or the American colloquialisms in Rosenthal’s that distinguish

those versions from his. Bush's translation, therefore, comments on O'Shiel's and Rosenthal's only in so far as they expose one another's more subjective choices, but the commentary does not take the form of a justification for taking over from preceding versions. However, as Hermans notes, even a choice made in ignorance of other possibilities can be understood as a commentary on the universe of discourse accessible to the translator. In other words, "translation speaks about itself" (2007:51).

Hermans employs linguistic models of discourse in order to explain the impact of the translator's positioning in relation to the work. The parallel is easy to observe: a translator acts as a reporter, someone who speaks for someone else and therefore does not take responsibility for the content of the discourse but only for the manner of presentation, which is expected to be 'faithful' or 'functionally equivalent'. The target text comes to stand for the source text, as if it had been literally quoted. Crucially, however, reporting someone else's words raises questions of "detachment and accountability" (Hermans 2007:67). Bush (2013) is perfectly aware of such questions; his acknowledgement of a subjective investment in Rodoreda's text is in open defiance of the requirements of detachment and critical distance that, in his opinion, are expected by academics. This defiant attitude is also embedded in his translation, where he gives characters English names; Julieta becomes Julie, Quimet becomes Joe, Cintet becomes Earnie, and so on. In particular, his renaming of Colometa, a fictional character of some renown in Catalan literature, as Pidgey – Colometa, little pigeon, is the nickname given by her first husband to Natalia, the main character – is a rather bold move in terms of what we might call, borrowing Goodman's words quoted above (1976:37), the "traditional European style of translation".

Another similarity between translations and quotations is that they "tend to be signalled and bracketed to distinguish them from the surrounding discourse" (Hermans 2007:69). Hermans argues that translations can be "viewed as direct speech mixed with elements of indirect speech" (ibid.:63) but are "normally framed as direct speech" (ibid.:71; emphasis added). Interestingly, though, the direction of announcement (who announces what to whom) is reversed: in reported speech, it is the reporter who announces the previous speaker's utterance and embeds it as part of their own; literary translations, on the other hand, are announced by publishers as belonging to authors, their quoted status discretely mentioned as an aside.

In fact, in the contemporary literary marketplace, and possibly in the interests of authentication, the framing of a translation can be deliberately ambiguous, as the cover of *In Diamond Square* illustrates (Figure 7.1). Apart from the name of the author and title, the cover features two quotations, one from Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez and another from Irish author Colm Tóibín. García Márquez's quotation is taken from an article in Spanish published in *El País* (1983), where he speaks of having read the novel in Spanish and Catalan. Tóibín may have read the novel in Catalan, Spanish or English; the quotation is taken from a 2013 review article in *The Daily Telegraph* where he refers to "Mercè Rodoreda's *In Diamond Square*". Interestingly, Tóibín later refers to "Mercè Rodoreda's *The Time of the Doves*" in his introduction to the English translation of another of Rodoreda's novels, *Death in Spring* (Rodoreda 2018). In brief, the cover does not state explicitly that this is a translated novel and uses the discourse around the novel selectively, to say the least, so as to frame different translations and the source text as as if they were one work. In Hermans's model, the cover could be described as free indirect discourse, "a translation that is recognisable but not announced or labelled as one" (Hermans 2007:73).

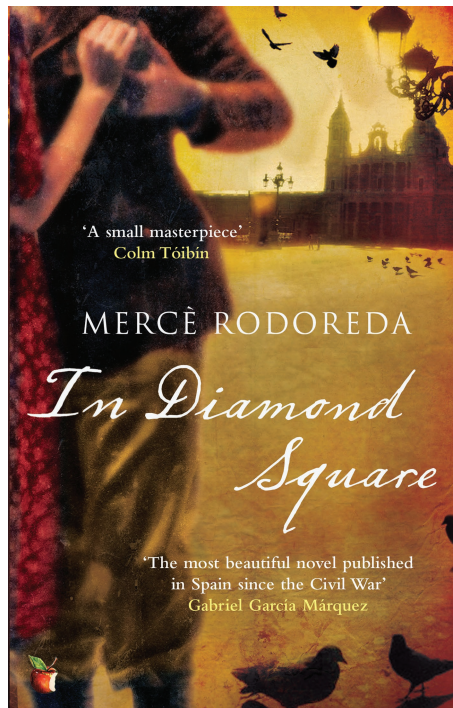


FIGURE 7.1 Cover of Virago's paperback edition of *In Diamond Square* (Rodoreda 2013)

The location of translation in theories of artistic representation

Hermans's argument that translations are metarepresentations is far more complex than I could do it justice here. In this section, I focus on one of the cornerstones of his argument, that of translations as demonstrations, because it shares the same theoretical roots with my proposal that literary translation is a performance art. Hermans draws on Clark and Gerrig (1990), who argue that quotations are a special form of language use that represent their referent through depiction rather than description. Clark and Gerrig distinguish demonstrations from descriptions on two accounts: first, demonstrations depict rather than describe, and second, they are *non-serious* as opposed to *serious* actions: “[d]emonstrations work by enabling others to experience what it is like to perceive the things depicted” (Clark and Gerrig 1990:765); as such, they belong to the mimetic tradition, rather than the diegetic mode of representation through description. Clark and Gerrig further note that the distinction between demonstration and description “can be traced back to Aristotle’s notions of mimesis and diegesis” (ibid.). The mimesis/diegesis dichotomy is also at the basis of theories of artistic representation such as Goodman’s (1976), whose work inspired Genette (1997) and Walton (1990), as well as the critical responses of Danto (1994) and Gell (1998). Goodman’s theory, as elaborated in *Languages of Art* (1976), seems therefore a suitable point to start this brief exploration of how translation is accommodated, or not, by theories of art.

Goodman’s theory of symbolic representation does not discuss the traditional distinction in terms of *diegesis* and *mimesis* but of (verbal) description and depiction (or pictorial representation), respectively. Interestingly, Goodman’s point of departure is that the two modes

of representation are more similar than one might think: he argues against the common understanding of depiction as a matter of resemblance and subsumes representation and description under the umbrella of denotation, a broader semiotic system (1976:43). According to Goodman, what we interpret as resemblance, or “realistic representation”, “depends not upon imitation or illusion or information but upon inculcation” (ibid.:38). In other words, both depiction and description depend on a series of conventions: a “plan of correlation, under which the picture represents the object” (ibid.).

In Goodman’s model, systems of depiction function very similarly to languages (1976:41), although they are far less ambiguous. Musical notation offers a closer analogy. Notations, Goodman speculates, were created to transcend the limitations of space and time and the individual in art forms where the works are transitory, as is the case with oral performances and music (ibid.:121). It is this possibility of devising a notation scheme that differentiates art forms such as literature and music from painting. Music and literature are also different from each other in that the former is based on a score and can therefore be recoverable and performed many times. The same applies to drama and partially to architecture; a literary work, on the other hand, is a script (ibid.:207), which means, in Goodman’s specific terminology, that replacing even one word with a synonym “yields a different work” (ibid.:209). Accordingly, a text “in another language is another work, and a translation of a work is not an instance of that work” (ibid.).

Genette (1997:176) dismisses Goodman’s position as not conforming to common usage which, he argues, allows one to say “indifferently”: “‘I’ve read *War and Peace* in French,’ or simply, in the same situation, ‘I’ve read *War and Peace*’”. According to Genette, it would be “quite artificial” to consider the French and English versions of a novel as “two distinct works, rather than as two *texts* (and thus two objects of immanence) of the same work”; he claims, on that basis, that readers of a translation “have a legitimate sense of operal identity” (ibid.:177). This leads Hermans to argue that “[f]or Genette, as for copyright law, a writer can look at a translation of his or her work and declare: ... ‘this is my work’” (2007:87).

Goodman’s dismissal of the possibility that translations may share an artistic identity with the source text is, I believe, aptly described by Clark and Gerrig as “sheer philosophical imperialism” (1990:799). I tend to agree, nevertheless, that translation cannot be viewed as an ‘instance’ of a literary work or, in Genette’s words, as having ‘operal identity’ with the source text. A very pertinent example of how quotations can become works in their own right is discussed by Danto (1994) in relation to a piece of visual art: Lichtenstein’s *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* (1962). A diagram of this painting by Erle Loran had been published in *Cézanne’s Compositions* as part of a study of Cézanne’s organization of space (Loran and Cézanne 1943/2006). Lichtenstein’s canvas differed in scale and substance but replicated the diagram in such a way that it would be difficult to distinguish one from another if presented in, say, a purposefully-framed photograph. Loran accused Lichtenstein of plagiarizing his work; Lichtenstein argued that he was making a statement about Loran’s work, not replicating it. Danto argues that, while they may look perfectly alike, the two representations have different contents. In Hermans’s model, appreciating Lichtenstein’s portrait is like appreciating irony: it requires recognizing the interplay of two discourses at once. The viewer needs to recognize the reference as well as the painter’s critical attitude to that reference. Another, possibly better known, example discussed by Danto (1994) is that of Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* (1964), precise copies of commercial

packaging that had been designed by another artist, James Harvey, who had a day job in commercial design.

Unlike Danto, Goodman considers that in literature the work is localized in the script [text] itself. This distinguishes literary works from music and drama, where “work is a compliance class of performances” (1976:210). Goodman gives the term ‘performances’ a stricter meaning than I give it here (see below), but he still considers all “compliant” performances of the same score as part of the same work. Genette follows Goodman and considers performances as works that are independent of the existing text or behaviour they represent. In the following quotation, Genette (1997:59) does not distinguish between the English translation of Corneille’s *Le Cid* and the French original, but he considers an actor’s performance an independent work:

[w]hen an actor interprets the stanzas of *The Cid*, in his own style, voice and accent, and with his own particular expressions, gestures and so forth; it is easy for a practiced observer to distinguish between the two works – Corneille’s and, say, Gérard Philipe’s – for ... the first can always be considered independently of the second and, thus, the second independently of the first.

Goodman’s overly restrictive notion of performances means that “compliant” performances, however “miserable”, would be considered as instances of the work, although “the most brilliant performance with a single wrong note” would not (1976:186). Danto’s theory is more forgiving, and aligns better with Hermans’s. Danto is concerned with what distinguishes works of art from mere representations and concludes that it is all about rhetoric, style and expression. Expression, he argues, “is the most pertinent to the concept of art” but “style and rhetoric serve almost the same differentiating function” (1994:165). After an in-depth discussion of the nature of art, resorting to concepts such as ‘style’ and ‘expression’ comes across as disappointing. The concept of rhetoric holds more promise – see Gould (2016) – and allows Danto to explain that Lichtenstein’s *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* is a piece of art because it “made a rhetorical use of the diagrammatic format”, and therefore caused “the audience of a discourse to take a certain attitude towards the subject of that discourse” (ibid.).

Following Danto’s logic, it could be argued that what makes translation an art is precisely the fact that translators recreate with an attitude, causing readers to see the work in a certain light. However, like Goodman and Genette before him, Danto underestimates translators and ends up falling into the poetry-is-what-is-lost argument: the carefully chosen words that “would fail if other words were used instead”, he suggests, “are lost when the texts themselves are translated”, which explains “why we prefer the original to the translation ... We do so because authorial subtlety and, let us say, *art* are contained in just the verbal materials from which the text is built” (Danto 1994:188). Here we go again.

Translation as a performance art

Even performances, to be appreciated as a piece of art, need to be recognized as such in the context of what Danto called the ‘Artworld’ (1964). Danto’s argument was initially misunderstood, although productively so, paving the way for what is known as the Institutional Theory of Art (Dickie 1974) and for sociological theories such as Becker’s (2012).

Institutional and sociological theories of art, like sociological theories of translation, are useful for understanding art in its wider contexts. They are less concerned with the relationship between artworks and artists, as I am here. However, they are not mutually exclusive. I mentioned earlier how Hermans's and Danto's religious metaphors stress the need for an institutional context in which the identification of a work as art or literature can function. Even bold rhetorical moves such as giving English names to Catalan characters are accepted as translations because there is a theoretical apparatus that enables them to be appreciated as such. Bush may expose the limitations of current theories, but his divergences from the norm are not radical enough to be excluded from the community of believers.

There is nothing in Goodman's or Genette's arguments that prevents them from considering translation alongside other performance arts and defining a novel as composed of multiple performances in a similar way to music and theatre; they seem to have fallen under the spell of transparency. Had translation been considered under the category of theatrical or musical regimes, it would have been accorded a different status. It seems, therefore, that what is missing is an art theory that can accommodate translations as art on the same level with performances. I discuss such a theory in the next section; but first I want to explain how the notion of quotation does not totally capture the artistic aspects of literary translations.

As explained above, Clark and Gerrig argue that quotations are demonstrations on the basis that they are non-serious, as opposed to serious, actions. The distinction is traced back to Goffman (1986) who, in turn, draws on Bateson's discussion of play as metacommunication in 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy' (Bateson 1976). Bateson suggests that the ability to play involves a certain level of meta-reflection, the ability to distinguish between serious and non-serious actions. Such level of reflection needs to be in place before a linguistic code can be developed. It is around this distinction that Goffman developed the notion of *keying* to describe the transformation of an activity that is "already meaningful in terms of some primary framework" (i.e. a 'serious' action) into "something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else", i.e. a non-serious action (Goffman 1986:44).

Goffman uses other examples, but he could have used translation to illustrate the defining characteristics of keying: without the existing activity or event (a source text) the keying (translation) would be meaningless; participants acknowledge that systematic transformation is going on; cues will be available to establish when the transformation will begin and end; and finally (1986:45), "the systematic transformation that a particular keying introduces may alter only slightly the activity thus transformed, but it utterly changes what it is a participant would say is going on".

Although the underlying process is the same, the term performance seems to me more intuitive than Goffman's keying to refer to an activity patterned on another, whose meaning it re-enacts. Performance, as a term, also calls attention to the relationship between artist and audience and thus captures a wider web of relations within its scope.

For both Goffman and other theorists of performance (Bauman 1975; Turner 2008; Schechner 1985), performance is a concept that enables scholars to understand ordinary life by means of an analogy with activities that had so far been considered as belonging to the realm of art. What I propose here is to reverse that analogy and adopt performance as a concept that helps us understand an art that is generally viewed as an ordinary activity. My argument is that translators' artistry requires more than skill in the use of literary language or the creative solution of problems; it requires the conscious embodiment of doubleness,

as explained in Saldanha (2021), where I illustrate how translators describe the experience of being themselves and other. Here, I will employ again the rather straightforward case of giving Catalan characters English names to demonstrate that the art of speaking for another is more complex than translators receive credit for.

One aspect of quotations and performances that goes unnoticed, for example in Clark and Gerrig's (1990) account, is that quotations demonstrate a past behaviour but also, as communicative acts in their own right, are geared towards an audience whose response they anticipate. Bush's decision to inscribe English names in Rodoreda's work is often explained by taking the view of "the English reader": he explains that 'Colometa' may have important connotations for the Catalan characters but "for the English reader, the Catalan suggests nothing but a slightly romantic liquid sound that will be vocalised wrongly" (Bush 2013:41). Pidgley, on the other hand, provokes reactions "both positive and negative, from the 'pidgley' used in Pokémon adventure stories to the 'pidgley' that evokes the 'flying dustbins', scourge of Ken Livingstone and gentrified London, and definitely a class apart" (ibid.) Bush's performance of Pidgley is carefully attuned to a particular audience. Diamond Square may "evoke nothing of Barcelona for English readers" as Virago's editor pointed out, but Bush does not really want to take British readers on a trip to Barcelona during the Spanish Civil war, neither does he want "to take Barcelona's Diamond Square, what Pidgley and Catalans suffered" to English readers; he wants to take them "into the canonical realms of world literature" (ibid.:42). I suppose it is not unreasonable to expect readers of canonical literature to be sufficiently acquainted, via English or other languages, with Pokémon players and London dustbins.

Bush is aware that certain translation strategies are less likely to receive authentication than others. He explains that making Pidgley and Diamond Square part of the world literature canon are aims articulated by Rodoreda herself in the prologue which the Virago edition included at his suggestion, hence forestalling critics who might object to his strategies as domesticating or foreignizing. This is an interesting rhetorical move on his part; however, his most daring move is to present Rodoreda herself as adopting the name Pidgley for the character Colometa. Readers of the English translation find Rodoreda explaining that "when I needed a central character for my novel I chose Pidgley, who has only one thing in common with me, namely the fact that she feels at a loss in the midst of the world" (Rodoreda 2013:x). Rodoreda also quotes a Spanish critic, Baltasar Porcel, as speaking of 'Pidgley'. By deploying Rodoreda's voice in the published translation, Bush puts his own creation, Pidgley's name, in the author's mouth. Thus, speaking for Rodoreda, he makes Rodoreda speak for him.

As this example shows, a translation can be more than a quotation with an attitude or implicit commentary. As I argue elsewhere (Saldanha 2014), translation effects changes that cannot be accounted for in terms of meaning or form. The particular nature of the transformation *and* transubstantiation process that we call translation cannot be described as changes in content or style: pigeons become doves, Quimets become Joes, Catalan anarchists take on the features of Irish irregulars (Bush 2013) because that is how translators inhabit the fictional world created by Rodoreda and make sense of it for a different readership. In the interests of authentication, translators' decisions – such as changing characters' names, or the choice of title for the novel – are generally vetoed by editors and authors or, in the case of Rodoreda's texts, the Rodoreda estate (Bush 2013:40). Although the ultimate decision appears to reside with authors or their executors, they can only choose from the options

offered to them. If Bush had not proposed *In Diamond Square* to his editors and argued for the title with the rhetorical skill of a translator, that title would not have been born. If Bush had not decided that Colometa could speak in English as Pidgey, Pidgey would not have been born.

As I will argue in the next section, once a translation is published, and within the temporary limits imposed by copyright law, it takes on a life of its own, beyond the control of the translators, as well as that of the publishers, authors and their executors. That is not to say that authors and translators do not have a responsibility to steer the life of the work in such a way as to stay true to the principles that caused the work to exist. These principles cannot, however, be contained by concepts such as fidelity or realism. Translators willingly put their own self on hold and attempt, as far as this is possible, to inhabit someone else's mind, recreate their memories and write with their hand, to be their double; in that capacity, they also inhabit their characters' lives and allow their voices to come through theirs. The self is never erased, however, and the only way of staying true to one's relationship with the text is by exploiting the distance between self and behaviour, in an act of self-reflection that "creates room not only for context and nuance and for exploration and experiment, but also for the critical inspection of the available vocabularies and their lineages" (Hermans 2007:156). Bush's discussion of his translation offers important insight into one such experiment, executed with a high degree of critical reflection on "the self's repertoire of dialect and languages" (2013:38).

The social life of translations

In assigning translation to the mimetic tradition, I do not mean that it is never descriptive, or diegetic. The most common characteristic of all accounts of those two modes of representation is that they all recognize the existence of hybrid categories. However, translation has been evaluated for too long under the diegetic regime, and it is high time we consider its mimetic aspects. My argument is that translation's artistry can be located in its mimetic role or, in other words, that translators make an art of their performances. This is not to say that translation is an art *because* it is mimetic. I assume that translation is an art because translators describe their experience as such; a philosophical argument for the artistic nature of translation can be found in Malmkjær (2020).

My aim here is to position translation within an art theory that does not automatically undermine it. The theory of art that, in my opinion, is best suited to accommodating literary translation in its framework is Gell's anthropological theory, as formulated in *Art and Agency* (1998). Unlike Danto and like Goodman, Gell's theory is about how art functions rather than what distinguishes art from non-art. Instead of Goodman's highly abstract model, Gell offers one that focuses on human social experience. This he justifies in terms of the anthropological nature of his theory. He also distinguishes his approach from sociological theories on the basis that they work at the institutional level while anthropology is "concerned with the immediate context of social interactions and their 'personal' dimensions" (1998:8).

The key to Gell's (1998) argument is that artefacts, in the general sense of human creations, whether artistic or not, have social lives in similar ways to humans. The parallels between the life of humans and that of things are explored in Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things* (1986), with contributions from a range of anthropologists and historians, including Gell (1986). Appadurai (1986) posits that commodities, like persons, have social lives;

objects are imbued with meaning by humans, and examining their circulation can therefore tell us much about the humans who engineer their exchange. As Gell explains, humans can never totally separate themselves from the pieces of reality they create, nor can they control their lives. He describes immaterial objects as “secondary agents” through which “primary agents distribute their agency” (1998:21). It is worth noting that Gell employs concepts such as ‘distributed person’ and ‘extended mind’ which were only in the process of being established in the philosophy of mind at that time (Clark and Chalmers 1998); distributed cognition and the extended mind are now widely accepted theories.

One of Gell’s most striking accounts of distributed personhood is that of Pol Pot’s soldiers and the mines they laid, which caused many deaths and mutilations in Cambodia. Mines are generally seen as instruments rather than agents of destruction. However, weapons are an essential part of what being a soldier means, and in a soldier’s hands, they can become agents of destruction on behalf of that soldier, without requiring their physical presence. I argue here that literary works, both originals and translations, are similar to mines: they execute the agency of an artist who is no longer in control of the texts they wrote. The difference is that translations and artworks, for better or for worse, acquire lives of their own and continue to grow and cross-fertilize in their own right.

Gell’s theory is refreshing in its lack of evaluative stance towards what makes an object, activity or event a piece of art. Not only is he not interested in the distinction between art and ‘mere representations’ as Danto (1994) is, but he does not question the validity of the subject’s relationship with the artefact: whether it is a voodoo doll or a canonical work, what matters is that objects of art are capable of embodying agency. Following Gell, therefore, Bush’s claim to an artistic relationship with the text is sufficient to be able to study the translation as a piece of art. As scholars, we can study Rodoreda or Bush’s art from several vantage points and select specific life slices of the work for examination: for example, Rodoreda’s text as initially published, before it got entangled in relationships with readers, translators and critics. However, our scholarly perspective should not, and cannot, define the work itself.

From Genette’s and Goodman’s perspective, Rodoreda’s text is “ultimate” (Goodman 1976:209); in Gell’s theory, as a piece of art it establishes relationships that go well beyond those established by the initial text, and therefore cannot be contained by it. Neither can a translation contain the source text. Works of art are not distinct objects, events, texts or scores: they have a social life of their own, initiated but not totally determined by the artist. Whatever happens to the material objects themselves and their copies, imitations, reviews, performances, or to the artist who initiated them, they will live on as long as there are readers and observers. What is more, as long as readers and observers continue to reproduce the work, as painters, performers or translators, the initial work of art will give life to many others. Ironic translation is dissociative, but translation is always echoic, and the attitude itself – skillfully elaborated and sufficiently in tune with the artworld to which it belongs – can result in a work of art with a life of its own.

Conclusion: whose voice, what lives?

Authors, publishers and translators attempt to control the direction taken by the literary work and, on occasion, they succeed in blocking certain translations; eventually, however,

even copyright expires and the work of metarepresentation inevitably continues. To conclude, I briefly illustrate how thinking of translation as a performance and a work of art in its own right may result in different answers to questions concerning the ethics and politics of representation. A recent example is readily available in the heated debate surrounding the translator chosen for a Dutch publication of Amanda Gorman's poetry, including her poem 'The Hill We Climb'. The poem is the text on the basis of which Gorman delivered a piece of spoken poetry that was given a platform any artist can only dream of: the inaugural ceremony of the US president in November 2020. The choice of Gorman as a performer was made on the basis of more than her artistic skills: she is a Black American young woman delivering a political message on behalf of one of the most powerful white men in the world.

A more comprehensive summary and discussion can be found in Kotze (2021); mine is necessarily brief. Dutch publisher Meulenhoff initially chose Marieke Lucas Rijneveld for the Dutch publication, a choice that journalist Janice Deul, in an opinion piece written for the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* on 25 February 2021, described as 'incomprehensible', given that Rijneveld is white and non-binary and there is no lack of Black Dutch women poets who could have given voice to Gorman's poem. Deul's argument was echoed across the world, not always accurately, as we might expect, but giving voice to a range of different perspectives. Translators into other languages who had received similar commissions questioned their own choice, coming up with different answers.

The debate among translators (see, for example, Barrios 2021; Mahdi 2021; Phellas 2021) focused on whether certain aspects of one's identity make one more or less suitable to translate a particular text. The crucial criteria for selection in this particular case, as Kotze argued, should have been which translator can better echo Gorman's poem but also the nature of the poetry event itself: the performance by a young Black American woman speaking on behalf of one of the most powerful white men in the world was central to the event. Offering a platform to translators independently of age, colour and gender would dilute the strength of the message, and although a book published by a European publisher is not the same as an inaugural ceremony of a US president, it is still an important platform.

In terms of making a work of art based on Gorman's poem, however, in terms of the relationship between self and other that translation involves, the question of what aspects of human identity should be engaged may offer different answers. A beautiful and powerful work of art can emerge from the experience of, say, a Dutch white genderless person willingly repressing their own voice so as to allow a Black young American woman to speak through them. The art is in the attitude. Indeed, a similar work of art did emerge from a Dutch white genderless person contemplating and questioning their right to give voice to a Black young American woman: the poem by Rijneveld entitled 'Alles bewoonbaar', translated as 'Everything Inhabitable' by Michele Hutchison and published in *The Guardian* (Rijneveld 2021). This new poem reveals Rijneveld's willingness to add their voice to Gorman's fight as well as a high degree of self-reflection on their part and humbleness towards those aspects of Gorman's poem they may not be best placed to inhabit, as the following lines from Hutchison's translation demonstrate:

Never lost that resistance and yet able to grasp when it
isn't your place, when you must kneel for a poem because
another person can make it more inhabitable.

From the perspective of poetry and translation as art forms, it is revealing that ‘Alles be-woonbaar’, inspired by the possibility of inhabiting someone else’s poetry, should need to be written by Rijnveld in their capacity as author. As author, Rijnveld was able to engage with Gorman’s work on equal terms; they did not need their work authenticated. As translator, the legal right was not theirs, yet. ‘The Hill we Climb’, in any case, will live beyond the control of Gorman or even the President of the United States, had he chosen to perform his own spoken poetry at the inauguration. And so will Pidgy and Diamond Square.

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8

GATEKEEPERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Valorizing indirect translation in theatre

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Scrutinizing contractual documentation may seem a dry approach to the exciting endeavour of literary translation – especially translation that is to be performed on stage before an audience, with all the collaboration that entails. Nevertheless, contractual agreements provide evidence of who commissions, creates and receives translation, not only by revealing who are the signatories, but also who is not party to the agreements. Documents enable us to map the progression of the translation process and identify the participants in that process along the way. This chapter argues that the examination of gatekeepers and stakeholders in UK theatre translation sheds light on issues of ownership and profession that have implications for a wider theorization of indirect translation. And therefore, by identifying the stakeholders and gatekeepers of the translation process for UK theatre performance, it is possible to map the sequencing of translation for theatre and plot the positioning of the various agents in the translation process. A staged text encloses translation along with the many elements that combine to make a performance, thus presenting to the audience that “smooth, unruffled picture” of translation that Theo Hermans considers conceals the “more unsettling and perplexing but at the same time ... much more interesting and intriguing side” of translation (Hermans 1996:6). In this chapter, I seek to follow Hermans’s lead in “pok[ing a] finger into at least some of the cracks” that paper over the “conventional perception and self-presentation of translation” (ibid.), peeling back the paper to investigate what lies beneath: the documentation that underpins the process and without which translation cannot receive a public-facing performance.

I begin by discussing the phenomenon of indirect translation and the extent to which indirect translation for theatre reflects the wider indirect translation model. The discussion includes an investigation of the theatrical commissioning practices for indirect translation in UK theatre and how such practices in turn can shed light on patterns of indirect translation beyond the context of theatre. I then deconstruct the UK theatre translation commissioning process, identifying the agents involved and categorizing their roles as stakeholders and gatekeepers in the process. This leads to a discussion of the contractual procedure, which I illustrate with examples from a scoping project of my own attempt to commission

translations from Dutch into English for performance. Finally, I ask what this process reveals about the ownership and valorization of translation in theatre and its significance for assessing the various roles in indirect translation, especially the status and professionalization of the translator. What do the minutiae of this probing reveal about translation as a practice and product? Although my discussion relates to translation practices in UK theatre, which are not necessarily replicated in other languages and theatrical cultures, I would argue that these practices nevertheless shed light on the complexity of the translation process in general. This chapter thus investigates the part played by indirect translation in bringing translated plays onto the stage in English and, by parsing the involvement of the various stakeholders and gatekeepers, assesses the value – monetary and moral – ascribed to the literal translator and reflects on the ethical implications of this process.

Indirect translation and theatrical indirect translation

Defining terminology in translation theory can be an unstable and therefore unsettling activity. St. André notes that “terminology in this area is by no means standardized” and takes issue with the argument that the term indirect translation can be “adopted to refer to any translation mediated by another translation” on the basis that “such a broad term may restrict the ability of researchers to make analytic distinctions without recourse to rather clumsy compound terms” (St. André 2020:470). Indeed, Assis Rosa et al.’s understanding of indirect translation, drawing on Yves Gambier, as “a translation of a translation” (Assis Rosa et al. 2017:113), does allow some latitude in identifying the stages of translation covered by the term, although the authors favour the three-language model whereby a text that has already been translated from one language to another is then translated from the second language into a third (what St. André prefers to term relay translation) as the archetype indirect translation. I concur with Assis Rosa et al. that it is important to have an overarching term that recognizes the blurring and shifts within the range of categories nestling below the term indirect translation. As I have argued elsewhere, interrogating the role of the intermediate text as a discrete step in the translation process sheds light on the significance of intermediary activity within indirect translation theory (Brodie 2018a:334). This is partly because the process of bringing a text in one language onto the stage in another language fits all three elements of Jakobson’s broader definition of translation (Jakobson 1959/2012:127): it displays interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic modes of translation. But it is also partly because the theatrical literal translation is a discrete and targeted text, analysis of which sheds light on the activity and concept of intermediation. Translation for performance on stage is an applied form of translation with a tight focus on its users, who fall into two groups: theatre practitioners and audiences. This focus brings about a pragmatic translation methodology that approximates indirect translation practices in operation and perception.

The translation of dramatic texts for performance in the English language on the UK stage frequently takes an indirect route: a mediating text – a literal translation – is employed (and sometimes specifically commissioned) for a target language writer to create a performance text. In theatrical terminology, the literal translation is a translation prepared by an expert in the source language in order to provide a target language writer with a text that will form the basis of a script for performance. It could be more appropriate to identify the theatrical literal translation as a dramaturgical translation since such translations provide

dramaturgical information in addition to a close rendering of the source text. This can include advice on the context of the original play and playwright, including cultural, historical, literary and political issues, along with annotations on knotty translation problems or code-shifting dilemmas, in which various solutions are presented to assist the performance text writer to make a decision. An English-language theatrical literal translation may therefore resemble an academic translation for a scholarly publication, in as much as it is likely to include a preface and a substantial number of footnotes. However, the literal translation differs from an academic translation in that, in UK theatre, it is usually prepared by a theatre specialist – often an actor or dramaturg who has an understanding of the practicalities of text in performance. It is important to stress that a theatrical literal translation is not a first draft of a subsequently performed text. It stands alone but constitutes a vital connecting document between the original play and its performance.

Since the adapting writer is likely to be commissioned specifically for his or her personal perspective on the issues in the text, including the themes adopted for the seasonal programming at the theatrical site where the play is to be performed alongside the wider narratives of the society and system within which the production will take place, the resulting performance adopts an overtly subjective approach to the source; this subjectivity is a principal reason for the selection of the adapting writer. The former literary manager of the Royal Court theatre in London, Christopher Campbell, told me that when matching a writer to a text, he would look for “a sense of affinity or an interesting lack of affinity” (Brodie 2018c:121). The text produced by the literal translator is therefore required to present the performance text writer with a range of solutions for translation problems in the source text, enabling that writer to make decisions that will simultaneously reflect both their own approach and the voice of the original playwright. Theatrical literal translations are thus specialist documents.

Despite their significant role in bringing a dramatic text to the stage, literal translations resemble intermediate translations in indirect translation more generally: they tend to be “camouflaged” (Assis Rosa et al. 2017:113). Whereas the writer of the performance text will often be prominently named in the publicity for a production, the literal translator is relegated to the small credits inside the programme, or not mentioned at all. This is one of the reasons why some theatre translators in the UK prefer not to take on literal translation work and query the ethics of the indirect procedure. Nevertheless, performed direct translations by expert linguists are in the minority among translations staged in English in the UK, usually restricted to previously untranslated and therefore unknown texts and mainly found in specialist theatres catering for more targeted audiences with specific theatrical interests. This says as much about the choice of translated plays for performance as it does about translation approaches and audience expectations.

The reluctance to engage with the practice of literal translation in theatre is indicative of the negative evaluation identified more generally in connection with indirect translation by Assis Rosa et al. (2017). Methodologically, they point out, indirect translation is considered “an undesirable practice according to translators’ professional ethics” (ibid.:123). The inaccessibility of intermediate documents and the unwillingness of practitioners to discuss their part in the indirect process inhibit research into and evaluation of ethical considerations. Only two of the nineteen entries identified by Pięta in her critical annotated bibliography of indirect translation research explicitly address the ethical and legal aspects of indirect translation practices as part of their discussion of theoretical, methodological and terminological

issues (Pięta 2017). As characterized by Washbourne, “[d]epending on the critic or reviewer, [indirect translation] is figured either as a cryptozoological curiosity or as a shameful pathology” (2013:609). Theatrical literal translations resemble most literal translations in that they tend to be camouflaged and overlooked. Nevertheless, the engagement with commissioning procedures required for theatre practitioners to create theatre – especially among artistic directors and literary managers, where the creative process begins – results in active consideration of the people and processes involved and is documented by private contracts and public credits. Investigating these in more detail provides an insight into the value attributed to indirect translation – in theatre and more widely.

Gatekeepers and stakeholders

In order to identify the gatekeepers and stakeholders in the documentation of theatrical indirect translation it is helpful to track the process of commissioning. My study of London theatre translation, *The Translator on Stage* (Brodie 2018c), investigated the processes of bringing translated plays to the stage in detail and demonstrated that no two productions are exactly alike in genesis or creation. Furthermore, the starting point of selecting a text for performance is challenging to identify and varies depending on context. Trencsényi considers that play selection was historically “the decision of the person who was running the theatre (the owner, the lease-holder, the actor-manager or the director)” and is still largely the responsibility of the artistic director, although the duty “has been increasingly shared with the dramaturg” (2015:14). The UK-based theatre director Christopher Haydon, in conversation with leading artistic directors, asked them to describe their approach to programming a season of work and received a range of responses indicating the collaborative nature of play selection (Haydon 2019). Sarah Frankcom, for example, describes her approach when leading the Royal Exchange theatre in Manchester as

collegiate and consultative ... We have a number of projects that come through a sort of “ideas testing” phase that involves investing money and [research and development] ... And we also look at plays from the repertoire that feel most important at a given point and time.

(Frankcom 2019:61–62)

A translated play included in a seasonal programme might therefore already be an established play in translation that could be revived or given a new translation, a new play from a playwright who has already had other work produced in translation or – much more risky – a play from a playwright whose work is as yet unperformed in English translation. Identifying this latter type of play is challenging because the selectors, unless their language knowledge is sufficient to have read or seen work in other languages (either in the original or translation), are dependent on reports from other theatre practitioners operating in the relevant language environment. Anthony Simpson-Pike, associate director of the Gate Theatre Notting Hill in London, summarizes the issues when seeking international work for programming:¹

There is a question of money and funding for translation. We’re a really small theatre. If I can’t read the language ... how do we access that writing culture and those scripts?

Sometimes we can get help from institutes, sometimes we can't. One of the difficulties there is that you want to get a play translated to decide if you want to programme it or not and often a funding body might want you to have a clear outcome, which is funding a new [performed] translation of the play. That becomes a barrier in terms of being able to find out more about writing cultures rather than committing to a certain play.

(Brexit Stage Left 2019)

For a work even to enter the theatrical translation system, therefore, there is a commanding series of gatekeepers, including literary agents, international theatre festival organizers and the convenors and judges of literary awards, all of whom are likely to highlight theatrical work which has the potential for translation. It is not unusual for these gateways to be supported in some form by national cultural agencies. My own project commissioning first-time translations of contemporary Dutch-language plays illustrates this range, as I explain later in this chapter.

A summary of theatrical translation commissioning activity for translated plays to be performed in UK theatre, however, would typically include the following theatre practitioners. When commissioning a translation, the artistic director of a theatre, generally in consultation with a specialist dramatic text advisor, such as a member of the theatre's literary department or a freelance dramaturg, will identify a specific playwright who fits the creative vision for a particular production. Like any job description, there will be a range of essential and desirable requirements for the post, one of which is familiarity with the source text language. The writer may have command of the source language and therefore be able to act as the direct translator. However, proven ability to rework text for performance is prioritized over knowledge of the source language; nevertheless, experience in working on translated texts and adapting across cultures is highly valued, and it is therefore not unusual for an adapting writer (indirect translator) to have familiarity with another language and concepts of translation. I have discussed elsewhere how the British playwright, translator and adaptor Martin Crimp, for example, "offers often startlingly new interpretations that locate his translations and adaptations within the wider sphere of his theatrical writing" (Brodie 2018b:217) and suggested that Crimp's approach to theatrical writing can be seen as a form of translation theory (Brodie 2016:85–87).

In some cases, the creator of the performance text is confident in the source language and will not need a literal translation to be provided, although arguably the process still goes through the indirect route. The UK-based adaptor Mike Poulton notes that even when feeling "competent in the language I am to work in, I make my own literal translation before beginning the serious, and lengthy, business of adaptation" (Poulton 2005:xiii). When the writer does not have sufficient (or any) knowledge of the source language, and funds allow, a literal translator may be commissioned to create a new source text for the writer. If there is an existing literal translation, this may be obtained in preference to commissioning a new version, as I discuss in my study of the UK productions of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* in adaptations written by Martin Crimp (2006) and David Hare (2015), from a literal translation created by Helen Rappaport that combined "a superior level of detailed research information targeted for a theatre practitioner with an understanding of theatrical requirements for performable text" (Brodie 2018b:214). These examples illustrate my contention that the literal translation is a discrete text with a clear focus on its theatre practitioner users

and eventual audience and should not be seen as an intermediate draft along the way to creating a polished translated text. The purpose of a theatrical literal translation is to provide its reader with the means to gain an appreciation of the source text from a theatrical performance perspective. The Swedish academic Agnes Broomé, while still a student at University College London, was commissioned to prepare literal translations of two of August Strindberg's plays for the British playwright Howard Brenton. Invited to reflect on her activity, she characterized the creation of a literal translation as writing for "an audience of one" (Broomé 2013). Indeed, the intended beneficiary of such a text is a writer who needs to form a close impression of the source text from which they can create their own version of an English-language performance text, along with access to the original via a knowledgeable interpreter. In these circumstances, the literal translator is also, in some respects, the representative of the original author. There are, however, further potential readers of this text: the artistic director of a theatre who is looking for evidence to inform the decision whether to commission a production of this particular play; and, once the production has been commissioned, the director of the play in the early phases of planning how to stage the production.

The specialist nature of literal translation adds a further layer to the camouflaging of literal translations. As I have mentioned, their readership is restricted to a handful of theatre practitioners and they are therefore not widely circulated or easily obtainable. Literal translations have limited sustainability and are unpublished. Copies may be held in theatre archives, but the extent and quality of archived material is dependent on the retention practices of individual organizations and the personnel charged with archival submission. Furthermore, the copyright protocol may affect the accessibility of literal translations, as discussed later. If there is no stringent archive policy and designated archivist (and sometimes even when there is), documents can be overlooked for retention, especially where complicated ownership provisions apply. This compounds the invisibility of the process.

As I have suggested, the theatre translation commissioning process is different for every production, but there are trends that can be identified in the workflow, enabling a mapping activity that assists in identifying the key stakeholders and gatekeepers. It helps if such an exercise is based on real-time, real-life procedures. I was fortunate in 2018 to receive funding from Professor Stella Bruzzi, the Dean of Arts and Humanities at my institution, University College London, to commission the translation of a sample of contemporary Dutch-language texts into English as a scoping exercise for a larger project investigating different methods of translation for the stage. My reasons for choosing to work with Dutch-language texts were varied. Whereas the theatrical products of many European languages are well-represented on the London stage – French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish and Swedish texts all appear regularly – Dutch-language texts are rarely staged in the UK even though there was a Golden Age of Dutch-language literature (including drama) in the seventeenth century, and there is currently a thriving experimental contemporary theatre movement in the Low Countries. Furthermore, there are emerging signs of an interest in Dutch-language theatre among English-speaking theatre-makers and audiences, with a contemporary² and a classic³ Dutch play both performed in London in October/November 2017. The Dutch theatre company Internationaal Theater Amsterdam makes regular visits to the Barbican Theatre in London, where it performs in Dutch with English surtitles, and its Belgian theatre director, Ivo van Hove, is a frequent guest director in other high-profile London theatres, including the National Theatre and the Young Vic. University College London also houses

the oldest centre for Dutch Studies in the English-speaking world, having celebrated its centenary in 2019; this provided me with the resources to investigate and evaluate potential plays for translation. Lastly, I do not speak Dutch myself, and therefore was in the position of many theatrical commissioners seeking to engage with languages they do not understand.

The sequence of the process I undertook in identifying potential plays for translation was as follows. I conducted a survey of contemporary Dutch-language plays with the potential for first-time translation into English, drawing on my network of Dutch speakers and theatre practitioners. My conversations included theatre practitioners, academics, professional translators and representatives of cultural institutes, all of whom were based either in the UK, the Netherlands or Belgium. I discussed the ensuing long list with Ellen McDougall, artistic director of the Gate Theatre Notting Hill, with whom I was collaborating on the wider performance project, and together we settled on four texts for translation. The synopsis of each play was the main driver in our selection; we were seeking a topic that would speak to local audiences and current events while clearly referencing its genesis. Alongside this requirement, we were influenced by our personal acquaintance with the playwrights or their work, recommendations from trusted contacts, the track record of the playwrights in terms of successful productions and awards, and whether the play would be suitable for production in a small theatre which generally produces plays less than two hours in length and with a small cast of no more than four. We were also intent on selecting a sample that included male and female playwrights from both the Netherlands and Belgium. The final selection is shown in Table 8.1.

I used the same informal network to make contact with potential translators, seeking those with experience in theatre and performance, expert knowledge of the source and target languages and professional translation skills, who were prepared to produce a literal translation in the first instance. The translator's brief was explicit in requesting a literal or dramaturgical translation aimed at providing a theatre practitioner who does not speak the language of the source text with the means to gain an appreciation of that text from a theatrical performance perspective. Translators were requested to provide sufficient information in their translation to allow an artistic director to decide whether to commission a production, allow a director to decide how to stage a production, and provide a writer with a close impression of the source text from which they could create their own version of an English-language performance text. The translators were therefore requested to include a preface providing context for the content of the play and any other dramaturgical background that they considered necessary. They were also invited to use annotations to explain significant translation decisions that might affect a potential performance.

Although all of the translators would have preferred to have been commissioned to create a performance text in the first instance, they embraced the intellectual exercise of,

TABLE 8.1 Authors, plays and translators

<i>Author</i>	<i>Text</i>	<i>Translator</i>
Tom Lanoye	<i>Fort Europa</i> [<i>Fortress Europe</i>] (2005) extract	Jorik Mol
Gable Roelofsén	<i>Gedeelde Kamers</i> [<i>Shared Rooms</i>] (2013)	Henriëtte Rietveld
Magne van den Berg	<i>Ik speel geen Medea</i> [<i>I won't play Medea</i>] (2016)	Claudette Sherlock
Lot Vekemans	<i>Niemand wacht op je</i> [<i>No one waits for you</i>] (2017)	Laura Vroomen

effectively, laying out their translation process for a reader to examine. All of them were introduced to the playwright of their text but it was left to their own discretion as to how much they wished to consult with the original author. The resulting translations were reviewed by members of the UCL Dutch department⁴ (including Theo Hermans) and myself; in my case, for the English readability of the translation rather than the language transfer elements. In my opinion, the professionalism and stagecraft of the translators emerged in the translations, which could easily be read without recourse to the notes. My view is underscored by the progression of one of the translations, Claudette Sherlock's translation of Magne van den Berg's *Ik speel geen Medea* (*I won't play Medea*). This play, in Sherlock's translation, has been selected for translation into and will be included in the forthcoming collection of Dutch drama (*Coleção Dramaturgia Holandesa*) of the publishing house Editora Cobogó, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – a further illustration of the significance of literal translation in the wider indirect translation process. As an indication of the playability of Sherlock's text, an extract was performed at an Emerging Theatre Translators Scratch Night as part of the Out of the Wings Festival in February 2021 (Out of the Wings 2021). These outcomes demonstrate how a literal translation contributes to the sustainability of a text and leads to performance. And there are precedents for the author of a literal translation to create the ensuing performance text: Kathleen Mountjoy documents how the academic and translator Catherine Boyle's "position as both literal translator and creator of the final version [for the Royal Shakespeare Company] of *House of Desires* [by the seventeenth-century Mexican playwright Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz] gave her a double role ... as she both represented contact with the original Spanish text and found her own voice for the play as the final translator" (Mountjoy 2007:85).

My own role in this project was as commissioner and facilitator, a position that is often undertaken by theatrical management. This had the effect of locating me as researcher inside the project rather than allowing me to remain a dispassionate observer, a particularly active example of Bourdieu's "scholastic epistemocentrism" (Bourdieu 2000:50). However, it also enabled me to note the minutiae of the process that would be difficult to capture in a retrospective review and to profit from my training and experience as a researcher. I have now spent more than fifteen years observing and commenting upon theatre translation on the London stage. Although I am not, and never have been, a theatre practitioner, I was at the time working in partnership with the Gate Theatre Notting Hill on a series of projects connected with translated plays and in consultation with the artistic director and executive director on the commissioning of these translations. Since starting this project, I have become Chair of Actors Touring Company, a theatrical organization that specializes in touring international theatre. I believe this gives me an insight into everyday theatre practices which I can then systematically record and analyse from an external, academic perspective.

The theatre practitioners I encountered in the development of this translation commissioning project can be mapped onto two broad activities: textual production and theatrical environment. Textual production includes the original author, translators and adapting playwright. The artistic director, director, literary manager and dramaturg could be categorized as operating in the wider theatrical environment, although it is important to note that these practitioners also read the text and their comments may exert influence on its development. Further practitioners will be involved in bringing the text to the stage and their decisions may also resonate in the creation and performance of the text. The producer physically makes the production happen, booking venues, cast and creative staff, and is

usually the individual responsible for devising the budget and negotiating the contracts and permissions that I discuss in the next section. The design team creates the set within which the translation will be staged, designing music, sound, lighting and costumes – all of which may affect the way the text is transmitted and received. The production teams facilitate the performance – supporting the actors, for example, with prompts or props, or providing them with special training such as fight movement or dialect coaching. These are all activities which can have a bearing on the delivery of the text. And of course, the actors embody the text on stage. Stakeholders are thus not restricted to the source playwrights, translators and target text writers, but also include theatrical and literary agents, theatre practitioners employed by the producing and commissioning theatre companies, and potentially additional funding institutions. This mapping exercise demonstrates the wide range of stakeholders who act as influential gatekeepers of the people, processes and products of translation in theatre.

Valorizing indirect translation in theatre

To what extent is this gatekeeping reflected and documented in the contracts and permissions underpinning the creation and performance of a translation? For the initial practical stages of my project, three separate contractual agreements were required, illustrating the range of gatekeepers controlling access to the original text and how the ensuing translation would be created and used. The first two agreements governed the translation of the original play. These constituted a licence granted to the commissioner by the original playwright for an English-language translation to be created. This licence gave permission for a translation to be made under the specified circumstances of the project and severely restricted the purpose for which it could be used. It was reviewed by the playwright's literary agent and/or publisher. The second agreement was a contract between the commissioner and the translator stating the terms under which the translation would be created, including payment terms, delivery dates and quality assessment procedures and setting out the rights to the translation. This contract was reviewed by at least one of the translators with reference to the model agreement made available by the Translators Association, a sub-group of the Society of Authors, the UK trade union for writers, illustrators and literary translators. The third document, required in the event that any of the translations might go forward to production as a result of this project, was a non-disclosure agreement between the parties to the transaction stating that they would not share the translation with any third parties.

It can be seen from these documents that the boundaries that are contractually drawn between the protagonists in the initial stages of creating a translation cannot easily be mapped onto the nuanced grid of stakeholders in the translation process, and that gatekeepers, such as literary agents, publishers and professional associations, are often removed from the translation activity. Further along in the process, in order to contractually document a performance script additional agreements would be required with the adapting playwright and the publisher of the translated performance text, and a further agreement drawn with the original playwright and source language publisher. Once a translation project has advanced to performance, royalty agreements would be included in such documents, stating what percentage of box office takings is to be shared.

This leads to the final point relating to the part played by the literal translator: the issues relating to the ownership of the translation. In order to assess this, it is instructive to

investigate how copyright is treated for other writers and translators in the UK. The writers of theatre performance texts tend to draw on the UK Theatre Writers Guild model agreement, which also “provides for the Writer to assert the Writer’s right to be identified as the Writer and the Manager to recognise the Writer’s Moral Rights as provided under Chapter IV of the Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988” (Writers’ Guild of Great Britain 2014:4) and includes a complex set of provisions relating to share of Net Box Office Receipts, with the proviso that it should not be less than 8 per cent (*ibid.*:8). For literary translators, an earlier version of the Translators Association model translator/publisher agreement was prefaced by an introduction arguing that “the status of translators should equal that of authors”, citing a document entitled ‘Recommendations on the legal protection of translators and translations and the practical means to improve the status of translators’ adopted at the general conference of UNESCO held in Nairobi in 1976 (Translators Association 2001:np). The current Society of Authors’ basic translator/publisher contract asserts the translator’s moral right to be identified as the translator of the work and stipulates that the publisher should “undertake that the Translator’s name shall appear on the title page and jacket/cover of their edition of the Translation and in all publicity material (catalogues, advertisements, website etc.) concerning it, and shall use their best endeavours to ensure that this undertaking is adhered to in other editions of the Translation and that the name of the Translator is mentioned in connection with all reviews of and quotations from the Translation” (Society of Authors 2018:3–4). Under these terms, a literary translator should be granted copyright of the English language translation. In commercial translation, however, the translator is considered to provide a service and/or generate a product. All rights of ownership are transferred to the client upon delivery of the work or upon receipt of invoice/payment, and the client is free to do what they wish with the text as it is their property.⁵

Theatre literal translators in the UK sit somewhere between literary and commercial translators. The moral ownership of the translation may be vested in the translator, but the commissioning theatre retains a licence to use the translation for production. In other words, the theatre can use the translation as often as they wish, and the literal translator may only charge additional fees for its use (usually by another producing theatre) by permission of the theatre that commissioned it. The model contract developed by the National Theatre for literal translation makes it clear that the translation will not be performed but will be used for reading and consultations within the National Theatre and may be used as a basis by a writer commissioned by the National Theatre to write a version of the original play. The theatre also retains the rights to license other writers to use the literal translation for work commissioned by the National Theatre. All other rights in the translation, however, remain with the literal translator. In addition to the fee, the literal translator receives a credit in the programme for the performed play and two complimentary tickets for the press night. In recognition of the collaborative nature of the translation development process, the agreement explicitly states: “Obviously such a stage version by another writer might contain echoes of the Literal Translation”.⁶ Thus, while the ownership of a performed text might belong to a direct translator or an adapting playwright, the literal translation belongs to the commissioner – most likely a theatre or theatre producer. The National Theatre template contract nevertheless demonstrates awareness of translation as writing/rewriting/repetition and grapples with issues of ownership.

Looking closely at the contractual documentation around theatrical literal translation in the context of the process itself highlights the nuances of the extended translation process:

the difficulties of capturing the process accurately in terms of formal definitions and the ethical issues raised by the interplay between the various stakeholders. It also signals the relatively low monetary value placed on literal translation, where the translator receives a set fee rather than a share of royalties and has limited rights to reuse the work. When describing the “contours of why [indirect translation] occurs”, Washbourne includes “copyright and authorial control” and “cost” among the various elements (2013:613). The theatre translation process provides a compelling illustration and evidence of how copyright, owner control and cost influence the development of a translation but do not necessarily represent the contributory nature of the intermediate text to the final product, or the degree of expertise and specialism of the literal translator.

Washbourne further considers that “the mediating text – the indirect translation – maps onto the territory of no-man’s-land, exile, rootlessness, u-topia (no place), and a dubious nether geography, as ‘indirect’ contains the semantic field of deceit, of artful deviation from straightforwardness” (ibid.:611). Indeed, my investigation of the documentation of formal agreements does suggest that the mediating literal translation falls contractually between two poles of ownership, providing a service on the one hand or creating a new literary work on the other. Nevertheless, reviewing the interplay between stakeholders shows the significance of the literal translation for the whole process, and also the importance placed on establishing the role of the literal translation within the process by the controlling gatekeepers. As Witt concludes in relation to her own case study of Soviet indirect translation, the use of intermediate texts for translation is “multifaceted and paradoxical. It ... [relativizes] the very concept of translation, and, perhaps even more importantly, of the translator, continuously informing discourses of professionalization and status” (2017:178). Prising open the cracks between the stages of indirect translation in theatre reveals the unsettling issues circulating around the practices and products of translation.

Concluding remarks

In his seminal work *Translation in Systems*, Hermans reflects that “[i]t would be only a mild exaggeration to claim that translations tell us more about those who translate and their clients than about the corresponding source texts” (1999:95). Investigating the documentation of the UK theatre translation commissioning process reveals the many contributing agents and demonstrates the wide field in which translation, and its various stages, are located. Studying translation systems alongside theatre systems provides an example of Luhmann’s concept of “structural coupling” that Hermans considers describes the “degree of mutuality between system and environment” and the corresponding “complexity and adaptability” of the translation system (2007:118). By responding to the specific requirements of the theatrical environment, theatre translation illustrates the complexity of ownership and models the adaptability of indirect translation processes within differentiated environments and systems. Based on my review of stakeholders, gatekeepers and contractual agreements, I would argue that theatrical literal translation activity deserves greater visibility, deeper understanding of its role in the performance process and fuller acknowledgement of the expertise and engagement of the translators. Investigating the process reveals the complex issues of visibility and ownership in theatre translation, and demonstrates how, although it is a specialized activity, it functions effectively as a site for translation research, especially in relation to indirect translation. Focusing on the minutiae of copyright and fees highlights

the hidden and contradictory features of translation: the varying visibilities of translators alongside hierarchical issues of translation ownership and acknowledgement which are a recurring feature of indirect translation. As Hermans reminds us, “translation is bound up with value” (1999:95). Engaging with the hidden, unsettling processes of translation, including the close examination of contractual agreements and the stakeholders and gatekeepers who participate in the process, provides a means to boost the status of translators and acknowledge the value of their professionalism and expertise in all outputs – whether direct or indirect.

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Notes

- 1 What follows is my own transcription of the recorded panel.
- 2 *Poison*, Lot Vekemans, translated by Rina Vergano, at the Orange Tree Theatre.
- 3 *Lucifer*, Joost van den Vondel, adapted by Henriëtte Rietveld, rehearsed reading, Tara Arts.
- 4 I am very grateful to my colleagues in the University College London Dutch department for their engagement with this project, and especially the reviewers of the translations: Jane Fenoulhet, Theo Hermans, Christine Sas and Ulrich Tiedau.
- 5 Correspondence with Richard Green, proprietor of The Nordic Word translation agency, 12 April 2018.
- 6 I am grateful to Emily McLaughlin, New Work Department, National Theatre, for providing access to the current template contract on 7 September 2016.

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9

MEDIA, MATERIALITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF RECEPTION

Anne Carson's Catullus

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It is worth pointing out that translators do not translate books. Translators translate text. Strictly speaking, “books are not written at all. They are manufactured by scribes and other artisans, by mechanics and other engineers, and by printing presses and other machines” (Roger Stoddard 1987, cited in Chartier 1989:161). Anne Carson is a rare example of a translator who translates both books and texts. That Carson had a hand in the making and manufacture of *Nox* (Carson 2010b), which is a translation of Catullus and an *objet d'art*, is not the reason why this is so. Rather, Carson translates Catullus poem 101, which first appeared in the book form of a papyrus roll, as material artefact; that is, Carson's Catullus is not versioned for a book with bound pages but unfolds in concertina format when you take it out of its book-box – which makes *Nox* an exercise in poetry translation as much as in media translation. Her interest in the materiality of the medium is shared by Catullus, who in poem 1 introduces his corpus¹ by reflecting on the manufacture, craftsmanship and material durability of his little book (*libellus*). Accordingly, this chapter reads *Nox* in relation to both poems to suggest that poem 1 forms part of the background to Carson's translation of poem 101. In turn, poem 101 is no less media-conscious since it speaks to the material conditions of commemoration, transmission and retransmission that are constitutive of elegiac tradition (Liveley 2020:256). By making mediality integral to translation, *Nox* makes visible something that is rarely practised or theorized: it is books and texts – outside and inside – that get translated, transformed and transmediated with every new translation and repackaged edition.

The aim then is to show how a translation that draws attention to thingness, bookishness and mediality, as *Nox* does, can contribute on the one hand to a wider understanding of the materialities of translation and, on the other hand, to an expanded notion of translation that is operative across the boundaries of the linguistic, textual, visual and medial. To this end, I build on two key notions that Theo Hermans introduced in *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation* (1985c) and in *Second-Hand: Papers on the Theory and Historical Study of Literary Translation* (1985d): that translation is a form of rewriting and manipulation; and that translation has a crucial function in shaping literary culture, even though it

is often deemed a second-order or second-hand product by authors, critics and translators. Here, however, I take materially what was already implicit in the terms *manipulation* and *second-hand*, namely that translation entails *manipulation* and that this is so not just linguistically and textually but palpably, as its Latin root in *manus* (hand/s) suggests.

In what follows I address transmissions, receptions and medial translations of Catullus, invoking the shared etymologies of *manipulation* and *manufacture*, and focus in particular on the hands, handlings and handiworks that have given shape to Catullus's work/persona in stone, copper, on papyrus, and paper, including Carson's handmade notebook and *digit-ally* produced book-in-a-box. After all, it is impossible to translate without handling,² and without something to handle, without the manual gestures that hold a book, turn pages or operate a touchscreen; just as it is impossible to circulate books in translation without what in German is so aptly named the *Buchhandel* (book trade).

While the conjunction between book history and translation studies is relatively recent, it is Hermans's two volumes that laid the groundwork for thinking about translation as part of a wider circuit of production and reception. As he pointed out as early as the 1980s, a host of manipulative agents and agencies "govern the production and reception of translations" in the target literary system (Hermans 1985b:11–12), among them, patrons, publishers, editors, readers, critics, reviewers, etc. who variously "produce, support, propagate, censor" translations (Lefevere 1985:237, 226–228). It is precisely this emphasis on the cultural contexts of the production and reception of translation that makes possible a more materially oriented study of translations. Indeed, Bachleitner makes a similar point in acknowledging the "Manipulation School", initiated by Theo Hermans and including André Lefevere, as paving the way towards a more book-historically informed study of translation that pays attention to "translations as material objects", including "the outer appearance of a translation" (Bachleitner 2018:103) and what in the context of this chapter I call translation's *manufacture*.

Catullus's book

My entry point for translation's manufacture is not found inside a book but located on top of a building. On the roof of the splendid Loggia del Consiglio in Verona, which was built in the 1480s as the city council chamber, stand five statues, each commemorating a famous son of Roman Verona. Among the five statues by Alberto da Milano are Catullus (Figure 9.1) and his friend and mentor Cornelius Nepos (Figure 9.2), each clutching a book, the former holding it in the crook of his arm, the latter holding it upright with both hands to display its spine. The statues are the inspiration for the engravings, attributed to William Blake, that are the frontispieces of John Nott's translation of Catullus's poems, published anonymously as a bilingual edition in two volumes in 1795 and the first (almost complete) rendition of his corpus into English. Since Blake's engravings are based on illustrations by Saverio Dalla Rosa of the statues, they are third-hand: "translations on to copperplate of images first executed in other media by other artists" (Essick 1991; cited in Dörrbecker 1994/95:103). According to Robert Essick, they "are given short shrift" by critics for being "reproductive prints" rather than "original print-making", despite the fact that they "were often executed with the same tools" (*ibid.*) – an attitude only too recognizable to scholars of translation who have long grappled with the all too persistent secondary status of translation over the supposed primacy of originals (Hermans 1985a:116).

There is another aspect, however, that I want to draw out here and that concerns the Catullus engraving's manipulation, albeit subtly, of the poet's appearance by way of accentuating



FIGURE 9.1 Alberto da Milano, statue of Catullus (1492), Loggia del Consiglio, Piazza dei Signori, Verona, Italy

Source: photograph by D. Kamaras (2017, Flickr/Creative Commons)



FIGURE 9.2 Alberto da Milano, statue of Cornelius (1492), Loggia del Consiglio, Piazza dei Signori, Verona, Italy

Source: photograph by D. Kamaras (2017, Flickr/Creative Commons)

his facial hair (Figure 9.3). As Stead points out, the engraving depicts Catullus with “facial hair in the Grecian style”, which conveys visually that Catullus, whether he did or did not have a beard in real life, was a “self-consciously Hellenizing Roman poet” (2016:88). Put differently, Catullus’s face embodies the idea that “classical reception studies are as old as Antiquity” given that “much of Latin literature amounts to an extended reception study of the Greeks” (Hutchinson 2018:107). The style of the facial hair is also a reminder that translation plays a key role in the reception of literature and was central to Roman literary production, including Catullus’s work as a poet and translator. From this we might conclude that Catullus’s face as represented by Blake is translatory, that is, it is shaped by and expressive of translation, just as Roman literature is steeped in translation or, indeed, just as “translation permeates Catullus’s oeuvre but in forms that are frequently unrecognisable to us” (Young 2015:1).

Bodies matter in other respects too. Both the Verona statue and Blake’s engraving make a feature of two kinds of bodies: the body of the book and that of Catullus. In Blake’s engraving

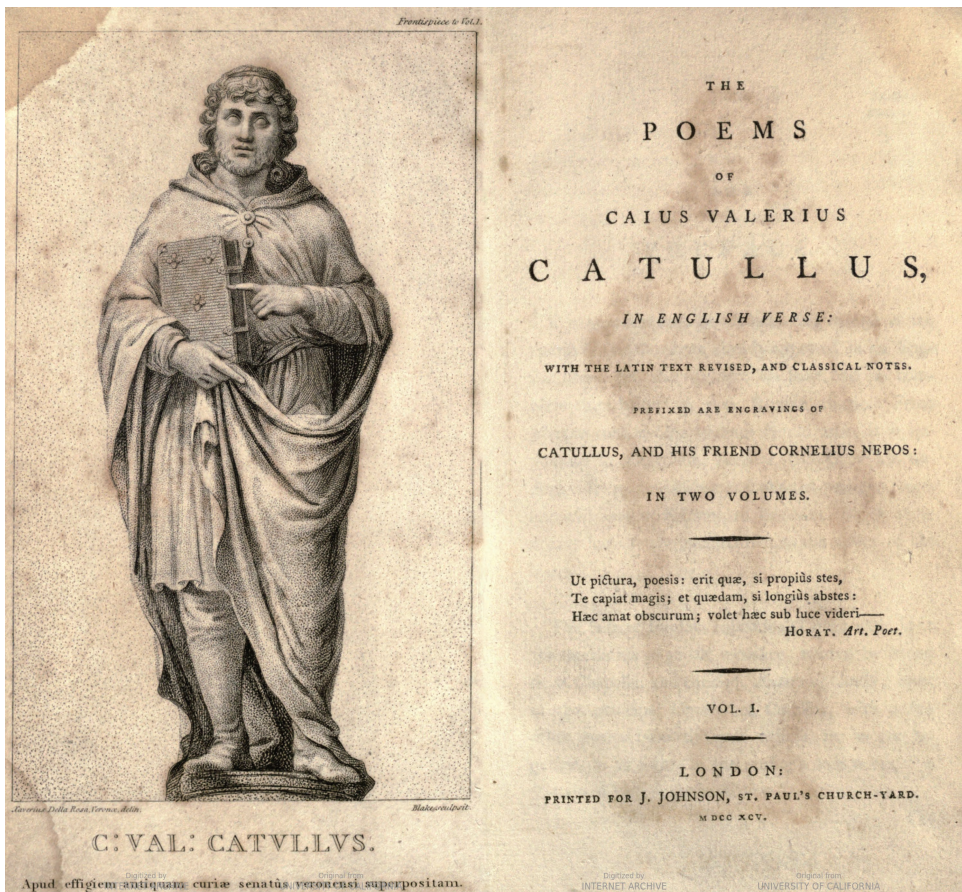


FIGURE 9.3 William Blake, engraving of Catullus from *The Poems of Caius Valerius Catullus*, volume 1, translated by J. Nott (London: J. Johnson, 1795)

Source: University of California Library (External-identifier urn:oclc:record:1050793252)

Catullus cradles the book protectively in his arm and drapes it with his clothing, as if the book was an extension of his body and person, and points to it with his left index finger – a gesture that recalls the manicule or “pointing hand” on the pages of medieval manuscripts and incunables (Sherman 2008:25–52). What his digit points to and touches is a codex not a bookroll, and as such is representative of the dominant book form in Alberto da Milano’s age, not Catullus’s. This change in medial form from roll to codex goes to the very heart of this chapter, highlighting the fact that works of literature are radically affected by their new media conditions and that therefore we need to think about reception and translation studies in material terms. If we accept that “changes” in the medium in which a text appears also “govern the transformations in its meaning”, as book historians and bibliographers have demonstrated (Chartier 1989:163; McKenzie 1999), then this has a bearing on translation too. As scholarship, especially in medieval and early modern studies, has shown, “the meaning of a translated text resides, not simply in the text itself” but also in the visual and bibliographical codes that are materially reworked in the target system (Hosington 2015:11).³ A work of literature is not a disembodied text; rather, it is always an articulated or expressive material object which is subject to transmediation every time it is copied, reedited, translated or retranslated. Transmediation serves as a descriptor both for media transitions, here between different writing cultures, as well as for the medial translation between book forms and between source and target *mise-en-page*.

Further transmediational modalities are at play for instance in Blake’s case, where transmediation additionally serves to describe the translation from a three-dimensional sculpture into a flat and one-dimensional engraving. The caption at the bottom of the page gives this explanatory note: “Apud effigiem antiquam curiae senatus veronensi superpositam”. Thus, based on a statue (*effigiem*) that is placed on top of a building (*superpositam*), the ink engraving is literally *über-setzt*, that is to say, not just trans-lated but rather over-laid, super-imposed as well as com-posit-ed. What has happened here architecturally has also happened biblio-materially: there is a translation/superimposition/compositing of the image on the verso page onto the recto page with a ghostly image of Catullus shimmering through the title page (Figure 9.3). The apparition has imprinted itself – self-reproduced – in the passage of time not just onto the title page but also onto the page before the engraving and the page after the title page; thus, the figure of Catullus appears on two different leaves and four successive pages. This accidental, autopoetic imprinting is in effect the living-on of Catullus on paper, or we might say the survival of the spirit in the (printed) letter. Succinctly put, “spiritual *Sein*” shows itself to be dependent on “medial *Dasein*”.⁴

Catullus’s booklet

The unforeseen inky spectre might also be taken as the image of a certain anxiety, over whether the poet might disappear from history or is destined for immortality. Catullus gives expression to this anxiety in poem 1, which imagines him inspecting the physical copy of his book of poems, scribblings that others, with the exception of Cornelius, had dismissed as stuff,⁵ and wondering whether his *libellus*, its papyrus all nicely smoothed with pumice stone, will outlast “more than one generation”:

Whom do I give a neat new booklet
Polished up lately with dry pumice?
You, Cornelius; for you always

Thought my trivia important,
 Even when you dared (the one Italian!)
 Unfold the whole past in three papyri –
 Learned, by Jupiter, and laborious!
 So take this mere booklet for what it's worth,
 Which may my Virgin Patroness
 Keep fresh for more than one generation.

(Poem 1, translated by Guy Lee, *Catullus* 1990:3)

The production process, these lines suggest, has ended and the life of this booklet has now entered the phase of reception, first in Cornelius's hands and then hopefully handed on, with the helping hand of the Patroness Virgin, to the hands of others. Although we might read these lines metaphorically as expressing concern about the reception of this little book's contents, whether the text will stand the test of time, or indeed as expressing distrust of the written word in relation to the spoken or performed word,⁶ the reference to the physical object of the *libellus* and its production as an artefact deliberately draws attention, as Farrell has shown, to the "impermanence" and the "fragility of material texts" (2009:165), especially the papyrus bookroll, which is prone to brittleness and soiling from handling. As Farrell also notes, it is the outer edges of the roll and the portion close to the front, where poem 1 would have been located, that would have sustained most damage and become "shopworn most rapidly" (*ibid.*:167).

Here, wear and tear would constitute evidence of *manipulation* by each and every reader who picks the *libellus* up. The more a text is read, the more the book is handled; and the more it is used and reused, the more it is abused (Sherman 2008:5–6; Price 2012:225). Catullus 1 thus sets the conditions for a material history of reception since wear and tear and traces of touch show that far from all reception being semantic, hermeneutic, or even linguistic, much of reception bears directly upon and marks indelibly, entropically, the physical entity placed in the receiver's hands, who soils the pages with each handling. The stains, for instance, that are visible on three of the corners of the Nott exemplar, shown in Figure 9.3, are accidental marks that are not intended, that is, are not meant nor are about meaning; but this does not make them meaningless. They are signs of usage, the brands of involuntary ritual, as the Alien anthropologist, newly arrived, would clearly discern.

The volume to which Catullus refers and which he dedicates and gift-gives to Cornelius has been lost to the ravages of time and has not survived materially. Nevertheless, the idea of the booklet lives on in this meta-textual reference, or better still, in this meta-medial commentary on its materiality as bookroll. What it tells us, in addition to what has already been said, is that for Catullus its value as a beautifully finished object and presentation copy lies not merely in its verbal content but also its materiality or character as handiwork.⁷ As for the physical arrangements on the inside – the *mise-en-page* – we do not know whether the order of the poems in which we read them now was arranged by Catullus or at the hands of others; how many poems were included in the *libellus*'s first 'publication' or rather its first circulation by hand; or, how many poems might have practicably fitted onto a single roll of papyrus (Skinner 2003:xxii–xxiii).

Catullus's anxiety about the reception of his work, as articulated in poem 1, is not exclusively tied to poetic immortality, for posthumous fame "must rest on the existence of written, physically enduring texts" (Parker 2009:219).⁸ That is to say, Catullus recognizes

and indeed anticipates that materiality is a precondition for reception. The claim therefore that Catullus's poems "transcend the physicality in which they are first presented to us" and that his words "outstrip the material text", as Feeney has it (2012:38), is only true of the particular exemplar to which Catullus refers in poem 1. Words cannot "outstrip the material text" since this would imply that there can be spirit without matter. For one thing, there would be no Catullus had his words not been stored on rolls, and rolls safely stored in containers, and then transmediated into a variety of modern book forms; for another, words have no existence unless there is a body, a mouth that speaks them or a book that inscribes them. Catullus 1 is a reminder of the "ineradicable materialism of Classics" (Porter 2003:67), and this is even so when the material remains are erased, effaced or eradicated. Although forensically and philosophically it might be worth pointing out that destruction, decay and decomposition by no means would spell the end of a book's body, since bodies even when they turn into ashes or dust break down materially and transform into particles before they are absorbed into something else and into the earth, and thus have a material after-life even when their content is no longer legible.⁹ This is just one of many reasons why reception studies, especially of Classics, needs not just hermeneutics and philology but also (media)archeology.¹⁰

Tom Stoppard's play *The Invention of Love* (1997) addresses these issues playfully through an exchange between two fictionalized characters, both professors of classics and translators, Benjamin Jowett and A.E. Housman. When the latter asks "But isn't it of use to establish what the ancient authors really wrote?" (ibid.:24), Jowett responds by pointing not only to the inevitable transformations that texts undergo when copied again and again, but also to the material decay that changes their physical form or destroys them altogether:

Think of all those secretaries! – corruption breeding corruption from papyrus to papyrus, and from the last disintegrating scrolls to the first new-fangled parchment books, with a thousand years of copying-out still to come, running the gauntlet of changing forms of script and spelling, and absence of punctuation – not to mention mildew and rats and fire and flood and Christian disapproval to the brink of extinction as what Catullus really wrote passed from scribe to scribe, this one drunk, that one sleepy, another without scruple, and of those sober, wide-awake and scrupulous, some ignorant of Latin and some, even worse, fancying themselves better Latinists than Catullus – until! – finally and at long last – mangled and tattered like a dog that has fought its way home, there falls across the threshold of the Italian Renaissance the sole surviving witness to thirty generations of carelessness and stupidity: the *Verona Codex* of Catullus; which was almost immediately lost again, but not before being copied with one last opportunity for error. And there we have the foundation of the poems of Catullus as they went to the printer for the first time, in Venice 400 years ago.

(Stoppard 1997:24–25; cited in Green 2005:15)

It is equally imaginable that the Catullan *libellus* and its papyrus might have ended up as wrapping for fish (Farrell 2009:170), as Catullus predicts about Volusius's *Annals*, which "will die beside the Padua" and "make loose jackets for mackerel" (Poem 95, translated by Lee, Catullus 1990:137). Apart from the snide remark that some authors' works are clearly not worth the papyrus they are written on and the Stoppard character's similarly pointed

comments about scribes and editors, there is also an implicit acknowledgement that books have uses other than reading,¹¹ or interpretation; here, serving as raw material for fishmongers, rats and fungi.

What the Stoppard passage thus brings into focus is human and non-human meddling with texts and books. Crucially, it thematizes reception in terms of *mediation* (copying, editing) and in a relation of dependency on a *medium* (papyrus scrolls, parchment books, printed books). While mediation and media jointly provide the foundation for Catullus's reception, the latter is the pre-condition of the former: "textuality is predicated upon materiality" (Petrovic 2018:4). That is, the medium is *a priori* insofar as mediation is always contingent on the "materialities of communication" (Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer 1994).¹² From the perspective of a media-philosophical approach (Kittler 1990; Debray 2000), as I have argued elsewhere (Littau 2011), the crux is this: our cultural products, indeed culture *per se*, are only available to us through media – from the human body to medial carriers such as the tablet, roll, codex, printed book and computer. Media are the hardware of our culture. There would be no culture, were it not for media. It is therefore incumbent on us to explore how media not only give shape to the works of the imagination but also how media actually body forth imaginations, including what shape and form translation might assume.

Carson's book

Scholarly writing has paid considerable attention to Carson's *Nox*¹³ as a work that commemorates her brother Michael's death and records her coming to terms with that painful fact by taking inspiration from and solace in Catullus's fraternal elegy 101; and while poem 101 clearly cannot be overlooked as constituting the significance of Carson's work, neither can the manifest attention she has paid to the material constitution of the object, echoing that paid to its fragility in Catullus 1. Thus, while Carson translates Catullus 101, it may have gone unremarked that *Nox* is filtered through Catullus 1 and the issues this particular poem raises and introduces right at the outset of the Catullan corpus about the materiality and fragility of the *libellus*. Arguably therefore, *Nox*, the text, is a translation of poem 101 and *Nox*, the book, is a translation of poem 1 for this reason: Catullus 101 is a commemoration, just as Catullus 1 reflects on the demise of the book, but the *libellus's* translation into other book forms, its re-embodiment, is the condition under which commemoration can survive at all. Carson thus foregrounds a crucial insight that she shares with Catullus regarding the materiality of media as the *sine qua non* for any possibility of reception, let alone the contingencies and manipulations of actual receptions.

Insofar as *Nox* is a translation of an elegy, additional mediological considerations are involved. For example, Liveley reads *Nox* as "an elegy for the death of the traditional printed book" (2020:238);¹⁴ crucially, however, she also reads *Nox* in relation to "Roman elegy's concerns with its own materiality and mediality" (ibid.:239). Elegy is a clear example of a poetry that is "both written and performed" (ibid.:246) and is thus from its inception "acutely aware", as Liveley argues, "of its own fragile status *qua* medium" (ibid.). A commemoration of the dead in the form of spoken funerary lament, it only has an afterlife if it is inscribed on a surface sufficiently durable to ensure that this ritualized remembering of the dead lives on, such as on a tombstone, or on papyrus used by the poet of elegy.¹⁵ Thus media are implicated in the fragility of elegy: elegy is about remembrance, but remembrance is conditional on media as storage devices. The first material translation is from the lamenting

body into media as technological extensions of memory, which are then subject to further transmediation as initial embodiments wear out, as indeed Catullus fears in poem 1. Carson's translation of Catullus 101 is accordingly a translation in text and book form of a poem that itself is a transmediation of an oral song of lament into a tombstone and onto papyrus, thus a handing down of what was already a series of medial translations, here translated one more time into the media-conscious *Nox*. As Carson's own translation pithily sums up these issues: funerary lament is as custom dictates what is "handed down as the sad gift for burials". The question is: *by what means, in which media* does this "handing down" occur?

By emphasizing the extent to which mediality and textuality are inextricably linked, what Carson's translation in effect critiques, to borrow Porter's words, is the "presumed timeless immateriality of Classics" (2003:65) and with it the irrelevance of materiality to translation. That materiality is what is lost in translation¹⁶ is not the case here. Carson thinks of her translation not simply as text but as expressive artefact; consequently, she translates verbal meaning and the materiality of media forms. This makes *Nox* an extraordinarily rich example of how media shape works of the imagination and body forth imaginations about translation.

Nox is based on Carson's private, hand-made scrapbook, which in collaboration with her husband Robert Currie and a host of agents from typesetter to printer to publisher, was remodelled into a "fold-out book in a box" (Carson 2012) – with the single fold-out sheet reminiscent of the bookroll and the box resembling the hard cover of a codex (Figure 9.4), or a "tomb" or "tombstone" (Brillenburg Wurth 2013:24). Contrary to Carson's claim that its fold-out design makes the book sufficiently robust to drop it down the stairs (Carson 2011), its unwieldy character in fact makes it "sturdily fragile" (MacDonald 2015:56), so



FIGURE 9.4 Book box for *Nox* and opening pages unfolded
 Source: photograph by S. Shintani (2010, Flickr/Creative Commons)

much so that *Nox* makes palpable Catullus's concerns in poem 1 about the fragility and insecure material future of the *libellus*. On the inside, the signs of manufacture are evident on every page, as is the manipulation of the Catullus source text, broken down into lexical entries on each Latin word on the verso page to provide us with a range of meanings for each word¹⁷ and the means to create our own translation, not least "[b]ecause the backs of the pages are blank" so that as a reader "you can make your own book there", Carson tells us (2011). *Nox* ends with an illegible English translation on a crumpled, stained and smudged piece of yellow paper; again, a visual display of the anxiety that Catullus mooted in poem 1 about the decay of his *libellus*. As an object and text, as a product of hands, hearts and heads, *Nox* shows on each and every page that translation is a combination of *manufacture* and *manipulation*.

Carson's translation is also part of an identifiable Canadian feminist tradition that views translation as a "womanhandling of the text" not merely to "flaunt the signs of her manipulation of the text" (Godard 1990:94) so as to make the presence of the translator as a creator visible to the reader, but to confront us with the materialities of translation, both as process and product. Carson's book obliges us to take into account the presence of the medium in our hands and scrutinize it as an object on the outside and inside. In this respect Carson takes on board, broadens and materializes Barbara Godard's proposal for a new poetics of translation. Here, translation is a material practice – a woman*handling* – that makes manifest the etymological links between *materia*, *mater* and *matrix* (Butler 1993:31) and thus genders the *materiality* of translation as feminine from the ground up.¹⁸ *Nox* unsettles deeply ingrained assumptions about books and about translations that have been as prevalent in literary studies as in translation studies; namely, that the material object of the book is nothing more than an empty shell, transparent and invisible to us when we read, and immaterial to our interpretations, as the phenomenologist might insist.¹⁹ And likewise, that the translator must remain "hidden, out of view, transparent, incorporeal, disembodied and disenfranchised" (Hermans 2001:7). Carson's translating persona does not remain hidden, but flaunts her presence; nor does her translation assume for the Catullan original an "aura of sacred untouchability" (Hermans 1985b:7).

As a bookish translation that draws attention to itself as book and as translation, *Nox* is emblematic of changing attitudes to translation,²⁰ to the book as medium and artefact, and to matter more generally.²¹ Carson's brother Michael's name is handwritten in broad pen strokes on the opening page and shimmers through a scrap of paper on which are printed in majuscules, as a nod to Roman square capitals, the words "NOX FRATER NOX".²² Traces of the ink soak through to the next page, as if to make contact with the Catullus poem which is reproduced here in Latin on a scrap of yellowish paper (Figure 9.4). Thereafter the page layout follows that of the bilingual edition, with the translation on the left-hand side and Carson's commentaries and account of her brother on the right-hand side, although there is bleeding across pages, and through them. The brother's life Carson tries to stitch together from fragments and memories remains as ungraspable as the translation, since spirit and matter are equally subject to decay. "WHO WERE YOU" (Figure 9.5), Carson asks, followed by a photograph of her brother on the next page. The phrase is imprinted on successive pages (Figure 9.6), not as self-reproduction (as is the case with the Catullus image in the University of California library copy of Nott's book) but as a simulation of autopoiesis. Contrary to its tacite appearance, the page is as smooth as Catullus's freshly pumiced bookroll, if not more so.

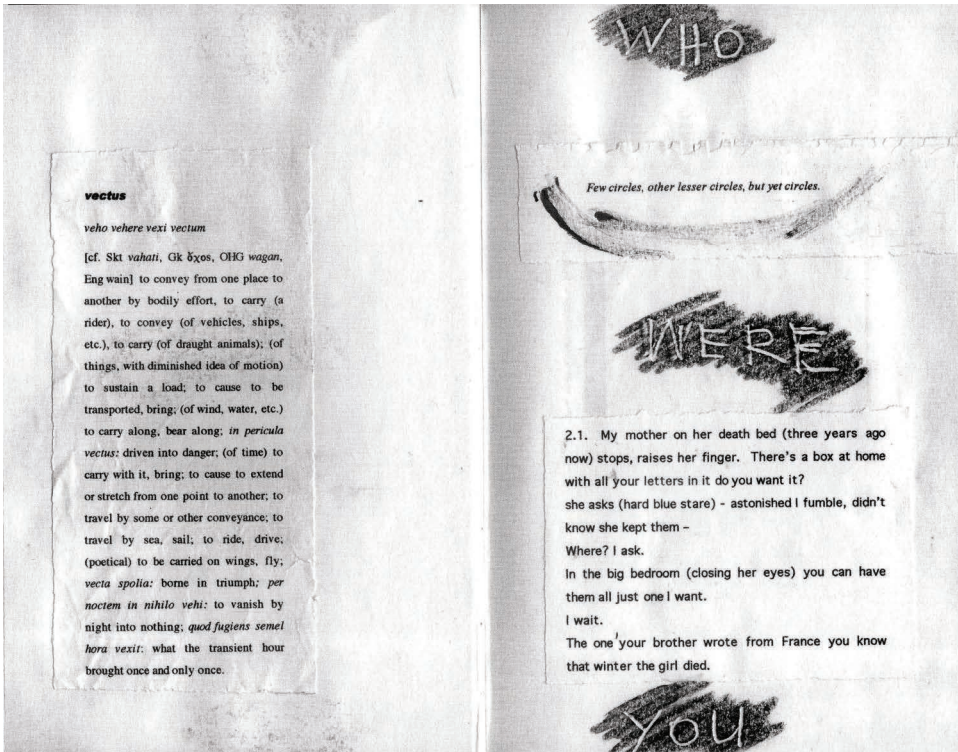


FIGURE 9.5 Double page spread with handwritten words

Source: copyright © 2010 by Anne Carson, reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

Transmediated from the scrapbook that Carson had made to commemorate her brother and which was almost lost when she gave it to a bookmaker in Germany (Carson 2011), the paper fragments in *Nox* are variously stained, washed-out, singed at the edges, dog-eared, crumbled, worn and torn to make a display of material decay, the very degradation that confronts the scholar and translator of the classics who works with papyrus fragments.²³ Carson (2004) explains her rationale for the design of the original scrapbook that became *Nox*:

I also used bits of text from Michael's letters, actual pieces of the letters, some of my mother's answers to his letters, paint, plastic, staples and other decorative items on the right-hand side. I also tried to give the book, on the left-hand side, a patina of age – because it's supposed to be an old Roman poem – by soaking the pages in tea, which added a mysterious sepia overtone. ... tea stains add a bit of history. It's an historical attitude. After all, texts of ancient Greeks come to us in wreckage, and I admire that – the layers of time you have when looking at sheets of papyrus that were produced in the third century b.c. and then copied and then wrapped around a mummy for a couple hundred years and then discovered and put in a museum and pieced together by nine different gentlemen and put back in the museum and brought out again and photographed and put in a book. All those layers add up to more and more life.²⁴

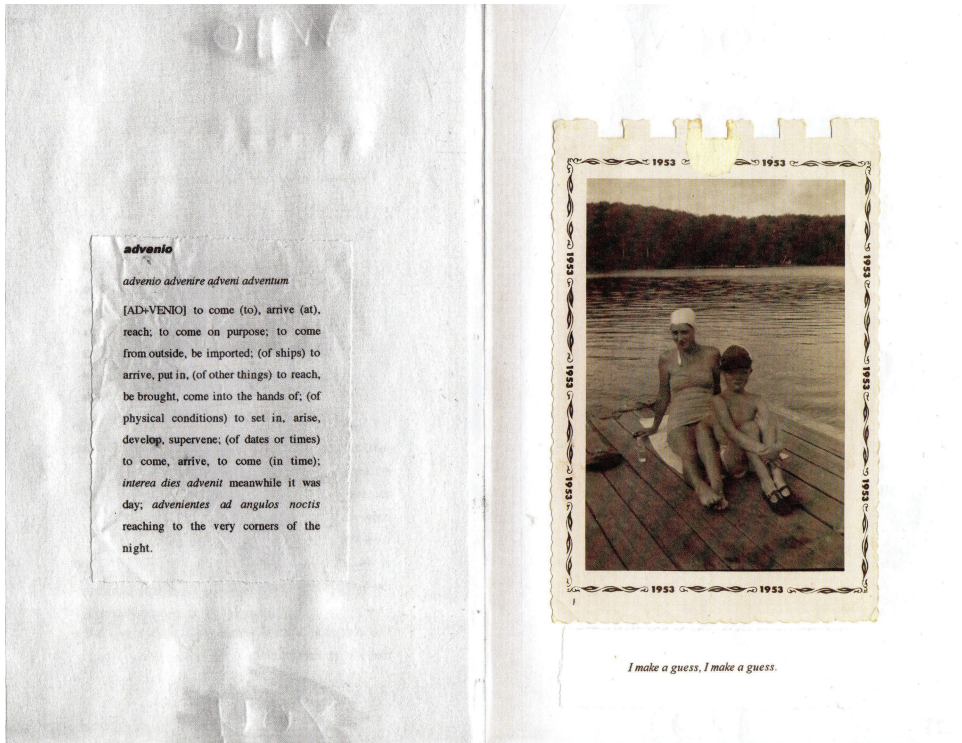


FIGURE 9.6 Double page spread with impressed markings of the handwriting from previous page
 Source: copyright © 2010 by Anne Carson, reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

The ‘layers’ that add life to bookrolls and books are like remnants, material memorials to disappearing pasts. Presenting *Nox* in the *leporello* book form – a concertina-folded roll that arguably “marks an intermediate stage between the scroll and the codex” (Brillenbug Wurth 2013:23) – is a medial translation and a means by which to enable the mediality of an old medium to live on. *Nox* further translates several media into one, including letters as well as handwritten and typed notes that appear alongside xeroxed and scanned pages, photographs and drawings. As Carson notes elsewhere with reference to deploying old and new technologies: while “[t]he scan is a digital method of reproduction, it has no decay in it” (Carson 2010a), with the xerox “you get all those edges and life, you get ... the ‘decay’ put back in” (Carson 2014).

Bookish translation

By drawing on old and new media technologies, including ancient book forms alongside contemporary forms of digital reproduction, the work as a whole resists reduction to a mediatic ‘Now’. As Brillenburg Wurth has shown, while “the foregrounded presence of photo-imaging in *Nox* makes the connection with the digital screen all too evident”, there is also “resistance to the digital” (2013:27) insofar as Carson herself is all too aware that *Nox*, produced in the Kindle age, is materially “un-Kindle-isable” (Carson 2011). If bookishness

is understood here as a resistance to the digital, it is paradoxically the digital that has in effect made bookishness possible. This is true in two senses: (1) the changing role and status of the book in the digital age, as Pressman (2009) explains, and not just fear of the death of the book, has been the trigger for a host of books of late that revel in bookish materiality; (2) bookishness in *Nox* is achieved through distinctly digital means. Pressman sees “the aesthetic of bookishness” as “an emergent literary strategy that speaks to our cultural moment” (ibid.:465); similarly, *Nox*’s aesthetics might be seen as an emergent literary-translational strategy that responds to media change and reflects on how the book and translation are shaped by the media of today.²⁵

Throughout this chapter my approach to *Nox* has been to read it as a book and not primarily as text. This is why I have deliberately not engaged in a critical reading of the translated text, which would have required attention to be paid to its linguistic and semantic qualities. I have instead sought to focus on the ways in which Carson translates Catullus 101, mediated by Catullus 1, pluri-medially in relation to ancient and modern media. To this end, I have argued that reception is as inseparable from translation as translation is from transmediation. Put differently, since media are themselves subject to transmediation through history, it follows that translating from the classics is as much about the translation of old into new media as it is the translation of ancient texts into modern languages and contexts. Carson’s *Nox* articulates – indeed, *materially theorizes* – precisely this in her translation of Catullus.

Notes

- 1 Catullus’s poetry survived in one manuscript, the Verona codex (MS *V*). Although MS *V* is lost now, it was copied in the fourteenth century, from descendents of which our Catullan corpus derives. On the complex transmission history and whether the corpus was comprised of 116 poems or not, see Lee (1990:ix–xiv). For an overview of “the ‘one-roll’ theory – that Catullus designed all the extant poetry to stand as a single unified collection – and the ‘three-roll’ theory – that our corpus represents a combination of three different ancient rolls that respectively contained poems 1–60, 61–8, and 69–113”, see Butrica (2007:19).
- 2 My point draws on Leah Price’s astute observation that it is “[i]mpossible to read without handling” (2012:6).
- 3 Important work in this field is also done, among others, by Armstrong (2013) and Coldiron (2015).
- 4 *Sein* in German means being, and *Dasein* means existence, but should be translated here as ‘being-there’. The phrases *geistiges Sein* and *mediales Dasein* are used by Assmann to signal a wider shift in cultural studies and the humanities towards the study of material media (2006:21).
- 5 On the meanings and significance of *nugae* as ‘stuff’, see Copley (2007:30–33).
- 6 Hugh Macnaghten’s translation of this line – “prolong More than one age my timeless song” (Catullus 1899/1925) – evokes oral culture and performance, assuming not only that song is the dominant medium of transmission, but also that song (as opposed to writing) is eternal, thereby linking poem 1 with poem 65, where Catullus casts himself not as a writer but as a poet who will “always sing songs” of woe for his dead brother. While there is some debate as to whether Roman media culture was predominantly oral rather than textual (Parker 2009), the translation strategy deployed here is congruent with McElduff’s assessment that “Catullus wrote for performance: these translations may exist on the printed page, but they were meant to be spoken, and spoken within a Roman context” (2013:127).
- 7 See also Dupont’s point that “[i]f the book (*volumen*) at Rome is an object whose material reality is ceaselessly recalled, that is because it is so often integrated into the social practice of the gift. Its value then lies as much, if not more, in its material beauty as in the texts it contains” (2009:149).

- 8 Parker makes this point in the course of a larger argument that debunks the myth that Rome was predominantly an oral rather than a textual culture, where song, performance and listening supposedly took precedence over books and reading.
- 9 I am drawing on ideas by the art/media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys, who argues that bodies are active even after death and that “the process of decay is potentially infinite”. In other words, transformation of material substances is “perpetual and everlasting” (2008:346). It is also worth pointing out here that media philosophy and media archaeology are closely related in German media theory.
- 10 This is precisely the kind of task that the collection of essays in *Classics and Media Theory* (2020), edited by Pantelis Michelaki, has undertaken.
- 11 On the uses of books other than for reading in the context of the nineteenth century, see Price (2012:6).
- 12 With the concept of the “materialities of communication” Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer sought to include “all those phenomena and conditions that contribute to the production of meaning, without being meaning themselves” (Gumbrecht 2004:8), namely all those materialities – or medialities – from the human body to exosomatic medial carriers, from human memory to the memory chip, that house and give shape to the products of spirit, mind and consciousness. For an application of these ideas to translation, see Littau (2016).
- 13 The word *nox* is left untranslated in Carson’s title, signifying at once its Latin otherness and its multiple meanings as night, nightfall, goddess of night, darkness, death, concealment, mystery, chaos, turmoil (*Oxford Latin Dictionary*).
- 14 Conversely, Plate reads *Nox* as a “eulogy for the book” (2015:108), celebrating the book medium’s capacity to persist even as it comes under threat.
- 15 Catullus 101 “alludes both to the ritual context of *conclamatio*” and “to the epitaph inscribed on a tomb and read out loud by the passersby” (Elena Theodorakopoulos, cited in Lively 2020:255), which poem 101 and Carson’s translation of it bring out by way of alliteration.
- 16 I am paraphrasing Robert Frost, who famously claimed that it is poetry which gets “lost out of” translation (1973:159).
- 17 For instance, the entry for the Latin *per*, the second word in poem 101, includes definitions ranging from “across (a barrier or boundary)” to “through ... (indicating the medium through which things are perceived)” to the use of *per* as in “*per manus tadere* to pass from hand to hand” (Carson 2010b:no page numbers), thus foregrounding the multiple meanings of *per* in a variety of material contexts.
- 18 This point also resonates with Hélène Cixous’s positioning of woman with “[m]atter” and “ground” (1986:63).
- 19 I am thinking here of Georges Poulet who made this claim in ‘The Phenomenology of Reading’: “Where is the book I held in my hands? It is still there, and at the same time it is there no longer, it is nowhere. That object wholly object, that thing made of paper, as there are things made of metal or porcelaine, that object is no more, or at least it is as if it no longer existed, as long as I read the book. *For the book is no longer a material reality. It has become a series of words, of images, of ideas which in their turn begin to exist.* And where is this new existence? Surely not in the paper object. Nor, surely, in external space. There is only one place left for this new existence: my innermost self” (1969:54; emphasis added).
- 20 In this context, see also Balmer (2004).
- 21 Both Brillenberg Wurth (2013) and Plate (2015, 2018) read *Nox* in the context of a new materialism and the material turn, respectively.
- 22 Carson’s lexical entry for *frater* includes the following: “a son of the same father or mother, brother”, “of a kindred race”, “as an affectionate way of referring to a person of one’s own age”, “as a euphemism for a partner in an irregular sexual union”, “as an honourific [*sic*] title for allies”, “referring to a member of a religious club” (2010b:no page numbers).
- 23 On translating Sappho fragments, Carson explains that her use of brackets is an “exciting” means and “aesthetic gesture towards the papyrological event” by which to “give the impression of missing matter” and highlight the “drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes ... – brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure” (2002:xi).
- 24 Elsewhere, Carson (2014) says “[t]he experience of reading Latin, to me, is an old dusty page you could hardly make out”.

- 25 *Nox* is a book that is contained in a box, but it is also a book without borders, forming part not only of an art installation at the Hampden Gallery in Amherst in December 2011 by Alexis Fedorjaczenko, but also part of a dance performance at the O, Miami Poetry Festival in April 2011 (Plate 2015:106–107).

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PART IV

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10

DISSENTING LAUGHTER

Tamil Dalit literature and translation on the offensive

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Translating humour is a popular topic of research in translation studies. As I argue below, much of this research has understandably been on humour as expressed at the linguistic level, since translation scholars are attentive to shifts in linguistic meaning from source to target languages. Delineating the many types and challenges that humour presents to the translator and readers of translations, scholarship has emphasized that humour is culture-specific and hence resists translation. This tends to limit attention to the *translatability* of humour as a primary point for debate, which leads to reductive, circular discussions, often followed by prescriptive recommendations. Instead, viewing humour as just one among several mechanisms of comedy could enable debates about its translation to escape this bind. Stott (2005:2) suggests that on the one hand, humour is “a specific tone operating free from generic restraints, which, while not the exclusive property of comedy is closely associated with it”. On the other hand, comedy is a wider term

that can refer equally to a genre, a tone, and a series of effects that manifest themselves in diverse environments. This ... require[s] us to think of comedy multilaterally, as at once a literary tradition with identifiable structural qualities, and as a way of describing isolated events or passages within other types of work.

As an art form that includes the verbal and non-verbal and moves across a continuum, ranging from the intention to amuse and entertain at one end, to the desire to ridicule, satirize and transgress existing status quos at the other, comedy offers a fresh perspective on the challenges of translating humour as a field of study. Humour, when seen as part of and one of the identifiable tools of comedy, could potentially not just amuse but challenge or even offend the reader, depending on their perspective and position. A critical approach to humour as integral to the social and political functions of comedy opens up new ways of studying the political role of translation in terms of its ability to participate in contestations of the status quo. This chapter focuses on the unsettling nature of comedy and its translation.

In what follows I examine a set of devices used in a new wave of literatures authored by Tamil Dalit¹ writers from the 1990s onwards that seek to challenge elitist literary and

social structures in contemporary India. This literature unapologetically focuses on Dalit² subjectivity and identity in late-twentieth century Tamil social and political contexts. The works emphasize regional dialects, colloquialisms that mark Dalit language as different in relation to established literary norms, accompanied by themes of resistance and the use of black humour, swearing and obscenity that together challenge long-established conventions of good writing in Tamil (and other Indian language) literatures. Such literary devices are considered an offence to literary sensibilities, with some even arguing against the use of the adjective *literary* to characterize them in the first place. ‘Offensive’ literary devices are mobilized in Tamil Dalit literature to both humorous and comedic effect, as the following sections explain in greater detail. Suffice it to remark at this point that the term *offensive* is used here in both senses of the word: (a) as something that may be unpleasant, disgusting or nauseating, and (b) as something that is challenging, aggressive or antagonistic, ready, for instance, for ‘offensive action’. These two aspects of *offensive* work in tandem in Tamil Dalit literature to contest several hierarchies – literary, linguistic, social and political – that serve to reify one another. Offensive literary devices not only produce humour in terms of a comic tone (that is, in their intention to amuse), but the mimicry, reversal and inversion they effect can also be interpreted more widely as the workings of comedy, as I demonstrate below.

Since comedy is strategically used to articulate Tamil Dalit subjectivity and resistance, how and to what extent can the interpretation and translation of Dalit literature as comedy participate in political action, identity and meaning making in translated literatures? And what can attention to this dimension add to the field of translating humour? To address these questions, I begin with a brief outline of the main approaches to translating humour and comedy in translation studies, before moving to a discussion of the offensive elements that produce comedic effects in Tamil Dalit literature.

Humour in translation

The main areas of debate in relation to translating humour have been as follows. First, there is the question of whether humour (universal or culture specific) can be translated, and if humour is culture specific, what strategies are available for transcending its specificities. Scholars examine whether humour is best translated by adopting formal or functional modes of translation. And finally, there are studies that focus on offering prescriptive advice, enumerating strategies for the translation of humour while repeatedly asserting that something is lost when humour is translated. Most scholars who have written on humour in translation (Delabastita 1994; Low 2011) have focused on a range of linguistic elements and devices as sources of humour: the use of specific words and phrases, parody, anagram, puns and punch lines, homophones and homonyms and the challenges of translating these effectively. This has often been accompanied by asserting the need to pay attention to the culture specificity of humour and the particular barriers that it creates. An early contribution by Vandaele (2002a) notes how difficult it is to define or re-construct humour. In his introduction to a key collection of articles on translating humour, Vandaele (ibid.:159–60) states that in order to understand the effects and function of humour for the purposes of translation, it is important to draw a distinction between humorous feeling and situational humour based on the presence or absence of a communicator – that is, between a “comic situation”, “unintended humour”, “intended humour” and “unachieved humour”. Several

contributors also discuss the ethics of censoring (Pavlicek and Pöchhacker 2002) or not censoring (Vandaele 2002b) humour, an important issue that is relevant to the argument I put forward in this chapter. However, much of the discussion of ethics and censorship focuses mainly on examples of jokes and humorous anecdotes that are censored for various reasons, including a desire not to offend readers.

This emphasis on the linguistic aspects of humour dominates the large body of scholarly literature on translation. Chiaro (2010:1) begins what is now considered a further key work on translating humour with the observation that “[v]erbal humour travels badly” and goes on to argue that it is the specific combination of linguistic and culture-specific features that make translating humour highly challenging. Ritchie (2010:46) demonstrates “the linguistic mechanisms in some simple forms of humour, emphasizing the variety of roles that language can play in the creation of the humour, and the varying consequences which this could have for the translation of the humour”. The main emphasis in this area of research has been on studying obstacles to translating humour, focusing on the phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and rhetorical aspects of the text that test even the most skilled translators. Low (2011:69) is a typical example:

To translate a joke in a way that cannot elicit a smile is a betrayal, no matter how semantically accurate it may seem ... For wordplay then, I recommend tools that play with the TL. For culture specificity I recommend tools like cultural transplantation, compensation in kind, and compensation in place.

This focus on formal textual elements and translation between specific language pairs has ultimately limited attention to the reductive question of whether humour can be translated or not, and has been complemented by attempts to identify and categorize different types of jokes, audience profile traits and intentionalities (Zabalbeascoa 2005).

Another approach has developed through the study of dialects, sociolects, ideolects and other language varieties and non-standard uses of language that a source text might draw on for humorous effect. Chiaro, for instance, observes that “[o]ne humorous feature which is inevitably lost in translation is regional and ethnic connotation. Yet, dialect is frequently used for humorous purposes” (2010:9). Here too, the debate often centres on the *translatability* of a given language variety. Some critics such as Federici (2011) and Herrera (2014) combine an interest in the humorous effect of such language use with attention to socio-linguistic aspects such as class and identity and the challenges these pose to translation, but they do not address the politics of humour asserted through the mixing of language registers. Linking language registers with the social identity of characters, Herrera (2014:280) points out that linguistic variation “can be taken as a marker of some level of differentiation: social, regional, ethnic, racial etc.”, and offers examples of cases where language varieties are standardized in translation, with detrimental effect. Importantly, Herrera points out that at “the dawn of the twenty-first century, the translation of dialect ... still remains one of the biggest *lacunae* in translation studies” (ibid.:290). Recommending that “in order to say anything remotely intelligent about the translation of variety, we would have to know what varieties are doing in cultural products in the first place”, Pym (2014) distinguishes between parody and authenticity. Parody occurs when a variety is reduced to a stereotype, whereas authenticity occurs when “a variety is represented in so much detail, with such a wide range of finely nuanced accented features ... that the linguistic result must surely be

the real thing". This opposition of parody and authenticity, too, is a simplification of complex linguistic phenomena because it suggests that the two are mutually exclusive, whereas I would argue that while source texts may be 'authentic' in their use of language registers, they may nevertheless mobilize authenticity for parodic and satirical purposes.

There are noticeable parallels in the critical debate on translating humour and translating language varieties. Concern over translatability is a recurrent, restrictive theme. The opposition of linguistic and culture-specific elements is equally persistent, creating an ultimately fallacious polarity that binds critical response to an either/or binary. Literary texts often work through far more complex strategies, defying attempts to neatly detect and categorize translation challenges and recommend appropriate translation solutions. Literary texts, such as the Tamil Dalit literatures under discussion here, use humour for subversive purposes, working simultaneously at various levels – through language, theme, situation, characterization, dialogue and action. This multi-directional and polyvalent type of humour engages the reader in a number of ways simultaneously, from amusement to satire to discomfiting laughter. The challenge for the translator is not merely a culture-specific 'funny' joke that must be reconstructed to effect a similar laugh in translation for an audience located in a *different* culture. The ambivalent nature of the humour in Dalit texts confronts their source-text readers with a dilemma as it disallows either clear sympathy for the protagonists or the taking up of antagonistic positions. This dilemma can be further exacerbated for those reading these texts in translation. In the case of Tamil Dalit literature, it is not the amusing properties of the joke but the transgressive nature of the humour and the laughter of Dalit protagonists – who are customarily expected to conduct themselves as either terrified, submissive victims, or grateful recipients of paternalistic handouts – which unsettles upper-caste characters within the literary world of texts as well as target readers and translators, who in fact often occupy and broadly *share* the same cultural and social order.

From humour to transgressive comedy

In literary critical discourse, comedy refers to a wider politics of interpretation and hence opens up the text beyond its formal elements to the polemic, social and political functions to which different types of humour can be put. It thus allows us to engage with source texts that deliberately shock through their language use, through swearing and obscenity; through scatological references to body parts and functions; and through themes of violence, including frank detailing of violence and verbal abuse within Dalit families *and* against the Dalit community. Such texts deploy comedy not to humour their audience but to render them uncomfortable, to provoke readers even while they laugh, demand engagement with their specific role as political and social provocateurs. The question for translation scholars then becomes to what purpose and effect this provocative and transgressive nature of the source text is translated. Formal, text-oriented approaches to studying such translations are inadequate, because they discourage us from looking beyond the text, and from posing questions such as to whom it is speaking and how it functions to challenge constrictive power structures. It is useful therefore to turn to critical conceptualizations of comedy and traditions and practices of comedy to analyse the translation of Tamil Dalit literature.

In what follows I draw on two ways of thinking about comedy that complement each other: one from European and the other from Tamil literary conventions. The Russian cultural historian Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1968) has been very influential

in shaping comedy studies by directing attention to comedy as an expression of popular discontent. As Stott (2005:33) indicates, Bakhtin's theory opens up comedy studies productively "via its thematisation of misrule and the visibility of characters from the lower social ranks", particularly "as a potential site of social disruption". Bakhtin proposed carnivalesque as a productive category to understand the social and political function of comedy. His reading of carnival from Renaissance Europe underscored the transgression of boundaries between the official cultures of the church and state and that of the marketplace, between the soul and the body, between the other world and this, between the upper and lower social classes. Since the publication of his work in English translation, the carnivalesque, with its celebration of the material lower strata, both bodily and social, has come to signify the subversive potential of laughter, comic inversion, licence and the grotesque. In Bakhtin's view (1968:47, 94), laughter defeats fear and "could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the people. It always remains a free weapon in their hands". Laughter also "unveils the material bodily principle" leading to a "festive liberation of laughter and body" (ibid.:89), an important aspect of the repertoire of Bama, the Dalit author whose work I discuss here. The display of "the generating, devouring, and defecating body" (ibid.:425) constructs grotesque realism as a literary mode which in Bakhtin's formulation comes to signify the potential threat of the social institution of carnival. Gardiner (1992) re-assesses the significance of Bakhtin's work on carnival for Utopia Studies, pointing out that it has given rise to a robust debate between those who view carnival as a politically progressive trope and those who see it as offering a misguided and uncritical utopian vision. Importantly, Marxist literary critics (Eagleton 1981) and New Historicists (Greenblatt 1994) have argued that Bakhtin's carnival acts as a safety valve and ultimately works to reaffirm authority and contain the radical potential of transgression. One of the few scholars of translation to discuss Bakhtin, albeit rather briefly, in relation to translating humour, Vandaele (2002b:269) too disagrees with Bakhtin's reading of radical subversion in humour.

The difference in social force between carnival (in the real world) and literary representations of carnival, which has remained at the centre of this debate, is particularly pertinent here. Can literary resistance in Dalit literature lead to actual change in the social positions Dalits occupy? While this is not the occasion to offer an in-depth discussion of the subversion-versus-containment debate, I agree with Stallybrass and White's (1986) alternative New Historicist response: "It actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative ... but that, given the presence of sharpened political antagonism, it may often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*" (Stallybrass and White 1986:14; emphasis in original). They argue that the transgressive power of carnival, however short-lived in duration or effect, is such that although the dominant order may not be toppled, it is also unable to silence the forces of carnival, thus exposing the fissiparous nature of dominant power structures. Furthermore, Bakhtin's twin celebration of heteroglossia and the body is particularly suited to the study of the three Dalit texts, as I will demonstrate. Distinguishing between the 'represented (or classical) body' and the 'carnival body' in Bakhtin's formulation, Jefferson (2001:214) argues that "carnival is also a concept and a practice which comprise an alternative to ... representation". This is particularly relevant for a critical engagement with the trope of the Dalit body, as I argue below, which resists representation as finished product (victim, brutish or untouchable) by continually displaying its many parts, refusing to be gathered into one whole, and thus amplifying carnival as process (active, proliferating *and* disgusting).

Dalit literary representations can therefore challenge dominant cultural formations both through choice of grotesque content and by making it visible in the public discourse as speech acts that challenge other forms of writing – newspaper reportage, police statements, court proceedings, post-mortem examinations, politicians’ speeches, etc. – that also seek to construct, represent or silence Dalits in specific ways in the public domain. The carnivalesque thus remains a powerful enough trope through which the subversive laughter in contemporary Tamil Dalit literature can be read and translated. In short, viewing Tamil Dalit literature through the lens of comedy rather than humour recuperates Bakhtin’s arguments for productive dialogue within translation studies.

My second framework of analysis comes from the conceptualization and use of comedy in Tamil literary culture. Theorizations of comedy are minimal in Tamil literary poetics, where, as Selvamony (2017:239) argues, “there was no attempt to create a persona type such as a clown ... who embodied laughter because the emotions [associated with comedy] were not seen as absolute ones but as gradable entities on an emotional continuum”. Among eight types of primary emotions recognized in literary texts, there is an allusion to *nakai* or laughter (*hāsya* in Sanskrit) in the *Tolkāppiyam*, a treatise on Tamil grammar and poetics commonly dated the third century BCE. As a literary device which alludes to humorous situations, *nakai*, Monius (2000) points out, may provoke laughter through mockery (or childishness, ignorance or credulity) while simultaneously making a more serious point. Humour, satire and satirical comedy have most often been used in two contexts: inter-religious rivalry and inter-caste rivalry.³ While there are numerous examples of inter-religious rivalry in both Tamil textual and oral traditions, the use of comedy in the case of inter-caste rivalry is more prominent in the oral traditions of song, performance and dance-dramas. Traditionally, plays focusing on elite perspectives mocked low-caste (including Dalit) characters in stock derogatory roles as ‘clowns’ and as socially inept. In parallel, Tamil folklore features a plethora of anti-brahmanical (upper caste) jokes and humour which abound in songs, stories and folk sayings. Not committed to writing, this entire repertoire of oral tradition that directs irreverent humour against oppressive castes has been ignored by Tamil literary historians, preoccupied as they have been with textual traditions available in writing. It is only more recently that this comedic mode has appeared in writing, in the demotic literature of Tamil Dalits. Tamil Dalit writers are now increasingly making use of comedy as an effective critical tool to challenge and mock those who consider themselves socially superior and therefore arbiters of social propriety and literary conventions. They mobilize the various forms of the grotesque that these conventions seek to suppress and reject.

Translating Dalit literature is linguistically challenging but is above all an act of intervention, and as such requires translators to go against the very grain of what is considered literary in the target language. Dalit literatures are translated for audiences within India as well as international readers. The first decade of the twenty-first century saw a marked rise in interest in translating Dalit literatures from Tamil (and other Indian languages) into English, which attracted attention far beyond the boundaries of the social world and audience they first addressed. I return to the issue of different audiences later in the chapter, but for now, it is important to note that conceptions of the comedic as deployed in these texts can function beyond the literary as powerful, political tools of resistance and radical questioning for writers, translators and their respective audiences in India. Conceptions of comedy in literary theory can therefore be a useful point of entry to study translation contexts that engage with literatures which draw on a range of non-standard literary devices for a political

purpose. They allow us to examine the social interventionist politics of writers and translators and to suggest how and to what extent Dalit literature as comedy can challenge the dominant discourse on caste.

Tamil Dalit literatures

Two trends in Tamil Dalit literature have been repeatedly highlighted in terms of choice of theme, style, perspective and language.⁴ One trend, older and abounding until the 1990s, tends to focus on the oppression and pain of Dalit protagonists, its style leaning towards the emotive to elicit sympathy. This literature, broadly termed ‘narratives of suffering’ by Indian literary scholar Sisir Kumar Das (1995), authored by both Dalits and non-Dalits, seeks to represent the humiliation and degradation of Dalit life and nature of the oppression faced. Dalit characters appear as speechless victims, dependent on the benevolence of non-Dalit protagonists to ‘rescue’ them from victimhood, thus further reinforcing Dalit subalternity. Usually written in standard Tamil, any digressions into colloquial registers only appear in dialogues ascribed to Dalit characters; while apparently serving the purpose of enhancing the ‘realism’ of the literary work, such a division reinscribes standard Tamil as the acceptable norm and Dalit speech forms as aberrations.

In contrast, Tamil Dalit literature since the 1990s has displayed a shift in modes of Dalit representation. Some Tamil Dalit writers, such as Imaiyam, have argued that

Dalit writers must record how they keep on living, with all their entertainments, their games, their performing arts, their language, their rituals, their conversations, their joys, ... Looking solely at the degradation that is a part of Dalit people’s lives, and recording only that, is a tremendous betrayal that has been done to those people.
(*Buck and Kannan 2011: 95*)

This new attitude to literature and writing among Dalit writers has insisted on offering perspectives on Dalit lives through Dalit eyes. It examines Dalit subjectivities, both individual and as a multi-layered community. It eschews the victim mode that presents non-Dalit upper castes as perpetrators of violence and Dalits as merely positioned on the receiving end of that violence. Instead, it features violent confrontations *within* the Dalit community, between various sub-castes classified as Dalit, and between generations and genders. It is also far more celebratory, focusing on a strong sense of community with its celebrations and feast days, using scatological humour, swearing, name-calling and mockery, and is written in non-standard, oral registers of Tamil throughout. Exploiting the immense heteroglossia within Tamil, Tamil Dalit writers are claiming the right to write in the non-literary Tamil as spoken by their communities as a powerful reminder of their presence. Designating Dalit literature as comedy, as I propose here, also helps to move it beyond the victim mode, making it possible to call attention to the celebratory and transgressive potential of this body of literature.

The laughter that rings through these texts nonetheless does not conceal the violence and pain that is endemic to Dalit life. Instead, the defiant humour of the texts makes the oppressive nature of their protagonists’ lives sharper and more poignant; their laughter is ambivalent as it both affirms Dalit lives and denies the oppressor’s power over them. This is particularly transgressive because Dalits continue to be beaten – often to death – with the expectation

that they will be silenced or reduced to a pitiful whimper. Laughing in defiance from their marginalized position challenges such attitudes and social hierarchies and instead celebrates their lives. It is the significance of this celebratory laughter, its transgressive nature and its social function in Tamil and in English translation that this chapter explores further in two narratives by the female Dalit Tamil writer Bama: her autobiography *Kurukku* (1992) and the autofiction *Caṅkati* (1994), both translated into English by Lakshmi Holmström in 2000⁵ and 2005 respectively.⁶ The third text I comment on is an anthology of literary and reflective pieces by nine Dalit writers, titled *Dalit Ilakkiyam: Enatu Anupavam* (2004), edited by M. Kannan and translated into English by David Buck and M. Kannan as *Tamil Dalit Literature: My Own Experience* (2011). These literary works do not follow the teleological structures of classic realist narratives that can be encountered in many a novel or short story in Indian languages. Instead, they adopt a grotesque realism (Bakhtin 1968) that challenges literary and social Tamil high culture through humour, ambivalence and inversion. Here the narrative structures are loose, there are multiple stories narrated in parallel or shorter stories embedded within longer narratives, multiple voices and therefore multiple points of view. The autobiographical voices do not reflect merely on internal emotional journeys of discovery or the awakening of a single individual consciousness associated with the autobiographical genre. Rather, there is a blending of autobiography (of the individual), biography (of the community) and fiction that resembles more closely a genre now often termed autofiction. Through their very act of witnessing that crosses the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, Dalit literatures resist the oppressive structures that seek to muzzle Dalit communities.

Tamil Dalit literature on the offensive

There are three main aspects of Dalit literature which custodians of Tamil high culture might consider ‘grotesque’: (a) the focus on Dalit bodies and their bodily functions; (b) the focus on Dalit female subjectivity and voice; and (c) writing in a spoken register of Tamil, specific to Dalit communities. Of these three aspects, Dalits’ – and especially Bama’s – mobilization of demotic forms of Tamil in writing has been most frequently commented upon. The wide gap between literary, written Tamil and spoken, colloquial Tamil⁷ is exploited by Dalit writers who insist on writing Tamil as spoken among Dalits in a variety of registers. Through their use of ungrammatical constructions, non-standard spelling, specific choice of words, and joining and splitting words according to speech patterns, Dalit writers shock and unsettle their Tamil audiences, who take pride in a long line of illustrious poets speaking in ‘literary’ registers since the second century BCE. Bama is one such Dalit writer who declares: “One thing that gives me most satisfaction is that I used the language of my people – a language that was not recognized by the pundits of literature, was not accepted by any literary circle in Tamil Nadu, was not included in the norms of Tamil literature” (Bama 2001). For the gatekeepers of Tamil culture, writing in this language register – which was traditionally never seen in written form, let alone published as *literature* – is a grotesque parody of Tamil. Bama’s English translator, Lakshmi Holmström (2012:xix), rightly observes that

Bama is doing something completely new in using the demotic and the colloquial routinely, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics

of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words and joins them differently, demanding a new and different pattern of reading.

Scholars such as Shankar (2012) have commented critically on the function of Tamil varieties in Bama's works and the challenges of translating them into English, while others have linked Bama's highlighting of female subjectivity through autobiography and fiction to her use of Tamil dialectal varieties (Geetha and Srilata 2007; Haider 2015; Sivanarayanan 2009). The use of demotic Tamil by Dalit writers fits well with Bakhtin's vision of grotesque realism and its challenge of "official culture", where "[s]peech and gesture are gradually freed from the pitifully serious tones of supplication, lament, humility, and piousness, as well as from the menacingly serious tones of intimidation, threats, prohibition" (Bakhtin 1968:380). Nevertheless, rather than focusing on the challenges of translating Tamil varieties, as other scholars have successfully done, this chapter directs attention to the related but important aspect of the display of the Dalit body and its bodily functions in Tamil Dalit literature and its English translation.

Bodies are centre-stage in the three Dalit texts I discuss. It is not descriptions of the beaten, broken, starving body that is of relevance here, although there is plenty of that in the novels and short stories, but accounts of the sweating, spitting, urinating, farting, sexually active or defecating body of the Dalit. In Bakhtin's formulation, this focus on the "material bodily lower stratum" or "the grotesque body" (1968:317) suggests not just a "humorous theme of debasement" (ibid.:379) but a reversal, where the orifices and protrusions of the body and its functions "in the act of becoming" (ibid.:317) turn high culture upside down, liberating and unburdening it, allowing "[t]error ... [to be] conquered by laughter" (ibid.:336). The imagery of Dalit bodies disrupts these literary texts in no ordinary sense. They are present in sharp contrast to the polished and intricately finished medieval Chola bronzes, created for connoisseurs and upper-caste social and religious elites (Dehejia 2009), and still celebrated as best examples of Tamil visual art, reminding us of the contrast Bakhtin draws between classical and grotesque bodies. They each inhabit different spaces and are assigned different cultural values.

Dalit bodies challenge a deeply held separation of ritually clean upper-caste bodies from ritually polluting – both literally and symbolically – Dalit bodies. In particular, the focus on faecal acts is deeply symbolic in the Indian context. In the collective, cultural consciousness of non-Dalit Indians, faecal matter and Dalits are inextricably and materially linked: Dalits are quite literally the removers of faecal matter from rural and urban homes and public toilets, even in modern India. The Dalit body has repeatedly been treated as faecal matter – as disgusting or offensive to the senses – to be flushed out of human society. Dalit protest has begun to mark such treatment with new forms of political engagement. Buck and Kannan, in their English introduction to the anthology of short stories I mentioned above (*Dalit Ilakkiam*, Kannan 2004/2011:xxxvii), quote Anand Teltumbde's comment on protest launched by Dalits in one of the Indian states in 2010: "the fact that they protested is perhaps not as striking as the way in which they protested: They gathered before the municipal council office and in public, smeared themselves with human excreta". Hence for Dalit literature to turn faecal matter into a recurrent trope, as part of Dalit *literary aesthetics*, draws deliberate attention to the material body of Dalits that renders them 'untouchable'. The spotlighting of the Dalit body and its function of provoking laughter at the upper caste is a

fitting reversal, reminiscent of Bakhtin's formulation of the "eruption" of grotesque bodily parts "into literature" (Bakhtin 1968:319). An apt example is Yalan Ati's statement in one of the short stories included in the anthology: "I make my subject matter the stinking lives of my people, or the language of their bodies, bodies turned into muddy messes smeared with sweat" (Kannan 2004/2011:139), and the closing lines of his untitled poem (Kannan 2004/2011:145) exemplify this further:

It is nothing but fecal soup
Our ancestors were made to drink
That I gag on and vomit back up
And call it a poem.

This English translation misses the point of the inversion in the Tamil lines by translating *cāṇi pālai* (fecal milk), which the poet regurgitates, as 'fecal soup'. Milk is a compelling symbol of nurture and strength, of parental care, linking humans from one generation to another in Tamil as in many other cultures. The oxymoronic 'fecal milk' is a powerful and offensive image of what has symbolically fed Dalit bodies, thereby also implicating the one who has enforced this diet, the upper-caste Tamil, who appears as the wolfish tyrant in parents' clothing. Moreover, to present this offensive regurgitation to the reader as a poem further challenges standard Tamil literary conventions of conceptualizing Tamil aesthetics.

Elsewhere there is a clear attempt to use humour and laughter to challenge physical oppression. Bama's *Caṅkati* is replete with instances where the protagonists respond with verbal mockery, laughter or subversive action that overturns the intended abusive brutality of high-caste exclusionary practices. These instances also often maintain the text's use of faecal imagery. In a long conversation with Maikanni, a young child, *Caṅkati's* narrator learns that she is forced to work long hours in a match factory with few breaks. Maikanni complains that she has been beaten up for defecating under a tree outside the factory. Amidst her tears, however, she recalls an amusing detail and informs the narrator and her mother that the factory has a special 'shit room' (*pī rām*) which must be used by all as a toilet.⁸ The three female characters laugh uncontrollably at the ludicrousness of such an enclosed space being designated for defecating within a building (Bama/Holmström 1994/2005:73). Sammuga Kizhavi, an old woman featured in *Caṅkati*, reportedly saw a Dalit child beaten up cruelly for accidentally brushing against the drinking pot of an upper-caste man. Thereafter, she urinates in it when his attention is elsewhere and defiantly tells the entire village: "Now let the evil fellow drink my piss" (Bama/Holmström 1994/2005:118). This tale is narrated to a younger generation of girls who are highly entertained at this reversal, where shared laughter strengthens the bond between Dalit female characters. Such references to offensive or grotesque bodily functions of the "lower stratum" (to use Bakhtin's phrase), including various bodily emissions and excretions such as farting, shitting, pissing and menstruating, disrupt the texts, refusing to let humour function at the level of a benign slapstick. Instead, these references alert us to a politics of the proliferating material body and a reversal of positions effected by communal laughter at the expense of the powerful.

The pain and mockery of female characters who experience the double jeopardy of caste and gender discrimination is also palpable in the three texts under discussion. Repeatedly abused by both upper-caste and Dalit men, Dalit female characters refuse to remain mere objects of sexual desire. They fight back in a 'grotesque' display of female bodily

parts and functions: breasts, genitalia, pubic hair and, frequently, menstruation (often referring to men as “mensur-drinkers” in the English translation) serve to disrupt the text, as when Rakamma, one of the female characters in *Caṅkati*, shouts out obscenities (Bama/Holmsröm 1994/2005:61):

Raakamma ... shouted obscenities, she scooped up the earth and flung it about. ‘How dare you kick me you low-life? Your hand will get leprosy! How dare you pull my hair! You disgusting man, fit only to drink a woman’s farts! Instead of drinking toddy every day, why don’t you drink your son’s piss? Why don’t you drink my monthly blood?’ And she lifted up her sari in front of the entire crowd gathered there.

What Holmsröm translates into the more acceptable and standard “monthly blood” appears as *en tūmai* in Bama’s Tamil. The use of the Tamil *tūmai* brings up issues of bodily purity and pollution, so that the phrase *tan tūmai* literally also refers to female menstruation as pollution. The treatment of standard biological functions as polluting highlights the double jeopardy faced by Dalit women. This confronts the reader with female bodily functions that are usually invisibilized and considered unspeakable in female speech, let alone mobilized as a form of verbal abuse.

In Alakiya Periyavan’s short story ‘*ticiayellām cuvarkal konta kirāmam*’ (The Village with Wall in All Directions), translated and edited by David Buck and M. Kannan (2011) and featured in the anthology *Tamil Dalit Literature*, a female character by the name of Senthamarai is raped and goes on to lead a protest by women:

“Sisters, pick out some choice words and let ’em hear it!” Senthamarai said to ... them. Drowning in the bitterness that filled their hearts, they shouted their abuses out in the streets Words that had been rubbed into their private parts spilled out into the streets like piles of excrement. Like the sticky, slimy sputum that her father spat up, Senthamarai kept on spitting out curses. Sinnathaayi threw it at the policemen that they ate her shit and menses.

(Buck and Kannan 2011:63)

Buck and Kannan’s use of the English *mensur*, a shortened form of *menstruation*, has a more clinical feel than the Tamil *tūmai*, which also featured in the previous example from *Caṅkati*. As I explain above, the phrase *tan tūmai* (Kannan 2004:86) literally translates as ‘her pollution’. Raakamma and Senthamarai use their female bodies and bodily functions to flout conventional portrayals of feminine beauty and desirability, to point to the way female bodies are brutally exploited by both upper-caste and Dalit men. The authors, Bama and Periyavan, anchor female subjectivity and voice in the female body rather than in inner consciousness. Moreover, the Tamil word could also be taken to indicate the ‘pollution’ with which *all* Dalit bodies were associated and which persists in the collective Indian imagination as that which cannot be touched.

In effect, these representative Tamil Dalit texts conjure the grotesque at multiple levels that work together to invert, disrupt and question. It is equally important to pay attention to the spirit of the carnivalesque that sustains the narratives. The unnamed autodiegetic female narrator of *Karukku*, for instance, describes the celebration of a religious festival right at the heart of a narrative of personal pain and recognition of her own Dalithood.

Chapter 5, *Karukku's* midway point, is alive with games, performances, communal singing and dancing, sharing a religious feast as a village, combined with laughter and celebration. In keeping with carnivalesque inversion, the narrator details an occasion when a urinating toddler wanders after a priest sprinkling holy water during mass. The narrator's satirical comparison of the 'holy water' that the boy and priest drizzle within the sacred space of the church, thereby disrupting solemn ritual, turns unintended humour into comedic reversal of official culture. Brief though this incident is, it both challenges the officious and discriminatory practices of the Catholic Church in India towards Dalits and epitomizes the grotesque lens that re-purposes humour for comedic debasement and debunking of the powerful. *Canikati* has several such scenes of communal humour and celebration, incorporating songs (reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's 'alienation effect' on stage) and communal feasting dotted throughout the novel in a way that attracts the reader's critical rather than empathetic attention to the celebratory and subversive laughter – laughter that supersedes the scarring pain experienced by Dalit characters. The Dalit body thus functions as the site of both conflict and community building.

Translating carnival for an 'offended' audience

Translating the humorous, satirical writing of Dalit writers is challenging for several reasons, among which the linguistic varieties used are of course one of the hardest and most evident. As Sivanarayanan (2009:148) argues, "[t]he loss of a regional, spoken dialect transforms the novel [in English] in significant ways". Separating out the linguistic aspects alone for analysis, however, does not offer a full picture of the complex ways in which the texts seek to destabilize perceived social norms and literary aesthetics. To focus only on the text's use of language varieties as posing nearly insurmountable challenges to translators and target audiences would merely be stating the obvious. While "the vernacular sphere of Tamil representations and self-representations ... enables a critical engagement with Dalit identity and literature" (Shankar 2012:74), its English translation cannot enable such engagement if we focus on language variety. As Shankar (2012:88) argues, "Bama's resistant language presents challenges for translation that draw attention to the politicized nature of not only literature but also translation". Dalit satirical writing certainly tests translators' abilities and the very limits of translation. It is no surprise that the effects of outrage created by the use of lower Tamil registers is extremely hard to match in English. It is possible to view the translational difficulties posed here as a further layer of resistance to co-optation.

Moving beyond issues of translatability to understand how the language variety intersects with the comedic elements helps to broaden the framework of analysis. Translators of Bama's two texts and the *Dalit Ilakkiyam* anthology make an effort to compensate for the lack of an adequate English language register by retaining the translation's focus on the other grotesque elements – the black humour, swearing and obscenity, songs and ribaldry – that direct the reader's attention to Dalit bodies, male and female, adult and child, human and ghoul. Hence, the overall effect of the grotesque is recreated and functions to pique, even shock, the reader of the English translations. This requires a re-structuring and a re-wiring of textual poetics with which to analyse both source and translated texts, as Shankar argues:

Some of this Tamil Dalit writing is beginning to appear in English translation, compounding the problem of an adequate poetics through which to explore it. If critics

within the indigenous culture have to refashion their analytical tools to access Dalit literature, then the critical task grows even more difficult as this literature circulates more widely through translation.

(Shankar 2012:71–72)

I propose that Bakhtin's reading of carnival and the demotic carnivalesque laughter that grotesque realism generates, accompanied by elements of Tamil folk culture, offers such a materially different and wider poetics with which to engage with Dalit literatures in translation. In this context, it is important to remember that the decision to translate Dalit literature, with its various uses of the grotesque, is in itself an act of intervention, one that requires translators to go against the grain of what is considered literature or literariness in the Tamil and Indian contexts. It is also useful to take into account who they are translating for. The two sets of translators under discussion here – Lakshmi Holmström and Buck and Kannan – use different strategies for the different audiences they address.

David Buck, American translator, and M. Kannan, modern Tamil studies scholar, translate for an Anglophone international, but perhaps a specifically American audience. They state that they use a “derivative of the English spoken by less-than-affluent people in rural areas of the American mid-south” (Buck and Kannan 2011:xix). But the English used (e.g. *grampaw*, *gramaw*, *a-goin'*) so clearly brings to mind the context of the American deep south that even while pointing to similarities in racial, economic and cultural discrimination between Tamil Dalits and Black Americans, the African American Vernacular English register directs the reader away from the specificity of the Dalit context. Landers's observation that dialect is untranslatable because it is “inextricably rooted in time and place” (2001: 117) is borne out in this instance, though his blanket recommendation against attempting to translate dialect in any literary work is not. It is neither time nor place that is in question here but rather the specificity of the nature and context of discrimination experienced and considerations of agency in representation. The issue here is that replacing the Tamil Dalit dialect with a parallel dialect in English does not challenge the reader with the particularities of Dalit lives and language the way the Tamil does. However, ending the analysis at this point is unsatisfactory and would replicate the circularity of the (un)translatability argument that I highlighted at the start.

Holmström translates predominantly for a national, that is, Indian audience but is also read by international readers. Her primary readers are non-Tamil speaking Indians who can access Tamil literature only through translation. Holmström uses Standard English, with occasional Tamil words included in italics. Despite using a few colloquial words such as *piss* and *shit*, she generally maintains a conventional and flattened use of English, as I observed earlier. She occasionally brings in grammatical constructions and syntax directly from the Tamil into English but is not sufficiently adventurous to deconstruct or destabilize English in her translations. Sivanarayanan (2009:151) argues that adopting a strategy of “thick translation” as proposed by Appiah might have prevented the English translation from coming across “on the one hand, as a pitiful lament, and, on the other, as a rant against caste discrimination”. By using a higher register of English, associated with the privileged sections of India, Holmström gives her translations a literary veneer which undermines the demotic tone and content of the source texts. At times she uses ‘Indian English’ constructions or syntax, which while adding some variety to the text, evoke – as other scholars have also pointed out – the middle-class/upper-caste urban Indian-English register. Neither does

she highlight or otherwise draw attention to a number of English words (such as *room* and *central*) that have crept into Tamil Dalit speech patterns and that add an additional linguistic layering in the source texts. The more or less standard Indian English Holmström uses distances the Dalit narrator from the action she narrates, such that the Dalit life she *shows* is at odds with the language in which she *tells* it.

And yet, it is possible to counter-argue a different set of demotic effects. Since Dalit literatures in English translation are aimed at two sets of readers – the Indian (or national) and the international – it is important to consider how the political nature and function of the grotesque speaks to this readership. Tamil Dalit writers both write *for* Tamil Dalits (in the sense of representing and celebrating their lives, and speaking to other Tamil Dalits) but also *direct* their literature *at* upper-caste (non-Dalit) Tamils as a way of resisting their oppression and silencing. Holmström's audience comprises non-Tamil Indians who are predominantly middle class/upper-caste Indians functioning in English. These anglophone readers are also very familiar with the nature and consequences of the caste divide that are equally prevalent in most parts of India. Indian readers find that they too are implicated, by virtue of being the butt of the translated humour, and are drawn into interrogating conventions of literary writing and hierarchies of social and political oppression. The jarring incongruity between Holmström's use of standard Indian English registers and the themes of grotesque realism and carnivalesque laughter that abound in the two translations draws the reader's attention to the misalliance between language and literary aesthetics. Here, when presented in standard Indian English, the grotesque becomes all the more powerful for this misalliance. Moreover, and more importantly, when the Dalit narrator speaks in Dalit registers of Tamil, she quite firmly occupies a Dalit space, but when the *Dalit* narrator speaks through the English translations in the very language register that the middle class/upper-caste Indian takes pride in, a further level of disruptive ambivalence comes into play. By narrating in a register at odds with her story, the narrator occupies a liminal space in the English translation, challenging existing caste solidarities among anglophone readers and entering their social sphere while proudly claiming Dalit identity in all other aspects. Although she remains an 'outsider' as a *Dalit* narrator, she also 'belongs' through the language register of her translated speech – a mark of insubordination that is often perceived as the 'insolence' of Dalits seeking equality with upper castes.

The discomfort that this kind of writing has generated in India is evident in the fact that the cultural networks of the privileged have tried to stop or delay the publication of source texts and their translations, and have worked against conferring literary awards and other forms of recognition on Dalit literatures in post-independent India for decades. Much of Dalit literature has been kept out of the literary canons of Indian language literatures, or postcolonial Indian Literature, and even fewer works are deemed worthy of translation. Not only has Dalit literature not been accepted as literature, but in the context of the prolific translation activity between Indian languages and of Indian language literatures into English, and other European languages, it was largely ignored by translators, publishers and readers until the late 1990s. After at least a hundred years of Dalit literature in print, it was only in 2002, for instance, that *Translating Caste*, an anthology of Dalit literature in English translation, was introduced as bringing "the issue of caste and its textual representation in contemporary Indian literature into the classrooms of universities in India and abroad" and described as "erect[ing] a framework for the study of the treatment of caste in an all

India literary arena” (Basu 2002:ix). It is still difficult to find Dalit literature in anthologies of Indian literature translated for either national or international audiences. What has been at stake so far? Allowing Dalit literatures to feature as examples of Indian literature⁹ problematizes the category. It would challenge the discourses that deny caste hierarchy and discrimination against Dalits which has been pervasive in Indian social structures. It is only relatively recently that key publishers such as Oxford University Press (India), Macmillan and Penguin India have begun to publish translations of Dalit literature. Yet, Ravikumar and Azhagarasan, the editors of a recent anthology covering the period 1890–2010, *The Oxford Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing*, mention translation only in passing: “The global interest in local cultures and marginalized literatures which encouraged the ‘Translation Revolution’ of the 1990s compelled us to introduce the singularity of Tamil Dalit writing translated into English” (2012:xi). This wave of Dalit literatures translated into English has followed a much earlier wave of translations in the second half of the twentieth century of regional, Indian language literatures written by upper-caste writers. Basu is one of the few editors of translated anthologies to note the critical and transformative effects translation can have in the Dalit literary context:

the issue of Translating Caste is not only an issue of communicating certain narratives about caste across languages or, even, across cultures. The narratives about caste which constitute the core of this collection, in themselves are engagements in an enterprise of translation – the translation of caste as a social institution into an assortment of cultural discourses.

(Basu 2002:ix)

English translations for Indian audiences have served an important function in disrupting existing cultural discourses. The majority of Anglophone Indian readers belong to the ‘perpetrator’ sections of society. Target readers are therefore in the extraordinary position of empathizing with Dalit characters while becoming aware that they themselves are the butt of literary and social satire that Dalit literatures present. Dalit literatures question conventions of good writing in Tamil (and other Indian language) literatures and thus disrupt entrenched hierarchies of literary taste, social caste and political oppression. The grotesque Dalit bodies that dot the literary narratives challenge upper-caste and class sensibilities with their material presence and laughter.¹⁰ It is Dalit literature’s national audiences that are most disturbed when encountering it since they are the most implicated in the Dalit offensive mounted through translation. Even as it challenges fixed definitions of literariness through demotic language registers and grotesque realism, in Tamil and in English translation, Dalit literature also destabilizes normative understandings of humour, laughter, and ultimately comedy. Encouraging a shift from victim-mode representations to participative assertions of Dalit identity and agency in the comedic mode, Tamil Dalit literature demonstrates that offending through laughter has a political purpose in this context, and that offending through translation is equally purposeful.

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Notes

- 1 The category 'Dalit writers' encompasses a range of writers, from those who do not identify as Dalit but who write on issues pertaining to Dalits to writers who self-identify as Dalits and write on Dalit issues.
- 2 The term *Dalit* literally means 'crushed' or 'ground down'. It refers to the sections of the Indian population considered 'outcaste', ritually impure and 'untouchable'. The term was first adopted in the western regions of India by Marathi Dalit intellectuals, in opposition to the patronizing term *Harijan* (children of God) that had been introduced by M.K. Gandhi in the 1930s. It gained popularity among Tamil Dalit writers and intellectuals in south India from the 1990s onwards.
- 3 See Israel (2012) for a discussion of inter-religious and inter-caste satire in the nineteenth-century Tamil context.
- 4 For an informative essay on Dalit Literature in Tamil and its relation to social, political and intellectual movements and history, see Kannan and Gros (2002).
- 5 *Kurukku* was first translated by Lakshmi Holmström in 2000. I cite throughout from the second edition, accompanied by a translator's introduction, which was published in 2012 by OUP (India).
- 6 *Caṅkati* was also translated into other Indian languages, such as Telugu (trans. Joopaka Subhadra) and into French as *L'assemblée* in 2002.
- 7 Tamil is a diglossic language, with two distinct varieties: a high variety restricted to formal (often literary) contexts and several low varieties used in everyday interaction.
- 8 Access to toilets and their location indicates both class and caste distinctions: Dalits would typically have access to forests and abandoned tracts of land. The women therefore find the presence of an indoor toilet made available to them hilarious. Similarly with bathing spaces. In another part of the novel, female Dalit characters take pride in the freedom to bathe and swim in open waters as opposed to hiding behind closed doors and walls (associated with upper-caste women and the policing of their bodies).
- 9 Although a contested category, a concerted effort has been made to include representative literatures from all the different Indian languages, but not all castes.
- 10 The sudden removal of Bama and other Dalit writers from Delhi University's literature syllabus in September 2021, just weeks before this chapter went to press, demonstrates the extent of this challenge. Splashed across the pages of Indian newspapers and on social media were inane contradictory claims of respecting the diversity of voices while not 'hurting the sentiments' of individuals or communities – in this case, clearly upper-caste, upper-class majoritarian religious groups. See, for example, www.nationalheraldindia.com/education/academicians-writers-ask-du-to-reinstate-texts-by-mahasweta-devi-bama-sukirtharani-in-syllabus.

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11

GIANNI RODARI'S *ADVENTURES OF CIPOLLINO* IN RUSSIAN AND ESTONIAN

Translation and ideology in the USSR

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WRITER AND TRANSLATOR

Literature was a highly sensitive ideological arena throughout the history of the Soviet Union. The Communist Party exerted strict control on the publishing industry, which was state-owned. The publication of books, both originals and translations, was carefully monitored, with publication plans for the different languages of the Soviet Republics approved centrally, in Moscow. From 1922 to the end of the Soviet Union, *Glavlit* – the Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs which worked hand-in-hand with various departments of the Communist Party – was responsible for pre- and post-print censorship, the strictness of which varied following the changes in the leadership of the Party and the Union (Ermolaev 1997). Soviet censorship therefore cannot be explained simply in terms of textual omissions and changes. The guiding work of the Communist Party had the more ambitious and far-reaching objective of transforming literature into an instrument of the formation of the good, loyal, Soviet citizen. As the leading cultural ideologue of the Communist Party Andrei Zhdanov famously reminded participants in the first Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, “Comrade Stalin has called our writers engineers of human souls” (Zhdanov 1934), implying that “the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remoulding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism” (ibid.)

In this passage, Zhdanov refers to manual workers, but the primary material for socialist “remoulding and education” was actually children. And in the words of Lenin’s wife Nadezhda Krupskaya, who restructured the Russian education system after the Revolution, children’s literature was “one of the mightiest weapons in the socialist education of the new generation” (quoted in Balina 2008:4). To study children’s literature in the Soviet Union we thus need to relinquish the preconception of a marginalized system existing at the fringes of society (Thomson-Wohlgemuth 2009:4) and recognize its central function in the ideological indoctrination of young Soviet citizens, a function that required particular attention to choosing the literary works to which children were to be exposed.

Supporting the publication of new original children's books by contemporary Soviet authors constituted the most straightforward means of reshaping the content of children's literature in line with the needs of socialist education. The Soviet canon of translated children's literature, meanwhile, continued to be mainly defined by the classics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Inggs 2011:83), although many foreign authors were banned for ideological reasons. Translations of contemporary children's writers from capitalist countries were rare, particularly under Stalin. One remarkable exception was Gianni Rodari's book *The Adventures of Cipollino* (*Il Romanzo di Cipollino*), published in Italy in 1951 and almost immediately translated into Russian. The translated version underwent a process of rapid appropriation, becoming part of Soviet culture and remaining one of the most popular books in the USSR for decades. In what follows we consider the reasons for this success and compare two Soviet translations of the book: the Russian translation of 1953 and the Estonian translation of 1960. This will allow us to explore the dynamics of Soviet power from a topological as well as historical perspective. On the one hand, we have the complex relations between the Russian centre of the Union and its Estonian periphery, the 'western borderlands' (Annus 2018) where the ideological grip of the Party and isolation from the external world were less strict. The difference between the centre and periphery was reinforced by different chronologies. While the Soviet turn took place in Russia in 1917, Estonia was an independent republic during the interwar period and was not annexed to the Soviet Union until 1940, following the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR. Germany briefly occupied the country during the war (1941–1944), but Estonia was reincorporated into the Soviet Union in 1944 and remained a Soviet republic until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. On the other hand, the Soviet Union as a whole underwent important changes in the transition from the Stalinist period, during which the Russian translation of *Cipollino* appeared,¹ to the Khrushchev Thaw, which was well underway when the Estonian translation of the book was published. While Stalinism represents the bleakest face of Soviet power, the Thaw was an attempt at mild liberalization of Soviet society. The loosening of ideological pressure from the Party seemed to set cultural agents free to develop into the new leading force, ushering in a "second cultural revolution" (Buchli 1999:137). In the field of literary translation, the Thaw coincided with a boom in foreign literature (Monticelli and Lange 2014) and a mitigation of the censorship system, consequently affording editors and translators more space for negotiation (Sherry 2015; Monticelli 2020). While the renewed impulse came from the centre this time, it had a more far reaching effect on the periphery of the Soviet empire, as our analysis of the Estonian translation of *Cipollino* will demonstrate.

Gianni Rodari and *The Adventures of Cipollino*

Gianni Rodari (1920–1980) is considered one of the most influential children's writers of the twentieth century. He won the most prestigious award in the field (the Andersen prize) in 1970, and his books have been translated into many languages. Italian scholar Tullio De Mauro (1980: 36) highlights the importance of Rodari in the vital transformation of education practice in Italy in the 1960 and 1970s, asserting that his books contributed "to set[ting] in motion a realistic and critical, rigorous and really inspiring and creative education in our schools".²

Il Romanzo di Cipollino, Rodari's first full-length book, was published in the early 1950s. At that time Rodari, who had participated in the antifascist Resistance, was an active member and functionary of the Italian Communist Party and wrote for its newspaper *L'Unità*. In 1950 he was appointed director of a new children's magazine entitled *Pioniere*. His first works were exclusively published and distributed by Party-related publishing houses, the *Edizioni di Cultura Sociale* in the case of *Cipollino*. The book was largely ignored by the public and its author remained unknown in Italy until the 1960s, when the prestigious publishing house Einaudi started to publish his work. Most of the (negative) interest in Rodari's activities in the 1950s came from the Catholic Church, which immediately banned *Pioniere* and repeatedly attacked *Cipollino* for its communist ideology.

Rodari's popularity in the USSR follows the opposite pattern. The quick translation of *Il Romanzo di Cipollino* into Russian (only two years after the Italian publication) immediately brought him huge critical and public attention. Even today *Cipollino* remains Rodari's best-known and loved work in the post-socialist countries. While Rodari's later acclaim in Italy, according to his biographer Marcello Argilli (1990:85), was partly influenced by his earlier success in the Soviet Union, *The Adventures of Cipollino* continues to be relatively unknown in Italy in comparison with the works Rodari published in the 1960s. How can the immediate success of this work in the Soviet Union be explained? A book for children written by a militant author who was a member of the largest communist party in the capitalist West was bound to attract the attention of Soviet ideologues. We argue, however, that it is the candid ideological background of the story that most successfully fulfilled the needs of Soviet education.

Cipollino, a buoyant and enthusiastic young onion, lives in a peaceful but poor peasant community of fruit and vegetables suffering under the despotic rule of the local tyrant Prince Lemon and his henchmen. When Cipollino's father is arrested and sentenced to life in prison because of a minor breach of the law, the heroic little onion, together with his companions, decides to stand up to the evil aristocrat and abolish the outdated feudal order. Eventually, the grassroots movement results in a full-blown revolution (as the author explicitly calls the event in his book) that changes the vegetal world forever and the community lives happily ever after. The story simplistically divides its characters into either inherently good (for example Cipollino's family, Little Radish) or inherently evil (Prince Lemon, Countesses Cherry, Knight Tomato). Most of the antagonists belong to the upper class, while most of the heroes belong to the peasantry. The poor and repressed heroes work hard and value kindness and duty, while the antagonists are rich, lazy, hard-fisted and greedy. The narrator of the story takes a clear position as regards the events and characters, explicitly setting up an us (*i nostri* or 'our own [people]' as the narrator calls Cipollino and his friends) versus them dichotomy.

Hollindale (1988) distinguishes three levels on which ideology operates within a narrative. The first level is explicit, openly didactic and manifests itself through the narrator's voice. The second level, expressed through the characters' voices, is more implicit but often has a more convincing effect on the reader, precisely through this implicitness (Stephens 1992). The third level, hidden in the language itself, consists of textual codes that reflect the system of conventions active in a society during a certain period, fixing boundaries of linguistic expression (Knowles and Malmkjær 1996). Rodari's *Cipollino* consistently expresses views that are in line with the communist ideology of the author at all three levels.

Although Rodari's story has the fantastic features that distinguish children's literature from mature realism, the topic, characters, ideological framework, transparency of the message and authorial position met all the requirements of socialist realism. Cipollino could easily be a Soviet poster child with his active and curious approach to life as well as his determination and constant drive to seek solutions and innovate. He is depicted as a popular, brave and curious character, a natural born leader who unites the disillusioned members of his community to fight for a common cause in full solidarity. As Maksim Gorky, undisputed leader of the Soviet *intelligentsia* after the revolution, clearly stated, "the main function of children's books is to raise man to heroic stature in children's eyes. Through books, the child comes to know man as a brave explorer, a fighter for truth, endowed with imagination and will" (quoted in Miller et al. 1976:534). *Cipollino* was a product of post-war Italy's traditional society, written as an attempt to transmit to Italian children subversive "messages of struggle, freedom, revolt against oppression" (Argilli 1990: 75), consequently inviting the censure of the Catholic Church. In the Soviet Union, however, it was fully in tune with the ruling ideology and was immediately selected and exploited by the authorities as a means of ideological remoulding and education.

The appropriation of *Cipollino* and his author in the USSR

Russian was the first foreign language into which the book was translated. The translation, first published in 1953, enjoyed widespread popularity and acclaim among the general public as well as the Soviet critics and authorities. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the story was translated into most of the major languages used in the Soviet Union, with huge print runs and several reprints in the following decades.

The popularity of *Cipollino* also extended to the author. Argilli tells us of Italian politicians and intellectuals visiting the Soviet Union in the 1950s and finding Rodari being referred to as the most famous Italian writer, although they had not even heard his name before (Argilli 1990:85). "As you are perfectly well aware, you are ... – after Togliatti – the most famous Italian in the Soviet Union", journalist Giuseppe Boffa, working as a USSR correspondent for the Italian news outlet *L'Unità*, wrote to Rodari in 1956 (quoted in De Florio 2019:26). Russian literary scholars referred to him as "our Rodari" (Frenkel 1980) as well as "protector and promoter of communist education in the Eastern bloc" (Begak 1971:34). The title of a major Soviet work on children's literature, *From Aesop to Gianni Rodari*, is similarly revealing of his exceptional status in the region (Brandis 1980).

With the onset of the Thaw, which accommodated a more liberal approach in terms of including foreign authors in school programmes, Rodari's books were widely included on the reading lists of Russian schools (Ponomarev 2017). Already in 1963, three years after the Estonian translation appeared, *Cipollino* also featured on the list of children's literature for Soviet Estonia's schools, where it was recommended for third grade pupils (Liivand and Väljataga 1963:21). The lists for 1980 (Raud 1980:76) and 1988 (when the translation was placed on the curriculum of 'Estonian language and culture') show that *Cipollino* had become an integral part of Estonian school literature until the very end of the Soviet Union.

The intersemiotic and transmedial spread of Cipollino's story and motifs that followed the publication of the translations turned Rodari's book into a central element of the Soviet canon of children's literature and culture. The character of Cipollino blended smoothly into the group of 'merry characters', a carefully selected *crème de la crème* of the most popular



FIGURE 11.1 Russian stamp from 1992 displaying characters of *The Adventures of Cipollino*, a token of ongoing popularity of Cipollino-related imagery in Russia

children's characters in the Soviet Union, and became an icon that was deeply embedded in popular Soviet culture. In 1961, the Onion Boy appeared in an animated film which became an instant hit that contributed significantly to the book's further success and durability across a number of generations. A feature film based on the book and released in 1971 included an introduction by Rodari himself, who narrates the birth of *Cipollino* while strolling around a marketplace in Italy. In 1976, the well-known composer Karen Khachaturian received the USSR State Prize for a ballet composition based on the book that premiered at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow in 1977. Rodari's translator Samuil Marshak wrote lyrics for several songs performed in the hugely popular radio adaptation of the book. The book's heroes appeared on a myriad of objects and in various contexts, from magazine covers to food products, New Year decorations, shop signs, birthday cards, stamps (Figure 11.1), and naturally toys. Cipollino also lent his name to various institutions such as nurseries across the Soviet Union. Numerous theatrical adaptations, including musicals, were staged in Russia and the other republics of the Soviet Union, often attracting fresh interest and even controversy well into the twenty first century. We return to the revival of interest in *Cipollino* in the concluding section.

The Russian translation of *Cipollino*

The Russian translation of *The Adventures of Cipollino* (*Приключения Чиполлино*) was published in 1953 through multiple issues of the Soviet children's magazine *Пионер* (Pioneer). The full translation in book format, published in 1955, was produced by Zlata Potapova

(1918–1994), literary scholar and translator. In addition to Rodari, Potapova translated a number of other Italian authors in the course of her career, spanning the period from the early 1950s to the 1990s, including Moravia, Calvino, Pratolini and Sciascia. However, the real discovery and introduction of Gianni Rodari to the Soviet public are commonly attributed to Soviet children's writer, poet and translator Samuil Marshak (1887–1964), who also edited Zlata Potapova's translation of *Cipollino's Adventures*. In the early 1950s, Marshak translated a selection of Rodari's poems for children, adding a note titled 'Why I Translated Gianni Rodari's Poems' that reads "These simple poems with few words truthfully reflect the everyday life of children as well as adults in Italian working class neighbourhoods" (Marshak 1952:1).

Marshak was a Soviet and Russian poet of Jewish origin, born in Voronezh and proclaimed by Maxim Gorky to be the "founder of Russian children's literature" (quoted in Razova 1964:88–89). He won numerous prestigious Soviet awards, honours and medals, including two Orders of Lenin (1939, 1957), a Lenin Prize (1963) as well as four Stalin Prizes (1942, 1946, 1949, 1951). Nevertheless, he was on the verge of being persecuted during Stalin's fight against cosmopolitanism, but escaped execution either because of the onset of the Thaw, or because he was rescued by Stalin personally, according to a widespread rumour (Geyzer 2021; Tregubov 2018). Marshak travelled to Italy for the first time in 1933, where he was hosted by Maxim Gorky. His memoirs (Galanov et al. 1971) state that he was very fond of the Italian language and knew it rather well. He took a particular liking to Italian folk songs, echoes of which he later found in Rodari's poems (Marshak 1952:1). Marshak took on the mission of introducing Rodari's writing to the Soviet audience, publishing his first translations in 1952. Several other translations followed in 1962–1963, and Marshak allegedly maintained a lively interest in Italian culture up to his final years.

It is generally recognized that the translation of children's literature allows the translator more freedom than the translation of adult literature, so that adaptational strategies tend to prevail. House (1997, 2015), for example, suggests that translators of literature for children are cultural mediators, who 'filter' information and values featured in the original text for children of the target audience. This filtering is often realized through strategies of domestication that adapt the source text to the target culture's norms (Thomson-Wohlgemuth 2009:226). In the Soviet Union, with its strict censorship system, this meant close compliance with the ruling ideology, especially in a case as sensitive as children's literature from capitalist countries. The so-called Soviet school of translation, which encouraged a rather free adaptive approach to originals, particularly in the case of children's literature (Borisenko 2018:206), supported a translation poetics which accommodated the manipulative needs of ideological censorship. As we have seen, in the case of Rodari the original matched the ideological and aesthetic requirements for children's literature in the USSR quite closely. Nevertheless, the Russian translation by Zlata Potapova still features abundant omissions, additions and changes. While in some cases the aim was to adapt the text at a purely realia-related level,³ there are numerous examples that clearly show how alterations were introduced in order to better reflect the ideological expectations of the target context.

One obvious example concerns the religious references that communist Rodari often employs in spoken-language expressions typical of the Catholic Italian context, and which had to be adapted in translation to accommodate the official antireligious approach of the Soviet Union. Interestingly – and rather appropriately for the Soviet context – Rodari's original tends to embellish the aristocratic antagonists' speech with religious references

much more abundantly than that of the positively portrayed characters, who use religious terms very sparingly. The Russian translation largely maintains religious references when they are used either by the aristocratic characters or in a strongly ironic context. In Example 1 below, the gluttonous aristocrats Baron Orange and Duke Mandarin visit the wine cellars of Prince Lemon and find ‘millions of bottles’, which the baron refers to as ‘God’s grace’. The expression is preserved in the Russian translation.

- (1a) – Ferma! Ferma! – gridava il Barone. – Guardate quanta grazia di Dio! (Rodari 2010:146)
 (1b) – Стойте, стойте! – кричал барон. – Посмотрите, сколько здесь этой божьей милости! (– Stop! Stop! – cried the Baron. – Look at all this God’s grace!) (Rodari 1957:151)

In other instances, where the religious reference is not attributable to an aristocratic character, the translation omits it:

- (2a) La botola si aprì, il sor Pisello precipitò nel buio pensando: “Stavolta sono morto davvero. Sento già le voci del Paradiso.” (The hatch opened and Mr Pea fell into the darkness thinking: “This time I’m dead for sure. I can already hear the voices of Paradise.”) (Rodari 2010:100)
 (2b) Люк открылся, и синьор Горошек полетел во тьму с затянутой петлей на шее. Перед этим он успел подумать: “На этот раз я, кажется, и в самом деле умер!” (The hatch opened and Mr Pea fell into the darkness, with the noose around his neck. He only had enough time to think: “This time I’m dead for sure.”) (Rodari 1957:101)

A particularly interesting and distinguishing strategy in Potapova’s translation aims to “overdramatize and increase the sentimental effect on addressees” (Kaniklidou and House 2017:4). Here, the strategy does not result in what Kaniklidou and House define as ‘sentimentalization’ and ‘infantilization’, but rather reinforces ideological oppositions and their irreconcilability in the Russian version of Rodari’s children’s tale. This strategy might then be defined as ‘ideological amplification’. It manifests itself in the abundant vivid additions by which the Russian translation renders the difference between Rodari’s positive and negative characters even starker than in the original, putting overdramatization in the service of ideology. For example, in a sequence where Prince Lemon is simply called a prince (*principe*) in the original (Rodari 2010:203), the Russian translation adds several negative adjectives, describing the prince as ‘arrogant, cruel, but cowardly’ (*nadmennyj, zhestokij, no truslivyj prints*; Rodari 1957:212). Even the original ‘calluses’ (*calli*) on Prince Lemon’s feet (Rodari 1951:7) are rendered as ‘disgusting calluses’ (*izryadnye mozoli*) in the translation (Rodari 1957:6). In a passage in which Cipollino manages to get hold of Prince Lemon’s beloved whip, which he immediately employs on its owner (Rodari 2010:193), the Russian version (1957:201) adds that the second lash was ‘stronger than the previous one’ (*novyj udar, posil’nee prezhnego*), implying that Cipollino is not afraid to punish his oppressor ruthlessly. In the Russian translation, the odious Knight Tomato not only ‘despises’ (*nenavistnyj*) but also levels ‘curses’ (*zaklyatyy*) at Cipollino for making him cry (Rodari 2010:212; 1957:222). Even the new school system established in the book after the revolution becomes better in the Russian translation than it is in the original. While the latter (Rodari 2010:222) describes the new

school as the 'nicest game of all' (*il gioco più bello*), the translation (Rodari 1957:227) tells us it was 'the best, the most interesting and the most useful game' (*samaya luchshaya, samaya interesnaya i poleznaya dlya rebyat igra*), bringing the playful and liberating education advocated by Rodari in line with the disciplined and practice-oriented approach of Soviet schools.

Two particularly interesting passages narrate the imprisonment of the good and the bad characters in the story, an issue which resonated with the gloomy reality of Stalinist Russia. In example 3, Knight Tomato announces that he will place Cipollino in an isolated secret cell as a regular cell would not be sufficient to punish him for plotting against the authorities and trying to help other prisoners. In the original (example 3a), the boy answers bravely, saying 'it is an honour' (*è un vero onore*). The Russian translation (example 3b) reads 'Do me a favour' but adds an entire sentence that casts the protagonist in an even better light: 'Cipollino came from an honest onion family that can easily make anyone cry, but the onion family itself will not cry at any cost'. Given the ideological purpose of children's literature in the Soviet regime, the aim of this addition is to further strengthen the protagonist's image as strong and unbreakable.

(3a) – Ti rinchiuderò nella fossa segreta, – annunciò a Cipollino, – la prigione semplice non degna di te.

– Grazie, Cavaliere, – rispose Cipollino. – È un vero onore. (Rodari 2010:67)

(3b) – Чтобы доказать тебе мое особое расположение, – говорил он, издеваясь над Чиполлино, – я засажу тебя в особую, темную камеру. Простая тюрьма недостойна такого негодяя, как ты.

– Сделайте одолжение! – отвечал Чиполлино не смущаясь.

Чиполлино был из той честной луковой семьи, которая кого угодно может заставить плакать, а сама не заплачет ни при каких обстоятельствах! (Rodari 1957:67–68)

In Example 4, the roles are reversed. During the revolution Knight Tomato is captured by Cipollino and his comrades, after which he remains in prison until pardoned and granted early release in the original (4a). Furthermore, Rodari compassionately refers to imprisoned Knight Tomato as 'poor' (*poveretto*). The Russian translation (4b) prefers to see Knight Tomato incarcerated 'until the sentence is duly served', with no pardons planned and omitting the word 'poor'. These changes make the world portrayed in the translation more coherent with the Stalinist reality of the early 1950s.

(4a) Poveretto, è stato in prigione un pezzo, ma alla fine gli hanno perdonato. (Rodari 1951:239)

(4b) Он отсидел, сколько ему было положено, а потом его из тюрьмы выпустили. (Rodari 1957:225)

The changes and omissions identified in the Russian translation are thus mainly intended to amplify the ideological oppositions already present in the original, drawing on two fundamental strategies of ideological symbolic construction (Thompson 1990): differentiation, by which the positive traits of heroes and negative traits of antagonists are consistently strengthened in the Russian translation; and symbolization of unity, by which the translation's narrator reinforces the solidarity between the good characters and the ability of the Soviet reader to identify with them. Overall, the translation erases all possible ambiguities

and nuances in the ideological divides of the story, making the text even more explicit in its message than the original.

Aleksander Kurtna and the Estonian translation of *Cipollino*

The Estonian translation of *The Adventures of Cipollino* (*Cipollino seiklused*) was first published by the State Publishing House in 1960. The translator, Aleksander Kurtna (1914–1983), was a well-known figure in the cultural field and the publishing industry of Soviet Estonia. He mastered a legendary 25 languages and his output during his relatively short activity as a translator, from 1956 to his death, was extremely prolific, amounting to more than 100 plays and almost 100 novels, including authors such as Dürrenmatt, Pirandello, Dante, Mrožek, Ionesco and Cervantes.

Born in 1914 to a Lutheran Estonian father and an Orthodox Russian mother, Kurtna received his education in the schools of the independent Estonian Republic and the Orthodox seminary of Pechory. After conversion to Catholicism in 1935 he was granted a scholarship to study in the Pontifical Russian College in Rome. Although he interrupted his studies in 1940, he remained in Rome until 1944 for unspecified research on Estonian history in the Vatican Archive. The research was funded until 1940 by the independent Estonian Republic, then by the Soviet Academy of Science, and from 1941 by the German Institute of history in Rome. During the war Kurtna travelled without hindrance from Rome to Soviet Estonia in 1940 as well as to Nazi occupied Estonia in 1942. A plausible explanation for this exceptional freedom of movement is that Kurtna acted as a double agent for Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany (Erelt 2010a, 2010b). In his memoirs, written during the Soviet period, Kurtna (1966) makes no mention of this, and instead highlights his participation in the Roman resistance. In fact, he was arrested in 1942 by the Italian fascists and spent one year in jail until the fall of Mussolini. In 1944, after the liberation of Rome, it was the Allies who arrested Kurtna and detained him for a couple of months. At the end of the war he was sent by the Soviet authorities to the Siberian camp of Norilsk, where he was imprisoned from 1945 to 1954. After the death of Stalin, he was released and returned to Soviet Estonia, where he earned a living as a translator and language teacher.

Experience of living at the crossroads of different languages, cultures, countries and worldviews and his capacity to adapt and survive in any situation are the most striking features of Kurtna's profile. Estonian dramaturg Mati Unt (2000) describes him as “a naive idealist and an insidious Jesuit”, while journalist Peka Erelt (2010b) concludes his detailed research on Kurtna's espionage activity by claiming that “being the slave of many masters, [Kurtna] deceived them all”. In his play *Brother Enrico and His Bishop*, Estonian writer Jaan Kross (2000) imagines Kurtna surviving in the Soviet Gulag thanks to his polyglotism, which afforded him the opportunity to work as an interpreter in the hospital of the prison camp, where inmates of different nationalities were detained.

The first piece Kurtna published after his return from the Gulag was an article for the cultural magazine *Sirp ja Vasar* (Hammer and Sickle) in which he called for direct translation from the original language, against the widespread practice in the post-war Soviet Union of using Russian as a relay language for indirect translations (Kurtna 1956). This was not only a practical issue, given the scarcity of translators from less well-known languages, but an ideological one: Russian translations had already been approved by the censorship authorities and were therefore safe texts to base translations on. Although Kurtna limits himself

to linguistic examples in this article, at the beginning of the process of de-Stalinization his critique of the 'deformations' caused by indirect translations from Russian was a hidden reference to ideological manipulation.

At first glance, the Estonian translation of *Cipollino* seems at odds with Kurtna's views on indirect translation, because in many passages the Estonian translation clearly draws on the Russian translation rather than the Italian original. This is evident in the case of translating religious terms, where Kurtna consistently follows the strategy adopted by the Russian translator in his choice of preservation or omission, as discussed in the previous section.⁴ More importantly, Kurtna also follows the Russian translation in its ideological amplifications of the characteristics of good and bad characters in the tale. This makes the instances in which Kurtna opted for fidelity to the original rather than to the Russian translation more significant, including the two passages discussed above that relate to the imprisonment of the protagonist and the main antagonist in the book, respectively. When Cipollino is imprisoned in a special cell, Kurtna does not include the sentence added in the Russian translation about the fearlessness of Cipollino's family and its ruthlessness against class enemies. He also follows the original very closely in the passage about the pardoning of 'poor' Knight Tomato and his release from prison before the sentence is fully served (example 5).

- (5) **Vaeseke**, ta oli üsna kaua vangis, **aga lõpuks kingiti talle ülejäänud karistusaeg**. (The poor thing was quite in prison for a long time, but in the end he was pardoned and didn't have to serve the rest of the sentence) (Rodari 1960:148)

While it was unthinkable during the Stalinist period, the idea of pardoning political prisoners is in line with the ideology of the Thaw period, during which Khrushchev released millions of people, Kurtna included, from the Gulag camps.

Italian, Soviet and Estonian republics

We now consider more closely an example of how Kurtna exploited the original in ways that already transcended the limits of Soviet ideological discourse, even in its more liberal version of the Thaw period. The discrepancies between the Russian and Estonian translations here reveal Kurtna's manipulation of the unsettling potentialities of the text of *Cipollino* and its translation.

The regime of Prince Lemon is characterized in Rodari's tale as a despotic form of government which represses dissent, but is not defined in more specific political terms. By contrast, the regime instituted after the revolution is defined politically as a 'republic' in the last two chapters of the original. The choice of the term in 1951 in Italy is immediately meaningful. The Italian republic had been proclaimed in 1946 after a referendum sanctioning the end of the monarchy, which had colluded with Mussolini. The republic was consequently a symbol of the defeat of fascism by the Resistance and the Italian democratic parties; in addition, it revived a long progressive tradition stretching from ancient Rome to the most radical experiences of the *Risorgimento*, which – in the imaginary of the Italian people – connected the idea of the republic with the fight for freedom from tyranny.

In the history of the revolutionary transition from centuries of despotic monarchs to Soviet power, the Russian Republic led by Aleksandr Kerenski constituted a very short experience, lasting from the 1917 February revolution to the proclamation of the Russian

Soviet Republic after the Bolshevik coup in November of the same year. While formally a union of republics, the USSR and all its components were first of all ‘soviet’ and ‘socialist’. The ‘land of the soviets’ (*sovetskaya strana*) was the commonly used epithet for the new state. The term republic thus not only lacked a tradition in Soviet Russia, it also problematically evoked the experience of Kerenski’s government, which was swept away by the Bolsheviks as a remnant of bourgeois power. This may explain why the Russian translator opted for the term ‘republic’ (*respublika*) only in the first of the four passages in which *repubblica* occurs in the original, where Rodari (2010:203) writes that the ‘republic had been proclaimed’ (*era stata proclamata la repubblica*). It is notable that Potapova (Rodari 1957:212) feels the need to add the adjective ‘free’ (*svobodnaya*) to ‘republic’, and in another addition writes that the republic was proclaimed in the ‘land/country’ for which she uses the Russian word *strana*, the same word used in *sovetskaya strana* (the land of the soviets). In the remaining three passages where it occurs, the Russian translation omits the word ‘republic’. When Rodari (2010:213) talks about the ‘the initial period of the Republic’ (*I primi tempi della Repubblica*), Potapova (Rodari 1957:224) simply translates this as ‘in the first instance’ (*na pervykh porakh*), and in two other passages where the original (Rodari 2010:210–211) mentions the ‘flag of the republic’ (*bandiera della repubblica*) she most notably replaces ‘republic’ with ‘freedom’: *znamya Svobody*, that is, the ‘flag of freedom’ (Rodari 1957:220–221).

In the case of Estonia the concept of republic is embedded in a politically charged tradition, and its use was even more problematic during the Soviet period. The formally Socialist Soviet Republic of Estonia was *de facto* a puppet republic annexed to the Soviet Union. The country was generally referred to simply as Soviet Estonia (*Nõukogude Eesti*) in order to clearly differentiate it from the interwar independent state, the Republic of Estonia (*Eesti Vabariik*). Consequently, if not for the children born after the war, at least for the generation of the Estonian translator, the use of ‘republic’ without any qualification was highly ambiguous, potentially understood as referring to the current puppet republic as well as, and more likely, to the independent Estonian Republic that was wiped from the map of Europe by Soviet occupation. It is therefore remarkable that Kurtna sticks closely to the Italian source text and, importantly, diverges from the Russian one in the translation of all four occurrences of *repubblica*. A closer look at two particular passages (examples 6 and 7 below), where the contextual and co-textual environments inevitably create associations with the history of the independent Estonian republic, will clarify this further.

- (6a) Essendo scappato senza voltarsi indietro, non sapeva nemmeno che le sue guardie avevano tagliato la corda /.../ e che era stata proclamata la repubblica (Rodari 2010: 203)
- (6b) Põgenenud kordagi tagasi vaatamata, et teadnud vürst, et ta ihukaitsjad olid üle läinud rahva poole /.../ ja et **oli välja kuulutatud vabariik**. (Rodari 1960:157)
(As he ran away without looking back, the prince didn’t know that his bodyguards had joined the people /.../ and the republic had been proclaimed)

In example 6, Kurtna translates the passage mentioned above about the proclamation of the republic after the victorious revolution very literally as “vabariik oli välja kuulutatud” (Rodari 1960:157). He uses not only the word republic (*vabariik*) without any addition, but also the same verb (*välja kuulutama*) and formulation that we find in the Manifesto to All the Peoples of Estonia (*Manifest kõigile Eestimaa rahvastele*), which announced the birth of the

new, independent state of Estonia on 24 February 1918: “Eestima... **kuulutatakse** tänasest peale iseseisvaks demokraatlikseks **vabariigiks**” (‘Estonia ... is **proclaimed** from today an independent democratic **republic**’). The painting *Eesti Vabariigi väljakuulutamine* (‘Proclamation of the Estonian Republic’, 1925) by painter Maximilian Maksolly is an iconic representation of this event. It was hidden during the Soviet period in the depository of the Museum of the city of Tallinn, becoming accessible to the public only in 1989, on the eve of the collapse of the USSR.

(7a) Erano così stanchi che camminavano con gli occhi chiusi, così uno solo di loro vide che sulla torre del Castello sventolava la bandiera della Repubblica. (Rodari 2010:210)

(7b) Nad olid nii väsinud, et kõndisid kinnisilmi, nii et keegi neist ei näinud, et **lossi tornis lehvib vabariigi lipp**. (Rodari 1960:144)

(They were so tired that they walked with eyes closed, and none of them noticed that the flag of the republic was flying from the tower of the castle)

In example 7, the flag of the Republic (*bandiera della repubblica*) is flying from the tower of Prince Lemon’s castle, the seat of despotic power now diminished. Rodari’s text (2010:210) explains that Cipollino had ‘planted’ (*piantare*) the flag there during the night and was now waiting for events to unfold in the tower. As we have seen, the Russian translator replaces ‘republic’ with ‘freedom’ so that it is the ‘flag of freedom’ that waves from the tower of the castle in the Russian translation. Following the original, Kurtna (Rodari 1960:161) translates *bandiera della repubblica* as *vabariigi lipp* (‘the flag of the republic’), which in Estonian unequivocally refers to the blue-black-white flag of the interwar years as well as the present independent Estonian republic. Moreover, the flag of the republic was hoisted for the first time on the tower of Tallinn’s Toompea castle (just as in the translation!), which had been the headquarters of the Russian Empire’s governor, on 25 February 1918, a day after the proclamation of the independent republic. The castle then became the seat of the Estonian parliament. The flag of the republic was removed from the tower and replaced with the red flag at the beginning of the Soviet occupation in the summer of 1940, when the castle became the seat of the Supreme Council of Soviet Estonia. The flag of the Estonian republic was strictly banned during the Soviet period, and keeping a *vabariigi lipp* at home was enough reason to send those deemed responsible to Siberia. The ‘flag of the republic’ was mounted again on the Toompea castle only at the very end of the Soviet Union, at the peak of the Estonian Singing Revolution in 1989.

Kurtna’s reference to the ‘flag of the republic’ flying from the tower of the castle and sanctioning the ‘proclamation of the republic’ and the liberation of the people from a despotic power was, even in the relatively liberal 1960s of the Soviet Thaw, something that could be done only in translation. The problematic political subtext is here activated through a source-oriented translation (compared with the Russian one) in which Kurtna carefully opts for lexical choices that reinforce the evocative effect of the passages discussed above. Thus, where Cipollino ‘plants’ (*piantare*) the flag of the republic on the tower in Rodari’s original, in Kurtna’s translation he hoists (*heiskama*) it. This is the official verb used in Estonian to refer to state flags such as the *vabariigi lipp* of the independent Estonian republic.

In Rodari’s story, when Knight Tomato sees the flag of the republic waving on the tower of the castle he thinks of it as a joke that ‘went much too far’. The same can be said of Kurtna’s

translation, which quite successfully challenges through Rodari's text the limits of the sayable under Soviet rule. The anti-authoritarian potential of Rodari's book is thus mobilized in the Estonian translation, which is more source-oriented on the face of it, but in fact subtly connects the narrative with Estonian history. The Russian translation, on the other hand, is exclusively aimed at amplifying the ideological function of the book in the target context, eliminating or replacing all the elements of the original that do not serve this objective. Finally, it is interesting to observe that whereas Rodari (2010:209–210) writes that 'only one' (*solo uno di loro*) of the despotic antagonists (Knight Tomato) saw the flag waving on the tower of the castle (see example 7a above), and the Russian translator (Rodari 1957:220) follows the original closely, Kurtna curiously has it that 'none of them' (*keegi neist*) saw the *vabariigi lipp*, thus introducing a small inconsistency in the story. Could this just be a translation error, or could it be that Kurtna is subtly commenting on the short-sightedness of Soviet censors who did not notice the lost republic and banned flag that his translation quite straightforwardly evoked?

The Adventures of Cipollino in the post-Soviet space

Russian literary critic Sergey Belyakov (2013) claimed that almost none of the old 'class struggle' narratives for children survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, while *Cipollino* continued to be a popular book in many countries of the former USSR. Translations of the book have been reprinted and the tale has been repeatedly staged in post-soviet Russia as well as Estonia. The book still appears on the recommended reading list published by the Ministry of Education of Russia, currently for the second and third grades (Narod 2021), and it was included by the Estonian Children's Literature Centre in its list of summer reading for 2020. If at first sight it may seem that the tale has lost its ideological character and become just a funny story with talking vegetables, a closer look reveals that the tale has maintained its political relevance despite undergoing a process of resignification in the post-Soviet context, with surprising results.

The original, anti-authoritarian potential of *Cipollino* has resurfaced in Putin's Russia, giving rise to adaptations that diverge from the Soviet tradition. In 2014, a Moscow-based theatre, the Actors' Society of Taganka, omitted the revolutionary element from its theatrical adaptation of Rodari's book, causing critics and journalists to ponder whether the new unofficial (self-)censorship of Putin's era deemed *Cipollino*'s original story unsuitable, with its characters clearly displaying anti-authoritarian tendencies that are unwelcome in contemporary Russia (Khartyya 97 2014; Maysuryan 2014). More recently, in 2019, a play based on Rodari's *Cipollino* was banned from the Molodye-Molodym amateur theatre festival, sponsored by the Moscow municipality because of its content. The adaptation was thought to feature references to topical and politically sensitive issues in Russia at the time, and the festival organizers thus deemed it unsuitable. According to the director, who openly called for support on social media, the head of the jury and director of the Stsena cultural centre where the festival was taking place decided that "she cannot take the risk", since the board of the cultural centre has to consider "employees, families, loans" (Novaya Gazeta 2019). It appears that the meaning of the story and its characters has shifted as *Cipollino*, once again, at least partially, goes underground – an area surely not unknown to a root vegetable such as Onion Boy – and becomes the dissident that Rodari wished to portray in post-war Italy. In 2014, another scandal broke out regarding *Cipollino*'s inclusion in a textbook of mathematics for Russian elementary schools. An official review by the Russian

Academy of Education condemned its use of foreign literary characters as unsuitable and excluded it from the federal list of study material (Kostochkin 2014; Yakoreva 2014).⁵

New interpretations of Cipollino have also emerged in other ex-Soviet countries, most notably Ukraine, following the Euromaidan events of 2013–2014. To give one example, a reading list published on the website of the important publishing house Stry Lev recommended Rodari's famous story to help explain the Maidan revolution to children (Kupriyan 2014). Cipollino famously accompanied Nadiya Savchenko while this military pilot and symbol of Ukraine's defence against its eastern neighbour was kept as a political prisoner in Russia. In May 2016, while still under detention, Savchenko asked her sister to post her photos of a homemade paper doll puppet theatre called *Cipollino Maidan* on Facebook, together with alternative descriptions of Rodari's characters. Among them we find, for instance, Prince Lemon, a "tyrant" and a "dickhead",⁶ as well as Cipollino's father, a "political prisoner, Maidan activist, Ukrainian patriot". In an interview with the Canadian–American lifestyle magazine *Vice*, Savchenko spoke about learning origami in prison and said she liked the idea of Cipollino being "a revolutionary who wanted to change the world for the better" (Kale 2016). Her Facebook post also includes Savchenko's hand-written explanation that reads: "Before you and your kids play with these toys, instigate an uprising, make a revolution, and build Ukraine, your new home – read them the story of Cipollino" (Kale 2016; Voices of Ukraine 2016).

Thus it appears that while the political regimes and times have changed, the Onion Boy still maintains his vitality and revolutionary spirit in ever-transforming socio-political contexts, the story constantly renewing its meaning and thus reproducing its significance in the midst of pivotal historic events in the post-Soviet space.



FIGURE 11.2 A doll puppet theatre called *Cipollino Maidan* made by Ukrainian pilot and political prisoner Nadiya Savchenko, who urged parents to read their children the story of Cipollino as an inspiration for building "Ukraine, your new home"

Unsettling translation

At first glance, the history of the translation of Gianni Rodari's *The Adventures of Cipollino* into the languages of the USSR is a straightforward example of the ideological appropriation of children's literature in the Soviet Union. A story written by an Italian communist author as a hymn to the rebellion of the oppressed against their oppressors was easy to turn into a vegetal allegory of class struggle and the proletariat revolution that could be employed in the Marxist–Leninist education of young Soviet citizens. The Russian translation of 1953, which served as a model for translations produced in the other languages of the USSR, is careful to eliminate any ambivalence from the tale, amplifying the clarity of ideological divides and judgements. The cultural appropriation of Rodari's book in a long series of transmedial adaptations secured the fortune of the Onion Boy as a model of conduct in the imagination of all post-war Soviet generations.

The story could end here; and on the macrolevel it probably does. To unsettle translation required us to move to the microlevel of translation strategies, comparing the Russian translation of 1953 with the later Estonian translation of 1960. The choices of the Estonian translator in the passages where he diverges from his Russian colleague allow a different, more nuanced and ambiguous story to emerge. On the one hand, the Estonian translation mirrors the new, more liberal cultural atmosphere of Khrushchev's Thaw. On the other, it reflects the personality and experience of the translator and his political loyalty to the history of independent Estonia, to which he pays hidden homage by following Rodari's original rather than the omissions and changes of the Russian translation. By unsettling the translation at this level we have shown how translation itself can become unsettling. Initially, the unsettling potential of translation remained a game of nuance and subtlety in Kurtina's version of *Cipollino*, hiding within a children's book a signal to adults, and doing it so skilfully that no one really paid much attention to it. Things interestingly change after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is the context in which the unsettling potential of *Cipollino*'s translation and its adaptations becomes more evident, and paradoxically also the moment when (self-) censorship directly intervenes in Russia to ban disturbing interpretations of the story.

This case study has contributed to the investigation of the synchronic (centre versus periphery) and diachronic (Stalinism versus Thaw) dynamics of Soviet power and the tensions that continue to affect the post-Soviet socio-political space. By unsettling translation and exploring translation's unsettling potential we not only establish translation as a fully historical object, but also create the conditions in which it is possible to study it as "a cultural practice interacting with other practices in a historical continuum" (Hermans 1999:118), directly addressing what Theo Hermans has called the "formative role" of translation in history (ibid.:144).

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Notes

- 1 Stalin died in 1953, the same year the translation was published, but the process of de-Stalinization gained momentum only in 1956, when the new party leader, Nikita Khrushchev, denounced Stalin's crimes.

- 2 “L'avvio di un'educazione realistica e critica, rigorosa e veramente sollecitante e creativa nelle nostre scuole”. All translations are the authors' unless otherwise indicated.
- 3 For example *zuchina* (courgette) is translated as 'pumpkin', and the title *Gran Ciambellano* (Lord Great Chamberlain) is translated as 'courtier', which are more common phenomena in the Russian context.
- 4 One exception is the expression *essere una manna* (to be a manna, to be a true blessing), which is omitted in the Russian translation, but preserved in the Estonian. This can be explained by the different force of the biblical connotation carried by this expression in the Estonian and Russian languages. In Estonian, the expression is widely used and its biblical connotation appears to have weakened over time.
- 5 According to the official expert report issued by the Russian Academy of Education for the Ministry of Education and Science, “the content of the textbook for mathematics does not encourage patriotism. The commitment of [these characters] to foster patriotic feelings and pride in one's homeland and one's nation is questionable” (Mukhametshina 2014).
- 6 Savchenko uses the Ukrainian obscene word *khuylo*, which, since the Euromaidan revolution, has become strongly associated with the Russian president Vladimir Putin in the slogan “Putin – khuylo!”.

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12

RETRANSLATING 'KARA TOPRAK'

Ecofeminism revisited through a canonical folk song

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The Turkish folk¹ classic 'Kara Toprak' (Black/Dark Earth/Soil/Land) was composed by Aşık Veysel (1894–1973), *bağlama* virtuoso and prominent representative of the Anatolian *aşık* tradition.² The song offers a non-Western perspective on the gendering of nature and on the unity of God, nature and humans. In the Turkish context, it symbolizes human mortality and our dependence on and embeddedness in nature. While the lyrics (see Appendix) invite the listeners to rethink their relationship with the Earth and reconsider what they toil for in life, the song nevertheless perpetuates the belief that, being abundant and fecund, nature will forever provide for humans, provided it is respected and cared for. This belief in the boundless resources of nature, reinforced through the use of gendered metaphors for the Earth, led me to approach 'Kara Toprak' through the critical lens of ecofeminism, as both the belief in the fecundity of nature and the associated metaphors have been foci of ecofeminist debates.

Ecofeminism, an area of study encompassing different positions and theories on feminism and environmentalism, was formulated in the 1980s and gained prominence in the early 1990s (Gaard 1993; Plumwood 1993; Mies and Shiva 1993/2014). Its many strands focused on the interconnected relationships between the oppression and domination of women and the domination and exploitation of nature (Moore 2015:58; Kings 2017:70). Ecofeminist scholars have offered thought-provoking and thorough "analyses of the connections among racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, speciesism, and the environment" (Gaard 2011:27). However, within both feminist and environmentalist circles, ecofeminism has been declared dead, old-fashioned, an embarrassing chapter in the development of feminist thought on environmental and material issues.³ Its arguments were "rendered suspect by concerns that it presents women as being closer to nature than men are and especially by claims that link this to women's role as childbearers and childrearers, something that feminists have worked hard to undermine" (Moore 2015:6). By the end of the 1990s, ecofeminism was critiqued as essentialist and universalist, and consigned to oblivion. Scholars did continue to work on the intersection of feminism and environmentalism, but preferred to rename their approach in order to avoid any negative connotations arising from the label (Gaard 2011:26).⁴

Ecofeminism has been presented as a thing of the past, and folk songs have been discarded into oblivion in many parts of the world. Paradoxically, many environmentalists are turning to what they consider to be the wisdom of the indigenous, to the people assumed to have lived on/with the land harmoniously for millennia. This recourse to, and often the appropriation of, the knowledge of the indigenous is rooted in Western desires “to possess indigenous knowledges (as) held within a primitivist stereotype of the environmentally ‘valid’ and ‘useful’ indigene” (Jacobs 1994:90; see also McCredden 1997; Wilson 2005).⁵ Inevitably, scholars and activists who yearn for these knowledges can only try to understand indigenous unity with the land and all that lives on it through their own cracked lens of dichotomies such as nature/culture, human/nature, non-human/human, God/human, and male/female, based on the “traditional Western Cartesian conception of reality” (Kings 2017:75). Dualisms are often used for purposes of categorization and control, where a supposedly weaker party is placed under the domination of a stronger one, e.g. woman and nature vis-à-vis patriarchy (Swanson 2015:87). Even the Western ecofeminists’ revolt against patriarchal and capitalist systems is rooted in these very dichotomies. Rather unsurprisingly, certain critiques of ecofeminism identified it “as a Western phenomenon that could not easily be translated to, or imposed on, non-Western contexts” (Moore 2015:11). There are other conceptualizations of humans and the Earth that are not based on these dichotomies and they may open up new avenues of discussion. For ecofeminism to survive and still be useful, it would help to acknowledge “the relevance of other epistemologies” (Wilson 2005:350), especially those coming from lands not directly colonized by Western powers.

The argument put forward in this chapter reflects my belief that ecofeminism is still a useful and timely framework which can offer valuable insights. My goal here is to further develop some of the tenets of ecofeminism through the lens of translation by focusing on the ecological and spiritual views of a man from a peripheral language and culture – and within that culture from a rural background. In discussing some of the concepts articulated in the song and their possible translations into English, my objectives are to show how ecofeminist theories and ideas have informed my process of retranslating ‘Kara Toprak’, to address some of the criticisms directed at ecofeminism, and to contribute to the re-evolving ecofeminist debates by extending the applicability of this theoretical framework to other languages and cultures beyond the Anglophone ones.⁶ The retranslation I offer here does not aim to be a singable version of the song but treats the lyrics as a poem; and, it is of course only one among many possible interpretations.

My starting point in what follows is not a romanticization of the Anatolian mystic knowledge embedded in the song but debates on intersectionality, which has emerged as a key tool in many feminisms, including ecofeminism. Intersectionality helps illuminate the interconnectedness of various dimensions of identity, such as race, class, gender, dis/ability, sexuality, caste, religion, species, nationality, age and the effects which these can have on the discrimination against and oppression of the most vulnerable (Kings 2017:64, 71, 83). Ecofeminism’s ongoing revival/survival (Gaard 2011; Moore 2015; Swanson 2015; Kings 2017; Gough and Whitehouse 2020) entails listening to the voices of all the oppressed, with their various intersecting identities. To these I add here the voice of a male songwriter with a disability who lived and died in rural central Anatolia, albeit reinterpreted through the voice of a female British academic and translator originally from urban central Anatolia, both advocating for an ethics of caring for the Earth. Like Swanson (2015:95), I believe that “an ecofeminist ethic of care is inclusive” and that we have

to move past a divisive binary where the possibility of caring for this Earth is left up to, or best tended to, by women-as-leaders [...] No longer does *she* bear responsibility for fixing the Earth-damage of *him*. It becomes *our* responsibility; it is up to *us*; *we* all have to take responsibility from here on. [emphasis in original]

Aşık Veysel and ‘Kara Toprak’

Aşık Veysel Şatıroğlu was born to a farming family in 1894, in Sivrialan, Sivas, and died in the same village in 1973. He is highly regarded as a prominent poet of Turkish folk literature of the twentieth century. After going blind in childhood, first through smallpox, then an accident (Gümüş 2019:177), his father presented him with a *bağlama*, a traditional plucked string instrument. He learned folk poems and songs through his parents and the *aşıks* who visited his village (ibid.:177). His work, which came to symbolize the local and the Anatolian, gained recognition in Turkey within the context of the state- and nation-building efforts of the 1930s, contributing to cultural identity formation in the young Republic of Turkey (ibid.). His songs were canonized through state radio and TV broadcasts over the following decades, and from 1965 to his death he was allocated a monthly salary by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in return for “his contribution to our native language and national solidarity”.⁷ His songs covered a range of themes, generally “based on morals, values, and constant questioning on issues such as love, care, beliefs, and how he saw the world as a blind man” (ibid.). Among more than 200 songs attributed to Aşık Veysel, ‘Kara Toprak’ and ‘Uzun İnce bir Yoldayım’ (I’m on a Long, Narrow Path) are the two best known, with the former arguably his most quoted (Parlak 2011:184).

Over the years, and especially since the start of the twenty-first century, ‘Kara Toprak’ generated several Turkish covers in a variety of genres, including contemporary folk with local and acoustic instruments, jazz, heavy metal, rock and rap, as well as classical guitar covers by Turkish and international musicians. Most notably, the renowned Turkish pianist and composer Fazıl Say based his acclaimed piece ‘Black Earth’ on Veysel’s ‘Kara Toprak’. Among the covers, that by a Turkish singer-songwriter of international fame, Tarkan, released as a single in 2013, remains the best known. Given the scope of this contribution, it is impossible to do justice to all these covers and to the multifaceted symbolism in ‘Kara Toprak’. In what follows, I focus on certain key concepts that feature in or inform the poem, how they may be translated into English, and how the discussion surrounding these concepts may feed into ecofeminist debates.

Is *Toprak* the Earth and *Kara* Black/Dark?

There are several existing translations of ‘Kara Toprak’ in English, mainly offered by Turkish fans on lyrics forums for the purpose of providing basic access to the content of the song.⁸ The only singable version, featuring the first, second and final stanzas, is by Tyson Nyofu, a US-based musician who has spent many years in Turkey.⁹ In these versions, the title is usually translated as ‘Black Earth’, and at least on two occasions as ‘Dark Earth’ (Nyofu’s singable version mentioned above, and Nazmi Ağıl’s version cited in Parlak 2011:184–185). ‘Black earth’ is a geological term, a direct translation of *chernozem* from soil science – literally black earth, from Russian *cherno* (black) and *zemla* (earth) – referring to a type of fertile black soil rich in humus. ‘Dark earth’, on the other hand, is an archaeological term.

It refers to a thick sediment which includes organic matter such as charcoal, indicating settlement over long periods of time; the term also evokes the rather unfortunate collocation 'dark continent' and its colonial and misogynistic overtones.¹⁰

The two words in the title are worth examining in some detail. *Toprak* in Turkish covers a range of concepts: soil, earth, land and ground – but without the dirt connotation of 'soil' in English. It is a tactile word, referring to something one can stoop down and pick up, something that crumbles in the hand and is good for growing things in. At the same time, it can signify land, especially one's homeland, mainly in the plural form (*topraklar*). 'Earth' in English, on the other hand, evokes first and foremost the planet we live on, the globe one cannot see in its entirety except from space; it is typically translated into Turkish as *dünya* (the world). The first part of the title, 'kara', has two meanings in Turkish: one, with its origins in the Arabic *qārra* (meaning continent), is land, the part of the Earth not covered by the oceans. The second meaning, with its origins in old Turkish, is 'black/dark', and is widely used in modern day Turkish alongside *siyah*, a word of Persian origin, which also signifies 'black'. At first glance, then, 'Kara Toprak' means humus soil, which is rich in dark, organic material made up of decaying plant and animal matter, and which is crucial for the health and fertility of the land. This perspective is in line with one of the poem's premises, viewing soil as a living being, a system – a premise held also by some Western agriculturalists since at least the start of the twentieth century (Harshberger 1911). Yet, as I explain below, there are other layers to the meaning of 'Kara Toprak', hence my decision to leave it untranslated in the version I offer here, in an attempt to direct attention to the diverse conceptualizations of soil/land/earth.¹¹

In her book on the changing nature of eco/feminism, Niamh Moore (2015) offers a genealogy of ecofeminist theories and activism to address the critiques of essentialism and universalism directed at ecofeminists in the 1990s. One strategy she uses is to focus on local, situated knowledges and the listing of activist hubs and networks, such as the Clayoquot Sound protests in Canada, the Chipko movement in India, and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the UK (Moore 2015:59). What these protests and movements had in common was the various ways in which debates on feminism and environmentalism intertwined in their coming into being. What makes each of them unique, on the other hand, is their focus on the here and now, the local and the tangible, as opposed to the abstract – the land as opposed to the Earth. They all emphasize "work which began not with abstracted notions of wilderness or rainforest, but with [e.g.] Clayoquot, with attention to the specificities of the politics of location and situated knowledges" (Moore 2015:23).

A similar concern with local and situated knowledges can be found in the life of Aşık Veysel, who reputedly established the first orchard in Sivrialan with the help of his siblings (Yılmaz 2019:3570). In a land known to be arid and barren, the family managed to grow a garden of apples and apricots, cherries and walnuts (*ibid.*). It is this intimate connection with the land he grew up on, and the knowledge of the soil he was working with, that is reflected in 'Kara Toprak', rather than a concern about the Earth in general. I would therefore argue that translating *toprak* in the title and the refrain with the more abstract 'Earth' would go counter to the emphasis on locality, on "the land that we live on" – as expressed by the First Nations people, such as Anishinabek in Canada and the US (cited in Wilson 2005:342–343).

In order to do justice to the conceptualization of the land and its specificity, any translation of this poem must take its historical and local context into consideration. 'Kara Toprak' is arguably *the* poem quoted in writings on the relationship between nature and the

Anatolians, as its multi-layered philosophical and mystic approach embodies their traditional conceptualization of nature (Yılmaz 2019:3566). This conceptualization is partially based on the fact that the people of Anatolia have depended on agriculture, therefore nature, for their survival for thousands of years (Parlak 2011:172). Parlak (ibid.:173) explains that before settling down in Anatolia, the Turks coming from Central Asia had

a nomadic life style. This meant more exposure to nature and natural forces, which were often unpredictable. Their efforts to understand nature and to attribute meaning to the forces that shaped it led them to develop systems of belief that placed these natural forces in the center of their lives. They believed that there was life in everything they could and could not perceive through their senses; therefore everything was sacred to a certain extent. Although their religious system was a blend of animism and shamanism, many Turkish groups had also been acquainted with Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, both of which placed utmost significance to man's [*sic*] harmonious existence with and within the natural environments.

This conceptualization, with its origins in Central Asia and later in Anatolia, is markedly different from the 'master model' (Plumwood 1993) that shaped Western culture's relationship with nature, which is based on taming, owning, extracting and exploiting – a process often facilitated through the employment of gendered metaphors.

Is *Toprak* the Mother?

The almost automatic translation of 'Kara Toprak' as 'Black Earth' that can be observed in the existing – non-professional – translations of the song is far from being literal or a translation error. Although Turkish has no grammatical gender, the personification of land/earth as an all-giving female is a trope shared in both the source and the target cultural contexts. While in English there is 'Mother Earth', in Turkish, there is *Toprak Ana* (literally Land/Earth Mother), a concept which goes back to ancient Turkic mythologies from Central Asia, as the complement to *Gök Ata* (literally Sky Father). Over the centuries the latter has fallen out of use, while the former is alive and well in common parlance.

What English speakers tend to visualize as Mother Earth is the globe and its biosphere personified as the giver and sustainer of life – an idealized image of a mother. For Turkish speakers, *Toprak Ana* is the ground beneath their feet, not only as the giver and sustainer of life, but also as the ultimate destination of a person's life. The standard idiom *toprağa vermek* (to give to the earth, i.e. to bury someone) is often worded as *toprak ananın koynuna koymak/virmek* (to place in/give to the embrace/bosom of Mother Earth) by grieving families and their circle of friends and relatives, in an attempt to offer some comfort in their sorrow. Other traditional idioms such as *topraktan gelir toprağa gideriz* (we come from soil/earth, we go back to soil/earth) are used as reminders of the transient nature of life, and the fact that our lives between birth and death are fully dependent on *toprak*.¹² According to Şenocak (2017:507), "*Toprak* is the mythological site of death, rebirth, striking roots, change and transformation, therefore an invitation to humans to face the realities they keep avoiding".¹³ *Toprak* is the ultimate recycler, transforming all life that unites with it, thus preparing "the basis for other living beings that will be created out of them" (ibid:515). The Turkish understanding of *Toprak Ana* thus reflects the Life/Death/Life cycle, unlike the English 'Mother

Earth', whose more problematic facets of death and transformation have been erased from collective consciousness over time.

The personification of *toprak* as a compassionate, protective and nurturing mother is extensively discussed in several articles that focus on the song (Şenocak 2017; Yılmaz 2019; Gümüş 2019). Şenocak, for instance, structures her article around five different facets of Mother Earth in Veysel's poem – a loyal lover and friend; the source of life, abundance and fertility; the healer; the origin of humankind and process of change and transformation; and the site of labouring and well-deserved income (2017:504–505). She then goes on to perpetuate the long-suffering, selfless, unappreciated, ever-forgiving and ever-patient image of the Turkish mother in her work, further anthropomorphizing *toprak* (ibid.:511). This interpretation is in line with the essentialism implied in the gendered Mother Earth metaphor (Gaard 2011:37), which has been intensely criticized by ecofeminists. As McCredden (1997:126) observes,

In a diverse range of patriarchal, as well as feminist, ecological and postcolonial discourses, the metaphor of mother earth has been invoked. It is used variously to emphasise fecundity, nurture, oneness and even bigness of creation, and – in the case of patriarchal and imperial discourses – plunderability.

Here I would argue that, notwithstanding the Turkic conceptualization of *Toprak Ana*, in this song *toprak* is not so much (or only) a mother, but a lover and a friend the poet keeps coming back to, sometimes as his equal, but often as an entity much greater than him (see also Yılmaz 2019:3570). It is not an infantilizing relationship where the supposedly female figure keeps on giving indefinitely, but a relationship of give and take, as I explain further in the final section of this chapter. Throughout my translation of the poem, I therefore avoided using any personal or possessive pronouns for *toprak*, in an attempt to reflect the neutrality and ambiguity in Turkish – as well as the language's ability to drop these pronouns when not needed – and to avoid conflation of the image of *toprak* with Mother Earth, as several of the existing translations have done. It is only in the final stanza ("One day, *toprak* will take Veysel to its bosom"), where the active voice was crucial to indicate agency, that I juxtaposed the neutral pronoun 'it' with 'bosom', usually associated with the feminine. In order to avoid over-gendering, I also opted for 'true' as the translation of *sadık* in the refrain ("My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*"), while existing translations often render it as 'faithful', a virtue historically associated with women.

Such metaphors depicting the Earth as a lover or friend are still suspect, of course, as they "imply a soft, kind, receptive, healing, warm and loving entity [which] is partial at best" and "utopian, romantic, and imaginary" at worst (Heather Eaton, cited in Moore 2015:208–209).¹⁴ Yet, reducing the imagery in 'Kara Toprak' to that of a generous and kind Mother Earth would not do justice to the poem's multi-layered philosophy, which is based on Sufism. Aşık Veysel comes from a long tradition of folk poets and Sufi mystics who lived in Anatolia, such as Rumi, Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş, Karacaoğlan and Pir Sultan Abdal; it is their teachings which helped him "express himself in the traditional aşık and dervish tradition" (Parlak 2011:183). In Veysel's poems and songs, as in those of his predecessors and masters, nature is regarded as God's great work and "love for the beloved, nature, and God is intermingled" (ibid.:183). Sufis tend to see the Creator in all the created, including the humans, and love all the created for the sake of the Creator. They

believe that “God is omnipresent and visible in everything one can perceive; hence there is oneness and unity in the universe” (ibid.:178). Furthermore, ‘Kara Toprak’ embodies the Sufi understanding that being united with the soil in death is returning to one’s original source (Yılmaz 2019:3569),¹⁵ that death is not the end but the ultimate union with the real lover (Gümüş 2019:183–184). Veysel’s, or his narrator’s, search for “the true beloved” – for truth – therefore ends in an understanding that he had “wandered in vain, toiled away for nothing” and in his realization and acceptance of his mortality (Gümüş 2019:182). *Toprak* thus emerges as the one true beloved, who not only provides for Veysel throughout his life, but is also the “vehicle or metaphor that will bring him to God” (ibid.:183–184). It is not only this implied unity between God, nature and humans, but also the references in the ninth stanza to the point, or dot, representing God’s creative processes in the Sufi tradition (ibid.:183), that rule out any facile translation of *toprak* as (Mother) Earth in English. Such a conceptualization also precludes regarding nature and all that is part of it as ‘the Other’ of the human, and consequently, challenges its exploitation or annihilation.

I would argue that such an outlook that breaks down the barriers between Earth, God and living beings, including humans, could contribute to addressing the critique of essentialism directed at ecofeminists. In tracing the changing nature of ecofeminism, Moore (2015:211) engages with this critique as follows:

Reading home or Mother Nature as metaphor relies on the separation of humans and nature, and on an implicit human exceptionalism. Making a critique of essentialism is actually an expression of an anthropocentric view of the world (cf. Gaard 2011), where humans are at the centre of things, which is where feminists who critique eco/feminism for essentialism demonstrate the limits of their theorizing. To read Mother Nature as metaphor relies on the assumption that something human (motherhood) is being applied to something non-human (nature). Yet if we refuse this distinction between human and non-human nature, such anthropocentric readings no longer make sense.

In ‘Kara Toprak’, the anthropocentrism implied in lines such as “Gave me sheep, gave me lamb, gave me milk” or “Brought my bloodline from Adam to this day” is somewhat mitigated by references to the ‘treasure’ and ‘generosity’ of God reflected on the Earth and its creatures, as well as the care and attention that should be directed to *toprak*. These treasures and generosity do not imply ‘natural resources’, as in the current Western understanding, but the process in which one’s own labour transforms into the Earth’s abundance.

Violence, labour and abundance – *Toprak* as an active agent

A major criticism of the conceptualization of Earth in gendered terms is based on the dichotomy of passive vs. active. The alleged passivity of the feminine and of the Earth, as well as other living beings, goes hand in hand with the violence directed at them (Gaard 2011:28):

The feminized status of women, animals, nature, and feminized others (children, people of color, farmers, slaves, as well as the body itself, emotions, and sexuality) have been conceived of as separate and inferior in order to legitimate their subordination under an elite and often violent and militarized male-dominant social order.

This social order is based on “imperialist and patriarchal mindsets which discursively constructed the land as feminine” (McCredden 1997:126), and therefore directly benefited from this construction in the form of large-scale land acquisition, land abuse, damming, mining and other forms of extraction of land-based resources. In the case of Aşık Veysel and ‘Kara Toprak’, violence is clearly implied in the lyrics, both in the form of overt references (e.g. ‘torture’, ‘belly pried open’, ‘face torn’)¹⁶ and covert ones such as animal husbandry. These references are particularly problematic to translate in the light of contemporary approaches to looking after the land and the creatures living on it, for example vis-à-vis animal rights and vegetarianism/veganism (Gaard 1993), permaculture, and no-dig horticulture. Yet, for Aşık Veysel who comes from a rural background in a fallen empire and then-developing country, this violence has less to do with colonialist or imperialist conceptualizations of the land as feminine, and more with the manual labour the land elicits from those who tend it.

In ‘Kara Toprak’, the land provides little “when not raked or dug”; it bestows its gifts only when sufficient care and attention are given. In exchange, *toprak* is the source of healing and health, awaits humans with open arms, and when it is time, takes them “to its bosom”. The understanding of Earth as “an active, reactive, and dynamic agent” (Wilson 2005:334) is certainly not limited to Anatolian mysticism. For instance, ecofeminist scholar Wilson has come across similar views about the Earth in her interviews with the Anishinabek, who regard “Mother Earth [a]s an active, living being that acts and reacts to human activities” (ibid.:347), rather than “a passive object, waiting to be acted upon” (ibid.:334). My translation adopts the active tense Veysel uses in relation to the Earth, and in a few instances I have further reinforced the active attribute of the Earth by shifting the actor to the front – e.g. “topraktan aldım” (I took from the land), translated as “the land delivered to me”, and “Hak’kın gizli hazinesi toprakta” (God’s hidden treasure is in the Earth), translated as “Earth keeps God’s hidden treasure”.

In her study of ‘Kara Toprak’, Şenocak (2017:510) contrasts earth and sky as follows: “With its down-to-earth and steady gaze, the land dissolves the world the air has effortlessly established up in the sky, as the land always leans on hard work and toil”. In this interpretation of the poem, any quick-fix formation of a world that does not involve labour is condemned. The shamanist belief that “The more you give to nature, the more nature gives back to you” is embedded in Aşık Veysel’s poetry and is further supported with Islamic beliefs (ibid.:512). For instance, in return for his labours, *toprak* gives the poet-narrator a rose, which is itself an important symbol in Islam, especially in the Sufi tradition (Gümüş 2019:183). The effort put into tending the land is linked to the secret of glimpsing eternity in this mortal world, and thus, leaving behind an immortal legacy (Mustafa Özçelik; cited in Gümüş 2019:183). Further associations of soil with humility, patience, trust, kindness, gratitude and compassion in the Sufi tradition tie in with the annihilation of the *nafs* (variously translated as ‘self’, ‘ego’ or ‘psyche’) and therefore, the eventual attainment of the ‘secret’ (Gümüş 2019:182; Şenocak 2017:510, 512). For the Sufis, argues Parlak (2011:181–182),

Self was part of nature, which was the great work of the Creator. Therefore studying the self meant studying nature, and respecting and protecting the created. ... The most valuable prayer ... was service to the created with the knowledge of oneness and unity of everything.

In environmental terms, and particularly from the perspective of ecofeminism, these debates relate to those on the more recent post-anthropocentric viewpoints, as well as the interconnectedness and co-existence of human communities with more-than-human worlds. In contemporary feminisms, the current emphasis understandably continues to be placed on strengthening the ‘self’ of the women after centuries of oppression, as well as challenging the current gendered workload distribution in public and private spheres. However, in their rejection of ecofeminism and its contributions, contemporary feminisms are risking becoming irrelevant in relation to the majority of issues facing humanity today. As Gaard (2011:32) argues,

Postmodern feminism focuses primarily on human categories, with little concern for the environment. It is this human-centered (anthropocentric) feminism that has come to dominate feminist thinking in the new millennium, effectively marginalizing feminism’s relevance. The global crises of climate justice, food security, energy justice, vanishing wildlife, maldevelopment, habitat loss, industrial animal food production, and more have simultaneously social and ecological dimensions that require both ecological and feminist analyses.

It is only through a more holistic understanding of the position of all humans – as well as non-humans – as intrinsic parts of an active and responsive Earth that contemporary feminisms can begin to address these urgent global issues.

Conclusion: Retranslating ‘Kara Toprak’ with and for ecofeminism

Its various trends aside, “the tenets of ecofeminism were always about care and caring, agency and action” (Gough and Whitehouse 2020:1427). I have argued that these tenets should be extended not only in terms of cultural and ethnic identities, but also in terms of gender. In the modern, Western worldview, as Kings (2017:77) puts it,

The divorce of mankind from the natural world (where women supposedly reside) allows for women to be perceived as being closer to nature, when in reality they are as much part of nature as the rest of humanity, whereas the achievement of manhood seems to be entirely dependent upon men distancing themselves from this fact.

Veysel’s work is a testimony to the fact that this is not the case all around the world or throughout history. As Wilson (2005:346) points out, “a distinct separation of men from nature does not necessarily exist within Anishinabek and some other indigenous cultures”, where different genders have rather different, but equally respected relationships with the land, and most importantly, none are “above nature”, but instead are in balance with it (ibid.:350). There are many conceptualizations of the relationships between the human and more-than-human world, and studying them can further strengthen ecofeminists’ arguments and observations. If ecofeminism is “a continually evolving academic/ activist tradition” (Kings 2017:82), it would benefit from acknowledging its roots in dualistic, Cartesian thinking and taking into consideration other conceptual frameworks. This re-evaluation can also address some of the critique directed at it, specifically charges of essentialism and universalism, and the value judgements that come with this critique.

Today, there is growing awareness of the fact that the Earth and its resources are indeed finite. Even the very word 'resource' is seen as problematic, as it implies that the Earth, its living and non-living treasures, are solely there to serve humans. An image of the Earth that keeps on providing infinite sustenance to people, as in Veysel's song, is surely a thing of the past. Yet, a multitude of projects around the world, including those on rewilding, regenerative agriculture and agroforestry, continue to demonstrate that the Earth rebounds when given the right care and attention – just as Veysel observes. It is my hope that contemporary readers of 'Kara Toprak' in its English translation, including ecofeminists, will be encouraged to learn more about such projects, and will work with what can be salvaged from the wisdom of diverse lands and cultures, and what still makes sense through the perspectives of our contemporary environmental, feminist and ecofeminist knowledge.

Notes

- 1 Folk music (*Türk halk müziği*) is an enduring tradition in Turkey, albeit shadowed by Turkish popular music, and by classical Turkish music (*Türk sanat müziği*), which continues the musical tradition of the Ottoman court. Folk songs are not necessarily all anonymous (though most are), and it is not uncommon to find folk songs attributed to the people who composed them.
- 2 *Aşık*s are singer-poets and bards who accompany their songs with long-necked lutes, primarily in Turkic cultures, as well as some non-Turkic cultures of the South Caucasus.
- 3 Moore, herself an ecofeminist, points to a temporal perspective underlying these critiques: "It ... appears that, not only is eco/feminism supposedly essentialist and universalist, but that it compounds its crimes, its lack of sophistication, its theoretical naïveté, through being essentialist and universalist *at the wrong time*. ... Though eco/feminism's emergence is traced to the 1970s and earlier, it is more commonly located in the 1980s and 1990s, thus exceeding the necessary temporal container of the 1970s for essentialism. Given this, eco/feminism can never even be a site of innocence, nostalgia, or loss. ... Eco/feminists' insistence on re-opening the supposedly closed questions of women and nature disrupts efforts to depict essentialism as safely confined to the past, and therefore eco/feminism challenges the progress narrative of feminism" (2015:220; emphasis in original). Moore argues that this challenge to the progress narrative ultimately undermines feminism's efforts to secure itself a place in the academy, and that this can only be mitigated by situating ecofeminism in the past or subjecting it to "a collective amnesia" (ibid.:221).
- 4 Gaard (2011) offers an excellent overview of the development of ecofeminism.
- 5 More often than not, this turning to – and the romanticization of – the past/indigenous knowledge is carried out with the best of intentions, as can be observed in the following quote: "Ecofeminism, a complementary philosophy to a caring ethic, can be understood as feminists' efforts to emphasize the interconnections between humanity, oppression, and ecological practices, and as a feminist practice that foregrounds a reconceptualization, arguably not new, of humanity's oneness with Earth. ... An ecofeminist ethic of caring re-attaches our collective consciousness to the timeless wisdom of indigenous and First Nations peoples, who knew themselves to be bound inextricably with Mother Earth" (Swanson 2015:100).
- 6 While this contribution may be seen as reflecting a growing interest in ecological issues in translation studies (e.g. Cronin 2017; Hu 2013), its understanding of the prefix 'eco' is somewhat different from the terms 'eco-translation' and 'eco-translatology' used in these works. The main thrust of this contribution is not, for instance, to elaborate on an ecology of poetry or song translation vis-à-vis the contextual, political or economic factors underlying any such translation or to see how the contemporary drive for ever larger scale translational work may have an impact on the environment. Rather, the contribution focuses on how an ecofeminist (re)interpretation of a poem may shape our understanding of our embeddedness in nature.
- 7 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%82%C5%9F%C4%B1k_Veyysel.
- 8 See, for example, <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/kara-toprak-black-soilearth.html>, <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/kara-toprak-mother-earth.html>, and <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/kara-toprak-black-earth.html-0>.
- 9 See www.nyofutyson.com/music.

- 10 The ‘dark continent’ was used to refer to Africa by the colonialists and to women’s sexual life by Sigmund Freud.
- 11 Needless to say, if this version were to circulate beyond this volume, the translation would have to be supported by a preface and/or endnotes explaining the reasons for the non-translation and elaborating on the various conceptual layers of *kara toprak*.
- 12 In recent years, a decidedly non-feminist take on *toprak* has also emerged in Turkey, reflected in phrases such as *ya benimsin ya toprağın* (you either belong to me or the earth) – a phrase uttered by jealous male partners who (threaten to) kill their lovers/ex-spouses for allegedly being unfaithful.
- 13 All translations from Turkish are mine unless otherwise stated.
- 14 Alternative views of nature can be glimpsed in the work of other ecofeminists such as Linda Vance (cited in Moore 2015:209): “After all, anyone who spends much time in the natural world knows full well that nature is not June Cleaver. I wrote the first version of this chapter while hiking in the forests and mountains of Vermont, where – in June – hail, thunder, rain, and lightning assailed me; where I slipped and slid over moss-covered boulders and slime-covered roots; where I toppled into a crevasse on a mountainside when loose gravel gave away under my boot; and where, at last, I was driven from a rocky summit by seventy-miles-per-hour winds, sleet and snow, and cloud too thick to see through. This nature – my nature – was a wild and rowdy woman, a bad and unruly broad with no concern for her children, and no use to anyone but herself. This is the nature you will rarely hear men celebrate as female; it represents, after all, an unsuitable role for a woman.”
- 15 This is in reference to the creation of humans from dried, black mud in Surat Al-Hijr, verse 26 of the Qur’an (Gümüş 2019:182).
- 16 The relevant lines in Turkish are in the active, not passive voice (e.g. ‘I pried open its/her belly’). The poet/narrator is directly implicated in the torture of the Earth, which only bestows abundance in return. Opting for this translation, however, would require a choice between gendered and non-gendered possessive pronouns (its/her), and was therefore avoided in the version offered here. The direct involvement of the poet/narrator in this process is instead implied through the use of ‘my pick and spade’ and ‘my hands and nails’.

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Appendix

Kara Toprak

Dost dost diye nicesine sarıldım
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır
Beyhude dolandım boşa yoruldu
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Nice güzellere bağlandım kaldım
Ne bir vefa gördüm ne faydalandım
Her türlü isteğim topraktan aldım
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Koyun verdi kuzu verdi süt verdi
Yemek verdi ekmek verdi et verdi
Kazma ile dövmeyince kıt verdi
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Âdem'den bu deme neslim getirdi
Bana türlü türlü meyva yetirdi
Her gün beni tepesinde götürdü
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Karnın yardım kazmayınan belinen
Yüzün yırttım tırnağınan elinen
Yine beni karşıladı gülünen
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

İşkence yaptıkça bana gülerdi
Bunda yalan yoktur herkes de gördü
Bir çekirdek verdim dört bostan verdi
Benim sadık yârim kara topraktır

Havaya bakarsam hava alırım
Toprağa bakarsam dua alırım
Topraktan ayrılısam nerde kalırım
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Dileğin varsa iste Allah'tan
Almak için uzak gitme topraktan
Cömertlik toprağa verilmiş Hak'tan
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Hakikat ararsan açık bir nokta
Allah kula yakın kul da Allah'a
Hak'kın gizli hazinesi toprakta
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Bütün kusurlarımı toprak gizliyor
Merhem çalıp yaralarımı tuzluyor
Kolun açmış yollarımı gözlüyor
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

Her kim ki olursa bu sırra mazhar
Dünyaya bırakır ölmez bir eser
Gün gelir Veysel'i bağrına basar
Benim sâdık yârim kara topraktır

(Aşık Veysel)

Kara Toprak

So many I've held close, thinking they're true friends
My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*
I wandered in vain, toiled away for nothing
My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

I've got attached to many a beauty
Got no loyalty back, nor did I benefit
Whatever I desired, the land delivered to me
My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

Gave me sheep, gave me lamb, gave me milk
Gave me food, bread and meat
Gave little, when not raked or dug
My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

Brought my bloodline from Adam to this day
Grew me many a fruit

Carried me on top every day
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

Belly pried open with my pick and spade
 Face torn with my hands and nails
 Still welcomed me with roses
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

Smiled at me while tortured
 There's no lie in this, everyone's a witness
 I put in one pip, gave me back four orchards
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

If I look up at the sky, I get nothing but air
 If I look after the earth, I receive blessings
 If separated from the earth, what would become of me
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

If you have a wish, ask God, but
 Don't stray far from the soil for it to be fulfilled
 Generosity was bestowed by God upon the earth
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

If you are looking for truth, it is a clear point
 God is close to human and human to God
 Earth keeps God's hidden treasure
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

Earth covers all my flaws
 Puts salt on my wounds, salves my cuts
 Waits for me with open arms
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

Whoever is honoured with this secret
 Leaves to this world an immortal legacy
 One day, *toprak* will take Veysel to its bosom
 My true beloved has always been *kara toprak*

(Translation by Şebnem Susam-Saraeva)



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PART V

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13

DEBATING BUDDHIST TRANSLATIONS IN CYBERSPACE

The Buddhist online discussion forum as a discursive and epitextual space

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This chapter examines how people talk about translations in online religious discussion forums, focusing specifically on the Buddhist context. Such forums provide an important site for the interrogation and propagation of Buddhist translations, in particular published translations of Buddhist sutras (i.e. classical scriptures), as well as for exchanging views on a range of translation-related issues concerning language and terminology. These discussions range from the provision of factual information, to the measured evaluation of translations from a variety of end-user perspectives, to more proselytizing discourses that seek to assert the doctrinal superiority or inferiority of a given translation and by extension the superiority of a particular Buddhist school and interpretive tradition. Online forums are thus discursive spaces that incorporate a complex *mélange* of doctrinal positions, textual competencies and levels of Buddhist practitioner experience, and in which debates around translation are situated within and shaped by broader religious discourses. In addition, in their interrogation of existing translations, they may also be understood as epitextual spaces that exist in a liminal relationship to the main text which they seek to elucidate.

To explore these issues further, I examine one specific Buddhist forum, Dharma Wheel (www.dharmawheel.net), a large forum devoted to all aspects of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, two of the three branches of the Buddhist faith (Harvey 1990/2013:2–3).¹ Together, these two branches encompass a whole range of schools and sects variously found in East and Inner Asian Buddhism, from Chinese and Japanese traditions such as Zen (Chinese: Chan) and Pure Land, to Tibetan schools such as Dzogchen and Gelug. Many of these are explicitly represented by specific subgroups in the forum. I focus on discussion threads that debate the merits of published translations, and in particular translations of the *Lotus Sutra*. This sutra is of crucial importance in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, and forms the central text of certain key Buddhist schools such as Tiantai (Japanese: Tendai) and Nichiren. It also occupies an important position in the history of Buddhist translation in the West, being “the first Buddhist sūtra to be translated from Sanskrit into a European language (French in 1844)” (Lopez 2016:4), and having at least nine English versions currently in print. The fact that it is also seen as a particularly difficult and sometimes perplexing text (*ibid.*), owing in

part to its complex imagery, perhaps further explains the significant amount of attention it receives in popular online discussion forums.

Conceptualizing the forum as a community of practice (CoP; Wenger 1998) situated within the broader Buddhist cyberspace (Connelly 2015), I approach such discussion threads as forms of mutual engagement that may be read as reifications of Buddhist practice. In doing so, I aim to address the following overarching question: How are translations discussed in an online Buddhist community of practice, and how is a single translation discussion thread positioned within the complex nexus of doctrinal beliefs and identity performances that constitute this non-translation community (Neather 2009)? My inquiry will be driven by three, more specific sub-questions:

- 1 How does the performance of identity by forum participants shape the discursive space of the discussion thread and how are claims to authority established and challenged?
- 2 How do sectarian allegiances inform the appraisal of translations, and how do they underpin ways of speaking about translation?
- 3 How far can such discursive spaces be considered epitextual to the translations they discuss?

I begin with an account of the Buddhist cyberspace and a theorization of Dharma Wheel as a CoP. This is followed by an introduction to some of the main doctrinal schools that find expression in debates around translations of the *Lotus Sutra*. I then proceed to examine the performance of identity by discussion participants, conducting an analysis of examples from two contrasting discussion threads (one from Dharma Wheel, and the other from Google Groups), and examining how a range of identity-based competencies are employed to shape the debate. From this, I consider how Dharma Wheel accommodates conflicting voices and where the thread in question is located within the broad space of this CoP, concluding with a consideration of the discussion thread as epitext.

The Buddhist cyberspace, communities of practice, and the case of Dharma Wheel

Discussion forums have emerged as one of multiple sites of online religious interaction. Such sites range from websites that provide more objective information, to online temples that facilitate virtual worship. Their widely varied nature has led to attempts at categorizing and typologizing the religious cyberspace, as Connelly (2015) explains. Christopher Helland, for example, speaks of “religion online” versus “online religion”, a terminology that distinguishes between “informational” and “participatory” sites, respectively (Connelly 2015:62; see also Campbell and Vitullo 2016:77). Subsequent formulations by Helland recognize that this dichotomy has begun to blur, with the line between information and participation not always so clear-cut, a situation which obtains in the Dharma Wheel site. In another typology, Karaflogka delineates sites of online religion as either “academic”, “subjective” or “confessional”, with discussion forums being located under the subjective category in a sub-category along with “personal religious groups” and “non-religious groups” (Connelly 2015:63). Connolly herself creates a still different typology, using four categories that denote the type of online medium involved: websites, social media, mobile apps, and virtual worlds and games. Discussion forums, she suggests, belong in the social media category, along with

blogs, wikis, micro-blogs and photo-shares (*ibid.*:65). Turning to a more specifically Buddhist context, Veidlinger (2015:8) notes the early emergence of Buddhist discussion forums in the online world (the first being Buddha-L in 1991), a phenomenon that he explains by “the emphasis in Buddhism on using all means available to transmit knowledge about the religion”.

The question of how far sites are participatory in nature leads us to consider their status as communities. For, while a purely informational – or ‘academic’ – site would be less likely to foster a sense of religious community, one in which the nature of the site is participative will clearly have strong potential to develop as a community within the broader Buddhist community as a whole. Ostrowski (2015) considers this question of community potential, examining how far Buddhist bulletin boards (which function as a type of forum) can build community identity. Her study reports a complex array of responses, with some respondents finding little sense of community online and others citing online interaction in the form of discussion as an important way of reinforcing their Buddhist practice. One of Ostrowski’s respondents states: “It is easy for me to develop some arrogance” (in her Buddhist practice offline), whereas “when I go online (because there are so many wonderful and experienced people), the arrogance is shaken” (*ibid.*:199). Here, mutual interaction and participation with others who form what Gee (2000) calls affinity groups develops competency in practice and strengthens Buddhist identity.

The close relationship between interaction, practice and identity here recalls Wenger’s (1998) conception of the community of practice (CoP). In communities of practice, community identity is constructed through the interactions of members whose practice is structured by three factors. First, CoP members share a joint enterprise, a common goal which they work together to achieve. Second, a successful CoP is characterized by the mutual engagement of its members, a central aspect of which involves the negotiation of meaning. Third, interactions in the CoP employ a shared repertoire, a set of communicative modes which Wenger suggests can encompass everything from genres of writing to physical gestures. Membership of the CoP can be understood as a continuum, stretching from novices (relative newcomers to the community) to the most experienced members, with novices moving from the periphery to the centre of the CoP as they slowly learn and internalize the CoP’s regime of competence, that is, the particular set of competences necessary to function as an expert member of the CoP. Of central importance in Wenger’s theory is the notion that meaning and identity are situated, shifting and emergent categories that are shaped through mutual engagement and learning (Yu 2019).

CoP theory has had some application in the conceptualization of online discussion forums. Kiesling et al. (2018:691), for example, argue that on the Reddit network, “each subreddit can be seen as a community of practice coming together around a topic or activity (the reason for posting)”, and suggest that different subreddit communities may exhibit differences in their norms of interaction. CoP theory would appear to have received little attention in the study of religious communities, still less those online. One work of importance to the present argument is Langer and Weineck’s (2017) study of offline/online Shiite Muslim communities in Germany. In their focus on online Shia discussion forums, they discern how the forum facilitates a mutual engagement in respect of a joint enterprise: at a broader level, this may be the propagation of Shiism, but at a more micro level, they suggest that main sections in the forum (with titles such as ‘The Prophet & the Ahl al-Bayt’), along with the “more specific sub-boards”, may be said to “constitute ... the joint enterprise”,

and that “[t]he threads in which these topics are discussed bear witness of the mutual engagement in this common topic as a joint enterprise” (ibid.:235). The shared repertoire that underpins this mutual engagement is the set of “Shiite narratives of history, authorities, symbols or expressions ... – that is, all possible forms and elements that may be remembered and reactivated in articulating a specifically Shiite identity” (ibid.).

The Dharma Wheel forum may likewise be approached as a community of practice. It is, as members in one thread (‘Is this a Tribal Site or a Philosophy Site?’) discuss, “a practice site” (Kirtu, joined 2010, 6479 posts²), characterized by “a wish to learn” (JeffH, joined 2014, 970 posts). These comments highlight aspects central to the nature of such communities. The joint enterprise in which members are engaged may broadly be described as one of discussing, debating and explaining aspects of Buddhist knowledge, both for the benefit of community members as well as for any other interested visitors to the forum. These activities are of central importance to the ultimate enterprise of propagating the Buddhist faith, and for this reason have long been emphasized as pious acts that will bring good karma to those who carry them out. In the *Lotus Sutra*, for instance, “explaining” is listed as one of five such deeds in which the adherent is expected to engage (Lopez 2016:8). At a more micro level, Langer and Weineck’s (2017) notion that sub-categories within a forum also constitute joint enterprises can be applied here also. Indeed, it can be argued that each thread itself acts as a kind of micro joint enterprise which, when taken with all other such discussions in the forum, forms the greater overarching shared enterprise.

It is worth pausing here to consider the nature of these sub-levels and their place in the overall structure of the forum. The homepage of Dharma Wheel is clearly arranged into five overarching sections: (1) Welcome, (2) Bodhisattvacarya, (3) General Dharma, (4) Upāya, and (5) Teahouse of the Compassionate One. Each of these comprises between four and six forums that reflect the nature of the main section. For example, section 3 (Upāya, a term sometimes translated as ‘skillful means’) includes: Meditation, Ethical Conduct, Engaged Buddhism, Prayers and Aspirations, Wellness, Diet and Fitness, and Dying and Death. Within these forums, there may also be sub-forums: under Wellness, Diet and Fitness, for instance, we find the Alternative Health and Tibetan Medicine sub-forums. As in Yu’s study of the online Yeeyan community, we may thus conceive of Dharma Wheel as a “broad community of practice consisting of sub-CoPs” (Yu 2019:247), in which the numerous forums and sub-forums function as sub-CoPs within the CoP as a whole. Clicking on each of these forums or sub-forums then takes the visitor to specific topic threads, which number between the hundreds and the thousands. As an example, under Tibetan Buddhism, a particularly popular forum, as of 14 July 2021 there were 8,504 topics and 150,297 posts. To extend Langer and Weineck’s idea, I argue that threads specifically devoted to questions of translation have a joint enterprise of evaluating and comparing translations with a view to furthering understanding of the Dharma (the Buddhist truth or teachings) that these translations present in different ways.

With regard to Wenger’s other dimension of practice, shared repertoire, the Dharma Wheel community draws on a whole range of shared Buddhist reference and modes of reasoning, including doctrinal references, quotations from the sutras and allusions to Buddhist practices, the expert use of which can signal particular aspects of a member’s Buddhist identity as well as his or her authority to comment on the validity of particular translations, as we shall see. In addition to these, and underpinning the whole mode of interaction on the

forum, is the notion of Right Speech, the third factor of the Eight-fold Path (also known as the Eight-factored Path), which enumerates the eight ‘right’ practices that Buddhists must follow to achieve nirvana (Harvey 1990/2013:83, 276–277). Right Speech is clearly the most germane of these to an online discussion forum, and as stated in Dharma Wheel’s ‘Terms of Service or ... The Rules!’ post (which appears at the top of the homepage and every discussion thread):

Re-framed in the positive, these guidelines [outlined in the Buddha’s definition of Right Speech] urge us to say only what is true, to speak in ways that promote harmony among people, to use a tone of voice that is pleasing, kind, and gentle, and to speak mindfully in order that our speech is useful and purposeful.

This practice goes beyond merely ‘being nice’ to fellow community members. The post goes on to quote a contemporary Buddhist writer who explains that “Right Speech is a mindfulness practice”. The enactment of Right Speech in the Dharma Wheel forum, then, is not merely a means to the smooth functioning of the forum’s interactions, but also a way of perfecting an important practice in the Buddhist path to salvation. The very use of this central element of the shared repertoire becomes a way of ‘being Buddhist’ and propagates Buddhism not simply through the discussion of Buddhist knowledge, but through fostering the correct ways of engaging in such discussion. These observations also apply to additional aspects mentioned in the Terms of Service post, specifically the exhortation “we also remind users of the Six Perfections (Paramita), specifically the perfection of Ksanti – patience/tolerance/forbearance/acceptance/endurance”.

As in other discussion forums, the smooth functioning of these rules is facilitated not only through the compliance of ordinary members, but also by Moderators and Administrators, whose positions reflect their level of experience and seniority within the CoP. In one thread discussing administrative changes (‘Admin Comings and Goings’, 21 June 2019), for instance, a new Administrator is humorously asked how he came to be appointed, and lists his credentials in a speculative set of questions as: “Involvement in online sanghas [Buddhist communities] since 2007? Three stints as moderator during my nine year membership here? Close to 20,000 posts ...? A keen interest in Dharma theory and practice?”. Those taking on these roles receive training as necessary, while those who have already reached the status of Moderator and Administrator may also return to regular membership status, or return to fill the role at a later date as needed. While returning to regular membership, however, the high status of former Moderators and Administrators in the CoP is marked in each post as “former staff member”.

The *Lotus Sutra* in discussion threads: debates and doctrines

Debates in Dharma Wheel regarding translations of the *Lotus Sutra* evince a variety of concerns. In the main discussion thread on which I focus here, ‘Translations of the Lotus Sutra’ (hereafter TLS; initiated 12 August 2014), Tatsuo, a commenter with over four years of experience in this community (joined 2010, 273 posts), explains that he recently read a discussion on which translation was “the best”, and wishes to initiate a similar discussion here. He lists seven published translations and frames the tone of the discussion with a

simply phrased question that noticeably avoids speaking of “the best” and instead focuses on users’ personal preference. This is then followed up with further, more specific questions:

Which version do you like most and why? Which are more scholarly and which are intended as more ‘inspirational’ Sutra translation? Does it really matter, if the translator/translation is associated with SGI/Rissho Kosei Kai/Nichirenshu?³

Some clarification is required regarding the different Buddhist schools mentioned here, as they are central to many discussions on the *Lotus* and its translations, both on Dharma Wheel and more generally, and to the ways in which these translations are debated. As mentioned briefly earlier, the *Lotus Sutra* is a key text in certain schools of Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia, one of which, the Nichiren school, is of importance here. Nichiren Buddhism was established in Japan by the monk Nichiren (1222–1282) and encompasses a complex array of lineages and sects. Nichirenshū, referred to in Tatsuo’s post, is a broad umbrella term that denotes both the Nichiren school as a whole, and the more specific sect of the same name that was formed in 1876 from the amalgamation of sects sharing a similar lineage and doctrines, during the religious reforms of Meiji era Japan (Lopez 2016:188; Stone 1994:248). This sect continues to operate today. A second group, Nichiren Shōshū (literally: Orthodox Nichiren Sect) is a breakaway sect whose name, adopted in 1912 (Lopez 2016:189), explicitly frames it as “the most rigorously purist of all Nichiren denominations” (Stone 1994:252).

Tatsuo’s post also refers to SGI, or Sōka Gakkai International, the international arm of the Sōka Gakkai (literally: Value Creation Society). This sect was founded in 1937 by two lay members of Nichiren Shōshū (Lopez 2016:192). The often difficult relationship between Sōka Gakkai and its parent sect, Nichiren Shōshū, has been extensively documented elsewhere (Stone 1994; Hurst 1998; Low 2010). Two points in this relationship deserve mention here. The first concerns the different wartime experiences of the two sects. Thus while Nichiren Shōshū found favour with the wartime government, the founders of Sōka Gakkai were imprisoned in 1943 for their anti-government stance, arising from their refusal to acknowledge the state religion, Shinto. One founder, Makiguchi, died in prison (Lopez 2016:193). As we shall see below, this fact is sometimes brought up in more polemical discussions about translations favoured by SGI. The second point is the schism that occurred in 1991, when Sōka Gakkai was excommunicated by Nichiren Shōshū, a split which transformed Sōka Gakkai into a wholly lay society and which was ultimately triggered by differences in proselytization practices (Stone 1994:254–255). These differences likewise inform contrasting perspectives on translation.

The TLS thread contains a total of 37 posts, 26 of which date between 12 August 2014 and November 2014. After this, there is a considerable tail-off in postings: the next post (no. 27) appears in October 2015 (almost one year later), followed by 8 posts in 2016, and finally 2 posts in October 2020, after which the thread was locked. Participants’ contributions raise a number of perspectives on religious authenticity. These include the philosophical reliability of the translation, linguistic and terminological accuracy, soteriological efficacy, potential for ritual performance (for example, whether the translation can function as a chanted text), inspirational power, the role of famous translators and publishing houses, and the institutional sanctioning of particular translations by rival sects. Some of these positions are left undeveloped: the issue of chanting, for instance, is mentioned only once, in post no. 27, and elicits no response from other participants. Others are more prominent, as is the case with

institutional sanctioning, a theme which here as elsewhere tends to centre on the Burton Watson translation and its institutional backing from SGI.

The discursive space of the 'Translations of the Lotus Sutra' thread

The discursive space of the TLS thread is constituted first through the identity performances of its participants. These performances involve the use and presentation of different elements within the shared repertoire of the CoP when interacting with other members, within the framework of Right Speech discussed above. The elements used by different members reflect the particular areas of expertise and experience that form part of each individual's Buddhist trajectory, and can be used to establish the authority of his or her arguments for or against certain translations. Three broad categories can be distinguished. First, there are what might be termed 'factual' demonstrations of Buddhist knowledge and expertise. These include domain-specific competence related to Buddhist doctrine or to the sutra in question, erudition in Buddhist textual history and traditions, linguistic competence (for instance in commenting on the meaning of particular Sanskrit or Chinese technical terms and micro-details of doctrine), and translation competence (as when specific renderings or equivalents are commented on). A second type of repertoire element is Buddhist practice and experience, where for instance a personal spiritual experience is related in a discussion of translation, or where a translation is evaluated in terms of the poster's own Buddhist practice (as when two long-time CoP members exchange experiences of contemplating grains of sand on a beach when considering a given translation of a famous Buddhist metaphor – posts 33 and 34). A final, third type of repertoire element can be categorized as 'stylistic'. For as Sul and Bailey discuss in their study of communication styles in a Zen online forum, "more advanced members of the forum *perform* a Buddhist identity through use of poetic, nonlogical postings that evoke Zen Buddhist perspectives and allude to historical Buddhist texts" (2013:216; emphasis in original). While the traits of Zen communication differ from other Buddhist schools, we shall see below how the specific argumentational style of Nichiren Buddhism is employed in Nichiren Buddhist posts, and how that performance may conflict with the overarching Buddhist style of Right Speech that shapes the forum.

A second factor constituting the discursive space is the dialogic nature of the interactions between the participants. These take two main forms: (1) "stand-alone comments" (Reber 2014:82), posts that respond only to the broad themes outlined in the opening post; and (2) posts engaging in dialogue with other posts within the thread, which create "dialogic sequences of comments" (ibid.:86). The level of intertextual cross-reference between posts also differs. Posters may explicitly quote other posters (or the opening post, in the case of certain stand-alone comments), or simply post a response without quoting. Again, some responses directly address a poster by name, while others either do not, or do so only indirectly (e.g. "what are the controversial translation choices ... that jaidyncasey is talking about?"). Clusters of type 2 posts, which show close intertextual engagement, can be found within the thread, while dialogic sequences may sometimes also occur in a less intense form, as when a poster responds to an earlier post after a number of other unrelated interventions. Posts of both types 1 and 2 are sometimes left unresponded to (in the case of the latter, this effectively marks the end of a dialogic sequence). The level of cohesion in threads will thus differ depending on the proportion of type 1 to type 2 posts and the intensity of intertextual engagement. The question of why some posts attract responses and some do not would

appear to be linked to different factors, including the strength of the argument presented, the type of repertoire elements drawn on in identity performance (for instance, textual knowledge versus personal practices), the position in the CoP of the member posting (novice or expert member), and the time of posting (earlier or later in the lifespan of the thread).

The TLS thread shows a broadly tripartite structure, with more stand-alone posts at the beginning and end, and a complex dialogic interaction in the middle portions. It is also worth noting that within this structure, occasional interventions may be found that serve a different function. Thus, at the latter end of the middle portion, there appears a post (no. 24) from Palzang Jangchub (joined 2012, 1006 posts), which functions almost as a kind of advertisement for a Tibetan Buddhist group's ongoing project of translating the *Lotus Sutra* from Tibetan. The post contains links to the project and its translations, and exhorts readers to make contact. The poster's tagline seems almost to visually reinforce this advertisement effect with its oversized (over 8×15 cm) dark red label containing a quotation in white Sanskrit, Tibetan and English script. This is not simply a stand-alone post, then, but one that is only indirectly connected to the discussion in which it intervenes: it publicizes a project rather than commenting on the merits of published translations.

Example 1: Carlita

To gain a sense of how these different performative aspects work in given posts, I turn to one stand-alone example, before moving on to more complex interactions. The post by Carlita (joined 2016, 97 posts) in January 2016 (Figure 13.1) demonstrates a novice position in the CoP. This is explicitly signalled by the framing of her main two paragraphs between an apology ("Forgive me. I'm just learning how to use this forum") and a practical question ("When someone replies, do I get an email notice?"). Also striking is the full-length quoting of the original Tatsuo post, which again suggests unfamiliarity with the forum's posting style: no other posts in the TLS thread quote the opening post in full, and where they quote portions, it is only in response to specific details in that post. While her CoP identity is thus that of a novice, Carlita performs a broader Buddhist identity in several ways. First, the paratextual elements to her post include a profile picture identifiable as the Boddhisattva Vajrasattva (known in Tibetan Buddhism as Dorje Sempa) set against a mantra in Tibetan script, and a tagline at the bottom of her post which features a quote from the *Lotus Sutra* and an *anjali* (hands together in blessing) emoticon. Textually, her Buddhist identity is presented through reference to her use of certain translations for study or for religious practice: "I use Burton Watson's for notes and things I can mark off. I use the translation by Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama for worship". Her addition of "However, they are drastically different if not different books all together" suggests a certain textual familiarity with the translations, but offers no further elaboration. Her second paragraph, "I don't know which one is 'authentic', but Burtson is easier to read. So, maybe use that for inspiration. The Tripitaka Series, maybe use that for authenticity" again suggests textual familiarity through personal use, but offers no examples or textual exegesis of the kind seen in contributions from more established posters. The tentatively phrased suggestions ("maybe use that for ...") and the uninterrogated assumption that inspiration and authenticity are incompatible also suggest a certain novice level of argument. The post attracts no responses.

While a detailed examination of member trajectories through the CoP is beyond the scope of the present study, it is of interest to note that in a series of posts on another thread

Re: Translations of the Lotus Sutra
 by Carlita • Sun Jan 17, 2016 4:49 pm

Text of Carlita's post

Forgive me. I'm just learning how to use this forum.

I had the same questions. I use Burton Watson's for notes and things I can mark off. I use the translation by Tsugunari Kubo and Akira Yuyama for worship. However, they are drastically different if not different books all together.

I don't know which one is "authentic" but Burton is easier to read. So, maybe use that for inspiration. The Tripitaka Series, maybe use that for authenticity.

When someone replies, do I get an email notice?

Tatsuo wrote:
 In another thread came up the question on which translation of the Lotus Sutra is the best. As far as I know there are seven translations of the Lotus Sutra in English:

1. H. Kern
2. Burton Watson
3. Gene Reeves
4. Leon Hurvitz
5. Senchu Murano
6. Tsugunari Kubo / Akira Yuyama
7. Bunno Kato

Which version do you like most and why? Which are more scholarly and which are intended as more "inspirational" Sutra translation? Does it really matter, if the translator/translation is associated with SGI/Risho Kosei Kai/Nichirenshu?

I personally know only the Kubo and Kato version and I really don't like the Kato version. Kato uses archaic language, awkward translations (for example happy karma 福) and Christian terms - something which makes a Sutra translation unreadable for me. For example, you can find terms such as sin, creatures, commandments etc. He also doesn't use the most common English terms (for example "tactful methods" instead of "expedient means"). Kubo/Yuyama on the other hand uses many Sanskrit names and often avoids the long English translation of names. He also uses the most common English Buddhist terms.

Carlita's tagline

[The Buddha says to his monks], when he opens his mouth to expound or when he reads the sutra, he should not delight in speaking of the faults of other people or scriptures. He should not display contempt for other teachers of the Law or speak of the good or bad, the strong or weak points of others.
 -Saddharma Pundarika Sutra

FIGURE 13.1 Carlita's full post

from two years later (January/February 2018) relating to Nichiren Buddhism ("Gohonzon Scroll Question"), Carlita displays similar characteristics. One is an inability to cope with the technical side of posting: "I accidentally posted the wrong area" (31 January, 11:54 p.m.); "I found I cant delete this" (7 February, 2:32 a.m.); "I dont know how to separate and create quotes. My comments are after" (7 February, 2:48 a.m.); "Don't know how to delete this. Sorry it's a mish mash of sorts" (7 February, 3:35 a.m.). Another is a lack of attention to detail and precision in presentation, and an emphasis on personal practice: "I learned about all of this from practice both Nichiren Shoshu and SGI. Study and lots and lots of reading the Goshu, The Lotus Sutra itself, and the Pali Canon" (7 February, 2:32 a.m.). While Carlita claims an in-depth knowledge of all the relevant texts here, in her valorizing of learning as religious practice she tends to downplay more analytical forms of textual learning. This is especially evident in her responses to a former staff member, Queequeg (joined 2012, 12,313 posts), notable for his precision in textual analysis. In a final comment in one post, she writes: "Im not saying you are wrong. I just see it differently. Book nerd". While the final phrase here might conceivably be self-referential, it seems more likely in the context to be a potentially dismissive moniker aimed at Queequeg, who in the TLS thread explicitly refers to his bookish predilections in similar terms ("These are perhaps the most 'academic' translations – nerd that I am readability is less a priority than precision"). Her repost is still within the bounds of Right Speech but begins to push boundaries, particularly since Carlita (who has just 97 posts), despite being two years on from her TLS thread post, still exhibits the behaviour of a novice member and relatively peripheral participant in the CoP. While Queequeg deals with these exchanges in a manner that combines the tone of a firm teacher with rigorous textual elucidation, we already get a sense of how Nichiren-oriented discussions may become combative.

Example 2: Jechan, Queequeg and Tatsuo

I now turn to interactional clusters of posts – “dialogic sequences”, to reprise Reber’s (2014) term – to examine how particular claims about translations are advanced in interaction, and how differences between participants are modulated or managed. I draw here on the notion of stance-taking from interactional linguistics. Kiesling et al. (2018:687) define stance as “the discursive creation of a relationship between a language user and some discursive figure [known as the ‘stance focus’ or ‘stance object’], and to other language users in relation to that figure”. Three dimensions are at work here, which the authors label *affect*, *investment* and *alignment*. Affect denotes the user’s evaluation of the stance focus, positive or negative, while investment denotes the degree to which that evaluation is felt. The third dimension, alignment, concerns how this user’s evaluation relates to those of other users in the same dialogue. In the following I will examine how possible disalignments are approached through claims for further evidence and through strategies to mitigate potentially face-threatening acts.

As noted above, a major theme in debates on translations of the *Lotus Sutra* is the issue of institutional patronage, and in particular the reliability of the SGI-sponsored version, by the eminent translator Burton Watson. While in the opening post Tatsuo has mentioned this as one of several questions for discussion, the first four posters following his post do not address it, although one does mention Watson. These posts are stand-alone. The first dialogic sequence begins when Jechan (joined 2010, 101 posts) mentions the SGI version. Jechan performs an explicitly Nichiren Buddhist identity. This is most obvious in her repetition of the Japanese seven-character mantra *namu myōhō renga kyō* 南無妙法蓮華經 (‘Glory to the mystic law of the *Lotus Sutra*’, which all Nichiren Buddhists chant) three times at the bottom of her post, and a fourth time in bold red lettering as her tagline. Her affinity for Nichiren is also seen in her praise for the Watson translation as having a “simple, straightforward approach; *much the same as Nichiren Buddhism*” (emphasis added). This performance of Nichiren identity provides an “exigency for discussion” (Grabill and Pigg 2012:113), shifting the thread in a new direction and occasioning a dialogic sequence for the first time. It also frames the broad doctrinal stance of the speaker in relation to the stance focus, in this case the Watson translation. The confidence of the prescriptive *should* in the phrase “SGI versions should be avoided” is also of note here, positioning the speaker as having maximum investment in her evaluation. The paradox here is that Watson is normally criticized for being SGI-sponsored, and thus Jechan’s praise for Watson and censure of SGI demands comment, which is duly provided by Queequeg (the former staff member, and an expert in the CoP): “Watson is the SGI version FYI. Better avoid it”, appended with a shoulder-shrugging emoticon. Disalignment here on the value of the Watson version is nevertheless mitigated through deliberate elements of Right Speech – specifically, the “FYI” presents this almost as an aside, something that Jechan should know but that does not need to be overplayed. Again, the advice to “Better avoid” the SGI version aligns with Jechan’s assertion. Queequeg’s response thus works as a non-antagonistic offer of information that seeks to disabuse his interlocutor of a misunderstanding.

At this point, the author of the opening post, Tatsuo, steps in for clarification, taking the opportunity to further refine the discussion by drawing a distinction between sponsorship and influence: “Did SGI just sponsor the translation or did they actually influence the translation?”. His two follow-up questions suggest that his remarks are addressed to Queequeg,

the respected CoP member: “Also what are the controversial translation choices in the Reeves version that jaidyncasey is talking about? / Can you elaborate on the benefits of the Hurvitz translation, Queequeg?”. All these questions imply a neutral evaluative stance in respect of their different stance foci (the SGI version and its sponsorship, the translation choices in Reeves, and the Hurvitz translation). Tatsuo then continues with his own view of what constitutes a good translation. Queequeg replies: “My understanding is that SGI sponsored Watson. I have heard people say that there have been changes to the latest Watson edition based on feedback but I don’t know. I probably shouldn’t even mention that as I don’t know”. His response opens up the subtleties of the Watson translation case, further expanding the space for debate. SGI, it appears, was only a sponsor. Possible changes were made, he suggests, and the context might suggest that the feedback was from SGI, although this is not made clear. Moreover the whole response is phrased to downplay the validity of these assertions: “My understanding is ...”, “I have heard people say that ...”, “but I don’t know”, and this hedging, together with the whole last sentence specifically calling into question his own right to speak on this, keep the discursive space open for further contributions that may build on his, by significantly lowering his investment in these assertions. Jechan then intercedes to note that while SGI may have made subsequent changes (confirming Queequeg’s tentative assertions), the original version was published by Columbia University Press, thus supporting her argument that the original version is reliable. Here too, the assertion is hedged by the opening “I think I read somewhere that ...”, and the final question mark, turning the declarative “But the original version was by ...” into a more tentative statement and a request for further information. Queequeg’s final response on this issue, “Columbia was indeed the publisher, but the translation was commissioned by SG. / Scholars do need to make a living”, provides further clarification, although it does not quite solve the lingering issue raised by Tatsuo of whether SG’s sponsorship actually ‘influenced’ the translation. While Queequeg is again in overall disalignment with Jechan, correcting her misapprehension, the alignment in “Columbia was indeed the publisher” and the humorous second sentence mitigate potential threats to Jechan’s face.

At this point, this dialogic sequence begins to disperse. Another poster, jaidyncasey (username subsequently changed to Shingyo), enters with an unrelated lengthy comment on the Reeves version, in response to the relevant part of Tatsuo’s post in this sequence. However, this is followed by a return to the SGI discussion by Jechan, this time bringing specific written evidence in the form of intertextual reference to the paratexts – the Translator’s Preface – of the Watson translation, which states: “The translation was prepared with the assistance of the Nichiren Shoshu International Centre, in Tokyo, which is connected with the Sokka Gakkai International”. A ‘detective’ emoticon is added, and then this same sentence from the longer first quote is quoted again for emphasis, with the comment: “Something wrong here ...?”. This post seeks further clarification on the precise institutional backing, for as discussed above, the Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai relationship is important in orienting doctrinal allegiances. This is followed by an unrelated post from Tatsuo (his third and last, making clear that the discussion has led to his purchase of two translations discussed by Queequeg), which again begins to move the discussion on. However, one further post, by another senior member of the CoP, DGA (joined 2010, 9423 posts), returns to Jechan’s last question: “What would be the matter? SGI funded the translation at the time they were affiliated with Nichiren Shoshu, right?”. This observation raises new questions: while Nichiren Shōshū adherents generally do not accept the SGI translation, it was done

well before the 1991 schism when SGI was excommunicated by its parent group, Nichiren Shōshū. No further development of these issues ensues, perhaps because DGA presents his answer in a definitive tone that expects his interlocutor to know the facts. We may note that DGA's identity as a Buddhist scholar is explicitly performed by the inclusion of a hyperlink to his PhD thesis in his tagline (now removed). Queequeg interestingly makes no further comment to Jechan, perhaps from a reluctance to engage in more detailed dissection of a position (i.e. that Watson has been tainted by SGI) that is largely received wisdom on the TLS thread and elsewhere but that as we have seen, he admits to not knowing the specifics of.

What we see in this lengthy set of exchanges, then, is how a dialogic sequence expands the discursive space of the thread, working through – if not completely clarifying – a complex issue in the evaluation of an important translation. An explicit performance of Nichiren identity and corresponding stance positions with high levels of investment with respect to Watson and SGI position the discussion in a new direction. The paradox of this stance (pro-Watson, anti-SGI) is then interrogated through dialogue, with new evidence being provided and then responded to in each case. While it is not possible to ascertain whether working through of this paradox leads to any actual change in Jechan's stance towards Watson and SGI, the dialogue is constructed in a way that allows genuine exchange and that consequently builds understanding, even if Queequeg's and DGA's final responses to Jechan ultimately suggest a certain unwillingness to explore the validity of the anti-Watson position further. The use of discursive strategies to downplay investment in a particular stance as the discussion unfolds is crucial in creating an exchange in which face-threatening is mitigated and learning through interaction can take place, ultimately furthering the joint enterprise of the CoP as a whole.

Nichiren polemics and the flaming of Watson: an “alt.religion” thread in Google Groups

Beyond such relatively mild discussions in which the overarching shared repertoire feature of Right Speech is employed to ensure genuine dialogue, more polemical styles of argument reflect their users' more absolutist doctrinal positions. To appreciate these in the context of discussions about *Lotus Sutra* translations, I turn to an example on a Google Groups discussion thread, before returning to Dharma Wheel to reflect on how such argumentational styles are treated in the broader context of that forum. The Google Groups thread in question is found within the “alt.religion.buddhism.nichiren” group and is titled ‘Three translations of a passage from the Lotus Sutra: The SGI Burton Watson translation is the worst’. It contains thirty-two posts between five principal commenters, with one further commenter making a brief remark. The discursive space of this thread is structured as one long dialogic sequence (although sometimes with several consecutive posts from one poster) that is characterized by extreme dissonance between two positions in the debate. Stance-taking here thus shows maximum levels of investment and either maximum alignment or maximum disalignment, depending on which position is being responded to. No attempt is made to mitigate or negotiate such disalignment. One example will suffice for the purposes of analysis here.

The author of the opening post, Katie, initiates a discussion of the Watson translation in which maximum negative affect is expressed, specifically with reference to its SGI sponsorship. Several posts are exchanged with iainx, another discussant who closely aligns with

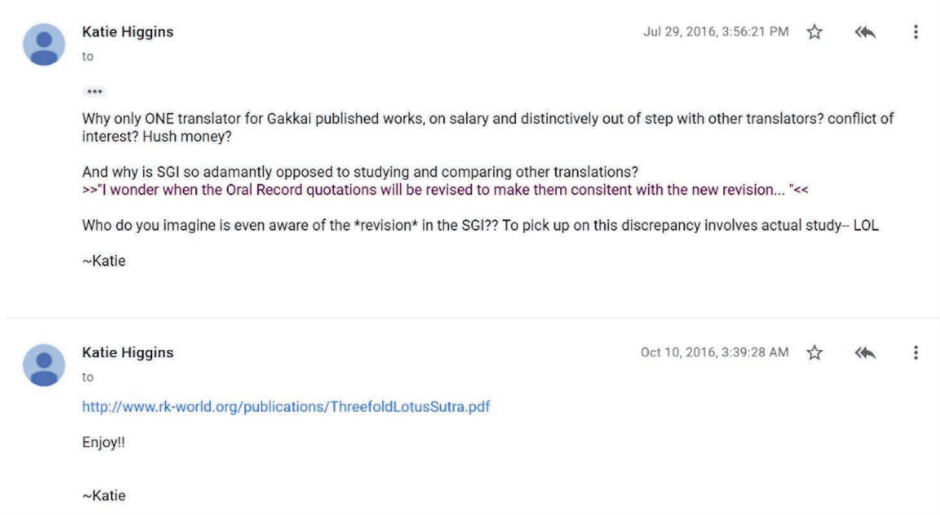


FIGURE 13.2 Katie's two posts suggesting the payment of "hush money"

her. At the other extreme is JazzisTVRicky (a pro-Watson poster who also makes one appearance near the end of the Dharma Wheel TLS thread), who is later joined by Chas, a poster having clear affinities with SGI. In the following portion, from midway through the thread, Katie claims that "hush money" might have been paid to the translator (Watson) to stop him talking about SGI's "revision" of the translation, and that SGI are "adamantly opposed to studying and comparing other translations", presumably because of the risk of these "revisions" being exposed. In an immediate follow-up post, she provides a hyperlink to another translation, recommended earlier in the thread (Figure 13.2). The emotivity of the post is striking, and is realized through a barrage of five quick-fire questions that are followed with a final conclusion claiming that only those who are involved in "actual study" of the translation can notice such "discrepancies", a claim which clearly positions Katie's identity as that of a textual expert-cum-religious detective who has uncovered an attempt to hoodwink unsuspecting readers. The propositional content of the post is unsubstantiated: no evidence is given to support assertions about the translator's "salary" or the notion that SGI oppose comparison of other translations. Also of note is the exaggerative emphasis ("ONE", "*revision*"), the sarcastic use of "LOL" and the emotive use of lexical boost ("even aware of", "actual study"), which become strong markers of alignment when addressed to iainx, who follows with a highly appreciative post.

These posts are followed by the first intervention from the opposite perspective, by JazzisTVRicky, which begins:

It amuses me that neither of you have discovered, most likely because you have not truly read Burton Watson's translations of The Lotus Sutra completely, where he openly refers to other translations of The Lotus Sutra:

Translator's Note found here:

<http://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/lsc/TranslatorsNote/4>

As in the TLS thread, here too we see how an intertextual reference to a paratext – the Translator’s Note – is introduced as evidence for a claim made. The portion of the Translator’s Note quoted here goes on to list all the available translations consulted (which the poster quotes in full after this opening), seeking to highlight the lack of evidence in Katie’s claims, and to establish the poster’s identity as textually experienced, countering Katie’s claim that SGI adherents don’t study. Disalignment in stance is here framed through sarcasm: “It amuses me that neither of you have discovered ...”. Having quoted the Translator’s Note at length, the post continues by framing the quotation as proof of Katie’s ignorance. A further claim to textual competence is made with an additional reference to another translation, the 1884 Kern version (which Jazz’s post on the TLS thread also singles out), and hyperlinks to three websites on which it is found. The reference would seem purely to serve as a display of textual erudition and familiarity with a wide number of translations. The final passage of this post becomes polemical, and constitutes a ‘flaming’ approach, across three one-sentence paragraphs that grow in intensity (Figure 13.3). In the first, Katie and her followers are said to “slander and make up lies and falsehoods about people who are dedicated to their professions and have the fortune to provide services in the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism throughout the world”. In the second, the slander accusation is repeated, while the attack is directly *ad hominem*: “[you] have accomplished nothing notable in your own lives”. In the third and final line, the strongest accusation – from a religious perspective – is delivered: Katie has engaged in “the tearing apart of Shayamuni’s Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism”.

Katie’s response offers no consideration of Jazz’s claims. Rather, she counterclaims by posting a link to a blogpost outside the forum. This blogpost, which discusses three versions of a single sentence in the Watson translation, is cited by Katie in four different posts in the thread and represents an appeal to the analysis of a trusted sectarian insider, Mark (the commenter who makes one brief remark on this thread). Here again, framing of disalignment with Jazz is achieved through sarcasm, for example the quotation of Jazz’s final “Caught

So this proves you are judging based on total ignorance and lack of seeking minds. The fact that you just recently are aware of The Threefold Lotus Sutra's availability on the net shows your lack of interest in and seeking mind towards Shayamuni's Lotus Sutra in truth.

Also neither of you have mentioned the first english translation which comprise a 27 Chapter Lotus Sutra By H Kern in 1884 found in several sites on the web.

They are here:

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/lotus/index.htm>

<https://ia600203.us.archive.org/3/items/saddharmapundar00cambuoft/saddharmapundar00cambuoft.pdf>

[http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Category:The_Sutra_of_the_Lotus_Flower_of_the_Wonderful_Law_Translated_By_H_Kern_\(1884\)](http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php/Category:The_Sutra_of_the_Lotus_Flower_of_the_Wonderful_Law_Translated_By_H_Kern_(1884))

Once again you slander and make up lies and falsehoods about people who are dedicated to their professions and have the fortune to provide services in the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism throughout the World.

You who have nothing to offer but nonsense, and have accomplished nothing notable in your own lives but the reputation of those whose pursuit of slander and degradation reveals your lack of character.

Nothing you come up with creates anything of value, only the tearing apart of Shayamuni's Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Caught again!

FIGURE 13.3 The second half of Jazz’s post

again!", appended with "says, Richard" (using Jazz's real name) and the final assertion that her link is intended for "those readers who can and DO read the actual posts :-D", a sarcastically phrased reiteration of her claim that SGI adherents such as Jazz do not read other views.

The tone of the thread continues in the same vein, if anything reaching an even higher level of vehemence when another, particularly frequent poster, Chas, introduces accusations relating to the death of an SGI founder in jail during the war (mentioned earlier in our discussion), while Nichiren Shōshū was in favour with the Japanese wartime government. Nichiren Shōshū believers, Katie included, are thus deemed by the poster to be apologists for war criminals. Here, we have moved well away from a discussion of translation. Instead, translation – and one particular translation – has become a touchstone for polemicizing over the politics of religion.

The discursive space, then, has here become one of tribal performance: far from the collaborative learning ethos and Right Speech-oriented repertoire of the Dharma Wheel CoP, comment here provides a way of asserting one's ingroup identity, in which any concession to one's opponents on the same thread would be viewed as a sign of weakness. Sarcasm, ridicule, exaggerative and inflammatory language, and extreme points of argumentational reference (such as the war crimes reference), along with the insistent repetition of links to other sectarian authorities (e.g. Katie's repeated citation of Mark's webpage) construct this discourse of confrontation and accusation. Buddhist identities are performed with strict adherence to sectarian allegiances.

While no one factor can account for these fundamentally different discursive approaches to talking about translation, I suggest that they are at least in part reflective of differences in ways of argumentation that stem from different doctrinal traditions. In her discussion of what she terms "Nichiren exclusivism", Stone (1994:233) notes:

Buddhist canonical sources define two methods of teaching the Dharma: *shōju* 摂受, "to embrace and accept," the mild method of leading others gradually without criticizing their position; and *shakubuku* [折伏], "to break and subdue," the stern method of explicitly rejecting "wrong views."

In Nichiren Buddhism, only Nichiren's teaching of the *Lotus Sutra* is accepted, while other Buddhist traditions are rejected in stark terms: "Nenbutsu leads to Avīci Hell, Zen is a devil, Shingon will destroy the nation, and Ritsu is a traitor" (ibid.:233). In the modern era, *shakubuku* proselytization methods have been of key importance both to Nichiren Shōshū and Sōka Gakkai, and differences over the use of such methods were ultimately a central factor in the schism between the two groups. According to Stone (ibid.; see also Hurst 1998; Low 2010), Sōka Gakkai originally developed a more extreme form of *shakubuku* that even included a kind of rebuttal manual with ready-made answers to rebut objections from doubters (Lopez 2016:194). SGI's global success has been attributed to its aggressive conversion campaigns. However, with this success, SGI also began to soften its position, arguing in favour of a less aggressive approach, in part because potential Western converts were seen as preferring a more tolerant, harmonious approach. With the resulting schism, the position thus changed, as Stone (1994:255) explains: "Ironically, it is the once-confrontational Sōka Gakkai that has assumed the moderate position, while – at least on a rhetorical level – the traditional denomination, Nichiren Shōshū, has become re-radicalized".

Accommodating conflict within Dharma Wheel: the relative position of the TLS thread

Having considered the extreme discursive space of the Google Groups translation thread, I return to consider further the space of the Dharma Wheel CoP, and the place of the TLS thread within that space. First, it is important to be aware that while the TLS thread represents a distinctly more welcoming and collaborative space than that of the Google thread, the discursive space of Dharma Wheel as a whole is more pluralistic than this duality might suggest, incorporating a range of different approaches and discursive colourations that fit within the overall parameters of the CoP to greater or lesser extents.⁴ Nichiren polemics thus occur in Dharma Wheel too, and are prevalent, perhaps unsurprisingly, in the Nichiren forum – a sub-CoP that as one Global Moderator puts it is “notorious” for its “nasty, divisive sniping” (“Lockdowns on Nichiren Site”); indeed to another member on the same thread, “the Nichiren section look[s] like a war zone”, owing to its large number of locked threads. Amid such polemics, the locking of threads becomes an essential tool for moderators trying to bring this almost recalcitrant sub-CoP back within the bounds of acceptability and avoid descending into what Queequeg, speaking of the Nichiren Google Group, refers to as the “[u]nmoderated depths of Nichiren hell”.

In addition to locking of threads, we also see the application of the CoP’s shared repertoire, characterized by Right Speech and related qualities such as humility, as moderators and less extreme posters seek to bring the discourse back to the CoP’s joint enterprise of learning and propagation of Buddhist knowledge. Responding to a post by Mark arguing that SGI is an “evil cult”, OregonBuddhist, the initiator of the thread (titled ‘Posiive [*sic.*] about Soka Gakkai?’) declares: “I’m not going to join Soka Gakkai, so I don’t really need the warning of ‘don’t join ...’ I just want a *little more education* on what they do right, what it is that attracts people” (emphasis added). In another thread (‘I’m Sure This Has Been Asked Before ...’), Mark propounds similar views, with Queequeg responding: “Youre contributions to the sangha have been significant over the years, but sometimes its just too much and too far for no ostensible purpose except you want to criticize. Stop causing so much grief in the sangha”. Here, strong disalignment is performed regarding Mark’s assertions and argumentational style, which are presented as incompatible with and harmful to the *sangha*, the broader community of Buddhist practitioners, yet the criticism is nevertheless still tempered with the face-saving observation that Mark has contributed much to that community.

In the Dharma Wheel space as a whole, then, the Nichiren sub-CoP illustrates Wenger’s (2010:180–181) assertion that “[a] community of practice can be dysfunctional, counter-productive, even harmful”. Viewed in its own terms, the Nichiren sub-CoP may be less dysfunctional than might be imagined. For, as we have seen above, for more exclusivist Nichiren members, confrontational forms of engagement are an essential part of their Buddhist identity, part of a particular set of identity traits that Gee (2000:110) refers to as a “Discourse”, a “[way] of being ‘certain kinds of people’”, in this case a Nichiren believer. In the context of the Dharma Wheel CoP, however, while more moderate forms of discussion about Nichiren Buddhism are compatible with the CoP’s joint enterprise, the intrusion of a confrontational Discourse employed as an article of faith by exclusivist believers using a repertoire of interaction at odds with the CoP’s key repertoire element of Right Speech sets up tensions in the CoP, in which such a Discourse is less welcome. Wenger (1998:158) speaks of a CoP as constituting a “nexus of multimembership”, into which individual members

bring different membership identities. Confrontational approaches to discussion as religious membership markers represent one aspect of multimembership that potentially complicates and disrupts a given person's membership of the Dharma Wheel CoP.

Returning to translation, we have seen how in the TLS thread different aspects of Buddhist identity are performed, whether explicitly doctrinal (as in Jechan's Nichiren case) or competency-based (e.g. Queequeg's textual and terminological expertise), and these identity performances can be used both to bolster claims over particular translations, and to provide exigencies for developing the discussion in new directions. While the thread shows strong interest from Nichiren posters because of the centrality of the *Lotus Sutra* in that sect's practice, as well as its popularity in the West (and hence in translation), Nichiren perspectives are only part of a more complex mix of evaluative positions. The location of the thread outside the Nichiren sub-CoP, under another section of the site titled 'Sūtra Studies', may partially account for this fact – that while Nichiren identities are performed by some members, the thread is more inclusive.

The very location of discussion, then, may itself exert expectations as to the nature of interaction: here, a participant is interacting not in the space of a sub-CoP characterized by virulent infighting but in a more pluralistic intellectual space, in which, as we have seen in regard to the Jechan sequence discussed above, knowledge can be more emergent, rather than fixed, and even the expert moderator or long-time CoP member can be a learner. Alignment and disalignment are clearly seen in respect of evaluative stance, and one can still detect that entrenched positions and received wisdom may ultimately be difficult to challenge, particularly when represented by more senior members of the CoP. Nevertheless, member interactions are more constructive and dialogic – indeed in the case of the opening poster, Tatsuo, they translate into his purchase of the translations recommended by members.

In this regard, it is also interesting to consider the behaviour of a participant from the Google discussion in the Dharma Wheel context. The post by JazzisTVRicky (joined 2016, 235 posts) at the tail end of the TLS thread (post no. 34 of 37) reveals a more peaceful aspect: "I find most [translations of the *Lotus Sutra*] to be quite similar and consistent in message. ... I base my understanding of the Lotus Sutra on my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Teachings". While this provides a clear doctrinal allegiance, it is remarkable for its uncombative acceptance, again suggesting that the poster modifies his style to the prevailing tone of the space. This was posted only 45 minutes after Jazz joined Dharma Wheel, and thus the respectful tone may also partly reflect his then status as a novice member of the CoP.

The Dharma Wheel TLS thread as epitextual space

The discursive space of the TLS thread – and other similar threads – may be said also to function as an epitextual space, a space in which discussion is contingent on the translations that it evaluates. In Genette's definition, "a paratextual element ... necessarily has a *location* that can be situated in relation to the text itself" (1997:4; emphasis in original). In contrast to peritexts, which form a physical part of the published work, epitexts are "all those messages that, at least originally, are located outside the book, generally with the help of the media (interviews, conversations) or under cover of private communications (letters, diaries, and others)" (ibid.:5). A central aspect of Genette's definition of all paratexts is that they are authorially sanctioned, implying that they are also in the author's interest. In the case of

epitexts, an interview with the author or letters by the author to a friend in which he or she discusses their work would clearly qualify. Publishers' blurb is one area where Genette finds ambiguity, for it "does not always involve the responsibility of the author in a very meaningful way" (ibid.:347). The question of whether it is possible to have paratexts that are non-authorially-sanctioned is raised by the case of translation, which as Batchelor (2017; this volume) argues, might be considered as a form of epitext: a translation is directly contingent on the source text yet is separate from it. However, in advancing such a perspective, she notes, translation studies scholars have tended to omit reference to authorial sanction from their discussion, since "authorial intention renders the concept problematic for the study of translations" (Batchelor 2017:28). New genres of writing in the online milieu, for instance fan-fiction, are another example of material that might be considered epitextual but that complicates the insistence on authorial sanction.

With regard to the nature of discussion in online forum threads, there is clearly no sense of such texts being sanctioned by the author – or rather, by the translator: translations and translators are debated and sometimes criticized in extreme terms, as we have seen. However, a set of complex relations needs to be teased through here. To begin with, while in Genette's conceptualization we would expect a given epitext to map to a corresponding text, in the present case, we have a situation in which one epitextual space maps to several different translations simultaneously (even if some members of the thread only refer to one translation in their posts). While this begins to part company with Genette, such spaces, in their provision of 'thresholds of interpretation', have clear epitextual force and suggest that, as with the question of authorial sanction, the notion of epitext as originally conceived needs to be reexamined and expanded.

In addition, if these discussion threads are epitextual to the translations they evaluate and the translations are themselves epitextual to their source text (the original sutra), then these threads may likewise be said to be epitextual to the original sutra, for in critiquing its various translations, they seek to elucidate and debate understandings of the sutra and the philosophical or soteriological position it presents. They thus exist in a relationship of dual epitextuality to the source text: they may function both as epitexts to other epitexts (the translations), and more directly, as epitexts to the single source text (the sutra) – the latter as when, for example, source text meanings and terms are discussed at length.

These observations give us pause as to the whole nature of religious commentary. If such commentary (to which these online discussions in a sense belong) can be said to be epitextual to the scripture on which it comments – and it surely provides a vital 'threshold of interpretation' that is liminal to the main text and often essential to its understanding – then in what sense does authorial sanction apply? For such ancient texts as the *Lotus Sutra*, any authorial sanction is clearly impossible, and indeed, it is often unclear even what the 'original' source text was. We perhaps need then to conceive of religious commentary as an ongoing process of epitextual interaction and forward movement, whether within a single doctrinal or commentarial tradition or in dialogue between such traditions. In this understanding, commentaries are authorized by particular religious sects or schools of thought. But beyond this, there is the sense that the very sutra itself is sufficient authorization: for proponents of a particular reading of the sutra, the sutra *is* the authorization of their interpretation and validation of their perspective.

The discussions in both the Dharma Wheel TLS and Google Groups threads thus can be said to have epitextual value. But this value differs. In the Dharma Wheel thread, the space provides a place for pre-textual encounter, where those searching for information

and advice on translations – whether experienced CoP members or outsiders visiting the site – can learn more. It also provides a place for post-textual encounter, in which reflection and comparison can take place. In this regard, the less dissonant space of the Dharma Wheel thread is a place for the construction of knowledge through dialogue, the critical re-examination of received ideas, and the introduction of new information. This is a constructive space that, while it is clearly a product of the CoP that produced it, is nevertheless also accessible to outside users or to new novice members.

Finally, it seems likely that in the Dharma Wheel TLS thread discussion would also be more believable to the uninitiated reader. In a highly dissonant forum like the Google Groups thread, by contrast, the discussions depart from an emphasis on the translation itself, and their liminality to the translation they describe is thus weaker. The space becomes an arena for the performance of group loyalties and a ritual rehearsal of fixed argumentational positions and styles that is an important part of the religious tradition of the group in question. The epitextual value of this space to the outsider is thus limited, since it becomes difficult to weigh the validity of such polemics in regard to the translation that they critique. As Queequeg states in a riposte to Mark: “Maybe there are some out there who do speak this language you use ... However, most people will just tune out.”

Notes

- 1 The third branch of Buddhism, which predates the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions, is Theravada Buddhism, found predominantly in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Dharma Wheel has a sister site devoted to Theravada discussions, named Dhamma Wheel (www.dhammadharma.com – *Dhamma* being the Pali equivalent of Sanskrit *Dharma*).
- 2 The figure provided here and elsewhere for each Dharma Wheel member’s posts is that of 14 July 2021, unless otherwise stated.
- 3 All typos, grammatical errors and non-standard romanizations are reproduced in this and all subsequent quotes as they appear on the thread.
- 4 In this regard see members’ discussion in the thread ‘Is this a Tribal Site or a Philosophy Site?’, referred to earlier.

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INTELLIGENT DESIGNS

A corpus-assisted study of creationist discourse

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According to the influential anthropologist J.G. Frazer (1909:162), many tribal societies traditionally ascribed to “the belief that human beings are directly descended from animals”. In such accounts, relations of both ancestry and kinship are assumed between members of the tribe and those of a particular species, such as lions, beavers or crawfish (ibid.:162–164). A common alternative perspective on the origins of humankind does not draw on the living organisms that surround us, but rather on the dead matter that supports us: earth. While the exact formulation and mechanism might differ, the major Abrahamic religions all refer to this belief in some form or another. The Qur’an, for instance, tells us that God “created man from clay like the potter’s” (Pickthall 1930/2018:445; Surat Ar-Rahman/The Merciful, Verse 55:14). In the Bible, the creator sternly informs humanity of its status: “you are dust, And to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).¹ The Biblical account of humanity’s creation is embedded in a cosmogonic narrative which explicates, rather than just the emergence of its protagonists, the conception of the universe as a whole. Despite its broader perspective, the narrative is focused on the formation of the earth, and attaches great importance to the role of humankind in its early history. Indeed, in the Book of Genesis, cosmogony quickly gives way to genealogy. For several generations, descendants of Adam and Eve are carefully listed by name and lifespan (Genesis 4–5). The Bible’s presentation of temporal information, in close proximity to its account of the foundation of the earth, would eventually facilitate the development of chronological scholarship. In the seventeenth century, the Irish bishop James Ussher, for instance, would famously calculate “that the creation of the world took place in the year 4004 BC and, to be precise, on Sunday 23 October of that year” (Barr 1999:380). Such specific dating practices are not necessarily central to Christianity, but the idea that the Holy Book offers a valid account of early human history was commonly accepted for centuries. Thus, when read literally, the Bible seems to offer a geocentric, anthropocentric and temporally narrow perspective on creation, which – often in conversation with Greek learned texts – would gradually become refined and institutionalized as Christian doctrine developed.

With the advance of the natural sciences, Christian cosmology has found itself increasingly besieged on a number of fronts. The idea that the earth occupies a central, stationary position in the universe was profoundly challenged by Copernicus's (1543/1995) astronomical model, which proposed shifting the centre towards the sun. Kuhn (1985:1, 135) describes Copernicus' work as an "epochal turning point" in humanity's intellectual journey, but adds that its significance lies "less in what it says itself than in what it caused others to say". Indeed, the spread of Copernicus's ideas depended upon further research and considerable dissemination efforts by scholars such as Kepler and Galileo, who met with fierce religious censure (Gingerich 2009). Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the notion that the earth is relatively young was found to be incongruent with the observations of early geologists such as James Hutton and Charles Lyell, whose work hinted at the "incomprehensible immensity" of what John McPhee (1981) has called "deep time" (Gould 1987:2, 4). The earth's topography, and the fossils found on its surface, were once accounted for by the destructive effects of a punishing flood (Genesis 6–9), but this outlook became less plausible in the face of evidence for gradual processes of "sedimentary deposition, accompanied by the gradual birth and death of species" (Lyell 1833:33). Finally, the idea that humanity occupied a privileged position in a world decisively crafted by a conscious creator was hard to reconcile with nineteenth-century biological research which pointed towards the likelihood of evolution by natural selection. Darwin (1871/1981:32–33), in particular, argued that "man and all other vertebrate animals have been constructed on the same general model", that this correspondence indicates common ancestry, and that it would eventually become fanciful to believe that each species "was the work of a separate act of creation".

Nevertheless, the discoveries in astronomy, geology and biology sketched above have all been contested, often on religious grounds, and evolutionary theory has proven particularly prone to public resistance. Surveys suggest that in the United States alone around 40 per cent of people believe that humans were created by God in their present form, and "even in the most evolution-friendly European states, the level of acceptance almost never exceeds 80%" (Blancke et al. 2013:1004–1005). Thus, creationist belief has a strong foothold even in the world's most secular regions. It is important to note, however, that creationism is not a homogeneous conviction, as beliefs vary considerably across creationist communities and individuals. Young Earth creationism, for instance, espouses the fundamentalist view that the world, and everything in it, was designed and delivered by a supreme being about 6 millennia ago, whereas proponents of the Intelligent Design movement often content themselves with pointing out the "empirical detectability" of biological features whose complexity is allegedly hard to explain by means of evolutionary theory (Ross 2005:322). However, despite apparent basic differences, it can also be argued that less overtly religious forms of creationism are little more than continued attempts to introduce anti-evolutionary ideas in educational settings (Dixon 2008:83). The debate about whether and to what degree the concepts of evolution and creation should figure in school curricula is embedded in a broader political discussion about rights and freedoms, and about the authority attributed to different sources of knowledge (ibid.:3, 10).

The creationist struggle for recognition is reflected in the linguistic patterns employed in creationist speech and writing. Bielo (2019:13) argues that creationist speakers often hint at an atheist conspiracy determined to suppress the creationist voice. This is perhaps unsurprising in the light of Douglas et al.'s (2016) research on "hypersensitive agency detection": the idea that "someone is pulling the strings" unites conspiracy beliefs with a broad range

of religious positions. Conspiracy theories tend to arise in relation to “stigmatized knowledge”, which consists of “claims that have not been validated by mainstream institutions”. Non-conformity to the mainstream is also observed by Tarzia (1990:13), who draws attention to the central trope of the “lone hero fighting against great establishment odds” in creationist texts. Within this framework, which is arguably characteristic of non-conformist political discourse regardless of religious affiliation, the solitary guardian of truth eventually overcomes their foe in a verbal conflict, which is presented one-sidedly (ibid.:14). Thus, previous research suggests that understanding modern creationism’s “claim to legitimacy” requires investigating its “repertoires of expressive resources” (Bielo 2019:24). Building on this observation, this chapter presents a corpus-assisted analysis of articles published on contemporary creationist websites. The analysis is focused on the integration of scientific and religious discourse, a pattern I relate in the final section to Hermans’s (2007a) work on equivalence in translation, which suggests that a relationship of correspondence between any two discursive items is often institutionally proclaimed rather than objectively demonstrated.

A corpus of creationist writing: materials and approach

The data for this study consists of a set of online articles available as part of the *Genealogies of Knowledge* Internet corpus.² This corpus was constructed with the aim of investigating the contemporary contestation of concepts such as *citizenship*, *human rights*, *expertise* and *evidence*, which are central to either political or scientific discourse – or both, given the interdependence of the two spheres of social activity. The corpus mainly consists of twenty first-century Anglophone texts, retrieved from a variety of sources such as blogs and online magazines. The specific subcorpus examined in this chapter amounts to over 400,000 tokens and contains a total of 126 articles from two present-day Christian creationist outlets: Creation Ministries International (CMI) and Creation Worldview Ministries (CWM).³ The first group of ministries holds that “the scientific aspects of creation are important, but are secondary to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (Creation Ministries International, ‘What We Believe’). Its mission is “to support the effective proclamation of the Gospel by providing credible answers that affirm the reliability of the Bible, in particular its Genesis history” (Creation Ministries International, ‘About Us’). The second organization’s purpose is to profess “the truths of biblical foundations, especially Biblical Scientific Creationism” (Creation Worldview Ministries, ‘About Us’). Much of the work published on its website is authored by Dr Grady McMurtly, a former adherent of evolutionary theory turned “Full-time International Creation Emissary” (ibid.). Notably, neither description presents the frameworks of science and religion as fundamentally at odds with each other. My analysis of the data drawn from the websites of these two organizations will thus pay particular attention to the interplay between religious and scientific viewpoints in creationist discourse. Overall, the content provided on both websites is highly similar, and the analysis does not focus on the difference between both outlets but rather on common arguments and positions. It should also be noted that the analysis opts to read the creationist material as expressing a genuine conviction. Yet, there is always the possibility, however slight, that the statements discussed were primarily produced with other designs in mind, be they creative, political or commercial.

The texts produced by both organizations are accessed through the *Genealogies of Knowledge* concordance browser. The browser’s default interface offers a keyword-in-context

(KWIC) view: a query for any linguistic item returns a set of concordance lines, which consist of all the relevant occurrences of the search string in the corpus, as well as a stretch of surrounding text on either side. Longer stretches of text, within the limits of fair use, can be viewed through an ‘extract’ function, and the software suite includes a number of visualization tools that support the identification and interpretation of patterns found across large quantities of textual material (Luz and Sheehan 2020). Corpus research assumes the importance of recurrent linguistic patterns, meaning that if something is frequently observed, it is likely to be important (Partington et al. 2013:8). Of course, unique or uncommon features of language may be equally important, but without the prior observation of regularity the unusual may escape notice. On a basic linguistic level, concordances primarily facilitate the recognition of formulaic utterances, common lexical items and patterns of collocation, the latter understood as “the frequent co-occurrence of words” (Sinclair 2004:28). Thus, a wealth of lexical and grammatical information can be derived from corpora, but they also provide insight into complex rhetorical and social phenomena. As Stubbs (2010:33) has argued, “social institutions and speech events are the same thing looked at from a different point of view”. We may then expect that certain recurrent speech acts will characterize creationism, as both a discourse and an institution that needs to position itself at the intersection of science and religion. Here, a number of questions can help elucidate some central tenets, at least as regards the selected outlets: Which intertextual relations are established by the creationist authors in the corpus, and in support of what claims? Who is granted authority in creationist texts, and in what contexts are basic concepts such as *evidence* and *truth* appealed to? These broad questions have guided the analysis I offer below. The approach to the data is corpus-assisted, meaning that the study depends on corpus techniques, but it is not limited to the information they directly provide (Partington et al. 2013:10). The primary access point to the texts is the concordance line, and the main focus is on textual patterns, but the presentation of the findings relies on more elaborate readings of specific passages.

Points of reference in creationist writing: a corpus-assisted reading

A straightforward and effective way to find out who is afforded authority in a corpus of texts is to search for mentions of proper nouns, particularly personal names (Buts 2020). In the *Creation Ministries International* (CMI) subcorpus, the most common proper noun, at over 500 occurrences, is *God*, whose name is almost always capitalized. The most frequent collocate of *God* is *created*, which occurs at one position to the right, and is followed by lexical items such *humanity*, *organisms* and *the universe* (Figure 14.1). The most frequent sequence of 3 words in the relevant concordance is *Word of God*. A highly similar picture emerges in *Creation Worldview Ministries* (CWM). In many of the concordance lines drawn from CMI, the Word of God is equated with the Bible, which is characterized as *inerrant*, *infallible*, *inspired* and *sure*. The equation between the Word of God and the Bible is sometimes extended to Jesus: “He Himself *is* the Word of God” (CMI, Livingston 2003, emphasis in original). To grant authority to one is to accept the other. Thus, perusal of the immediate co-text of the central signifier *God* immediately delivers the main thrust of the argument found throughout the corpus: The Bible states facts, it does not lie, and it clearly identifies God as the creator of the world and of mankind.

Apart from *God*, *Jesus* and *Darwin* are the most frequent personal names in the corpus, and at 370 and 368 occurrences, respectively, their position seems strikingly similar. While

ed in Genesis. Creation The Bible is clear that God created the universe and everything in it by His word. 'Creation science' derive from the conviction that God created the universe—including humans and other living things. Thus, Paul accepts the Genesis history that God created first Adam, who then named all the land vertebrates. If the inerrant Scripture in Gen 1 states that God created the world in six literal days, then why should evolution not been back since. This position states that God created the universe, the initial single celled life and Homo sapiens. At the church has generally understood that "God created this world in a very short period of time, under the view, the Scripture clearly tells us that God created the universe, and all the physical things in it, including life. Creationists. They understood that if a triune god created the universe, and he is knowable, then facts about God are turned to praise only because it is true. God created the universe. He made our first parents, and the action in the world is characterized by words. God created the universe by speaking (Genesis 1). God's c

FIGURE 14.1 Illustration of a concordance, showing patterns around the sequence 'God created'

this might be considered a quantitative coincidence, the suggested symmetry between Jesus and Darwin is reinforced by the fact that the corpus contains multiple instances of the collocations *before Darwin* and *after Darwin*, structures that are strongly reminiscent of Christian calendrical conventions. Clear differences, however, arise from the verbs that are employed in the immediate environment of these two central figures. Verbs occurring frequently to the right of *Jesus* include *said*, *taught*, *answered* and *quoted*. Jesus is fashioned as an instructor who has the authority to select and disseminate appropriate knowledge, with the concordance showing particular attention being paid to Jesus quoting Genesis. The most frequent verbal collocate to the left of *Jesus* is *saw*, with multiple variations such as *see* and *seen*. The reference is often to Biblical eyewitness accounts, and the pattern of visibility gains in strength in the light of the frequently observed combination *Jesus appeared*. The focus on Jesus's attested visibility is hardly surprising, since the corporeal existence of Jesus is what anchors Christianity in concrete reality, and thus in history. Yet, the *appearance* of Jesus implies a former absence, and some of the eyewitness accounts in the corpus converge upon a crucial moment during which Jesus was not seen, namely three days after his death, when his tomb was found empty. The bodily absence, which supposedly supports the idea of Christ's resurrection, is of crucial importance to the creationist perspective, as the following fragment from the corpus illustrates:

After all, doctrine is inextricably linked to history and science, so that whatever Scripture affirms on scientific or historical matters is also true. For example, the key doctrine of the Resurrection is linked to the historical fact that Jesus' body had vacated the tomb on the third day. It also impinges on science, because naturalistic scientists assert that it is impossible for dead men to rise. And the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection is tied to the historical accuracy of the event recorded in Genesis (1 Cor. 15:21–22).

(CMI, Sarfati 1994/2018)

The fragment presents a complex chain of associations and dissociations that ultimately hinges upon a rhetorical passage from a letter to the Corinthians attributed, at least in part, to Paul the Apostle: "For since by a man death came, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:21–22). The epistle to the Corinthians is part of the Christian canon of scripture

and, from the perspective of Biblical infallibility, must therefore be taken at face value. A correct interpretation of the narrative arc of condemnation and redemption thus requires that both its constitutive episodes be taken as historical fact, and that one cannot be true without the other. If scientific propositions run counter to this exposition, they need to be revised. Nevertheless, for the structure of cause and effect to be meaningful, historical and scientific insights cannot be dismissed in toto, meaning that only a particular strand of science is rejected, namely ‘naturalistic science’. Naturalism is “the idea or belief that only natural (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual) laws and forces operate in the world” (Oxford English Dictionary 2021). In the corpus under study, naturalism is strongly associated with evolution, and frequently derided. The general sentiment, as well as a range of commonly found linguistic elements in the concordance for *naturalistic* (such as *evolutionists* and *mechanistic*), are concisely captured in the following example from *Creation Worldview Ministries* (CWM):⁴

Evolutionists want to incorrectly define science as being only that which is **naturalistic**, mechanistic and random. “Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not **naturalistic**”.

(CWM, McMurty 2020b)⁵

The sentence between inverted commas is a quote, correctly attributed in the essay to Todd (1999), as published in *Nature*. Importantly, Todd’s text was published in the correspondence section of the journal and is thus not part of its research output, as could potentially be wrongly inferred from the standard citation format employed in McMurty’s essay.⁶ The essay contains many such decontextualized and slightly disjointed quotes, which are all brought to bear on the central argument expressed in its title: “Evolution is a religion!” (McMurty 2020b). The central idea is that belief in evolutionary theory defies reason and rests upon a blind act of faith. Within as well as beyond the corpus, the main prophetic voice associated with evolution is Charles Darwin, whose symmetrical position to that of Jesus Christ now gains in clarity. As stated before, common verb forms that collocate with both names partly illustrate the contrasting positions of both figures in the corpus. Whereas Jesus *said* and *quoted*, Darwin *wrote* and *published*. The difference in modes of proclamation and institutional embedding is compelling, but it reveals little about the substance of the quarrel with Darwin as presented in the corpus. More informative concordance lines can be retrieved by searching for forms of the verb *to know*, particularly when negated, as illustrated in the following examples:

Darwin had no concept of genetics and considered that offspring came from “Blended inheritance.” **Darwin did not know** about the Laws of Thermodynamics, only then being described by Joule, Clausius, Lord Kelvin and Pasteur. **He did not know** that the First Law of Thermodynamics proves that the universe cannot be the reason for its own existence. **He did not know** that the Second Law of Thermodynamics proves that evolution cannot happen.

(CWM, McMurty 2020f)

Darwin did not know how heredity really works, but people today should know better. **He did not know**, for instance, that what is passed on in reproduction is essentially a whole lot of parcels of information(genes), or coded instructions. It cannot

be stressed enough that what natural selection actually does is get rid of information. It is not capable of creating anything new, by definition.

(CMI, Wieland 2001)

The main argument put forward in both fragments is that Darwin's work competed with alternative views and was developed independently of a range of important breakthroughs in fields such as physics and biology. More contentious is the claim, unapologetically put forward as part of the same argument, that several scientific discoveries invalidate the theory of evolution. Yet, contrary to the view that Darwin's work does not adequately relate to the achievements of the broader scientific community, the corpus at times presents Darwin, together with other highly influential scientists, as a model of noble and informed dissent, as in the following extended example from the corpus:

if Pasteur had been content to accept the scientific consensus of the day, he would not have made his ground-breaking discoveries. If **Darwin** had accepted the scientific consensus of his day, he never would have published his books on evolution.

(CMI, Sanders and Halley 2015)

The idea of scientific consensus is clearly framed as suspicious in this statement, an attitude attested elsewhere in the corpus, as another extended extract illustrates:

The greatest scientists in history are great precisely because they broke with the consensus. "There is no such thing as consensus science. **If it's consensus, it isn't science.** If it's science, it isn't consensus. Period." Nevertheless, like the believers in epicycles, and phlogiston, and humours, and spontaneous generation, many scientists today believe in evolution. Can so many be wrong? History says 'yes'.

(CMI, Howard 2014)

Evolution here is equated with a series of antiquated and disproven concepts and hypotheses, to strengthen the central claim that consensus hinders scientific progress, as argued by the author of the quote embedded in the text. The quote is from a speech by Michael Crichton (2003), a famous writer of fiction who, as the CMI text stresses, had "a previous career in medicine and science" (Howard 2014). Credentials are clearly important, even though the institutional systems that bestow them are not. At work here is the idea of the "lone hero fighting against great establishment odds" identified by Tarzia (1990:13) as a central motif in creationist discourses. As I suggested earlier, the notion of an establishment that needs to be resisted ties in neatly with Bielo's (2019) observation of conspiratorial tendencies in creationist speech. However, a conspiracy must involve more than a divergence of worldviews, even if undisclosed interests are involved. Conspiracy theories suggest that something sinister is at play, and that a certain organization with evil designs is secretly working towards "some malevolent end" (Barkun 2013:3). In this regard, it is particularly telling that nouns such as *debate* and *truth* co-occur in the corpus with verbs such as *suppress* and *hide*, as in the following examples:

Creationists would welcome public **debate** with anyone who wants to defend the statement that "Creationism is ... contrary to scientific fact". But rather than allow such debate, the proponents of this campaign would rather **suppress** the matter.

(CMI, Sibley 2011)

Elitist evolutionists are running scared and they all know it whether or not they are willing to admit it to outsiders. It serves no purpose to **deny**, **deceive** or try to **hide** the **truth**.

(CWM, McMurty 2020c)

As the second example shows, the evolutionist position on *truth* is also associated with verbs such as *deny* and *deceive*. *Deception*, in turn, is frequently found in the textual vicinity of *Satan*, as in “Satan’s first deception was to introduce people to evolutionary theories” (McMurty 2020e). With some effort, the speech of the Satanic serpent that convinces Eve to partake in the fruits of the tree of knowledge can arguably be construed as a statement signalling the possibility of evolutionary processes: “on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God” (Genesis 3:5). Thus, the antagonistic symmetry between Darwin and Jesus, or evolution and creation, can be cast as a fundamental part of the more monumental struggle between good and evil.

According to the authors in the corpus, the evils of evolution may have begun with the devil’s whispers, but they certainly did not end with Darwin’s writings. With just under 100 occurrences, a commonly mentioned figure in the corpus is Ernst Haeckel, a nineteenth-century German zoologist and “arguably the most influential champion of Darwin’s theory of evolution on the European continent” (Levit and Hossfeld 2019). Haeckel was a vocal critic of Christianity and argued that “revelation” and the “truths of faith” were emotional distortions of reality, “based entirely on deception” (Haeckel 1905:18). Conversely, in the CMI/CWM corpus under study Haeckel himself is presented as a “pro-to-Nazi Darwinist” and an “evangelist for evolution and apostle of deceit” (CMI, Sarfati 2000, quoting Grigg n.d.). The association with Nazism is based on Haeckel’s promotion of a specific form of “social Darwinism” that aims to ensure “successful natural selection” within and among human societies, and which therefore favours the political “application of the laws of biology” (Stein 1988:55–56). Eugenic interventions and racist policies are not illogical outcomes of this outlook, and Stein (ibid.:57) thus argues that “Haeckel and his fellow social Darwinists advanced the ideas that were to become the core assumptions of national socialism”. The creationist corpus under study offers a similar assessment and seeks to illustrate this lineage through selective Hitler quotations such as “He who would live must fight. He who does not wish to fight in this world, where permanent struggle is the law of life, has not the right to exist” (Hitler 1925/1939:240). The presumed connection between evolutionary theory and genocidal tendencies is a common concern among creationists, who not only believe that “evolution by natural causes is implausible” but also “that belief in evolution makes human beings immoral, by making them think of themselves as mere animals” (Szerzynski 2010:160). The perceived inadequacy of evolutionary theory is therefore considered both a moral and a factual failure, in as far as this distinction is valid in a spiritually conceived universe.

As the examples discussed so far demonstrate, the essays from the creationist discourse represented in the CMI/CWM corpus make ample use of quotation to shape and illustrate the grand narrative of a cosmic battle between the forces of evolution and those of creation. Quoted sources include speeches and articles from likeminded individuals, and a range of current and historical writings that are meant to illustrate the continued relevance of the creationist tradition, as well as the persistent corruption of the evolutionary position. However, the great majority of references are predictably drawn from a single source, namely the

This matches what we would expect from	Genesis 1, where it says that God created organisms to repro
thousand years ago, just as He indicated in	Genesis To summarize—evolutionists concentrate their efforts
cannot and will not be destroyed by Man:	Genesis 8:22 (NAS)> The promotion of "Global Warming" is p
sh. Stewardship requires industry and toil. (Genesis 2:15) Man was to work in the Garden of Eden and ca
mitted to the special creation as described in	Genesis and Christianity must fight with its full might, fair or fo
h claims are groundless. The Genealogies of	Genesis 5 and 11 do not and cannot contain any gaps. The ir
door to the "scientific history" that displaced	Genesis Theologians were largely asleep, mesmerized by "scie
ed Neanderthals are mentioned in the Bible,	Genesis 10:3. They are simply people who migrated from the
date The Flood of Noah at about 2,350 BC.	Genesis 6:14-16 gives the dimensions of the Ark of Noah. Gei
and that the first 11 Chapters of the Book of	Genesis must be understood in no other way. These chapter
recent creation as recorded in the Book of	Genesis therefore, these three interpretations must automati
couple named Adam and Eve. According to	Genesis and other passages of the Bible, Adam was not born

FIGURE 14.2 Concordance sample illustrating reference to 'Genesis'

Bible. Even so, the Bible contains a large collection of texts on a variety of topics, and not all its passages are equally popular among creationist authors. As may be expected, Genesis, which features the creation story, is the most frequently referenced in texts from both Creation Ministries International and Creation Worldview Ministries (Figure 14.2).

Among the books of the Old Testament, Job and Isaiah are also referenced particularly often, including the following passages:⁷

Remember that **You have made me as clay**; Yet would You turn me into dust again?

(Job 10:9)

Through a land of distress and anguish, From where come lioness and lion, viper and **flying serpent** ...

(Isaiah 30:6)

Repetition suggests veracity, and the function of the verse from Job is partly to echo the act of creation as presented in Genesis. The second verse arguably illustrates the existence of an animal that no longer soars over the earth, and thus helps the creationist perspective come to terms with the fossil record. Palaeontology is regarded with suspicion by the authors represented in the corpus, and even though *fossil evidence* and *fossil record* are frequent collocations, this is mainly because palaeontology is repeatedly presented as lacking credibility, providing no real proof for evolution, or even contradicting an evolutionary interpretation, as in the following example: "The very pattern in the fossil record flatly contradicts evolutionary notions of what it should be like ... The links are missing" (CMI, Batten 2002). Thus, mythological and prophetic passages from the Old Testament serve to provide alternatives to scientific interpretations considered flawed by the creationist authors. From the New Testament, CMI/CWM authors mostly draw on the Gospel of John and on Revelation, often to give voice to Jesus, who functions both as a spiritual guide and as a chronicler of facts. Lastly, Biblical citations repeatedly refer to the Pauline letter to the Romans, and specifically to the following passage:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness, because that which

is known about God is evident within them; for **God made it evident** to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

(*Romans 1:18–20*)

The statement, which partly accounts for the common pattern *suppress the truth* in the corpus, speaks to the sentiment that the design of the world clearly reveals its divine origins, and that those who reject this truth deserve damnation. On the whole, Biblical references in the corpus seem to fulfil a number of core functions. They serve to confirm the story of creation, either by direct retelling or through intertextual echoes. They are also appealed to as a source of alternative explanation when the scientific consensus on a topic of interest is perceived to clash with creationist doctrine. Finally, Biblical references serve to inspire fortitude and steadfastness in the face of evil or, in other words, in the face of evolution.

Declarations of equivalence: the creationist system of communication

The idea of evolution is absent from the Bible, conceptually as well as lexically. Yet the corpus under study shows that creationist authors do appeal to the Bible to condemn evolutionist thought. In an article in CWM, for instance, the author declares that “Paul wrote a letter to the evolutionists warning of the consequences of evolutionary philosophy” (McMurty 2020a). The letter, which was quoted at the end of the previous section, was addressed to the Romans. Even though it warns against the dangers of unbelief and idolatry, and in this context mentions the worship of animal imagery, suggesting that it is addressed to adherents of evolutionary theory requires a considerable stretch of the imagination. Given the theory’s relatively recent development, this reinterpretation seems rather anachronistic. However, anachronism is an irrelevant criticism if the Bible is assumed to express eternal truths whose validity is expected to last throughout the ages. A similar strategy of interpreting the words of the Bible in such a way as to suggest they correspond to modern scientific discourse is illustrated in the following extract from another article in CWM by the same author:

People started out with perfect genetic material at the time of creation. This genetic material remained perfect until the time shortly after creation when mankind sinned. This event brought imperfection into the universe. The mechanism which continues this process of becoming more and more imperfect is called the Second Law of Thermodynamics in science, and it is a part of ‘The Curse’ of Genesis 3:17.

(*CWM, McMurty 2020d*)

One might consider it unwarrantable to equate the end of prelapsarian paradise with the introduction of entropy in the universe, and with genetic degradation. But the fact that some consider the correspondence valid raises the question of how we know that two texts, or two utterances, express the same information. On what grounds can we assume or reject such a relationship of correspondence? This is ultimately a question of how we establish or identify equivalence, a concept that continues to nourish and plague the discipline of translation studies. Because no two sign systems are fully commensurate, and because the practice of translation is socially and culturally embedded, equivalence relations can never be

reduced to purely semantic concerns (Tymoczko 2013:3). In the final analysis, equivalence is not simply observed by comparing texts, “but is imposed on them through an external intervention in a particular institutional context” (Hermans 2007a:6). Hermans’s proposition that translational equivalence is primarily declared rather than inferred is pertinent to the complex rewording practices encountered in the creationist corpus. The examples discussed so far suggest that the act of Biblical citation establishes an equivalence relation between two or more concepts, utterances or texts, one of which is always the Bible. The narrative is fixed and demands that every novel piece of information is made to correspond to a unit of meaning that is already available within its scope. As a particular mode of communication, creationist discourse divides the entirety of available knowledge into two competing orders offering parallel yet incompatible worldviews, namely creationism and evolutionism, and subordinates every other distinction to this fundamental division. In this process, creationist discourse compresses the irreducible complexity of any communication that does not conform to its outlook into an antagonistic duplicate of its own narrative foundations: as Satan is to God, so is Darwin to Jesus, and evolution to creation.

We may well wonder at this point how the integrity of the Bible is maintained when it is subjected to a variety of highly flexible interpretations. How do we know, for instance, that the Bible is not simply a textbook on thermodynamics, rather than a factual account of humanity’s origin and purpose? The answer lies partly in the fragmentary nature of Biblical referencing. Even though particular verses or passages may temporarily serve to demonstrate the Bible’s scientific applicability, the totality of its content is not subjected to low-level comparisons and equations. Furthermore, in the face of scientific information that is clearly incompatible with the creationist outlook, the authors in the corpus tend to revert to strict literalism, as in the following passage from CMI:

dating puts the age of fossilized dead animals at up to hundreds of millions of years before people appeared on the scene. These fossils show evidence of violence and suffering—cancer and arthritis can be seen in the fossils, for example (see Genesis: the Curse). So in the old-earth schemes, this death and suffering was going on when God created Adam and Eve, and pronounced everything as ‘very good’ (Genesis 1:31). Hardly!

(CMI, Batten 2001)

The author here seems to accept that scientific methods for assessing evidence of bone damage are adequate. Methods for dating bones, however, cannot be reliable since they fail to conform to the creation narrative, which is presented as unquestionably sound. Thus, when confronted with novel information, creationist discourse heavily relies on selective appropriation, meaning that the coherence and applicability of the Biblical narrative is guaranteed by suppressing certain statements while accentuating others (Baker 2006:114). Selective appropriation allows for the flexible application of creationist doctrine, while maintaining the structural integrity of its system of communication. Drawing on the conceptual repertoire developed by the systems theorist Niklas Luhmann, one could speak here of “operational closure”: the creationist system, when confronted with inadmissible or disturbing stimuli, will always have recourse to a connection or insight within its own set of communicative resources (Luhmann 2013:64). Or, as per Hermans’s metaphor: whatever the system takes from its environment must be converted into its own currency. While the

boundaries of the system and its regenerative capacity are thus maintained, the system is “not impervious to its environment”, which continually supplies novel “irritations” (2007b:65). For instance, tackling anthropogenic causes of climate change is currently considered one of humanity’s major challenges. However, the authors in the corpus are not always inclined to accept the scientific consensus on the topic, as illustrated in the following extract:

People who don’t think humans are the primary force behind climate change point out, not unreasonably, that the majority of Earth’s climate is determined by the sun, and the earth has undergone warmer and cooler periods in the past (and a global Flood around 4,500 years ago), and so wonder whether that might not be a factor.

(CMI, Sanders and Halley 2015)

From a creationist perspective, resistance to the idea that anthropogenic factors influence climate change is not illogical. The idea implies that humans wield enough power to change the workings of the natural environment and that the effects of our activities threaten to leave us at its mercy. Thus, both the origins and consequences of man-made climate change may be deemed incompatible with a discourse that reserves for a single divine entity the right to create and destroy on a planetary scale. On the other hand, Biblical literalism implies that signs of the apocalypse are expected, and for centuries millenarian movements “have focused on predicting the exact date of the anticipated second coming of Christ” or, more generally, “the end of the world” (Hall 2013:1). Regardless of how climate change is perceived in religious communities, as society is becoming increasingly environmentally aware and seeking to re-establish kinship with the lifeforms that surround us, the ancient struggle with biological, geological and astronomical developments is likely to remain central to creationist discourse.

Yet how can information that irritates the creationist system continue to be brushed aside so decidedly? How can the scientific consensus be so easily rejected when it does not fit the narrative? Especially with regards to evolution, one contributing factor may be the association of the concept of ‘theory’ with baseless speculation, as in the expression “just a theory” (Gregory 2008:46). It is revealing, in this sense, that the adjective *evolutionary* collocates not only with *theory*, but also with *story* in the corpus, in statements such as “there are many facts that contradict the evolutionary story” (CMI, Batten 2002). The theory of evolution is presented as a mere tale, invented and propagated by doctrinaire defenders. To understand this viewpoint, it may be helpful to acknowledge that scientific theories need to be narrated to be communicated, and a general outline of human evolution displays features that are strongly reminiscent of common mythological and folkloristic tropes, such as the protagonist’s “development from humble origins” (Landau 1984/1997:109). If one considers the theory of evolution as no more than a narrative on offer in the marketplace of ideas, accepting its veracity becomes less of an obligation. However, as was illustrated in this chapter, in creationist discourse the stories of creation and evolution reveal ample structural similarity, with corresponding positions reserved, for instance, for Darwin and Jesus. A central paradox that renders creationist writing both prolific and problematic, then, is that it aims to substantiate a fundamental difference between competing originary accounts by demonstrating their profound similarity. It is a matter, in fact, of consciously not declaring equivalence, even though correspondence is being continually established.

Notes

- 1 New American Standard Bible. All Bible quotes are taken from this translation.
- 2 The corpus is accessible through the Genealogies of Knowledge website. Due to copyright restrictions, the corpus texts themselves cannot be downloaded, but the output of any analysis can be saved to the user's computer. The open source software through which the corpus is accessed is free to download at <http://genealogiesofknowledge.net/software>.
- 3 A full list of articles included in the study is available from the author, and the full contents of the Internet corpus can be consulted via <http://genealogiesofknowledge.net/corpora/internet-corpus>.
- 4 Throughout this chapter, emphases are added to corpus extracts to highlight either the search string or the central observation.
- 5 Publication dates listed for all corpus references are based on the information provided on the organizations' current websites. Sometimes, they point towards an older version of the article, but in other cases no such information is provided, even though it is clear that the content has been re-uploaded after a recent website update.
- 6 The citation in McMurty's text reads: "Dr. Scott Todd, Kansas State University, *Nature* 401(6752):423, Sept. 30, 1999".
- 7 For reasons of consistency, all quotes are from the New American Standard Bible, although this is not the sole version quoted by authors in the corpus. Some reference, for instance, the English Standard Version. Often, reference is provided without full quotation, and without identification of the relevant translation.

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15

SUBTITLING DISINFORMATION NARRATIVES AROUND COVID-19

'Foreign' vlogging in the construction of digital nationalism in Chinese social media

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As the COVID-19 pandemic gained a foothold during the spring of 2020, governments across the world found themselves grappling with difficult policy choices under intense public scrutiny. Amid the mounting death toll and heightened concerns over the economic impact of successive lockdowns, Donald Trump's administration attempted to deflect criticism by denouncing China for its failings in the initial management of the outbreak (Singh et al. 2020) – a strategy bolstered by American mainstream media through their concerted effort to 'name, blame and shame' the Asian superpower for spreading the virus (Jia and Lu 2021). This state of affairs was mirrored in China, where social media contributed to disseminating and amplifying Chinese officials' claims that the pandemic had been caused by a US military germ warfare programme (Winter 2020). Mainstream and social media thus became the battlefield on which the US and China continue to clash as they struggle to counter negative perceptions of their handling of the initial outbreak, and strive to retain and strengthen their status as global players (Conley Tyler 2021; Davidson 2021).

Allegations of China's engagement in disinformation campaigns,¹ including those addressing the circulation of narratives around the origin of COVID-19, have become a staple of Western media reportage and are now subject to growing journalistic and scholarly scrutiny. In a recent report published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Zhang et al. (2021) argue that disinformation campaigns are the Chinese Communist Party's preferred strategy to discredit critical reporting – whether it focuses on what Western media refer to as the 'Xinjiang's internment camps' or the origin of the Coronavirus pandemic, to give but two examples. In Zhang et al.'s view, these disinformation campaigns set out to promote hypotheses and scenarios intended to "confuse investigative work" and "smear and discredit the organizations and individuals involved in that reporting and research" (ibid.:1–2). The transatlantic advocacy group Alliance for Securing Democracy, on the other hand, argues that China's aims in launching social media offensives against critical news outlets or research institutes are to capitalize on populist sentiment online – often by remediating and repurposing content from Russian state-backed media outlets² – and to undermine democratic regimes and values in the US and Europe (Alliance for Securing Democracy n.d.).

The notion of narrative features prominently in much Western reporting and academic research on the subject. China's reported involvement in digital disinformation initiatives has been variously characterized as a means of "aggressive promotion of its narratives" (Shih 2021) and an attempt to "control narratives around key public issues [and] assert the CCP's [Chinese Communist Party's] discourse power" (Zhang et al. 2021:2). Of particular importance, according to Western news outlets, is the widening range of Chinese actors being mobilized by the Chinese Government to advance its narratives (Tang 2021). State media, for example, have long supported the Government's strategy by "actively supplying news ... to developing nations and even western countries to try to change the narrative [about China's place in the international community] worldwide" (ibid.). Likewise, diplomats and Chinese Communist Party officials have been playing an increasingly active role in waging social media campaigns, by posting content on Western social media platforms to guide and influence opinions on sensitive affairs within their host communities (Scott 2020). This top-down approach to the management of national mediascapes in non-democratic countries is now being complemented by a bottom-up strategy, whereby digitally empowered audiences are deployed to advance official narratives on social media. Planting sympathetic, pro-regime views in user comment sections or incentivizing the production and distribution of social media content by committed patriots are two ways in which authoritarian states are attempting to "harness the process of mediatisation [of politics] to their advantage" (Tolz et al. 2020:4).

China's recruitment of Western influencers to advance the country's narratives and promote official discourses is reportedly the latest development under the Chinese Communist Party's evolving strategy to forge and manage consensus within a globally networked environment (Parker 2021). Of particular note is the enlisting of British and American vloggers who have managed to attract large communities of Chinese followers by defending China against criticism from the West. As digital disinformation experts have noted, the endorsement of China's official stance by Western social media influencers acting as "fellow travellers" (Michael 2019:78)³ resonates very strongly with domestic netizens, who are led to "believe the Chinese Community Party is admired by international audiences" (Parker 2021). As is also the case with other fellow travellers examined in the literature (Bullock and Trombley 1999), Western influencers producing media content commissioned by China's authorities publicly challenge official discourses that circulate in their native geopolitical spaces and align themselves with the Asian superpower's narratives. But while fellow travellers are often recruited by authoritarian countries to undermine the Euro-American world order and influence public opinion in democratic societies (Michael 2019), the work of foreign influencers examined in this chapter is intended to consolidate Chinese self-identity and a sense of national pride.

As these influencers' proficiency in Mandarin is usually lacking or limited, subtitling is crucial to ensure that their vlogs are widely watched and appreciated by Chinese audiences. This chapter explores the contribution that subtitled vlogs on COVID-19 posted by Western influencers make to the projection of China's strategic narratives around the origins and management of the initial outbreak of the pandemic within the idiosyncratic attentional regime of Chinese social media. Through their vlogs, Western influencers expose Chinese social media users to selected aspects of hostile Western narratives, which are then dissected, critiqued and neutralized. Effectively, Western influencers' vlogs act as a mechanism of ontological optimization, mobilization and immunization against foreign narratives. In an

ecosystem characterized by restricted access to foreign media content, and in the absence of overt domestic debate around national strategic narratives, I will argue, the posting of subtitled vlogs by Western influencers ultimately enables the formation of affectively compliant audiences.

Previous work (Pérez-González 2014, 2017) has explored the dynamics of mutual recognition between prosumers and their audiences in networked subtitling communities. These studies have revealed the role that subtitling plays in forging affective structures of online sociality. Indeed, the production and consumption of subtitles in these virtual, geographically dispersed networks – where participating individuals negotiate and mobilize various aspects of their identity – enable processes of affective priming and engagement that exceed the mere flow of information in the “thin band of consciousness we now call cognition” and incorporate semiconscious flows of sensations “moving through the bodies” of those participating in the activities of the community (Thrift 2007:236). As will be explored below, neither these affective flows nor the mobilizing force that subtitling represents are confined to the subtitled content itself. Analysing viewer comments on social media, for example, has been found to yield important insights into the reception of media content through subtitling (Pérez-González 2016; Lee 2021). To explore the proliferation of nationalist discourses articulated within and around these vlogs and gain a better understanding of netizens’ involvement in China’s digital nation-building project, this chapter therefore draws on a case study involving the analysis of *danmu* (bullet comments) posted by viewers in response to a vlog available on the video-sharing platform Bilibili.

Strategic narratives: global versus domestic ecologies of attention

Although references to narratives in the body of media reports cited in the previous section draw on the everyday or lay sense of the term, the concept of strategic narratives has been productively deployed by international relations scholars interested in the role played by institutional communication and discourses as an important extension of material power in the context of global politics. Miskimmon et al. (2014:176) define strategic narratives as “a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international relations in order to shape the opinions and behaviour of actors at home and overseas”. Seen through this framework, the enrolment of foreign vloggers by China’s government as reported in Western media can be construed as an attempt to stage expressions of praise from outside China for the Chinese Communist Party’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and, more generally, to reshape the discursive environment to the government’s advantage. Through the mobilization of these vlogged foreign narratives, domestic audiences in China are provided with new sensemaking devices (Miskimmon et al. 2017) to understand and engage with the world around them. The centrality of communication in the ontological and epistemological processes through which networked communities tell and are told about their shared reality means that it enables the forging of shared meanings about China’s place on the global scene. Narratives therefore act as “an overall heuristic to interpret the world” (Miskimmon et al. 2021:8) and inform constructions of political identity that very large sections of Chinese society are happy to subscribe to and align with.

In non-authoritarian societies, users of global social media platforms are exposed to a wide range of strategic narratives circulating in their environment and encounter abundant opportunities to reason about and renegotiate the narratives in which they are embedded –

both the ones they subscribe to and those that they choose to contest. Therefore, in producing content to advance strategic narratives on Western social media platforms, overcoming the areas of vulnerability inherent in these heuristics is paramount. The fact that connectivity in global social media is both extensive (it allows a very large and geographically dispersed community to express approval or dissent with a given narrative) and intensive (the dematerialization of digital communication accelerates the processes of collective deliberation) represents a major threat to the power of strategic narratives (Roselle et al. 2014). Without referring specifically to these sensemaking devices, Cronin (2017) accounts for the impact of enhanced connectivity in terms of the tension between cyberspace and cybertime. Digitization, Cronin argues, has brought about the deterritorialization of cyberspace and enabled the instantaneity of networked communication. As more people are able to access the tools and acquire the degree of literacy required to participate in the public digital sphere, space becomes an infinite resource. By contrast, cybertime, understood as “the finite, organic, physical elaboration of information” remains bound by the constraints of materiality, and hence “slows down the operations of our mind as it seeks to invest information with effective forms of meaning” (ibid.). For a strategic narrative to be successful, audiences must be able to recognize the relevant actors and their associated or implied traits; identify the setting(s) of the narrative, complete with the premises and rationale motivating the choice of space; and make sense of the temporal sequencing of events. Temporality may therefore pose a significant challenge to the integrity of strategic narratives and undermine the mid- and long-term explanatory power of these sensemaking devices. Indeed, social, political and historical developments often make it necessary to renegotiate the meaning of such events if/when views that were collectively forged in the past become contentious sites of debate or struggle again (Lams 2018; van Noort 2020).

The idiosyncrasy of China’s media ecology, however, goes a long way towards countering the vulnerability of the strategic narratives that circulate within the country’s social media platforms. As is also the case in other authoritarian regimes (Tolz et al. 2020), the increasing mediatization of Chinese politics is indicative of the average netizen’s growing capacity to evade governmental control (Zou 2021). Still, Chinese platforms remain relatively disconnected from the circuitry of the global public sphere. Designed to ensure that communication flows within “discrete media spaces demarcated largely by national boundaries” (Zou 2021:529), Chinese social media remain more firmly aligned with traditional media scripts and official narratives than their global counterparts (Schneider 2018; Khalil 2020). An important reason for this is that the top-down control of narrative flows is complemented by the prevalence of self-regulation among Chinese netizens, whose posting activity is “closely watched by the party-state authority to monitor and weed out potentially subversive content” (Han 2021:439). In the Chinese digital mediascape, the demands placed by the attentional economy of cybertime on global social media are thus compounded by additional constraints pertaining to the country’s unique ecology of attention (Citton 2017). These may manifest themselves as overt censorship, but also in the form of sophisticated and opaque mechanisms designed to condition netizens’ attention and their standards of plausibility or verisimilitude.⁴ So while extensive connectivity is also central to Chinese platforms, insofar as they bring together members of one of the largest global linguacultures, restricted access to foreign news outlets and global social media platforms impairs intensive connectivity, ultimately limiting the spectrum of views represented within the country’s networked communities. In light of the obstacles that narratives circulating in global social

media have to overcome to penetrate this closed-off ecosystem, the potential for dissent with dominant Chinese narratives is more limited, as is the likelihood of entrenched narratives being disrupted by temporality (i.e. having to be renegotiated if/when media content endorsing competing narratives emerges).

Beyond methodological elitism

In their introduction to a special issue of *Politics* on everyday narratives in world politics, Stanley and Jackson (2016) acknowledge that international relations scholarship has largely focused on elite actors and advocate the need to move beyond the current ‘methodological elitism’ to address a number of underexplored concerns, namely “[h]ow is political order and transformation justified and challenged by those without formal or official power? To what extent do those outside the corridors of power obey or accept the political justifications of elites? And how are the perimeters of political possibility reproduced or resisted in the mundane practices of everyday life?” (ibid.:24). This chapter adopts a non-elitist approach and examines how non-elite Chinese audiences respond to subtitled vlogs projecting narratives that aim to counter accusations of negligence against China in its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak and to mobilize discontent against the US.

As already explained, the Chinese Communist Party’s official line is more likely to meet with acquiescence than resistance in Chinese social media. However, the adoption of a non-elitist methodological approach should yield interesting insights into the extent to which non-elites deliberate on or, alternatively, largely absorb the narratives that the Chinese government circulates in response to accusations of negligence in its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Writing prior to the advent of the digital era, Hall et al. noted that “conversations between neighbours, discussion at street-corners or in the pub, rumour, gossip, speculation” (1979:129) – and the iterations of negotiation and repositioning they entail – are particularly effective in securing acquiescence with elite discourses. In the context of Chinese digital culture, the dynamics of social media conversations provide snapshots of how power relations play out in mundane debates among non-elite members of society. Although these are not able to force changes in the official line of non-elected governments, studying the reception of strategic narratives that are ontologically primed for distribution within social media should enable a more nuanced understanding of how vernacular agency is exercised in participatory settings.

In what follows I focus on the reception by Chinese netizens of a subtitled vlog produced by China-based social media influencer Nathan Rich and posted on the Chinese video-sharing website Bilibili. Featuring Rich’s commentary on a timeline of events pointing to a potential COVID-19 cover-up on the part of the US, this vlog is examined to explore how translated media content conditions the attention field of vlog viewers and influences their collective standards of plausibility and verisimilitude, as evidenced by the *danmu* comments they post on the platform.

Nathan Rich, aka the ‘Hotpot King’

Nathan Rich’s connection with China is a good example of a charismatic influencer being recruited and paid to produce vlogs in support of non-democratic regimes. As Fedor and Fredheim note (2017:168), this form of “anti-Westernism, augmented with a dose of

conspiracy” seeks to “inspire and mobilize” netizens based in authoritarian countries to serve as “agents of influence” in disinformation initiatives. While Nathan Rich’s IMDb webpage⁵ focuses primarily on his family background and past experience in technical roles within the American film industry, Wikipedia reports as follows:

Since moving to China, Rich has started a video blog sympathetic to the People’s Republic of China. Among the views he holds are that those who had taken part in the Hong Kong protests were “terrorists” and “right-wing”, and that Taiwan was an integral part of China and could therefore not be a state. He has also commented on the China–United States trade war and China’s handling of the coronavirus epidemic.⁶

Media reporting on Rich varies in terms of the way his work is presented to readers. Writing for *Taiwan News*, Everington (2020) characterizes Rich as a “China propagandist” with a criminal record who plays “the part of the model foreigner who really understands China” and promotes “conspiracy theories that the coronavirus started in America”. By contrast, in their article for *Global Times*, a daily tabloid closely aligned with the Chinese Communist Party, Bi and Bai (2020) present Rich as “an American political commentator currently living in Beijing”, most of whose vlogs aim to “debunk the anti-China conspiracy theories and malicious rhetoric by Western media and officials”. In trying to gain a better understanding of Nathan Rich’s narrative affiliation, it is worth bearing in mind that, according to the vlogger’s own website,⁷ Rich was the recipient in 2020 of the ‘Touching China’ Award conferred by CCTV, China’s state-controlled broadcaster, and the ‘Top 10 Overseas Influencers’ Award given by the Chinese microblogging platform Weibo. Although there is certainly nothing objectionable about these achievements, Rich’s connections with influential outlets in China’s media marketplace should not be overlooked.

Nathan Rich maintains a healthy presence on global social media platforms. Of particular relevance for the purposes of this chapter is the fact that his YouTube channel “has amassed 475,000 subscribers [494,000 at the time of writing], many of whom are Chinese, no small feat considering that the platform has been blocked in the communist country since 2007” (Everington 2020).⁸ This large YouTube following has been acquired despite the fact that, according to Rich, YouTube is “aggressively demonetizing” his videos, resulting in the number of views “getting locked and reduced”, as well as ‘likes’ and subscriptions being removed (Rich n.d.). Explicitly attributing YouTube’s actions to the “controversial” nature of the topics he explores in his vlogs (*ibid.*), he asks his followers for various types of support in order to be able to “fight back”. Apart from retaining a high level of visibility as a vlogger, increasing the size of his following is also important for financial reasons, as the assistance provided by the Chinese government is commensurate with the size of the audiences that foreign influencers are able to garner outside China (Lu 2020).

Unsurprisingly, given the nature and orientation of his work, Rich is also present on all the major Chinese social media platforms. Often referred to as China’s YouTube, Bilibili is a video-sharing platform; at the end of December 2020, it catered for 202 million users (Bilibili 2021) – a large proportion of whom, including the Communist Youth League of China, double up as creators of media content (Liao 2020). Most of the material published in English on Rich’s YouTube channel is also available with bilingual English/Mandarin subtitles on his Bilibili ‘space’,⁹ which at the time of writing drew one and a half million ‘fans’. Significantly, Nathan Rich is one of the few foreign vloggers who “have been given

the green light to use the platform” to publish political commentary on Bilibili, which provides him with “unprecedented reach to Chinese audiences” (Lu 2020). As will be elaborated in the section on analysing vectors of negative contagion on Bilibili, the bilingual subtitles in English and Mandarin that feature in his Bilibili vlogs facilitate the spread of pro-China narratives among domestic social media audiences and the formation of a virtual community of netizens with like-minded dispositions and traversed by shared affectivity.

Danmu

Of particular relevance to this study is Bilibili’s *danmu*-posting facility.¹⁰ The terms *danmu* or *danmaku* designate video-overlay live comments generated by viewers of media content in various settings, including video-sharing platforms. The number of ‘barrage’ or ‘bullet’ comments superimposed on the video image, which travel from the right to the left margin of the screen, can increase significantly during climatic moments, effectively creating ‘bullet curtains’ that block the image. Described as a “hypertextual audiencing tool” (Chen 2020:321) that co-exists and interacts with standard subtitles, traditional off-screen comments and other non-verbal semiotic resources, *danmu* have been shown to enable the formation of virtual communities of interest and have ushered in new practices of online deliberation. As reported in the literature (Djamasbi et al. 2016; Dwyer 2017; Chen 2020; Yue 2020), *danmu* have significantly contributed to the emergence of vernacular fan discourses around the anime, comic, game and novel culture in China and to the formation of other sites and expressions of counter-culture and dissent.

This form of participatory spectacle (Androutsopoulos 2013) or textual intensification (Dwyer 2017), as *danmu* have been characterized in the literature, fosters affective flows among members of virtual communities wishing to exercise their vernacular agency in response to the content with which they are presented. Although *danmu*-mediated spectatorial experiences are largely solitary and asynchronous (Yue 2000), 76% of participants in a study on commenting activities online reported feeling “more social and connected to other viewers” when posting and reading *danmu* on screen (Djamasbi et al. 2016:654). In the remainder of this chapter, I focus on the reception of a specific vlog posted by Nathan Rich on his Bilibili space, conduct a content analysis of the *danmu* generated by viewers of this video and examine how non-elite actors engage with the strategic narratives to which they are exposed.

Analysing vectors of narrative contagion on Bilibili

This section reports on the analysis of the body of 3,200 *danmu* posted by the end of November 2020 in response to a vlog published by Nathan Rich on 17 March 2020 and entitled ‘Does the new coronavirus originate in the United States? Is this statement a conspiracy theory or a reasonable suspicion?’.¹¹ With almost 7 million views and 40,000 *danmu* posted at the time of writing, this vlog is by far the most popular among the 102 available on Rich’s Bilibili space. The *danmu* posted on this vlog were downloaded onto a spreadsheet using a dedicated software application.¹²

The vlog begins with a montage of brief extracts from news programmes broadcast on US TV channels presented in quick succession. These extracts – which report on the much higher-than-normal incidence of flu in the US in the autumn of 2019, the abrupt shutdown

of an army's germ lab and the health emergency declared by America's Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in connection with episodes of serious lung disease caused by e-cigarettes – become the backdrop for the narrative Rich constructs in the remainder of the vlog. The narrative is supported by a graphic timeline panel projected behind the vlogger, where the viewer's attention is drawn to a number of selected events, interspersed with photographs and short video clips. Although Rich's compilation of news clips and the graphic timeline do not feature any textual transfer from English into Mandarin, his choice of the montage format is consistent with the “bricolage of exotic texts and visuals” from well-known foreign outlets that is often used in translated COVID-19 disinformation campaigns (Zou 2021:527), where source texts are often “misrepresented to fit into the conspiracy theory” (ibid.:525).

After decrying the proliferation of conspiracy theories on the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rich proceeds to examine the “evidence” supporting the “widely held view” that it was caused by an accident in an American military research facility. According to this version of events, American researchers are supposed to have failed to follow containment protocols while conducting experiments with coronaviruses (SARS-COV and MERS) on animals. This theory holds that, instead of reporting the accident, CDC chose to shut down the lab and circulate fake news to conceal the outbreak – for example, by attributing the high number of lung disease cases to the combined effect of a severe bout of flu and the vaping habits of Americans. Although the structure of the vlog explicitly foregrounds Rich's emplotting of events as a coherent narrative to condition his audience's attention, the vlogger concludes that there is not sufficient evidence to support the failed experiment theory, not least because of CDC's opaque management of what went on in the research lab. The influencer finishes by thanking his viewers in Chinese (谢谢) and declaring that ‘it's OK to love China’.

On the surface, the vlog chosen as my case study projects an issue narrative, one of the three types of strategic narratives put forward by international relations scholars. By interrogating available ‘evidence’ on the origins and handling of the COVID-19 outbreak, this issue narrative “set[s] governmental actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are ... [and] what the conflict or issue is” (Roselle et al. 2014:76). As the *danmu* featuring in examples 1–4 illustrate,¹³ a large number of viewers commenting on Rich's subtitled vlog choose to express their admiration for his capacity to identify the main actors and emplot the key events in this narrative; as the examples show, they praise Rich's capacity to join the dots between what less astute analysts would have regarded as unrelated actors and events, without any connection with the accident that released the virus.

1	00:00.0	00:10.5	卧槽, 带预言家	WTF, big seer.
2	00:00.3	00:13.3	大 预 言 家	BIG SEER.
3	00:01.5	00:05.5	《大 预 言 家 》	“BIG SEER”.
4	00:02.1	00:13.1	大预言家大预言家	Big seer, big seer.

Specifically, Rich is portrayed as the ‘Seer’, one of the character roles in *The Werewolves of Millers Hollow* game,¹⁴ in recognition of his capacity to unveil the true identity of werewolves posing as villagers – or, in the context of the video, his ability to discover what really happened in the American military research facility, drawing on his deductive skills. As is also the case with the seers in the game (they are likely to be murdered

by werewolves, who wish to remain unidentified and hence retain their capacity to kill fellow villagers), an attempt on Rich's life is bound to be made to prevent further revelations. The similarities between the seer's and Rich's roles are explicitly foregrounded in examples 5–7.

5	00:01.1	00:10.8	赶紧刀了	Kill [him] with a knife, quick.
6	00:03.1	00:12.8	小心被刀	Be careful not to be killed with a knife.
7	00:11.5	00:23.0	预言家不行今晚刀了	The seer has to be killed with a knife tonight if there is no other way around.

Although most of these remarks concerning the inevitability of Rich's death seem to be primarily made tongue-in-cheek, many viewers show genuine concern about Rich's physical safety. In exhorting fellow viewers to provide collective protection for the seer by figuratively weaving an armour of *danmu* around him, these audience members imply that Rich may at some point become the target of retaliatory action on account of his work (see, for instance, examples 8–14). As illustrated in examples 15–19, some viewers go further in expressing their concerns. Their *danmu* explicitly attribute those potential retaliatory operations to American national security agencies, and hence acknowledge the US's role as a key actor in Rich's narrative:

8	00:09.3	00:17.7	保护	Protect.
9	00:11.2	00:21.2	加大力度保护	Protect [the vlogger] stronger.
10	00:11.4	00:21.4	保护保护!!	Protect, protect!!
11	00:16.8	00:26.4	保护大王	Protect the King.
12	00:22.1	00:31.8	保护友军	Protect [our] ally.
13	00:31.5	00:44.5	保护预言家, 请注意安全!	Protect the seer. Please be safe!
14	00:54.7	01:06.2	你一定要保护好自己	You must protect yourself well.
15	00:06.4	00:19.4	兄弟萌把保护刷起来! 火锅大王一定要小心 CIA!	Bros, post "protect" [on the screen]! The Hot Pot King must be careful of the CIA!
16	02:36.5	02:49.5	注意安全啊哥们, 小心点美国政府	Be careful, bro, of the American government.
17	03:12.8	03:25.8	这位大哥已经被 CIA 和 FBI 盯上了!	This bro has been followed by the CIA and FBI!
18	07:02.8	07:13.3	真不怕被暗杀吗	Are you really not afraid of being assassinated?
19	07:06.4	07:19.4	还好美国比较开放, 可以随意指点不然 up 主就危了	Fortunately, the US is relatively open, otherwise the uploader would be in danger because of such frank talk.

The selection of *danmu* in examples 20–27 is indicative of the extent to which Rich has succeeded in conditioning his audience's attention. Although the final part of the vlog features the vlogger's acknowledgement that the US's negligence in the accidental release of the COVID-19 virus cannot be demonstrated, his viewers choose to align themselves with the narrative that Rich painstakingly elaborates earlier in the video. As reflected in his viewers' responses, Rich's emplotment of the events presented in this vlog attributes the responsibility for the global transmission of the virus firmly to the US:

20	00:00.0	00:13.0	【谨防美国继续释放其他病毒!】	Beware that the US may continue to release other viruses!
21	00:03.1	00:14.1	美国才是混乱根源	America is the source of chaos.
22	00:09.6	00:19.3	就是美国	It is America.
23	00:35.0	00:48.0	美国以前的流感就是试验品	The previous flu [season] in the US was a test.
24	00:37.5	00:47.2	美国病毒	American virus.
25	00:48.7	01:00.2	美国不死, 大难不已	There will be countless big troubles until the US is finished.
26	02:28.3	02:41.3	让全世界看到美国才是真正的魔鬼	Let the whole world know that the US is the real evil.
27	04:30.5	04:43.5	美国想干嘛? 美国整天搞这些是想一直保持世界霸主的地位。当然或者想侵略	What does the US want to do? The US does this all day long because it wants to maintain its hegemony. Of course, or it wants to invade.

As this set of examples show, the issue narrative advanced in Rich's vlog intersects with an international system narrative – another of the categories included in Roselle et al.'s (2014) typology of strategic narratives – inscribed in the same video. *Danmu* 20–27 provide ample evidence of how Rich's viewers perceive the structure and dynamics of the world order and, in line with the results of other studies on disinformation campaigns around COVID-19 (Zou 2021), highlight the capacity of international system narratives to “mobilize people's discontent towards the U.S. administration” and tap into “pre-existing popular hostility towards the Western hegemony as well as the vehement popular demand to defend China from external biases and criticisms” (ibid.:529).

As the proponents of the taxonomy postulate, strategic narratives are often inextricably linked, whether they belong to the same or a different type. My analysis of *danmu* published in response to Rich's vlog reveals that a third type of strategic narrative comes into play ten months after the video was originally posted. Following the airing of a CCTV documentary supporting the hypothesis that the COVID-19 virus was released by accident within an American military research facility, a large number of new *danmu* is posted by audience members. The fact that the emplotment of events underpinning the state broadcaster's narrative is very similar to the assembly of facts woven into Rich's vlog almost one year earlier is seen by many viewers as an endorsement of the influencer's ‘theory’ by China's government and an indication that Rich's stance is aligned with China's goals. Indeed, the extent to which Rich's vlog is able to feed on nationalist emotions reveals the contribution that a national narrative, the third type in the typology of strategic narratives, makes to the vlog's overall heuristic force as a sensemaking device.

As the selection of comments reproduced as examples 28–33 illustrates, strategic narratives are advanced through the synergic efforts of state broadcasters, party officials' presence on social media and the work of Western influencers. As far as the *danmu* posted by the second wave of Rich's vlog viewers is concerned, temporality appears to have strengthened the explanatory power of the narrative being subjected to renewed scrutiny. Indeed, on learning that CCTV has rubber-stamped Rich's account of events, viewers flocked to Bilibili to unearth the truth behind the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic – as evident in the large number of *danmu* containing the term “考古” (conducting archaeological work), used by

viewers as part of expressions describing their decision to revisit the old vlog to access information that they had previously missed.

28	00:15.7	00:25.7	央视锤了!!	CCTV has given hard evidence!
29	00:29.7	00:42.7	这两天央视在提这个事, 过了10个月	CCTV has been reporting this issue these days. 10 months later [i.e. after Rich's vlog was released].
30	00:38.9	00:51.9	央视不是慢, 国家喉舌必须要有证据	CCTV doesn't [work] slowly. As a state-owned mouthpiece, it must have evidence.
31	00:44.5	00:57.5	2021 看完央视新闻, 回来看视频	In 2021, [I] came back to watch this video after watching CCTV news.
32	02:59.1	03:12.1	央视官媒发声了, 那代表很有可能已经有事实上的证据了	The representative of state-owned CCTV has announced that it's highly likely there is concrete evidence.
33	06:35.2	06:45.7	央妈正式回应了	CCTV has responded officially.

On the whole, the analysis of the body of *danmu* scrutinized here reveals that Chinese viewers overwhelmingly acquiesce with the elite-driven narratives that Rich articulates and animates in his vlog. Examples 34–43 are indicative of the extent to which the influencer's audience has unquestioningly absorbed the narrative that the COVID-19 pandemic originated in the US. As attested by the significant degree of repetition observed across individual *danmu*, Bilibili provides a productive site for the “repetition and accumulation of expressions and beliefs”, which in turn facilitates the “hardening of public opinion into consent” (Tyler 2013:78).¹⁵ Example 43 is particularly significant in this regard. On the whole, attempts to resist the strategic narrative articulated in this vlog are extremely rare (see examples 44–46).

34	00:01.5	00:12.0	实锤了! 是真的	There is hard evidence now! It is true.
35	00:02.3	00:11.3	破案了	The case is solved.
36	00:02.4	00:15.4	翻回头来看, 还是和初看的时候感觉一样——有理有据!	Watching it again, [I] still have the same feeling as my first [time] watching – [it's] reasonable with concrete evidence!
37	00:03.1	00:07.1	2021 真相只有一个!	In 2021, there is only one truth!
38	00:03.6	00:16.6	没想到 2020 年看到的 2021 被证实了	[I'm] surprised that a video [which I] watched in 2020 has been corroborated in 2021.
39	00:09.2	00:22.2	我又来了, 刚发的时候看了觉得有点道理没想到真的	I'm here again. [I] thought it was reasonable when it was released but didn't expect it to be true.
40	00:18.5	00:31.5	2021 年 1月20 日前来打卡, 新冠源于美国已是不争的事实!	On 20 January 2021, check-in. It's already an indisputable fact that the coronavirus is originated in the US!
41	00:23.6	00:36.6	现在实锤了, 我去年刚好看到过这个视频!!!	There is hard evidence now. I've watched this very video last year!!!

42	00:23.9	00:27.9	2021 年美利坚投毒实锤	In 2021, there is hard evidence proving that America has poisoned us.
43	00:37.2	00:41.2	之前一直不敢公开支持这个视频,今天官方开口了,来了来了	I haven't dared to support this video publicly before. Today the government has said it. Here, I came.
44	00:09.8	00:22.8	了解事实,拒绝谣言。他都说直到证据确凿之前,自己不能相信这个阴谋论,请弹幕保持理智。	Know [the] facts and reject [the] rumours. He said that he will not believe this conspiracy theory without concrete evidence. So, please stay rational.
45	00:13.8	00:23.3	哪石锤了?	Where is the hard evidence?
46	00:36.5	00:49.5	阴谋论一样那个 大部分阴谋论拿不出来多少证据的 而且阴谋论会一口咬死自己说的就是对的	All conspiracy theories are the same. Most of them cannot provide much evidence, and they all say that they are right.

Concluding remarks

The analysis and discussion of *danmu* posted by Rich's viewers demonstrate the significance of affective flows within the virtual community galvanized by his vlog. Hundreds of comments are posted to praise and show respect for the 'big seer', using phrases like '手下我的膝盖' (accept my kneeling [before you]). The phrase '收下我的三联' – denoting the use of prolonged mouse clicks to simultaneously like a video, donate Bilibili currency, and subscribe to a Bilibili channel – is also used by a significant number of viewers to signal their decision to devote their undivided attention to their vlogger and his work going forward. Declaring their intention to donate the funds (回来补币) they have accrued in the past by providing their immaterial labour on the Bilibili platform is yet another expression of the lengths to which viewers may go to acknowledge a vlogger's influence and visibility in the attentional regime of Chinese social media. The participatory spectacle that *danmu* provide is constantly punctuated by manifestations of emotion prompted by the significance and implications of the 'big seer's' work, as in '全身发毛, 20%恐惧 80%气愤', which translates as 'goose bumps all over my body, 20% fear 80% anger'. It is also punctuated by expressions of mutual recognition and solidarity among audience members, who acknowledge the worth of fellow viewers' contributions through phrases like '被弹幕吓到 谢谢' (overwhelmed by the comments, thank you). Of particular interest in this context is the audience's treatment of *danmu* as a dedicated medium for the mutual expression of affect. For some viewers, the very action of posting a comment effectively represents an endorsement of the vlog content (e.g. '必须发条弹幕啊', must post a *danmu* comment [to show support]), as part of the infinite series of "rapid, reversible, incremental actions" that the Bilibili environment fosters (Chun 2011:64). Although a significant proportion of these expressions of affect may be planted by China's authorities (King et al. 2017), the analysis of this case study foregrounds the centrality of the production and exchange of compliant affective intensities in repressive authoritarian states seeking to assert control over their national digital space.

More broadly, the analysis of this case study suggests that subtitled vlogs posted by foreign influencers – in particular, those who have been exceptionally authorized to discuss

political content on Chinese social media platforms like Bilibili – serve as productive sites of narrative optimization in non-democratic regimes. Western vloggers working as part of wider initiatives involving other actors and agencies – including state broadcasters, printed media outlets and government officials with a social media presence – are able to garner a large following in the digital economy of attention and facilitate acquiescence with elite-driven discourses by enabling the affective construction of online sociality. Practically unchallenged by subscribers to alternative views, Western vloggers operating in platforms like Bilibili – which, unlike global social media, are demarcated by national boundaries – are able to capitalize on mundane affectivity as a way of promoting domestic adherence to official strategic narratives without deliberation. As is also the case with other COVID-19 disinformation campaigns, the vlog chosen as case study ultimately promotes and empowers manifestations of “self-serving cosmopolitanism”, understood as a “narcissistic and locally conditioned sense of global consciousness that is oriented towards the consolidation of self-identity and pride” (Zou 2021:524). This supports earlier claims that the parochialism of Chinese social media platforms fosters vehement manifestations of (often exclusionary) nationalism and impacts the way netizens construct and experience their imagined national community. Being able to penetrate the country’s social fabric pervasively, digital expressions of nationalism have become a key rhetorical device to forge consensus within globally networked environments (Schneider 2018). Behind the thickness of Bilibili’s ‘bullet curtains’, communities of shared affective receptivity are harnessed to produce compliant responses as part of China’s ongoing digital nation-building project.

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Notes

- 1 The use of the term disinformation by the outlets and thinktanks mentioned in the remainder of this section follows Bakir and McStay’s (2018) definition of the term as the deliberate creation and circulation of false information.
- 2 The collaboration between China Media Group and Russian news agencies – including RT, the Russian state broadcaster – has enabled the development of dedicated infrastructure for sharing material to be circulated on social media (CGTN 2018).
- 3 Michael’s understanding of ‘fellow traveller’ as “a person who is sympathetic to an ideology or organization and who cooperates with the organization’s politics without being a formal member thereof” (2019:78) draws on Bullock and Trombley’s (1999) definition.
- 4 An interesting illustration of the extent to which collective attention can be conditioned by social media is provided by Qi (2021), who reports on the reaction of Chinese netizens to the publication of *Wuhan Diary: Dispatches from the Original Epicenter*. The release of the English translation of the posts published online by Chinese author Wang Fang (writing under the pseudonym of Fang Fang) during the Wuhan lockdown between January and March 2020 was engulfed in controversy over the publisher’s choice of paratexts for the printed volume. As reported by Qi (2021:4), the blurb characterized China as an authoritarian state where technology is deployed to monitor citizens and their social media posts and presented the author as a dissident who decried the impact of corruption and “systemic political problems” on the country’s initial response to

the pandemic. As soon as the book became available on Amazon, “hundreds of thousands of Chinese netizens bombarded the Diary’s author with all sorts of criticisms, calling her ‘a traitor for supporting the enemy’s narrative’” (Yuan 2020; quoted in Qi 2021:6). Qi analyses the offensive mounted by netizens against what they perceived as threats to the Chinese Communist Party’s strategic narratives. The intensity of their affective response is largely accounted for by the fact that netizens’ social media timelines are overwhelmingly dominated by congenial expressions of support, to the detriment of dissonant or competing views.

5 See www.imdb.com/name/nm4012879/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm.

6 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nathan_Rich.

7 See <https://hotpot.team/about/>.

8 It is common for Mandarin-speaking YouTube vloggers based outside China who provide commentary that does not follow the Chinese Communist Party line to attract users living in China (Zhu 2019). Access to a VPN allows Chinese netizens to circumvent the country’s Great Firewall in search of uncensored information. Given that Rich’s content is supportive of China’s official discourses, his large Chinese following on YouTube signals his followers’ desire to enhance his visibility and presence outside China’s borders.

9 <https://space.bilibili.com/394067394>.

10 For an overview of the historical and technological development of *danmu* or *danmaku*, see Dwyer (2017) and Pérez-González (2019).

11 See www.bilibili.com/video/BV177411Z77q.

12 The application, called 哔哩下载姬 (DownKyi), can be downloaded from <https://github.com/FlySelfLog/downkyi>. See www.programmersought.com/article/62706002892/.

13 The sets of digits accompanying each example denote the start- and end-times of the period during which each *danmu* is on display as it slides from the right to the left of the screen. The right-most column provides English glosses of each bullet comment.

14 See <https://playwerewolf.co/pages/character-roles>.

15 Although this is also the case with other social media platforms, the fact that *danmu* are superimposed on the image reinforces viewers’ perception of repetition and accumulation.

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