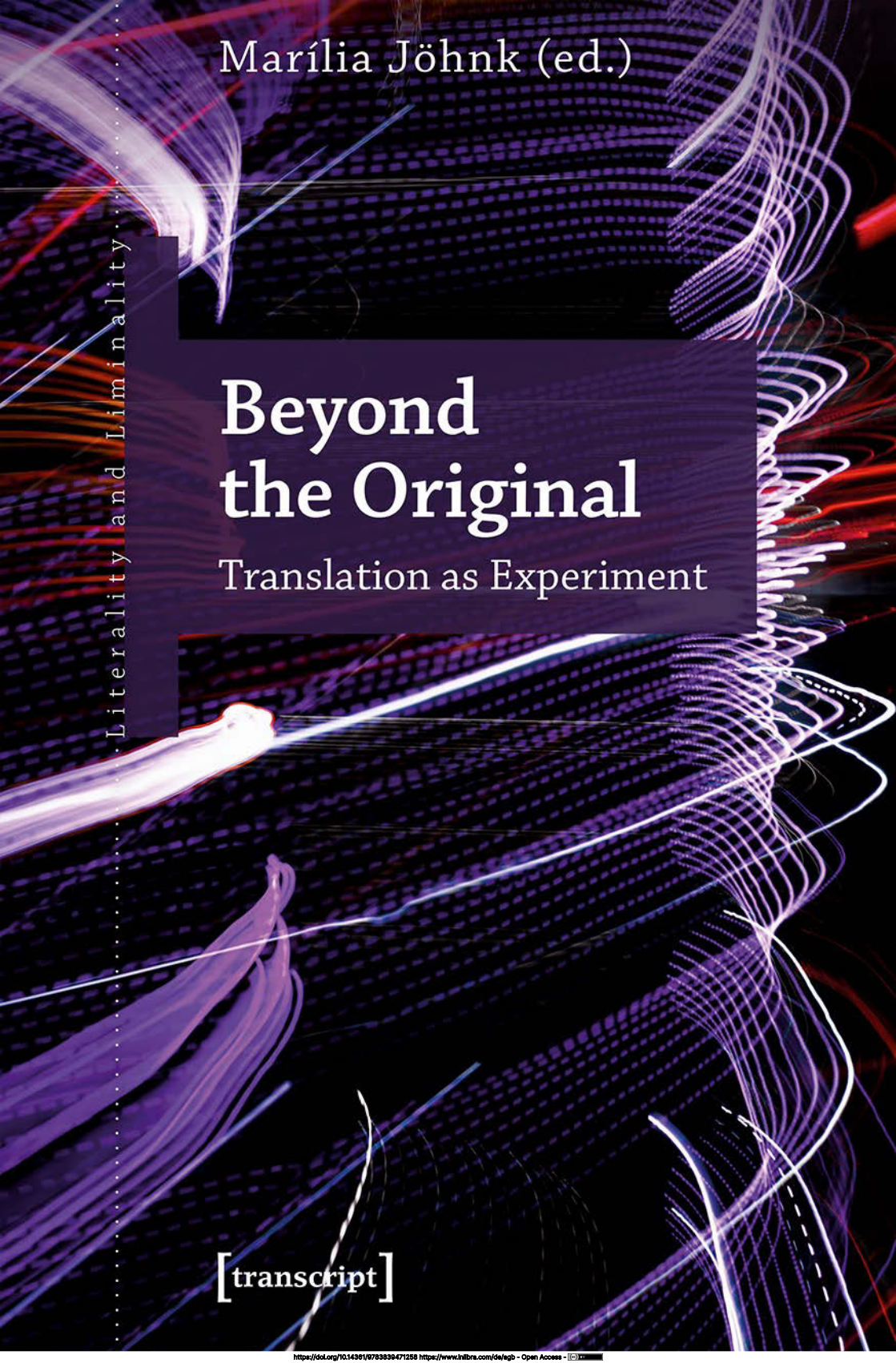

Marília Jöhnk (ed.)
Beyond the Original

Editorial

Over the past decades, significant developments in literary theory have facilitated an opening up of the philologies, especially towards questions usually debated within cultural and media studies. The subsequent expansion of the concept of literature has brought to the fore the blurred edges of those cultural boundaries where, in language and writing, the Other and the Self merge.

The book series **Literality and Liminality** contributes to this discourse by placing the theoretical and historical transformations of language and literature at its centre. The concept of literality shifts our interest to the written word as the very basis of literature, to the purpose of literary theory in cultural studies, and to the relationship between literary texts and cultural contexts. With the concept of liminality, the series aims to explore literature as a sign of a culture of the in-between, as the opening of a space between borders.

The series is edited by Achim Geisenhanslüke and Georg Mein.

Marília Jöhnk teaches comparative literature at Goethe-Universität Frankfurt. She received her PhD from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and works on Latin American, French, Spanish, and Portuguese literature. Her research focuses on multilingual writing, translation, gender, Enlightenment studies, and Modernism.

Marília Jöhnk (ed.)

Beyond the Original

Translation as Experiment

[transcript]

The scientific workshop "Translation: Experiments" and the open access publication of this book were co-funded by the Johanna Quandt Young Academy at Goethe and the Open Access Publication Fund of Goethe University Frankfurt am Main.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at https://dnb.dnb.de

transcript Verlag | Hermannstraße 26 | D-33602 Bielefeld | live@transcript-verlag.de

Cover design: Maria Arndt
Cover illustration: photo by Parsa on Unsplash (modified)
Printing: Elanders Waiblingen GmbH, Waiblingen
https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839471258
Print-ISBN: 978-3-8376-7125-4 | PDF-ISBN: 978-3-8394-7125-8
ISSN of series: 2509-7512 | eISSN of series: 2703-0172

Printed on permanent acid-free text paper.

Contents

Translation and Experiment

Theoretical Inquiries into an Emerging Concept for Translation Studies

Marília Jöhnk

Translating Dancing Tongues

How do you translate a text that dwells on ambiguities, that plays with the materiality of language and the meaning generated in the space between languages? The scholar and translator Chantal Wright opted for an experimental approach to translating such an experimental text, namely Yoko Tawada's "Porträt einer Zunge." As anyone familiar with the work of the German-Japanese author Tawada knows, her essays revolve around language and translation while also reflecting on gender, literature, writing, and interculturality. Wright expressly calls her translation "an experimental translation" and comments: "It is in the nature of an experimental approach that some will perceive it as having gone too far, and others not far enough" (33n1).[1] She does that while opting for a middle way, in between the rewriting of a text and the notion of fidelity: "My prose translation seeks out that space—which has always been open to translators of poetry—located between enslavement to the original and the creation of a text that is so loosely inspired by the source text that it is no longer, strictly speaking, translation" (29). What is even more interesting: she includes herself in the translation and reflects on this experimental translation. This gives rise to a situation in which the translator speaks and continues a relationship that is imagined by Tawada herself in her

1 In her study, Lily Robert-Foley also alludes to Chantal Wright as an example, calling her text "simultaneously translation, commentary and life writing" (*Experimental Translation* 179).

writing. The translated text, in the left side of the column, is amplified through the extensive commentary on the right side:

I told P that I intended to paint a "portrait of a lady." "I'm not a lady," P countered with a smile. Some women who live abroad remain eternally young because of the distance to their mother tongue. They love their old mother and her tongue from afar without being exhausted by it.

A commonly held belief about exiles, expatriates, refugees and immigrants is that their native languages eventually suffer from attrition: removed from the source of linguistic infusion, the members of such groups use their native language only at home and within the small community of other native speakers that surrounds them. Here, however, we have another view: freed from the source, women who live abroad remain eternally young (the narrator reforges the semantic connection between "mother tongue" and "mother").

I and M, Prague '68ers who fled to Germany after the Russian invasion, are examples of asylum seekers turned immigrants. In conversation with their adult son on a trip to Prague, they talked about how their Czech is very different from the Czech spoken in Prague today. They suspect that this divergence did not come about through a gradual linguistic evolution but is the result of an overt attempt by the authorities to erase traces of the Prague Spring from everyday life by replacing the old radio and television voices with new ones in the early 1970s. M and I's Czech was not subjected to this purge, residing as it did in Germany at the time. (Tawada, "'Portrait of a Tongue' by Yoko Tawada" 45–47)

Inserting the self into the text is a common practice of critical writing, and not something that has emerged only after Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*. It shows how Wright literally goes beyond the original, making herself visible as a translator (on this aspect see Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 19). By no means is this insertion of the self into the text meant to be "an exercise in narcissism" (Wright 26). Wright seeks to show "a protocol of how a translator encounters a text" (26). She literally occupies space—and is not invisible. On the contrary, she shows that every translation is a polyphonous act of reading. Therefore, Wright's translation of Tawada serves as a perfectly fine example for experimental translations, which transgress many beliefs one might have about what a translation is and how it might look. Experimental translation does not only provide visibility to the translator; it also allows one to gain a new perspective on linguistic differences (Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 19–20) and is therefore highly prone to theoretical and philosophical inquiries into the convergences and disparities of language(s). Like Wright, the portrayed translations in this volume go beyond common conceptions of translation and show fresh, creative, and bold texts. Each contribution focuses on one example and, through the methodology of close reading, engages with different voices who, as this volume argues, are far from having gained the attention they deserve in literary studies. The main thesis of this volume is that experimental translation sheds a new perspective on commonly judged slippages in translation and discovers the aesthetic and epistemic potential of translations as *sui generis* textual forms. In this sense, this volume also advocates for more inclusion of translation analysis in literary studies and in university curricula in the realm of literature.

Instead of writing a resume on each one of the following contributions, I wish to take them as a ground for my reflections on the nature of experimental translation. Additionally, I will include a summary of the state of the art—which seems necessary for such a dynamic field—that is linked to the present historical moment and the current developments in the field of humanities. Therefore, I wish to draw on ideas and reflections found in this collection's articles in order to develop a conceptual and theoretical inquiry into the potential of "experimental translation" in literary studies. Before diving into these concepts, I wish to emphasize that most articles of this volume were written in the context of German academia, and precisely from the perspective of scholars (and sometimes also translators) who speak from their experience in comparative literature and various philological fields (German studies, classic philology, Romance languages, etc.). It is important to stress this perspective,

given that a volume on experimental translation produced in the context of *Translatologie* would assume a completely different methodology. The present contributions approach translation from a philological and comparative point of view. (On the potential of a philological study of translation, see Toepfer.)

What Is Experimental Translation?

When I first started to think about the notion of experimental translation, there were fewer bibliographical references to the subject than in the present moment. There has been a boom in academic literature delving into the notion of experimental translation—not least due to the increasing boom in AI, which has profoundly transformed translation in practice and theory. In her most recent monograph, Lily Robert-Foley explores the potential of experimental translation in the context of the rising importance of AI (*Experimental Translation*; see also Luhn, *Spiel* 39–40). This dimension is mentioned but not explored in the present contributions, which engage with experimentalism from a different perspective. While there are more scholars participating in this debate from a global perspective, I will, in addition to Lily Robert-Foley's research, concentrate on the approach of Anna Luhn, which I find most fruitful for this present volume.[2]

In 2021, Robert-Foley first published an essay to which most of the following contributions refer. In the essay, Robert-Foley starts with an extensive list of possible forms of experimental translation ("Politics" 401–04), some of which will also be discussed in this collected volume. While experimental translation can take many forms and is not "a recognized literary form" per se, Robert-Foley states that the most basic definition would be "any translation practice that opposes itself to translation norms" and that could also be referred to as "conceptual" (406, 401, 404). The experimental character opposes itself to rigid definitions: "The location of the practice itself in between forms,

2 Nevertheless, I want to mention other contributions that show how on a global scale there is a greater concern with experimentalism and translation studies. See, for instance, the monographs from Robinson and Lee, to which I will only refer selectively. Several shorter contributions also dwell on the notion of experimentalism in translation (mostly without exploring it further), such as Berretti. (I am citing this article from Berretti as it was published in *Open Edition*, and therefore without pagination.) Further references to research on experimental translation can be found in Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation*.

texts, languages, and cultures makes it hard to catalogue and classify, as any translation practice becomes slippery in the transition to theory" (406). Robert-Foley continues to explore the idea that experimental translation questions the very definition of translation and is therefore deeply embedded in theoretical endeavors (405). Experimental translation thus constitutes "a threat to the mainstream dogma of translation, in particular, the place of fidelity, equivalence, accuracy, transparency, smoothness, and legibility" (405). Those exact values are also questioned in the present volume through the idea of the "original," which is connected to the idea of fidelity and authority. But, as Robert-Foley also explains, one has to be careful even with this very basic notion of experimental translation, since the "translation doxa" (410) that experimental translation opposes has to be embedded in its precise historical context: "At least some of what I have identified as experimental translation only finds itself in opposition to the norms of the modern era" (410). Continuing this line of thought, Robert-Foley also explains that the deconstruction of the notion of fidelity needs to be carefully contextualized: being faithful to a marginal text can question power relations just as much as not being faithful to a canonical text (417)—experimentalism, therefore, always needs contextualization.

Robert-Foley continued her reflections in her recent monograph, *Experimental Translation*, which was published in 2024. As stated, this book engages with translation in the light of the developments in AI—my depiction of the state of art will mostly concentrate not on the different procedures and the specific examples that Robert-Foley evokes, but rather on her reflections on the term "experimental translation." In her book, Robert-Foley underlines the definition of experimental translation while questioning norms of translation, such as fidelity and the focus on meaning (13). She precisely states that experimental translation is "a device for interrogating and challenging marketplace norms and practices of translation in the age of algorithmic production" (216). Apart from this quote, which reflects the subversive potential of experimental translation, I consider the explorations on the closeness of experimental translation, adaptation, and experimental writing especially fruitful (33–34, 210, 212–13). According to Robert-Foley, those categories relate to one another, they "overlap," but they are by no means identical (213, see also 210). The nucleus of experimental translation in contrast to these other forms of writing is the relation to another language: "language difference matters" (215).

Luhn, who has also contributed an article to the present volume, continues Robert-Foley's explorations in two publications written in German: At the center of Luhn's reflection is the ludic and playful character of experimental trans-

lations (*Spiel*; on this dimension, see also Lee), which will also be a recurring pattern in the contributions of the present volume. But this playful and ludic nature does not mean, as Luhn repeatedly shows and also emphasizes in her present contribution, that those translations are not motivated by very serious intentions and agendas. Luhn therefore stresses the notion of experiment as a tool for gaining knowledge and new insights. In her study *Spiel mit Einsatz*, Luhn places emphasis on specific scenes of experimental translation, both from a practical and from a theoretical point of view. In her reflections, which follow those of Robert-Foley, Luhn explores how the notion of experimentalism is older than the notion found in recent contributions to experimental translation. In fact, she exposes how many theoretical reflections on translation that one could consider progressive dwell on experimentalism without further exploring this term and its implications (*Spiel* 58). She analyzes the connection between experimental translation and textual criticism (138), which is an aspect also highlighted in Judith Kasper's essay on Anne Carson's translation of *Antigone*, as well as in my own reading of Maria Gabriela Llansol in the light of Baudelaire scholarship, and which ultimately marks Robert-Foley's definition of experimental translation as "creative-critical, practice-based research interrogating translation norms and epistemic virtues" (*Experimental Translation* 18).

Contextualizing Experimentalism: From Naturalism to the Vanguard

Before diving into the nuances and perspectives of these collected case studies, I want to deepen the connection between experimental literature and experimental translation. [3] The connection between these two concepts has been explored by Luhn from the point of view of scholarship (*Spiel* 59–61). I would additionally like to depict the genealogy of experiment as an aesthetical category, while alluding to its discourse through very selected readings. The research on literature and experimentalism is extensive, and, for this reason, I will consider only two examples.

3 The reflection on the concept of experimentalism is based on the explorations of this term in Jöhnk, *Poetik des Kolibris* (esp. pp. 211–18). Some parts in this section are translations and rewritings from one chapter of that text, which is concerned with experimental literature (translation does not play a role).

The concept of experimental literature is often and rightfully connected to the experiments of the vanguardist movement and is understood, in this sense, as an exploration of new grounds and a break with former aesthetic techniques (Berg 143)—something that Luhn also mentions in her present contribution in this volume and that Robert-Foley also underlines as an important parallel to experimental translation (*Experimental Translation* 8–9). This is convergent with the aforementioned definition of experimentalism in translation studies, which stresses the aspect of breaking rules in relation to the normative conception of translation. Experimental literature has different meanings: in one sense, it characterizes the fascination with sciences that was evident in many nineteenth-century French authors, such as Honoré de Balzac, Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, or, especially, Émile Zola (Schwerte 397).

In 1880, Zola published his manifesto *Le Roman expérimental*, which was essentially related to a text from the physician Claude Bernard, namely his *Introduction à l'étude de la médicine expérimentale*, which had appeared fifteen years earlier (Zola; Bernard). In the same way that Bernard had transferred the methodology of experimentation from physics and chemistry to medicine, Zola wanted to adapt the concept to literature (Zola 59–60, 62, 81; Schwerte 398). Zola was primarily concerned with his characters and their constellation. He believed that the experimental setting should understand how people are influenced by their social milieu as well as by physical and chemical powers (Zola 72, 96; Schwerte 398).

Zola's concern with experimentalism concentrates on characters (their determination and behavior), as can be seen in *Thérèse Raquin*; they—and not form, as we might think—become the site of experiment (Schwerte 399). This distinguishes his conception of experiment from the ideas developed in the aesthetics of the vanguardist movement (Schwerte 399). Currently, experimentalism is, as stated above, especially connected to the vanguard movement; this is consistent with the applied notions of experimental translation, given that most contributions focus on translations brought to light after the aesthetic revolution of the vanguardist movement (on this aspect, see Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 8–9). In this sense, a vanguardist experimental text is above all an aesthetically experimental text that challenges notions of genre, language(s), and form. Within the vanguardist movement, one might think about André Breton's *Manifeste du Surréalisme* (Stockwell). In this text, Breton shows how he envisions experimental aesthetics, while not expressly referring to this term. He describes an experimental setting for writing (his notion

of *écriture automatique*); by doing this, it becomes possible to reproduce this experimental setting for writing (Breton 327, 331–32).

With this in mind, I would like to draw some conclusions about the transmission of experimentalism from literature to translation: Firstly, there is not just *one* definition of experimentalism; and secondly, experimentalism can be situated in distinct periods of literary history. Experimentalism in translation, as in literature, is linked to concepts like failure, playfulness, and ludicrousness, as well as to transgressions of an aesthetical and moral nature—aspects that have been explored by different contributions on experimental translation (see Lee; Robinson 171). Experimentalism might have a certain aim, but it is not afraid to fail (Prusák).

Situating Experimental Translation

The case studies found in the present volume show that experimental translation is not a category limited to a certain historical moment. As already indicated by Robert-Foley, the historical setting needs to be carefully contextualized, given that normative views on translation change over time and are also connected to geographic and linguistic cultures. Robert-Foley refers to Donna Haraway's situating of knowledge in her explorations (Haraway; Robert-Foley, "Politics" 407–08). I wish to expand on those reflections in light of the contributions in the present volume. While the summarized literature on experimental translation concentrates on a broader perspective, this volume will give time and space to study experimental translations individually. This is consistent with the object, given that, as stated, experimentalism in translation is something that needs to be situated, that is resistant to narrow definitions, and that should be studied in its own intertextuality.

Every contribution in the present volume forges its own nuance of experimental translation. There are no preconceived definitions; the goal lies in understanding what experimental translation means and how this concept is fruitful when thinking about translation. [4] Beginning from this perspective, I

4 It may be useful here to comment on the plurality of conventions that are at issue in the volume. Given that this collected volume addresses experimental translation practice, each contribution seeks an individual approach to providing English translations of the analyzed works. And while MLA stylistic conventions are generally followed, diversions from such guidelines are made in selected instances and for specific reasons.

wish to emphasize Kasper's notion of experimental translation, according to which every translation is an experiment because it discovers something new in the act of rendering a text from one language to the other. Concentrating on "experimental" translation allows all the contributions in the volume to have a different perspective: instead of judging or criticizing a translation, they see the aesthetic potential in linguistic errors and failures. This is the case, for instance, in Caroline Sauter's portrayal of Bella Berkovich's translation of Albert Cohen's *Livre de ma mère*. Bella Cohen, née Berkovich, was the third wife of Cohen. The original was dictated to her, and, after her husband's death, she translated the book into English. In her contribution, Sauter sheds light on a translation that has been characterized as having purposefully "clumsy" and "awkward" language, but that is, precisely because of those characteristics, interesting. Here I want to underline that, at least in German academic culture, the view that translation is material that needs to be *judged* instead of *interpreted* is still in vigor. Focusing on experimental translation therefore allows us to consider translation as primary source material and as a *sui generis* literary form beyond judgement and review.

In order to situate experimental translation, it is necessary to contextualize the speaking person.[5] Therefore, it seems important to note that many contributions were written by scholars and translators. Melanie Strasser explicitly explores this speaking position in her contribution, which addresses her own work as part of the Viennese translation collective Versatorium. Just as Berkovich inserted herself into the translation of Cohen's *Livre de ma mère*, and into the mother-son relationship at the center of this text, Sauter inserts herself, as scholar-translator, into her essay by attending to her relation to her own mother. In this sense, the self becomes a site of experiment, as observed in Wright's translation of Tawada. The performative dimension of experimental translation, which is stressed in Luhn's contribution, is therefore literally being performed while we are reading.

While experimentalism might seem like a "modern" phenomenon and, as such (at least to my knowledge), has been explored mostly in relation to modernity, it is important to keep in mind that also in early modern times there was not just one way or methodology to translate a text (Brown 136–86). This aspect is stressed by Julia Heideklang in her analysis of experiments that were conducted with Latin quotations during retranslations of Niccolò

5 On the convergence of experimental translation and auto-theory, see Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 177–79.

Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. In this sense, the only contribution to this volume that addresses early modernity questions whether the category of "experimental translation" is modern, given that early modern cultures, in their translation practices, were already open to, and even undertaking, what is now called experimental translation. This characteristic is also stressed by Kasper, who, as mentioned, sheds light on the fact that every translation is an experiment, in the sense that it uncovers something new that was not known beforehand.

In his reflections on translations, Venuti has repeatedly referred to experimentalism, particularly in modernism and in connection to Ezra Pound (Venuti, *Translator's Invisibility*, esp. 198, 214), but also in other contexts (Venuti, *Scandals* 12, 15, 123). Nevertheless, this volume argues that it is possible and necessary to connect the concept of experimental translation to texts from early modernity and from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as shown by Heideklang and Stefan Willer. This becomes even clearer when looking at the eighteenth century, where the trend of pseudo-translation questioned the distinction between original work and translation (see Vanacker). In this context, it is worth keeping in mind legal issues, such as the fact that the lack of copyrights prior to the nineteenth century gave translators more freedom (Nebrig and Vecchiato 2). The "invention of the original", which changed the public's relation to the concepts of "original" and "translation," is said to have taken place during the eighteenth century (Poltermann). In his contribution, Willer explores an unknown side of Goethe: as translator of Denis Diderot, he forged the neologism "originalmäßig," which is ironically a translation from the French "textuellement" and is an adjective that describes something similar to an original, which nevertheless cannot be identified as original. The potential of experimental translation before the twentieth century is also reflected in the sexist concept *belle infidèle*, which refers to a translation that is aesthetically attractive, but not "faithful" to the original. Lori Chamberlain, in "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation," has famously critiqued this gendered notion of fidelity, alluding to its place in civil law and the idea of possession and power.

The notion of translation as an experimental technique is inscribed within the dichotomy between "faithful" and "free," which scholars such as Hilary Brown consider anachronistic: "The terms belong to a past era, recurring in debates about translation prior to the twentieth century, and contemporary translation theorists have developed a range of more sophisticated approaches to translation analysis" (144). Robert-Foley also contextualizes the notion of fidelity when she says that the breaking of norms related to fidelity has to

be regarded in connection to the translated text ("Politics" 417). Moving away from the original therefore has a different meaning when one departs from a canonical text rather than from a marginal text. The notion of fidelity is repeatedly questioned in the present volume: While "fidelity" gains a rather literal quality in Berkovich's translation of her husband Cohen (and infidelity is metaphorically used by the loving widow in order to insert herself in a loving, textual mother-son relation; see Sauter), the notion of fidelity does not seem to necessarily contradict the experimental approach of Goethe (Willer) and of Llansol (Jöhnk).

The present volume begins with texts that are often considered canonical, with translations of Sophocles, Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Baudelaire (Achim Geisenhanslüke; Kasper; Heideklang; Jöhnk). Those translations of very canonical texts find their own way to relate to tradition as well: Not only the "original," but also—even more so—its history in translation, is part of the translation process. Some of the translators have a very renowned and canonical place in literary studies. This applies to Paul Celan as well as to Carson and, it goes without saying, Goethe (Kasper; Geisenhanslüke; Willer). Others are marginal and poorly known translators, such as Berkovich or Llansol (Sauter; Jöhnk), and in these cases gender relations also play a part. In this context, Robert-Foley reminds her readers about parallels between experimental translation and feminist translation ("Politics" 414–15).

Going Beyond the Original, Questioning Power Relations

Common to all the contributions in the present volume is a critical engagement with the concept of "original." The title "beyond the original" is an homage to Yasemin Yildiz's *Beyond the Mother Tongue*, which explored the potential of multilingualism in literature. Many case studies from the present volume could be related to the "scandals of translations" portrayed by Venuti (*Scandals*). In this way, many contributors draw attention to the fact that their translations were harshly criticized; this applies to Carson (Kasper), Llansol (Jöhnk), and Berkovich (Sauter).

The critique of originality and faithfulness is not new to translation studies, but it still has to be stressed. A volume on experimental translation certainly cannot fail to reference Haroldo de Campos, a Brazilian writer and lawyer who translated extensively and brought into Portuguese parts of the Hebrew Bible, Ulysees, Goethe, and many others, and who is frequently mentioned

in the context of experimental translation (Jöhnk, "Übersetzungstheorie"; Luhn, *Spiel* 13–21; Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 16–17). In numerous texts he reflected on a new vocabulary to relate to translation, speaking of "recriação" ("recreation"), "transcriação" (transcreation), "re-luciferação" ("re-luciferation"). His refreshing approach to translation also had to be expressed lexically. In "Da tradução como criação e como crítica," he explicitly described translation as a collective endeavor and experiment while evoking the concept of the laboratory (Campos 35; Luhn, *Spiel* 20–21). In this essay, Campos discusses his own translation work in groups and shows how experimental translations were developed to a considerable extent in the Global South.

The French scholar Tiphaine Samoyault has explored the question of power and translation in her study *Traduction et violence*. As already shown by Robert-Foley, experimental translators question power relations; this is also shown in the contribution about Llansol's translation of *Les Fleurs du mal* (Jöhnk). The way that questions of power are at the heart of experimental translations has also been addressed by Robert-Foley ("Politics" 410; *Experimental Translation* 215). Luhn also stresses that conflict is an inherent moment of experimental translation (*Spiel* 119).

By now, what can be understood as an experimental translation, along with the way that discussions about this concept are fruitful for analyzing translations, has become evident. However, it is important to critically engage with experimental translation, as well as to consider its limits. The concept of experimental translation could also be considered elitist in light of its vanguardist character (see, for instance, Venuti, *Scandals* 12, 15–16, 18). This is even more true when looking at some of the translators portrayed here, who are sometimes hermetic, and resistant to interpretation. Some of these translations are very academic, in the sense that one needs a lot of knowledge in order to understand them. Therefore, experimentalism in translation could also be considered a tool for self-fashioning and for exhibiting one's own cultural capital and position in the literary field. Some experimental translators might seek to distinguish themselves in the Bordieuan sense, and most translations studied here are not amongst the most successful in respect to readership. The more experimental a translation is, the more it attracts an academic (and relatively narrow) readership. In this sense, experimental translation serves as currency, and it does not only question power relations—it might fortify them as well.

Forms of Experimental Translation

Robert-Foley invokes an extensive list of possible forms of experimental translation ("Politics" 401–05). In many of the volume's contributions, experiment is explicitly connected to "form" (Sauter; Jöhnk). Different subcategories of experimental translations are portrayed throughout the volume: Heideklang depicts the case of retranslations of Latin quotations; Luhn concentrates on a translation that could be categorized as pseudo-translation; Willer sheds light on a translation that translates an already translated text back into the original language (or, to be precise, produces "new translations"); and Strasser writes on her experience with collective translation. Carson's translation is also translated (Kasper), which shows how a translation becomes a source-text for another translation and gains more independence. Apart from that, the present volume mentions mistranslations, bad translations, collective translations, and homophonic translations. As already mentioned, many of those categories blur distinctions between multilingual/bilingual texts, translations, adaptions, and re-writings (Geisenhanslüke; Heideklang; Kasper; Luhn; Willer). The articles and the translators nevertheless insist on the term "translation." Luhn draws attention to the fact that this insistence is not a detail but possesses a performative level. But experimental translations not only perform the precarity of the original, they also epitomize it, as in the case of: antique source material (Kasper); Goethe's peculiar translation of Diderot, in which the translation gained the status of original and was subjected to new translations into French (Willer); or Hervé le Tellier's pseudo-translation of the fictitious Portuguese author Jaime Montestrela (Luhn).

Time plays a crucial role in every contribution. For instance, attention is given to: differences in historical time and reflections on translation's time (Sauter); translation as a means of constituting time and relating to one's own time (Geisenhanslüke); and the way that time can recur via haunting (Sauter; Willer). In this context, it becomes clear how experimental translation can be consistent with an experimental text as well as with a text that belongs to the classical canon. In the case of Celan, Shakespeare's poems are adapted into Celan's own realities and historical time, and they are made to reflect life events such as the Goll affair and the destruction of Celan's reputation (Geisenhanslüke).

Amidst all the different forms of experimental translation, one characteristic seems dominant in every article, namely the importance of exchange, dialogue, and community. Many contributions explicitly stress the importance of

collective work, as seen in Wright, who, as previously noted, re-created her dialogue with the text (Sauter; Strasser). Scholarship on experimental translation has also placed emphasis on this collective dimension (see Luhn, *Spiel* 135; Berretti). This collective and dialogical dimension needs to be emphasized, because even if experimental translation questions what translation actually is, the intense intertextual dimension persists (Luhn, *Spiel* 102; "'Dieses Spiel"). The relation to the translated text can sometimes assume a very personal dimension, as in the case of Berkovich translating her husband's work (Sauter), or of Goethe translating in a competitive and agonistic way his friend and rival Diderot (Willer).

Just as this form of translation is fueled by a collective effort, this present volume is the fruit of a collective endeavor and ongoing dialogue. Its starting point was a workshop on "Translation: Experiments," which Caroline Sauter and I organized. This workshop was held at the Institute for Comparative Literature at Goethe University Frankfurt in May 2023 and funded by the Johanna Quandt Young Academy. I want to express my gratitude for the funding of the workshop by the Johanna Quandt Young Academy and the financial support of this present volume by the University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg, the Forschungsförderung Fachbereich 10, and the R3 Support at Goethe University. The present volume testifies to the constant occupation with translation in the realm of comparative literature, a global and transcultural—but also precarious—discipline that, just like translation, does not have an easy and comfortable position in German academia.

May 2025, Frankfurt/Main

Works Cited

Berg, Gunhild. "Experimentieren." *Über die Praxis des kulturwissenschaftlichen Arbeitens: ein Handwörterbuch*, edited by Ute Frietsch and Jörg Rogge, transcript, 2014, pp. 140–44.

Bernard, Claude. *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale*. Larousse, 1951.

Berretti, Jany. "Pour la traduction expérimentale." *Palimpsestes. Revue de traduction*, Hors série, 2006, pp. 89–112. Open Edition Journals, https://journals.openedition.org/palimpsestes/251. Accessed 2 May 2025.

Breton, André. "Manifeste du Surréalisme." *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. 1, edited by Marguerite Bonnet, Gallimard, 1988, pp. 311–46.

Brown, Hilary. *Women and Early Modern Cultures of Translation: Beyond the Female Tradition*. Oxford UP, 2022.

Campos, Haroldo de. "Da tradução como criação e como crítica." *Metalinguagem: Ensaios de teoria e crítica literária*, by Campos, Vozes, 1967, pp. 21–38.

Chamberlain, Lori. "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation." *Signs*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1988, pp. 454–72.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, pp. 575–99.

Jöhnk, Marília. *Poetik des Kolibris: Lateinamerikanische Reiseprosa bei Gabriela Mistral, Mário de Andrade und Henri Michaux*. transcript, 2021.

———. "Übersetzungstheorie aus Brasilien: Haroldo de Campos im Dialog mit Christian Morgenstern." *arcadia*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2023, pp. 35–51.

Lee, Tong King. *Translation as Experimentalism: Exploring Play in Poetics*. Cambridge, 2022.

Luhn, Anna. "'Dieses Spiel ist keine Spielerei': Experimentelle Übersetzung, Übersetzung als Experiment." *Babelwerk*, June 2023, https://babelwerk.de/essay/dieses-spiel-ist-keine-spielerei-experimentelles-uebersetzen-uebersetzung-als-experiment/.

———. *Spiel mit Einsatz. Experimentelle Übersetzung als Praxis der Kritik*. Turia+Kant, 2022.

Nebrig, Alexander, and Daniele Vecchiato. "Einleitung: Translatorische Kreativität um 1800." *Kreative Praktiken des literarischen Übersetzens um 1800: Übersetzungshistorische und literaturwissenschaftliche Studien*, edited by Alexander Nebrig and Daniele Vecchiato, De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 1–15.

Nelson, Maggie. *The Argonauts*. 2015. Macmillan, 2016.

Poltermann, Andreas. "Die Erfindung des Originals: Zur Geschichte der Übersetzungskonzeption in Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert." *Fallstudien zu ihrer Kulturgeschichte*, edited by Brigitte Schultze, Schmidt, 1987, pp. 14–52.

Prusák, Mariana. "Schiffbruch auf festem Lande. Über das Scheitern von Experimenten." *Experiment und Literatur. Themen, Methoden, Theorien*, edited by Michael Gamper. Wallstein, 2010, pp. 321–42.

Robert-Foley, Lily. *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production*. Goldsmiths Press, 2024.

———. "The Politics of Experimental Translation: Potentialities and Preoccupations." *English: Journal of the English Association*, vol. 69, no. 267, 2020, pp. 401–19.

Robinson, Douglas. *The Experimental Translator*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

Samoyault, Tiphaine. *Traduction et violence*. Seuil, 2020.

Schwerte, Hans. "Der Begriff des Experiments in der Dichtung." *Literatur und Geistesgeschichte. Festgabe für Heinz Otto Burger*, edited by Reinhold Grimm and Conrad Wiedemann, ESV, 1968, pp. 387–405.

Stockwell, Peter. "The Surrealist Experiments with Language." *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, edited by Joe Bray et al., Routledge, 2012, pp. 48–61.

Tawada, Yoko. "'Portrait of a Tongue' by Yoko Tawada." *Yoko Tawada's Portrait of a Tongue*, by Tawada, pp. 35–144.

———. "Porträt Einer Zunge." *Überseezungen*, by Tawada, Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke, 2002, pp. 118–52.

———. *Yoko Tawada's Portrait of a Tongue: An Experimental Translation by Chantal Wright*. Translated by Chantal Wright, U of Ottawa Press, 2013.

Toepfer, Regina. *Translationsanthropologie: Philologische Übersetzungsforschung als Kulturwissenschaft. Mit einer exemplarischen Analyse der ersten deutschen Odyssee von Simon Schaidenreisser (1537/38)*. Wehrhahn, 2022.

Vanacker, Beatrijs. "Between Original and Translation: Transcultural Fiction and Pseudotranslation in the Eighteenth Century." *Literary Transnationalism(s)*, edited by Dagmar Vandebosch, Brill, 2018, pp. 89–103.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. Routledge, 1998.

———. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. Routledge, 1995.

Wright, Chantal. "Introduction (II): Translating 'Portrait of a Tongue.'" *Yoko Tawada's Portrait of a Tongue*, by Tawada, pp. 23–33.

Yildiz, Yasemin. *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*. Fordham UP, 2012.

Zola, Émile. *Le Roman expérimental*. Edited by Guedj Aimé, Garnier-Flammarion, 1971.

The Acute of the Present

Paul Celan's Shakespeare Translations

Achim Geisenhanslüke

Translating a Contemporary Diction

According to scholarship, Celan began studying English in 1944 solely in order to be able to read Shakespeare in the original. Later, in a 20 August 1965 letter to his wife, he writes: "pour moi, il n'y rien de plus beau et de plus grand que Shakespeare" ("for me, there is nothing more beautiful and bigger than Shakespeare"; Celan and Celan-Lestrange 288).[1] The confession about Shakespeare is surprising at first sight for a poet who has lived entirely between the languages of German and French. No French-speaking author of the modern age like Rimbaud or Apollinaire, no Russian author of the twentieth century like Mandelstam, no early model like Rilke: it is Shakespeare who embodies for Celan the epitome of beauty and greatness. He thus undoubtedly occupies an exceptional position in Celan's work. The relationship between Celan and Shakespeare seems to be a special one, one that—unlike, for example, the case of the epoch-making adaptation of Rimbaud's *Bateau ivre* and Valéry's *La jeune parque* in the 1960s—initially seems to have little to do with Celan's own poetic work.

At second glance, however, the situation is more complex. Shakespeare then assumes a greater, exemplary significance in Celan's work. This applies first of all to the translations that culminate in the 1967 publication, by Insel-

1 All citations from Celan's letters and from scholarship will be translated into English. Celan's translations, however, will not be retranslated into English, given that this would contradict the specific aesthetic and diction the following article explores. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English—whether of Celan or others—are my own.)

Verlag, of twenty-one selected sonnets by the Elizabethan poet. These sonnets would accompany Celan's work for more than twenty years.

Celan's translations move between two different points of reference. On the one hand, there is the translation by the poet and private scholar Gottlob Regis, from the first half of the nineteenth century, to which Celan expressly refers; on the other hand, there is Stefan George's translation, from which Celan distances himself just as decisively. Celan's own concern has been made clear precisely against the background of Regis's achievement and the critical setting aside of George's preciosity in translation: "Mir ging es beim Übersetzen vor allem auch um eine natürlichere—also ungezwungene, ungestelzte—und, wenn ich so sagen darf, heutigere Diktion. An mehreren Stellen werden Sie Assonanzen begegnen; dazu hat sich seinerzeit auch Regis verstehen müssen" ("In translation, I was primarily concerned with a more natural—an informal, not artificial—and, if I am allowed to say so, more contemporary diction. In different instances, you will encounter assonances; Regis also had to deal with them in his own time"; Gellhaus 417). In claiming to translate Shakespeare into a "more contemporary diction," Celan makes it clear that he is concerned less with placing Shakespeare in a historical context than with establishing a relationship to his own present precisely in its historical distance from the subject matter. Therein lies the experimental character of his translation.

The Shakespeare translation therefore inscribes itself at the same time in Celan's own lyrical production during the 1960s. Celan kept track of the precise dates at which he translated each sonnet. Two translations appeared in *Neue Rundschau* as early as 1960, eighteen were performed by Celan on NDR (Northern German Broadcasting) for Shakespeare's four-hundredth birthday in 1964, and the whole of the twenty-one sonnets was published in 1967. Celan first translated sonnet 90, followed shortly thereafter in February 1960 by sonnet 137, the final poem of his selection; finally, at the suggestion of his friend, the author Franz Wurm, he translated sonnet 107, which thus assumes special significance.

The fact that Celan increased the number of sonnets that he translated for the final publication to twenty-one is thus not solely due to Wurm's suggestion. It becomes clear that Celan, in selecting twenty-one from the 154 sonnets published by Shakespeare, is creating a cycle of his own precisely in view of the "more contemporary diction" for which he is striving. Celan's translation can be read as a poetic engagement with Shakespeare's work, which at the same time establishes a constellation with his own work.

In this context, the translation of the sonnets appears not only as a testimony to Celan's poetic encounter with Shakespeare and the English language in the context of proximity and strangeness, but also as part of his own work history. In this way, however, the translation enters into a particular historical constellation. Historically, the translation of Shakespeare coincides with the disastrous consequences for Celan of the Goll Affair, in which he was accused of plagiarizing Yvan Goll's oeuvre. In terms of his own work, the translation coincides with the publication of the volume *Atemwende*, of which Celan writes to his wife Gisèle Lestrange on 8 March 1967, despite the adverse circumstances: "C'est vraiment ce que j'ai écrit de plus dense jusqu'ici, de plus ample aussi" ("It is really the most dense and also the most ample of what I have written so far"; Celan and Celan-Lestrange 502).

In this context, what Celan's poems and translations during the late 1960s accomplish is the constantly renewed attempt to make the time that is sedimented in them speak. In this sense, Martin von Koppenfels speaks of the poem as a time capsule, especially with regard to translations: "Gedichte sind Zeitkapseln. Mittels Metren und Klangfiguren bilden sie eine Membran um die Zeiterfahrung eines Moments, die sonst verloren wäre" ("Poems are time capsules. Through meters and sound figures they form a membrane around the experience of time in a single moment, which otherwise would be lost"; xxxii–xxxiii). Celan's poems as well as his translations are to be understood in this sense as a form of inherently rhythmical and musical language, as noted by the poet Thomas Kling, who spoke of "ein rhythmisches, verkürztes, klangvoll-musikalisches Sprechen über Welt, in das grundsätzlich alle Sprachlagen geschichtet sein können" ("a rhythmical, abbreviated, sonorous-musical way of speaking about the world, in which, generally, all forms of language can be embedded"; 329).

The poem as "Zeitkapsel" ("time capsule"; Koppenfels xxxii) and *Sprachspeicher* ("language-memory"; Kling 329)—this is all the more true for Celan's Shakespeare translation, as well as for his own poetry, since the guiding themes of Shakespeare's sonnets are time, transience, and age, but also the beauty that grows out of the poem as a flower of the word. In the context of Celan's poetry during the 1960s, time means the experience of destruction, pain, and separation, but also their poetic processing in the poem as a crystalline structure that defies the transience of beauty—experiences that he was able to read from Shakespeare's sonnets and to transfer into the more contemporary diction of his own time. The confrontation with Shakespeare is special not only because it occupied Celan for so long, but also because in the

translation of the Elizabethan poet, who seems so historically as well as poetically distant, Celan's own present simultaneously opens up. In this context, Celan's very own version of Shakespeare will be discussed as an experimental form of translating. Experimentation characterizes the way Celan explores time, historical alterity, language, and rhythm.

Shakespeare's *Eingedenken*

Celan's translation of Shakespeare has presented researchers with a challenge. Compared to Rimbaud's *Bateau ivre* and Valéry's *La jeune parque*, it is singular, dedicated to a different time and a different language. At first, there seems to be a difference between Shakespeare and Celan, as Annette Simonis has pointed out. She suggests that the difference between the language of middle and late Celan and the language of Shakespeare's sonnets is extremely striking. On the one hand, there is Celan preferring an elliptical language and short verses; on the other hand, there is the long structure of the Shakespearean verses, which are also discursive and argumentative (162). Simonis also remarks that another divergence between Shakespeare and Celan lies in the Elizabethan predilection for dense metaphors and wordy poetry (162).

As Simonis remarks, Celan's hostility to metaphor, like his elliptical technique of representation, is at first glance opposed to Shakespeare's creative art of language. How the two come together—the inventive creator of language Shakespeare and the poet Celan, who tends toward muteness—seems a mystery.

Uncertainty reigns already in the question of the selection of the sonnets, as suggested by Leonard Olschner. At first sight, he points out, it might not be comprehensible why Celan chose those twenty-one poems among the 154 sonnets (211). However, the reason becomes clearer when one comes to realize that around half of the poems revolve around memory and questions of *eingedenken*, time, and durability (211).

Certainly, the reference to memory meets an essential trait of Celan's Shakespeare translations. However, it applies to the entire work and can thus hardly serve to grasp the special position of the sonnets in comparison to the poems.

In view of the offer Shakespeare's poems make to the reader, the answer with regard to the specific genre of the sonnet is therefore initially simpler. For the theme of Shakespeare's sonnets is, unsurprisingly and above all, love.

Love, and the question of the relationship between beauty and transience, is the guiding theme of the poems, and this is also true, under altered auspices, for Celan, especially in the context of the constellation that the letters, translations, and poems form for him.

Sommer *war*

Celan's Shakespearean translations set their own accent. Thus, Szondi has already drawn attention to the importance of the moments of caesura, paronomasia, and repetition, which are also present in Celan's lyrical work, in order to characterize Celan's own ductus of translation precisely in contrast to the English original:

> Nicht der Verzicht auf die überlieferten rhetorischen Figuren unterscheidet also Celans Übertragung vom Original, sondern die veränderten Voraussetzungen, die andere Art des Meinens, die seiner Sprachverwendung im allgemeinen und seinem Gebrauch rhetorischer Figuren im bewondered immer schon vorausliegt, wiewohl sie erst aus der Performanz, aus dem Text, erschlossen werden kann. (Szondi 331)

Celan did not renounce the passed on rhetorical figures in his translation. The difference towards the original rather lies in the changed assumption, the divergent way of meaning, which precedes his usage of language in general and his use of rhetorical figures specifically, although this can only be apprehended in the performance of the text.

The different kind of meaning Szondi speaks of results from the historical distance to the object, which at the same time leads to the fact that Celan's own poetry and the reference to his own present are repeatedly inscribed in the translation.

What this means for the rhythmic orientation of Celan's translation in the proper sense has been worked out by Lengeler. He too emphasizes above all the differences between Shakespeare and Celan. Three individual procedures, he says, determine Celan's diction, namely hendiadys, postponing the adjective, and hyperbaton (134). The result of this rhythmic series amounts to a dissolution of Shakespeare's form. As Lengeler points out, the rhythm of Shakespeare is "zerhackt" ("chopped up"; 134).

Celan, however, is closer to Shakespeare than Lengeler would have us believe. As much as he seems to adapt Shakespeare's rhythm to his own on the formal level, Celan remains faithful to the theme of the sonnets. This is already evident in the translations of the first five poems, which are the ones attributed to the so-called "procreation Sonnets," the first seventeen poems of the cycle, which deal with Shakespeare's call for the procreation of offspring. If it is already clear in Shakespeare's "procreation sonnets" that procreation alone can save us from the impending decay of beauty, then it becomes apparent in the translation, moreover, that Celan attaches a possibly even greater significance to the theme of time and transience. To the wish that "beauty's rose might never die," as it says in the first sonnet, Celan translates the genitive into the nominative "die Rose Schönheit soll nicht sterben" and thus further reinforces the equation of rose and beauty (Celan/Shakespeare 317). And, to the threat of "time decease," the translation reacts with a reference to temporality that is clearer than in the original. Celan calls the rose "die gezeitigte" and thus makes it the object of a transience to which it helplessly falls prey (317).

Against this background, the introductory alliteration "Was west" (317) is not only an expression of the possession of beauty, but also already a reference to decay, which is then explicitly addressed at the end of the fourth sonnet: "Die Schönheit, ungenutzt: mit dir mußt du sie verwesen. / Doch nutzt du sie, sie wird, was bleibt, verwesen" (323). The rhyme with the identical words plays with the double meaning of *verwesen*, as "to administer" and as "to perish." It thus not only introduces a legal component that is constantly present in Shakespeare's poems and is directed in the "procreation sonnets" to the question of the order of last will and inheritance, but also underscores the importance of time and transience for the central theme of love and beauty: "die eigne Knospe ist dein Grab" (317), it says, in reference to the rose beauty invoked in the first sonnet.

Thus, at the same time, an autobiographical experience inscribes itself in the poem. When the second sonnet begins with "forty winters" and Celan translates "Wenn vierzig Winter deine Stirn umdrängen" (319), it becomes clear that in the translation, which is dated 5 February 1961, the "you" is Celan himself, who was forty years old at the time. The question that Shakespeare poses with regard to afterlife in the heir relates Celan's adaptation in more than one sense to that of his own afterlife as poet and father:

Or who is he so fond will be the tomb
Of his self-love to stop posterity?

Liebst du dich so? Das Grab so? Sollt
dir dies: dein eigen Ende sein, genügen? (320–21)

In Shakespeare, self-love stands against posterity, against afterlife in the legally legitimized heir. In the early 1960s, Celan increasingly posed the question of posterity in the context of his own poetry being threatened by slander, a plague of its very own order. The plague to which Shakespeare alludes (in poems written during the time of the plague) is, for Celan, the annihilation of his own name triggered by the Goll Affair (Wiedemann). In the translations, Celan consistently addresses this time as one of eclipse, while asking if summer has already begun: "Ist Sommer? Sommer *war*. Schon führt die Zeit / den Wintern und Verfinstrungen entgegen" (325). In the translation of the fifth sonnet, Celan takes up the antithesis between summer blossom and winter torpor that was introduced by Shakespeare and consistently relates it to the rose beauty alluded to at the outset (324–25). That summer is irretrievably lost and now the "hideous winter" reigns, the translation accepts as the new reality: "Sommer *war*." Not unlike Hölderlin's *Hälfte des Lebens*, poetry has settled into the time of winter: "Doch so, als Geist, gestaltlos, aufbewahrt, / west sie, die Blume, weiter, winterhart" (325). The question of the flower's essence resumes the beginning and responds in the alliteration of "weiter, winterhart" to the transience that threatens beauty and that the poem seeks to absorb. The first five poems thus form an internal cycle that revolves entirely around the being and passing of beauty, whereby beauty is associated not only with love, but, as a flower, also with the written word.

Infamous Translations

In Shakespeare's sonnets, as in Celan's translation, the topics of time, transience, and melancholy correspond to one another: that of love as a "fool," as "Narr." "So true a fool is love that in your will, / Though you do anything, he thinks no ill," from Shakespeare, is translated by Celan to "Solch treuer Narr ist Liebe: nimmer sieht / sie Arg in deinem Tun—was auch geschieht" (330–31). Celan takes over the common constriction of love and foolishness from Shakespeare and at the same time surpasses it by translating the "error" that justifies the foolish judgment as delusion: "So ich dies hier als Wahn erwiesen seh, / so schrieb ich nie und keiner liebte je" (353) is his translation of the conclusion of sonnet 116. He also translates the "madding fever" from sonnet 119 as "dies

Fieber, wahnhaft, das da brennt und trennt!" (354–55). The last poem of the cycle, which Celan translates, once again takes up the topic of foolish love, which can be heightened to the point of madness:

CXXXVII
Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.

If eyes corrupt by over-partial looks
Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forgèd hooks
Whereto the judgement of my heart is tied?

Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common place?
Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,
To put fair truth upon so foul a face?

In things right true my heart and eyes have err'd,
And to this false plague are they now transferr'd.

CXXXVII
Narrsts Aug mir, Blindling Liebe, fort und fort!
Es schaut, nimmt war—sieht nicht, was es gewahrt,
erkennt die Schönheit, sieht der Schönheit Ort,
siehts Beste—hälts für dessen Widerpart.

Verschautes Aug, solls nun vor Anker gehen
in jener Bucht, wo festmacht alle Welt:
mußt, Liebe, Trug zum Haken schmieden, den
das Herz fühlt, wenn es Herzensurteil fällt?

Kanns dies sein eigen nennen, da es sah:
Allmend ist diese Flur und nimmer sein?
Mein Aug, dies schaudernd, sagts, dies sei nicht da?
Läßt wahr sein, schön, und weiß: es ist gemein?

> Mein Herz, mein Aug: verirrt im Wahren, beide,
> und heimgesucht nun von dem Lügen-Leide. (356–57)

The "blind fool," which Regis had translated as "töricht blinder Wicht" (141) and George as "blinder narr" (219), is translated by Celan, in a further nominalization, as "Blindling Liebe." He takes up and at the same time alters the Petrarchist metaphoric of seeing that informs Shakespeare's poem. Where the blindness of love clouds sight in Shakespeare, Celan refers to the heart and the eye as instances of the True, whose judgment is misled. Vision, which is actually directed at the beautiful, recognizes only its "Widerpart," in this case not the true and the beautiful, but the mean. When Celan takes up Shakespeare's "common place" with "gemein," he alludes not only to the widespread, but beyond that to the infamous defamation that happened to him. When the translation concludes by juxtaposing the true and the "Lügen-Leide," thus turning Shakespeare's "false plague" anew—Regis had spoken of "ekler pest" (141), and George had addressed "die falsche seuche" (219)—it becomes clear that the visitation of which the last verse speaks is one that not only quotes Shakespeare, but also concerns Celan's own present.

It is thus hard to overlook that the legal context, which is already invoked in Shakespeare, moves in Celan's work in the direction of the connection between infamy and slander: "Nicht an dir liegts, daß sie dich schmähen und schmähen: / kaum zeigt sich Reines, schon wirds schlechtgemacht" (Celan/Shakespeare 337), it says in sonnet 70, and sonnet 71 also ends with a reference to the "verhöhnen" to which Celan finds himself exposed (339). What is at stake is fame, and what threatens it is envy: "Dies ist dein Ruhm, der so wie keiner klare,— / den Mund der Neider schließt auch er nicht zu" (337).

The blindness of love, which Shakespeare places at the center of his poems, is thus transferred by Celan to the blindness of contemporaries, who are unable to distinguish the true from the mean in his own case. To be sure, there is hope that the error surrounding the status of his poetry will ultimately be resolved: "Du, müßtest du nicht so: beargwöhnt, sein, / im Reich der Herzen herrschtest du allein" (337). As has been shown, however, the hope was in vain. Even the heart-language of poetry could not put a stop to the infamous defilement.

Legal Dimensions

Against this background, the last of Celan's transcribed poems takes on a special significance. Written on 29 November and 21 December 1966, it is based on a suggestion by Franz Wurm, which Celan was initially not sure he could follow: "Das Sonett CVII lese ich wieder und wieder—wer weiß ob ich es übersetzen kann" ("I am reading and rereading sonnet CVII—who knows if I will be able to translate it"; Celan and Wurm 47). Well, he could:

CVII
Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to come,
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Suspos'd as forfeit to a cónfin'd doom.

The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.

Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh; and Death to me subscribes,
Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme
Whil e he insults o'er dull and speechless tribes:

And thou in this shalt find thy monument
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass are spent.

CVII
Nicht Angst, mir eigen, nicht der weltenweiten
Wahrträume Sinn für Dinge, die da kommen, kann
bemessen meiner Liebe Fristen oder Zeiten,
entgrenzt und unverwirkt ist sie, in niemands Bann.

Der Mond, der sterbliche, verschattete: er blinkt!
Augurenwort, die war Augurenspott beschieden.
Das Schwankende von einst? Gekrönt und unbedingt.
Und mit dem alterslosen Ölzweig kommt der Frieden.

Umbalsamt, meine Liebe, bist du, bist umtaut
von frischer Zeit—kein Tod, dich fortzuschwemmen.
Ich lebe, ihm zum Trotz, im Reim, den ich gebaut,
derweil er dumpfen grollt und sprachelosen Stämmen.

Und du: in diesem hier, da steht es noch, dein Bild,
wenn Gräbererz verwittert und Tyrannenschild. (Celan/Shakespeare 348–49)

Within Shakespeare's poems, sonnet 107 occupies a special place. It addresses the transition of the throne from Elizabeth I to James I, which took place from March to April of 1603 and was significant for Shakespeare in that his early patron, the Earl of Southampton, was released by the new ruler after being imprisoned in the Tower for rebelling against the queen (Duncan-Jones 21). The new political order thus affected Shakespeare quite directly. In the sonnet, therefore, Elizabeth is also addressed as a "mortal moon," the new age as one of peace, a "peace […] of endless age," before the final quartet makes the transition from the passing of the throne to the permanence of love, which defies death in the linguistic representation in the poem. In the concluding invocation of "monument," the sonnet triumphs over the political rule of tyranny tied to time in "this poor rhyme," in whose seemingly small power, borne by a rhetorical gesture of modesty, life is suspended in its temporal conditionality. The sonnet breathes the spirit of new freedom that the reign of James I makes the poet expect and, at the same time, the spirit of confidence in his own artistry in happier times.

Celan detaches the poem from its concrete historical references in order to set his own accents within the framework of more contemporary diction. What thus moves to the center is "true love," which in Shakespeare is already invoked in the first quartet and which Celan now celebrates as an expression of self-imposed sovereignty in the language of the poem: "entgrenzt und unverwirkt ist sie, in niemands Bann."

It is true that Celan retains the rhyme scheme that combines the cross-rhyme of the quartets with the concluding couplet rhyme, as he does in all the translations of the sonnets. But it is striking how freely he deals with the question of versification, especially in the first stanza, and how he changes the rhythm of Shakespeare's sonnet by breaking up the original's carefully set end of verse with enjambments: the first verse takes up the alliteration of "wide world" but distributes it even more intensely, over the first two verses, in the "weltenweiten Wahrträume"; the second and third verses are also connected

via a line break. This changes the rhythmic weighting of the individual verses. While Celan connects one pair of verses to another pair to form a quartet, thereby giving rise to a fluid structure in which three verses merge into one another, the last verse stands out: "entgrenzt und unverwirkt ist sie, in niemands Bann." The rhythmic freedom Celan takes from Shakespeare isolates the last verse and thus gives it greater weight: the dissolution of love, which the translation addresses, is also accomplished by the poem on the formal level by releasing the sonnet from the spell of fixed form.

The very first verse thus not only confirms the tendency toward parallelization that Lengeler has already emphasized: "Nicht Angst, mir eigen, nicht der weltenweiten / Wahrträume." At the same time, the liquefaction—not chopping—of syntax, which through enjambment and alliteration reinforces the intrinsic value of language, reveals itself as a defense against fear, which wants to place love under "niemands Bann." Against this background, the spell, which Celan places at the end of the first quartet as a translation of the "doom" of which Shakespeare speaks, can be understood, like the latter, not only as a fateful doom, but also as an act of outlawry from which the poem liberates itself.

With the ironic parallel setting of "Augurenwort" and "Augurenspott," which in Shakespeare was directly related to the coronation of the new ruler, the second stanza takes up the prospect of a dissolution of boundaries brought about by love. The flashing of the moon, which in Shakespeare can be read as an "eclipse" and thus as the long-awaited end of Elizabeth's reign, is reinterpreted by the transcription as a sign of a pacification that would no longer be subject to the changing of the times. Around the final verse of the second quartet, a discussion between Klaus Reichert and Paul Celan has unfolded, which once again confirms how serious Celan was about distancing himself from George. Reichert had sent George's translation to Celan, and Celan replied to him:

> Zu CVII: Denkbar wäre: 'Den alterslosen Ölzweig ruft nun aus der Friede.' Aber das hiesse, obgleich bei 'proclaims' sozusagen nächstliegend, den Georgeschen Fund übernehmen und das Füllsel- 'nun'. Bleiben wir bei der ersten Fassung; sie hat, kompensatorisch, den Vorteil der einfachen Diktion. (Celan and Reichert 71)

Concerning CVII: Conceivable would be: 'Den alterlosen Ölzweig ruft nun aus der Friede.' But this would mean—even though in the case of 'proclaims' it is, so to say, the most obvious choice—adopting George's finding and the filler word

'nun'. Let's stay with the first draft; it has, from a compensatory point of view, the advantage of simple diction.

It is not the transformation of the olive to the palm tree that bothers Celan in George's translation, but the translation of "proclaim," which in Shakespeare again indicates a legal dimension, as "ausrufen," which awakens unpleasant associations, not least in view of Germany's political history. Celan does not mention Regis's alternative "Und Friedens Ölzweig lächeln ew'gem Bunde" (111) as a means of legitimizing his adherence to an "einfache Diktion," a simpler diction. He avoids the attribute of eternality and translates "olives of endless age," in a more literal manner than Regis or George does, as "alterslosen Ölzweig." Celan thus translates Shakespeare's dominant legal question about the legitimacy of the new rule into a Hebrew Bible scenario: the olive branch and peace refer to the covenant between God and Noah after the survived Flood, thus sending a sign of hope.

Balm, which in Shakespeare is usually associated with the anointing of a monarch, points in a similar direction, but in Celan's "Umbalsamt, meine Liebe, bist du, umtaut / von frischer Zeit" it takes on a different meaning that points in the direction of the ritual anointing of death. The renewed enjambment indicates the movement that resists death, which, unlike in Shakespeare, is related not to the self but to love. The conclusion of the second verse, "kein Tod, dich fortzuschwemmen," takes up the metaphor of water, which peace and the olive branch already suggested in the context of the Hebrew Bible. Against this background, the phrase "meine Liebe" can be understood, as in many of Celan's poems, not solely in the erotic sense, but also as a remembrance of the dear dead whose ashes were transported from the rivers to the sea.

Thus, the I shows itself, to advantage, less as a loving than as a poet: "Ich lebe, ihm zum Trotz, im Reim, den ich gebaut / derweil er dumpfen grollt und sprachelosen Stämmen." The appeal to rhyme, which Celan strips of the addition of the poor—Regis had formulated it differently, "Ich leb' in armen Reimen ihm zum Neid, / Wenn er sprachlosen, dunklen Herden grollt" (111), while George had formulated it "Da trotz ihm mein arm lied mir dauer leiht … / Er schlage menschen dumpf und ohne sprach!" (204)—is an act of poetic self-assertion that Celan shares with Shakespeare and yet accentuates differently: The poet's language is resistance to death and a weapon against the speechlessness of those whom adaptation grasps as a dull rumble under the archaic image of the tribes.

Against this background, the conclusion completes the act of poetic self-assertion by placing the image of true love erected in the poem above that of political domination: "Und du: in diesem hier, da steht es noch, dein Bild, / wenn Gräbererz verwittert und Tyrannenschild." Regis, from whom Celan takes the speech of the "Tyrannenschilde," had spoken of the "Denkmal" (111), and George had spoken of the "gedächtnismal. / Wenn herrscher-reif verfiel und gruft von stahl" (204). The association with the memorial, which seems to fit so well with the function of the dirge in Celan's poems, is manifestly refused by him. The conclusion programmatically opposes the transience of political tyranny with "dein Bild," the image of a love that, not subject to any spell, can unfold freely. Not unlike the letters and poems from the same period, the translation, invoking Shakespeare, creates the image of a resistance to time motivated by love that outlasts threatening decay.

What Celan's translation thus accomplishes, in its explicit invocation of *einfache Diktion*, is a translation of Shakespeare into his own time. What he retains is the connotation of beauty and transience attached to love; what he changes are the historical contexts in which the images are integrated. If in Shakespeare they refer to the transition of political rule in early-sixteenth-century England, Celan carries in the contexts that define his own time. These include not only the ostracism invoked by the banishment and ridicule to which Celan was subjected in the 1960s, but also a belief in the power of the poetic language of the heart, a language of love, to defy attack and opposition. Where Shakespeare already speaks beyond Elizabeth's epoch and proclaims peace and freedom, Celan speaks on his side of hostilities as of madness, but answers to those aggressions through poetic means and rhythm. In Celan's case, the multi-stellar nature of poetic expression therefore also applies to the translations and the time stored in them, in the turn that programmatically concludes the volume of *Atemwende*: "Licht war. Rettung" (107).

Works Cited

Celan, Paul. *Atemwende*. *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, by Celan. Edited by Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert, 2nd ed., vol. 2, Suhrkamp, 1992, pp. 11–109.

Celan, Paul / Shakespeare, William. "Sonnette/Sonnets." *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, by Celan. Edited by Beda Allemann and Stefan Reichert, vol. 5, Suhrkamp, 1983, pp. 316–57.

Celan, Paul, and Gisèle Celan-Lestrange. *Correspondance*. Edited by Bertrand Badiou with Eric Celan, I Lettres, 2001.

Celan, Paul, and Franz Wurm. *Briefwechsel*. Edited by Barabara Wiedemann, Suhrkamp, 1995.

Duncan-Jones, Katherine. "Preface." *Shakespeare's Sonnets*. Edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones, Arden Shakespeare Edition, 3rd series, Thomas Nelson, 1997, pp. 1–105.

Gellhaus, Axel. *'Fremde Nähe'. Celan als Übersetzer*. Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1997.

George, Stefan. *Werke*. Edited by Robert Boehringer, vol. 2, dtv, 2000.

Kling, Thomas. *Sprachspeicher. 200 Gedichte auf deutsch vom achten bis zum zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*. Eingelagert und moderiert by Thomas Kling, DuMont, 2001.

Koppenfels, Martin von. "Einleitung." *Spanische und Hispanoamerikanische Lyrik. Von den Anfängen bis Fernando de Herrera*, vol. 1, edited by Martin von Koppenfels and Horst Weich, Beck, 2022, pp. xix–xxxvii.

Lengeler, Rainer. "Shakespeares Sonette in Celans Übertragung." *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch 1985*, edited by Werner Habicht, Verlag Ferdinand Kamp, 1985, pp. 132–45.

Olschner, Leonard. "Übersetzungen aus dem Englischen." *Celan-Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, vol. 2, edited by Markus May, Peter Goßens, and Jürgen Lehmann, Metzler, 2012, pp. 209–11.

Regis, Gottlob, translator. *Sonetts/Sonette*. By William Shakespeare, aionas, 2015.

Reichert, Klaus. *Erinnerungen und Briefe. Paul Celan*. Suhrkamp, 2020.

Simonis, Annette. "Zum Problem der Dialogizität in der Lyrik Paul Celans." *Orbis Litterarum*, vol. 49, 1994, pp. 159–72.

Szondi, Peter. "Poetry of Constancy – Poetik der Beständigkeit. Celans Übertragung von Shakespeares Sonett 105." *Schriften. Teil 2: Essays*, edited by Wolfgang Fietkau, Suhrkamp, 1978, pp. 321–44.

Wiedemann, Barbara, editor. *Paul Celan – Die Goll-Affäre. Dokumente zu einer ,Infamie'*. Suhrkamp, 2000.

The Latinization of Machiavellian Thought

The Translation of Latin Quotations as a Case Study for Experimental Translation in Early Modern Europe

Julia Heideklang

Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469–1527) probably most widely known work, *Il Principe* (1513), was not only printed but also translated for the first time posthumously. His famous treatise has been translated not only once, but multiple times into Latin, with numerous printed editions. Each translation stems from different periods and political contexts and incorporates different approaches to translating a text into Latin.

After a short introduction to the complex and intriguing history of translating Machiavelli's *Il Principe* into Latin, I will analyze three different cases of quotations from ancient source texts, how they are presented to the readers of Machiavelli's Italian treatise in the early print editions, and how they were subsequently translated by Silvestro Tegli (1560), Hermann Conring (1660), and Caspar Langenhert (1699) (Table 1).[1]

1 In addition to the three translators mentioned above, Giovanni Stoppani (1542–1621) must be mentioned: Stoppani was famously involved in the revised translation printed in 1580, which cannot be overestimated in its impact regarding reception and knowledge transfer and, therefore, should be kept in mind; but, as I will point out in this paper, the actual text of the translation was most probably not reworked by Stoppani and, at least for all quoted passages included here, shows no alterations to the translation done by Tegli in 1560.
Due to simultaneous drafting, another paper just recently published and cited here (Heideklang, "Recreations of Machiavellian Thought in Latin") is in part informed by the same details, especially with regard to the analysis of table 4. All translators will be cited as authors of their translations and will be found in the bibliography accordingly. All translations of the quoted passages are my own, unless noted otherwise. While this article is mostly formatted according to MLA guidelines, some stylistic conventions were not adapted in order to maintain the practices of Latin philology.

Table 1: Overview of the different translations of Machiavelli's Il Principe into Latin.

Translator: Title	**Year of Printing**	**Printer**	**Location**
Silvestro Tegli: **Nicolai Machiavelli Reip. Florentinae A Secretis, ad Laurentium Medicem de Principe libellus** **VD16 M9**	1560	Pietro Perna	Basel
Silvestro Tegli/Giovanni Niccolò Stoppani: **Nicolai Machiavelli Princeps ex Sylvestri Telii Fulginati traductione diligenter emendate** **VD16 M10**	1580	Pietro Perna	Basel
Hermann Conring: **Nicolai Machiavelli Princeps aliqua nonnulla ex Italico Latine nunc demum partim versa, partim infinitis locis sensus melioris ergo castigate** **VD17 1:002017A**	1660	Henning Müller the Younger	Helmstedt
Caspar Langenhert: **Nicolai Machiavelli Florentini Princeps**[2]	1699	Johann Janssen-Waesberge	Amsterdam

Against this background, I will discuss the seemingly curious occurrence of translating back quotations from ancient Latin texts via an Italian intermediary as a case study for experimental translation in the early modern period. Experimental translation is discussed in recent publications as a translation practice that subverts or defies expectations of established translation practices, transgressing shared norms and boundaries (Robert-Foley 401; Luhn 63–66; Lee 1–3).[3] Since this term is usually applied to modern translations, I will use this case study as an opportunity to explore the potential of experi-

2 Langenhert's translation is not documented in VD17; the remaining copy, held by Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (signature Pol.g.1169w), may serve as physical evidence.

3 On the transmission from experimental literature to experimental translation, see Marília Jöhnk's Introduction to this volume.

mental translation as an approach in analyzing and understanding early modern translation processes.

Machiavelli's Writings and Their Latin Translations

The Latinization of Machiavelli's political thought was initiated by a translation of *Il Principe* issued by the printer and bookseller Pietro Perna (1520–82) in Basel in 1560. Indeed, Latin was not the first target language, as *Il Principe* was first translated into French: in the year 1553, two different translations were issued, one by Guillaume Cappel (1553) and one by Gaspard d'Auvergne (1553); these preceded the translation into Latin (Soll 11–13; Cappel; D'Auvergne).[4] The translation of d'Auvergne would become the standard French translation, a point to which I will return (Soll 13).

Additionally, *Il Principe* first circulated in the form of manuscripts and was printed only a considerable number of years later, in 1532; in the cases of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, *Discorsi* (1513–17), and *Istorie fiorentine* (1526), the print editions even followed posthumously. With this, already the first Italian print editions were not within the author's control and allowed for interventions and manipulations, among them those Latin quotations discussed below. Consequently, such alterations impacted the Latin translations in later decades and centuries.[5]

At the time, Basel was already a center of printing and bookmaking; it was also the center of a network of immigrant Italian Protestants, mainly from

4 The first French translation in manuscript form dates even to 1546 (see Soll 11).

5 As Soll emphasizes, "when *The Prince* was first published posthumously in Rome, by A. Blado in 1532, it was already a text altered from its initial form and status, as were subsequent Italian editions" (10–11). The first print edition by Antonio Blado in Rome was followed a few months later by a second print edition issued by Bernardo Giunta in Florence; on the relationship between those two first print editions, see De Pol (560). For the purpose of this paper, I will exclude Agostino Nifo da Sessa's *De regnandi peritia* (1523), which benefitted greatly from the unpublished circulation of Machiavelli's manuscripts of *Il Principe* (Mordeglia 59–60; Cosentino; Valetta) and which, as far as I have compared the texts, has not impacted the style or terminology of the Latin translations (Heideklang, "Recreations of Machiavellian Thought in Latin").
Although the first Latin translation is based on the first printed Italian edition, the text will be quoted from the 1532 edition printed by Bernardino Giunta (Florence 1532). This is due to a lack of access to a digitized copy of the first edition, printed in Rome.

Lucca—a network that still had connections back to circles of Italians and humanists (Mordeglia 60–61; Guggisberg; Bietenholz, esp. 16–18, 78–79; Pasterk 39). Printer and bookseller Pietro Perna emigrated to Basel due to religious persecution (Reske 87; Kaegi 13–14). Silvestro Tegli of Fogliano (d. 1573) became part of the same network, after leaving Genova due to conflicts with Johann Calvin (1509–64) (Mahlmann-Bauer; Mordeglia 63–66; Bietenholz 3, 13; Kaegi 8).[6]

In this environment, Tegli began his translation into Latin in 1559, the same year that Machiavelli's *Il Principe* was included in the Roman *Index librorum prohibitorum* (Marcus).[7] Still, the project seems to have been economically promising to Perna and fit seamlessly into the printshop's own focus on promoting Italian writers and texts (Kaegi 16, 22; Perini; Mordeglia 61; Bietenholz 15).[8] It also had an increased impact and selling value, as it was the first Latin transla-

6 See also Tegli's own description of his stay in Genova and the circle there in his dedicatory letter to Abraham Zbaski, III, a Polish nobleman who was also part of that network (fol. 2r–3v; see also Kaegi 7–8, 15–16). An important and central figure of that network was Celio Secondo Curione (1503–69). The university professor was one of the leading men in the circle of Italian immigrant Protestants in Basel. Tegli also contacted him, as did many others looking for support and help when arriving in Basel (Kaegi 10–12). He probably had a great influence on who was chosen as a translator in the project (Mordeglia 67).

7 The question of whether one of the main figures involved, Pietro Perna, Silvestro Tegli, or Celio Secundo, must have known about the banning of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* can most probably be answered in the affirmative (Mordeglia 62–63; Perini 177). Not only was Celio Secundo in a central position to be informed of current events and shifts, but for printers and publishers as well, it was key to be informed about current changes in order to calculate costs and risks in printing projects accurately. Furthermore, we have to keep in mind not only that different indices were published, but also that they were not enforced immediately, and that no systematic orientation was given on how to enforce them. On this point, see the very insightful monograph of Hanna Marcus. Finally, there are many examples to be found of printers, publishers, and booksellers who were quite informed and who still either circumvented or directly ignored certain printing prohibitions or the *Indices*. Soll even remarks that "[b]y banning *The Prince* in 1559 and recognizing its subversive, secularizing potential, the Church in effect made the clandestine manuscript into a an [sic] internationally recognized book, and a desirable one" (11).

8 Kaegi (10–12) also sees a connection to the immigrants from Lucca specifically, who themselves wanted to work towards a Christian republic, free from the influence of the de' Medici family as well as Spanish rule (see also Mordeglia 62).

tion: *Nunc primum ex Italico in Latinum sermonem versus* ("Now for the first time translated into the Latin language"; Tegli).

From this first translation onward, a central point of each translation and edition was to justify why reading Machiavelli's *Il Principe* was not to be condemned, and why it should instead be pursued. On the title page, one finds the following statement: *nostro quidem seculo apprimé utilis & necessarius, non modo ad principatum adipiscendum, sed et regendum & conservandum* ("namely, in our time [a book] quite useful and necessary, not only in achieving a republic, but also for ruling as well as preserving it"; Tegli).[9] As observed by Mordeglia, Tegli demonstrates his own prowess in writing humanistic letters, deploying various topoi (*captatio benevolentiae, labor,* the dedicatee's *eruditio*) characteristically employed in dedicatory letters (66–70). This translation facilitated the Latinization of Machiavellian thought and served as a catalyst for further Latin as well as vernacular translations. While Mordeglia claims, based on the remaining copies extant today, that this print edition cannot have been circulated very much (75), Soll emphasizes that this "international" translation "enjoyed large circulation and served as a basis for new vernacular translations, becoming one of the main vehicles of diffusion of Machiavelli's political doctrines in Northern Europe" (12).[10] The translation was subsequently reprinted in 1570 (Mordeglia 75).

In 1580, a revision of this first translation was issued, again by Pietro Perna in Basel, which was reprinted at least ten times over the following decades (Mordeglia 75; Almási 1). This revision was printed twenty years after the first Latin translation and was issued in quite a different environment as well, as the reception of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* had shifted greatly towards reprehension of his political doctrine (Almási 1–3; Kaegi 29). A first indicator of this

9 See also the argument developed by Tegli in his dedicatory letter (fol. 5r–6v).

10 See also Petrina (83–115). Mordeglia builds her claim upon finding only three to four copies via catalogs, held today within European libraries. However, her list needs to be completed to draw a final conclusion. I agree that the remaining copies of Tegli's first edition are difficult to track down (the *Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog* [KVK], for instance, does not give out any results, even with various search options). But there are at least six more copies: one in the *Bayerische Staatsbibliothek* (signature: Pol. g. 589, see bibliography), another in the *Staatliche Bibliothek Regensburg* (signature: 999/Jur.597), and four additional copies listed in the VD16's entry—and there are probably copies that can be found in other public and private libraries as well when searching all catalogs individually.

changed perception is the new arrangement of the title page, which advertised this translation as a new *emendatio* and emphasized its new paratextual apparatus meant to frame and balance its scandalous centerpiece: *ex Sylvestri Telii Fulginatii traductione diligenter emendata. Adjecta sunt eiusdem argumenti aliorum quorundam contra Machiavellum scripta de potestate & officio Principium contra Tyrannos* ("diligently edited from Sylvestro Tegli of Fogliano's translation; to the same have been added arguments of certain other [authors] against Machiavelli's writings on the Prince's rule and office against Tyrants").[11] The making of this third edition was filled with conflicts that came to light only due to the juridical consequences of the printed copies from 1580.[12]

Maybe the most interesting point about the collaboration between Perna and Stoppani is the fact that the initiation of various translation processes seems to stem from Perna himself: After the reprint of Tegli's first translation in 1570, both Tegli and Celio Secundo, who was Perna's advisor and was deeply involved in the project, died. Hence, Perna approached another Italian immigrant humanist, Giovanni Niccolò Stoppani (1542–1621), who at the time was also a university professor of Aristotelian logic. Apparently, Perna already planned to issue a more comprehensive translation of Machiavelli's writings, or at least an edition with both *Il Principe* and *Discorsi,* in Latin translation.[13] Maybe Perna was inspired by the success of what had become the French

11 See also Mordeglia (77–78).

12 For the very detailed and insightful analysis, see Almási. Almási's findings correct some of Mordeglia's hypotheses (77–78). Since the documents have been reviewed in detail by Almási, I will only point to a few aspects of the collaboration of Perna and Stoppani regarding the reconstruction of the translation process.

13 This becomes evident from court documents: "Es hab sich begebenn, dass vor etlichen Joren Perna zu Ime kommen, begert, daß er Ime die Opera Machiauelli welte transferieren, dass aber von vile der gschefften nit beschehen kennen, solang biss uf die Herpstmess verschinen 80. Jars, sig Perna zuo Im kommen und vermant, er Stupanus ziehe in uff, fürcht er werde umb das exemplar kommen, soll im nur eine praefation über den alten text machenn, sind also der sachen eins worden, und er ime 6 Reichsthaler verheißen, hab Perna gsagt, er soll sie uff den fürsten von Münpelgart und Deckh stellen, welchs Stupanus nit thun wellen, sonder gsagt, er welle es dem Bischoff von Basell Christoph Blasero dedicieren: […]." (StAB, UAH 2,1, f. 29r; 16 Aug. 1581; qtd. in Almási 10n54). The court documents seem to support a slightly different process in the making of the 1580 edition than proposed previously by Kaegi (28–30). Additionally, Perna and Stoppani had already collaborated for ten years in producing Latin translations, particularly of Italian historical, scientific, and medical works (Kaegi 27; Mordeglia 77).

standard edition: the 1571 edition of the French translation of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and *Discorsi* by Gaspard d'Auvergne, mentioned above (D'Auvergne; Soll 13). Stoppani's preface also suggests a comprehensive translation project when he speaks of Machiavelli's writings as *partim politica, partim historica, partim denique de ratione bellum gerendi* ("in part political, in part historical, [and] finally, in part on the art of war").[14] However, the wording of the correspondence and the court documents also raise the question of whether Stoppani himself ever even laid a hand on the text of Tegli's translation. With the death of Pietro Perna in 1582, his ambitious project did not come to a halt; rather, the printing of Latin translations of Machiavelli's writings further migrated throughout Europe.[15]

In 1660, another collaborative effort was made to achieve a new translation of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. That the seventeenth century was characterized by an intense debate on Machiavellianism and Antimachiavellianism is reflected in the number of prints around the turn of the century (Stolleis, "Machiavellismus" 186–94). By the mid-seventeenth century, however, there was still no scholarly and commented translation of the text, which was now fundamentally embedded within debates in the field of political theory. University professor and polyhistorian Hermann Conring (1606–81) turned his massive reading notes into a new, or rather revised and actualized, translation of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, followed by his *Notae et animadversiones* a year later (Stolleis, "Einheit").[16] Quite aware of living in times of structural changes and the rise of military absolutism and territorial states (Dreitzel 143; Dauber 102), Conring also felt the lack of an annotated translation, and it seems, considering his corrections and modifications within the translation as well as his dedicatory epistle to Gebhard von Alvensleben (1619–81), that he wanted to reinstate the more "original" thought of Machiavelli within a less biased scholarly debate (Stolleis, "Macchiavellismus" 186). It also seems that all the previous printed editions

14 See also Kaegi's commentary on Stoppani's remark (28) and Mordeglia (77).

15 In the context of this paper, it would lead too far to discuss the different "routes" of Machavellian thought through Europe, but I want to at least stress the fact that other printers seem to have taken up the enterprise of producing a Machiavellian canon via Latin translations; on the discussion of different routes, see particularly Zwierlein.

16 From 1632 onwards, he was a professor of natural philosophy in Helmstedt, later also for medicine and political theory (Nahrendorf; Döhring, 342–43). For a more complete understanding of the figure of Hermann Conring, his writings, and his network, see the collected volume by Stolleis.

were at that point no longer easily accessible or available (Stolleis, "Macchiavellismus" 186). While the consequences for Stoppani, due to the 1580 edition, were quite severe, the situation in 1660 and the political network to which Conring addressed his publications were much better suited to achieve a favorable reception.[17] From the start, Conring defines his own translation in relation to the first translation by Tegli.[18] It becomes apparent that for Conring, the good translator (*bonus interpres*) needs to follow the principle of faithfulness (*fides*), and that this "faithfulness" extends to the style that the translated author has chosen for his work:[19] in Machiavelli's case, this meant a rather rough and incisive manner of writing (*sive de industria sive quod accurate scribendi docendique artis fuerit imperitus*; "either because he lacked industry, or he was not skillful in the artistry of writing and teaching"; fol. a2r–a2v).[20] In contrast to Tegli's first translation, Conring had a particularly scholarly interest that ultimately manifested in his scholastic commentary published a year later.[21] Therefore, Conring approached his translation with a nearly archeological sense of translation. In contrast, the interest of Tegli and Perna seems to have lain in producing a translation that allowed for Machiavelli to be read among other "clas-

17 On Conring's relationship with leading French politicians, see Stolleis, "Einheit" (25); on the reception of the translation and commentary in 1660 and 1661, see Stolleis, "Macchiavellismus" (187–91).

18 He knew about the earlier print editions, and his own dedicatory letter either implicitly builds upon arguments that have been used by Stoppani and Zetzner or explicitly comments on the earlier editions (Stolleis, "Macchiavellismus" 187).

19 Conring seems to echo the famous line in Hor. ars 133–34: *nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus / interpres* (text following the critical edition of Shackleton-Bailey). Whereas Horace uses the *fidus interpres* ("the faithful interpreter") as one end of the spectrum against which he sets the poet apart (Hinckers 88–90; Brink 211), Conring seems to read it as advice for the *bonus interpres* to be faithful; on Horace's *fidus interpres* and the philological debate surrounding it, see Hinckers (88–92). She provides a comprehensive overview of the terms used for translation processes and the discourse on translation in ancient Latin literature.

20 On Machiavelli's style, see, for instance, Bernhard; Fournel.

21 See Conring as well as Stolleis ("Macchiavellismus" 189); on Conring's *Animadversiones* and partly against the analysis of Dreitzel, see Dauber (esp. 112).

sics" on political theory and that would spark interest among readers—both approaches seem to have resonated with contemporaries.[22]

Conring further argues that his translation, although technically a revision of the translation by Tegli, embodies such significant changes and corrections (*castigata et mutata*) and that it is practically new (*nova*).[23] Also new was the paratextual apparatus that not only featured the long dedicatory epistle by Conring that reinstated Machiavelli as a prematurely judged author on political theory (fol. a3r),[24] but also rid Machiavelli's writing of the various treatises accompanying the *Princeps* over the preceding decades (fol. a2v).

Overall, the Latin edition closely recreates the early Italian editions. For the first time, the two writings that were initially published together with Machiavelli's *Il Principe* in the first Italian print editions were also translated into Latin and combined in one Latin print edition.[25] Finally, Conring is also the first translator of *Il Principe* to add a Latin translation of Machiavelli's dedicatory epistle to Lorenzo de Medici.

A last Latin translation was done by Caspar Langenhert (1661–1730) and printed in Amsterdam by Johannes Janssen-Waesberge. Langenhert left the Netherlands and settled in Paris in 1697 (Jaworzyn 124n25), where he reworked the previous translations of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* into a new and quite different translation with a running commentary integrated in the form of foot-

22 The success of the translation by Tegli is supported by the numerous print editions and versions that followed in the eighty years after the first print in 1560. These were boosted, of course, by the controversy regarding the 1580 versions of Perna and Stoppani; for Conring's reception, see Stolleis ("Macchiavellismus" 189).

23 The participle *castigata*, as Mordeglia alluded to, is, therefore, of some importance and is emphasized by being placed on the title page and explained within the dedicatory epistle (80).

24 *Apud quammultos nimirum ipsum Machiavelli nomen sine execratione non auditur* ("Unsurprisingly, the name of Machiavelli itself is heard among many only with a curse"). See also De Pol (561). On his arguments as well as his criticism, see Dauber; Stolleis ("Macchiavellismus" 187–91); Conring fol. br–cv.

25 One of those writings, the *Vita Castrucci Castracani*, had been translated before. This anonymous translation was already printed in 1610 by Lazarus Zetzner and added to the *Historia Florentina*; see also Conring (fol. a2v).

notes.[26] In a separate short *Praefatio*, Langenhert comments on his own approach to and motivation for translating *Il Principe* anew:

> Amice Lector.
> Machiavelli Principem in latinum sermonem verti: tum quod satiari nequirem ratiocinia ejus legendo; cum quod, ut latinè, sic belgicè nimis quam sordidè traductus sit. Meo autem in vertendo & linguae genio liberrimè indulsi; non verba totidem anxius verbis, sed sensum reddidi, mentemque Florentini notationes ei adjeci aliquot, […]. (fol. 426r)

> Dear Reader.
> I translated Machiavelli's *Il Principe* into Latin: for one, because I could not be satisfied [just] by reading his thoughts, and also because he had been translated into Latin as well as into Belgian all too meanly. But as I translated, I freely indulged in the inspiration of language, not anxious to render the words in an equal number of words, I translated their meaning and the thought of the Florentine, and I added some annotations [sc. in the form of footnotes], […].

As we will see in the following analysis of the three translations, this translation indeed takes a quite different approach to translation and forsakes the fundamental principle of faithfulness (*fides*), laid out only a few decades earlier by Conring. Instead, Langenhert claims a certain freedom, a certain *libertas* for himself in translating and annotating Machiavelli.[27] As we will see in the examples below, this leads to a hermeneutic rewriting: rather than an interlingual

---

26 As of yet, I have not found any documentation of when Langenhert started his work on Machiavelli's *Il Principe*; it seems as if it is not related to his main occupation and publication efforts, such as the *Novus Philosophus*. See Jaworzyn on his philosophical views.

27 Langenhert references the distinction between two opposite approaches to translating: faithfulness to the wording (*verbum de verbo*) or the meaning (*sensum de sensu*). This distinction goes back to ancient Roman literature, most famously discussed by Hieronymus and Cicero (McEldruff; Hinckers 137–46). One might wonder whether Langenhert uses these references for general self-positioning or whether this might have been aimed at Conring's approach, in which the "good translator" observes "faithfulness," as previously discussed (*Est vero in boni interpretis officio* […] *praestare fidem*); see n19 above. He also invokes a *genius linguae*; see s.v. "genius," in: TLL, vol. 6.2, p. 1838, lines 41–61 (Bulhart). The metonymic understanding saw *genio indulgere* as the opposite of *genium (de)fraudare*, as "rejoicing or indulging into a certain lust or desire"; this opposition had a quite vivid reception in the early modern period (Starnes).

translation *sensu stricto* (or translation proper), the reader is presented with a translation that reworks and transforms Machiavelli's treatise, seemingly following in the footsteps of Langenhert's own reading process. [28]

Latin Quotations in *Il Principe* and Their Latin Translations

As we can observe, Machiavelli's *Il Principe* has been subject to retranslation. Retranslation signifies a text being translated twice or multiple times into the same target language (Berman; Bensimon; Cadera and Walsh; Poucke and Gallego; Chouit).[29] The retranslation hypothesis states that the first translation is less source-text oriented. It domesticizes the text, introducing it for the first time into the receiving cultural and linguistic system. In contrast, subsequent translations become increasingly source-text oriented, emphasizing the otherness of the text after the receiving system has familiarized itself with the text (Cadera and Walsh 5–6). This hypothesis came into focus in recent years and has already been critically debated (Poucke and Gallego).[30] This argument does not seem to hold in the case of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. However, within these retranslations introduced above, an intriguing phenomenon occurs. This phenomenon concerns the Latin quotations within all three translations, which were integrated into the Italian treatise, were translated into Italian in the early print editions, and, ultimately, were translated back via the Italian intermediary into Latin.[31] As we will see in the analyses below, it is worthwhile to discuss this phenomenon not only as a special case of retranslation but also as a case of experimental translation.

---

28 Research of the past decades firmly suggests that each translation incorporates a form of reworking, transformation, or rewriting of the source text, wherein the processes of reading and translating are deeply intertwined (Bassnett; Sprivak; Stolze 223; Toepfer 207–09; on translated titles and rewriting, see Hosington 76).

29 On the development of the retranslation theory and its different components, from the first concept brought forward by Berman onward, see the helpful overviews by Poucke, Cadera Walsh, and Chouit. Chouit points out that the concept of retranslation lacks an overall consensus regarding various aspects.

30 Berman sees a main motivation for retranslation in the aging of the translation and the need for actualization (1); against Berman, see Susam-Sarajeva. Another motivation for retranslation, particularly within a short time span, can be posed by terminological struggles (Brownlie 156–57; Chouit 186–87).

31 On translating back and its relation to retranslation, see, for instance, Chouit (184).

In the following, I will compare the three examples of quotations from Latin source texts, looking at how they were presented to sixteenth-century readers in Machiavelli's printed treatise and subsequently translated back into Latin in all three (re)translations. Following the detailed analysis, I will return to the theoretical framework of retranslation and experimental translation.

As a reader of ancient literature, Machiavelli included quotes from ancient texts, e.g., Virgil's *Aeneis*, Tacitus's *Annales*, or Livy's *Ab urbe condita*.[32] It has to be noted that in the modern philological editions based on the critical evaluation of the surviving manuscripts of *Il Principe*, all three quotations are included either *verbatim* or in slightly modified Latin wording taken from the Roman source texts. However, looking at the early-sixteenth-century print editions, there is a notable discrepancy: here, only one is kept in the Latin wording, namely the quotation from Virgil's *Aeneis;* in the other instances, the early print editions presented to their readers an Italian translation of the Latin quotations. Since all of the translators will have likely used such print editions, we will look at the text as presented in the early Italian print editions, starting with a sentence taken from Tacitus's *Annales*:[33]

> Et fu sempre opinione, & sententia de gli huomini sauij; che niente sia cosi infermo, & instabile, com'è la fama della Potenza, non fondata nelle forze proprie: & l'armi proprie sono quelle; che non sono composte di sudditi, ò di Cittadini, ò di creati tuoi; tutte l'altre sono o mecennarie o ausiliarie. (Machiavelli fol. 22r)
>
> It was always the opinion and conviction of wise men that nothing is so weak or unstable as the reputation of power that is not based upon one's own forces. One's own soldiers are those composed either of subjects or of citizens or one's own dependents; all the others are mercenary or auxiliary forces.

32 Despite claiming that he was born poor, Machiavelli was well-educated; he gained good knowledge of Latin as well as of the classical authors of ancient Rome. But his tutors were even more focused on the works of famous authors of the Italian Renaissance, such as Petrarca and Dante (Celenza 4–5, 14–15; Bondanella and Viroli ix–x). This can be noted for his other works as well, such as his *Discorsi* (see, for instance, Wurm).

33 Since the first print edition, printed by Antonio Blado (Rome 1532), is currently not accessible to me on-site or via digital sources, my transcripts and translations are based on the print text presented in the edition printed by Bernardino Giunta (Florence 1532). All translations of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* are based on the translation of Bondanella but modified where my own understanding of the text digresses from Bondanella's reading.

The source of this *locus communis* is the beginning of chapter nineteen in the thirteenth book of Tacitus's *Annales*:

> Nihil rerum mortalium tam instabile ac fluxum est quam fama potentiae non sua vi nixae. (Tac. ann. 13, 19; Heubner; Wellesley)
>
> Nothing in the human realm is as unstable and fleeting as the reputation of power that is not built upon one's own strength.

It comments on the intrigue and power struggle within the Roman emperor's house following the death of Britannicus. As soon as Emperor Nero strips his mother, Agrippina, of her privileges, she finds herself seemingly standing alone in this conflict. In chapter 13 of his treatise, Machiavelli incorporates this statement, criticizing the use of auxiliary and mercenary forces.[34] The quotation is only implicitly marked as such by the phrase "it has always been the opinion and conviction of wise men" (*fu sempre opinione & sententia de gli huomini sauij*), categorizing it as a well-known saying rather than as a quotation *sensu stricto*. Furthermore, in the early Italian print editions, we find neither typographical markers such as quotation marks nor printed marginalia highlighting the particular nature of this sentence to its readers.

At first glance, it becomes clear that Tegli did not substitute the Italian translation presented within the print editions with the original Latin quotation, but rather translated the Italian phrasing of Machiavelli back into classical Latin. The text remains without changes (aside from different ligatures) in Stoppani's revised translation (fol. 101 [g3r]). Just as in the Italian print, it is presented typographically without any quotation markers. From the start, there are some noticeable differences: The first is the elevation of style (*amplificatio*),[35] as, for instance, the "wise men" (*gli huomini savij*) are transformed into the *sapientissimi viri*. Equally, the simpler phrasing by Machiavelli is augmented by repetition (*nihil levius, nihil infirmius*). Secondly, a slight reformulation takes place: Machiavelli's Italian rendering of the Tacitean quote is actually closer to the wording than is the Latin translation by Tegli (and also the subsequent one

34 The critical edition of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (Martelli) presents the following Latin wording: *Nihil rerum mortalium tam instabile ac fluxum est quam fama potentiae non sua vi nixa*. Although erroneous according to modern critical conjectures (Furneaux 176; Heubner; Wellesley), it was the wording still accepted as the correct reading of Tacitus in print editions contemporary to Machiavelli.

35 This is further supported by the observations of Mordeglia (70–71).

by Conring), which transforms "nothing so … as" (*niente così … com'è*) into "nothing weaker … than" (*nihil infirmius … quam*). Thirdly, Tegli mirrors Machiavelli's use of conjunctions with the use of the Latin *aut … aut … aut*.

Table 2: Latin translations in chronological order for a comparison of the integrated Tacitean quote from Machiavelli's Il Principe.

Tegli (1560, fol. 91)	
Atqui in ea semper & opinione, & sententia fuerunt sapientissimi viri, nihil leuius, nihil ea potentiae fama infirmius, quàm quae non propria sit suffulta virtute. Arma itaq(ue) propria ea sunt, quae constant aut ex ijs, qui tuo subjiciuntur imperio, aut ex ciuibus, clientibúsve, reliqua omnia aut in mercenarijs, aut in auxiliarijs numerantur.	And this was always the belief and opinion of the very wise men that nothing is more fleeting, nothing weaker than that reputation of power which is not held up by one's own strength. And so those forces are one's own which consist either of those who are subdued to your rule, or of citizens and vassals; all remaining are counted either among the mercenary or auxiliary [forces].
Conring (1660, fol. 58 [H2v])	
Et vero in ea semper & opinione & sententia fuerunt sapientissimi quique: nihil levius, nihil infimius, aut instabilius esse, quam famam potentiae non propriae virtute suffultam. Sunt autem arma propria, quae constant aut ex subditis tuis aut ex civibus aut ex clientibus; reliqua omnia mercenaria sunt, aut auxiliaria.	And indeed, particularly the wisest men always had the belief and opinion that nothing is more fleeting, nothing weaker or unstable than the reputation of power not held up by one's own strength. But those are one's own forces that consist either of your subjects or of citizens or of vassals; all remaining [forces] are mercenary or auxiliary.
Langenhert (1699, fol. 74–75)	
Sapientium fuit ab omni aevo sententia: "nihil rerum tam debile ac fluxum, quam fama potentiae non suâ vi nixae." Vis illa tui sunt milites, ex tuis civibus, subjectis, clientibusve conscripti; reliqui omnes vel mercenarii, vel auxiliarii.	This was the opinion of wise men of every age: "None of the things is as unstable and fleeting as the reputation of power not supported by one's own strength." This power are your soldiers, brought together from your citizens, subjects, or vassals; all remaining are mercenaries or auxiliaries.

Let's now turn to Conring's translation for comparison. He keeps the *amplificatio* in his introductory marker (*sapientissimi quique*), and he even expands the repetition introduced by Tegli to a tricolon of "nothing more fleeting, nothing

weaker, nothing more unstable" (*nihil levius, nihil infirmius, aut instabilius*). But he also simplifies the subsequent sentence structure. In the second sentence too, we might notice that he builds upon the translation made by Tegli rather than consistently mirroring Machiavelli's own style, contrary to his discussion in his dedicatory epistle of what ought to be a faithful translation.

In contrast to Tegli and Conring, Langenhert's translation is clearly marked by a tendency to simplify and reduce the text. This is also accompanied by generalizing effects. For instance, his introductory sentence now states that wise men of every age had this opinion (*sapientium fuit ab omni aevo sententia*), which increases the authority attributed to the following statement. It is noteworthy that Langenhert's reductions do not make a halt before Machiavelli's original wording. While both Tegli and Conring had rendered Machiavelli's Italian *opinione & sententia* into the Latin *opinio et sententia*, Langenhert reduces those two words, which form a hendiadys, to only *sententia*. In Langenhert's case this also might serve as a marker for the following statement being an actual *sententia* out of commonplace books.[36] Strikingly, Langenhert not only reinstates the (almost) correct Latin quotation from Tacitus's *Annales*; the print also reintroduces the typographical markers. Moreover, there is also an important semantic shift noticeable: Whereas Tegli and Conring both used *virtus* for Machiavelli's *forze*, Langenhert returns to the Tacitean *vis*; and he even more strongly emphasizes the importance of the word through repetition (*sua vî nixae; vis illa*). While Conring, in the last sentence of the segment, already returned to Machiavelli's syntax from Tegli's more elegant "the remaining are counted among" (*reliqua omnia … numerantur*), Langenhert again goes even further by foregoing conjunctions where possible, but also by eclipsing the verb (which would be a repetitive *sunt*) in the second part of the sentence, thereby taking advantage of the inherent conciseness of the Latin language.

With this first example, we already note the differences in the rendering of the Italian text, the different translation strategies, and the different approaches to the text. Of the three translators, only Langenhert reinstates the original source quote, which might even seem counterintuitive, considering his approach to translating *Il Principe*.

A different case follows at the beginning of the seventeenth chapter, where Machiavelli quotes two lines from Virgil's *Aeneis*:

36 On early modern commonplace books, see Moss, "Locating Knowledge"; Moss, *Printed Common-Place Books*; Blair, "Humanist Methods." In the broader context of early modern scholarly practices, see Blair, *Too Much*.

> Et intra tutti I Principi, al Principe nuouo è impossibile fugire il nome di crudele, per essere li stati nuoui pieni di pericoli: onde Vergilio per la bocca di Didone escusa la inhumanità del suo Regno, per essere quello nuouo: Dicendo. "Res dura, & Regni nouitas me talia cogunt, Moliri, late fines custode tueri." Nondimeno deue essere graue al credere, & al'muouersi, ne si deue fare paura da se stesso[.] (Macchiavelli fol. 25r–v)
>
> And among all the princes, the new prince cannot escape the reputation of cruelty since new states are full of dangers. Thus, Virgil, through the mouth of Dido, excuses the cruelty of her reign due to being new, saying: *Res dura et Regni nouitas me talia cogunt, Moliri, late fines custode tueri* [My harsh situation and the newness of my rule force me to take such measures, and to protect my borders extensively with guards]. Nevertheless, a prince must be cautious in believing and being moved, and he should not be afraid of his own shadow.

The quotation is taken from the first book of Virgil's *Aeneis*, his epic narration following the journey of Aeneas from the ruins of Troy to their arrival in Latium and Aeneas's victory over Turnus. The two lines quoted in Machiavelli's treatise are part of the first book's description of Dido's first encounter with the Trojans, washed ashore on the North African coast after a severe storm had destroyed their fleet at sea:

Tum breuiter Dido uultum demissa profatur: "soluite corde metum, Teucri, secludite curas. res dura et regni nouitas me talia cogunt moliri et late finis custode tueri.	561	Then Dido briefly speaks, lowering her eyes: "Free your heart from fear, Trojans, let go of your sorrows. My difficult situation and my reign's novelty force me to take such measures and to protect my borders extensively with guards.
quis genus Aeneadum, quis Troiae nesciat urbem, uirtutesque uirosque aut tanti incendia belli?" (Verg. Aen. 1.561–566)[37]	565	Who does not know of Aeneas's family, or the city of Troy, the strength and men or the fire of such an immense war?"

37 The text is quoted following the critical editions of Mynors and Conte. On the translation of *demissa*, see Williams (202) and Austin (180), as well as Serv. Aen. 1, 561 (Thilo and Hagen 171). On *res dura*, see Austin (180); on *late finis custode tueri*, see also Austin (180) and Williams (202).

Dido's words follow the introductory speech of Iloneus, one of Aeneas's people, who explains their misfortune at sea, introduces Aeneas as the leader in a laudatory manner, and indicates their ultimate goal of reaching Latium. With this, she admits to forceful practices used in her new kingdom to sustain safety and rule, while she assures the Trojans that they are safe and welcome. In his commentary on Virgil's *Aeneis*, Servius points out that Dido alluded to two particular dangers.[38] Additionally, he claims that such fear is characteristic of a new reign.[39] In this particular case, the Latin quotation was kept in the early print editions. We also find typographical markers. The source is explicitly mentioned, and the hexameter lines are marked through capital letters. With this, we observe a different emphasis and treatment of quoted prose authors, such as Tacitus and Livy, and Virgil's epic poem.

Therefore, it might not be surprising to find an equally distinct handling of the segment within the three Latin translations as well.

Important for comparison is Tegli's decision to translate Machiavelli's phrasing *il nome di crudele* with the Latin *inclementia* ("mercilessness") and the Italian *inhumanità* with a corresponding *inhumanitas*.[40] The quotation is also marked in Tegli's Latin translation, although not through typographical markers, but rather through an inserted *inquit* signaling direct speech. In the revised translation, the *verbatim* quotation had been set in italics (Stoppani fol. 117). Here, the quotation is marked typographically. In both versions, the original hexameter is interrupted due to the position of *inquit* and is more strongly integrated into the prose text. Turning to Conring's translation in comparison, we note how he, again, kept certain translation decisions made

38 See Serv. Aen. 1, 563: *et duo formidat: vicinos barbaros et fratris aduentum, quae propter novitatem personarum generaliter dicens reliquit.*

39 See Serv. Aen. 1, 563: *et regni novitas quae semper habet timorem.* But it is noteworthy that Serv. Aen. 1, 563–64 distinguishes between fear (*timor, terror*) and cruelty (*crudelitas*). I wonder whether or how Servius's commentary, which was accessible in print by the late-fifteenth century, might have informed the translators' decisions. Was his commentary the reason why none of them used the term *crudelitas* in reference to the quoted example? Unfortunately, there is no other clear indicator allowing for such a conclusion.

40 There also seems to be a curious connection between the phrase *deve essere grave* in the Italian source texts and the translators arriving at the Latin *gravitatem quondam*—a choice that Conring also decided to keep in his revision. Indeed, Langenhert seems to come closest with his *gravis esto*. On *gravitas* as a (mental) quality and strength, often documented in combination with *auctoritas*, *disciplina*, or *firmitudo*, see s.v. "gravitas," in: TLL, vol. 6.2, p. 2306, ll. 35–75 (by Bräuninger).

by Tegli, such as the terminology used, equally using the adjective *inclementis* and the term *inhumanitas* for the core attributes discussed by Machiavelli. But there are also some shifts and eye-catching changes made by Conring: First, we note the subtle change from "among other rulers" (*inter alios principes*) to "among all Rulers" (*inter omnes Principes*); secondly, Conring expanded the text for small explanatory additions, which make the text's inner structure better accessible for its reader, e.g., adding the *sui* in the first sentence, adding one more *Princeps* after the quotation, and micro-expanding *moveatur* with a *quibusvis*. Once more, it becomes clear that while Conring tries to bring the style and wording closer to the printed version of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, he also uses micro-expansions to subtly elevate the style and thus make its meaning clearer to its readership. As in the 1580 print edition, Conring's translation also presents the Virgilian quote in italics. Even more so, the different lines of the poem are indicated not only through capital letters, but also through presentation as separated lines, recreating the hexametric distich of the source text. Finally, Tegli's choice to use *inquit* is altered by Conring's more elegant choice *inquiens*, which echoes the Italian *dicendo* in meaning, position, and function more closely and allows the two hexameter verses to be "spoken" together as in Virgil's *Aeneid*.[41]

Finally, with Langenhert, we continue to observe a much more freely conducted translation or hermeneutic rewriting of the text. And this also includes semantic shifts. In the first sentence already, the text is distinguished from the two preceding translations by two key changes. First, there is now no supposed crowd of possible categories of rulers, but a clear statement that the *Princeps novus* is automatically the one perceived as cruel, or in the interpretation of Langenhert as "strict" (*severus*). This is a clear departure from the Machiavellian wording and insinuation of outright cruelty to maintain power. Langenhert even doubles down on his choice by translating *inhumanità* with *severitas*. He, too, has kept the Latin quotation typographically distinguished from the surrounding prose text. Additionally, Langenhert even added to the quotation three footnotes, which mostly explain the quotation and its meaning, in the context of Virgil's *Aeneid*, to the reader of his translation. But he also uses this opportunity to include his personal view on the chosen example: *Exemplum haud plane incongruum* ("An example indeed quite aptly chosen").

41 Note also that Conring translates the Italian *per la bocca di Didone* ("through the mouth of Dido") with *ore Didonis*.

Table 3: Latin translations in chronological order for a comparison of the integrated Virgilian quote from Machiavelli's Il Principe.

Tegli (1560, fol. 105 [g5r])	
Atqui inter alios principes, ille potissimum qui nouus est, fieri non potest, vt inclementiae nomen effugiat, cum noui dominatus adeò periculis sint referti. Hinc Vergilius sub Didonis persona, ex nouitate regni inhumanitatem excusat. Res dura, inquit, & regni nouitas me talis cogunt moliri, & latè fines custode tueri. Nihilominus grauitatem quandam adhibeat, quominus temerè omnia credat, aut moueatur, aut sibi ipsi metum injiciat [.]	Indeed, among other rulers, above all the one who is new can most likely not avoid a reputation of mercilessness, because new dominions are especially filled with dangers: hence, Vergil, under the disguise of the figure Dido, justified heartlessness with the novelty of her reign. "My difficult situation and my reign's novelty force me to take such measures and to protect my borders extensively with guards." Nonetheless, he must apply a certain dignity, so that he does not blindly believe everything, or get disturbed or instill fear of himself in himself [.]
Conring (1660, fol. 66–67 [l2v–l3r])	
Inter omnes autem Principes ille potissimum qui novus est, fieri non potest, ut inclementis nomen effugiat, cum novi dominates adeo periculis sint referti. Hinc Virgilius ore Didonis regni sui inhumanitatem novitiate excusat, inquiens: *Res dura & regni novitas, me talia cogunt* *Moliri, & late fines custode tueri.* Nihilominus gravitatem quandam adhibeat Princeps, quo minus temere omnia credat, aut quibusvis moveatur, aut sibi ipsi metum injiciat [.]	But among all the Rulers, the one who is new can most likely not avoid being named as "the cruel one," since new dominions are so much filled with dangers. Hence, Virgil through Dido's mouth justifies the heartlessness of her reign with its novelty, saying: "My difficult situation and my reign's novelty force me to take such measures and to protect my borders extensively with guards." Nonetheless, the prince must apply a certain dignity, so that he does not blindly believe everything or get excited by whatever, or instill fear of himself in himself [.]

Langenhert (1699, fol. 87 [F4r])

Immo ille, qui novus est, Princeps severus habeatur, necesse est; quod dominatus ejus discriminum plenissimus. Severitatem huc suam trahit Dido apud Virgilium:
Res dura & regni novitas me talia cogunt
Moliri, & late fines custode tueri.
Nec tamen umbram tuam metuas; gravis esto, temerè nihil quicquam credens, te non concutiens frustra [.]

Truly, it is necessary that the Ruler who is new, is perceived as strict; since his dominion is filled with danger. Hereto Dido attributes her strictness in Virgil:
"My difficult situation and my reign's novelty force me to take such measures and to protect my borders extensively with guards." But in the end take care not to fear your own shadow; be dignified, not believing blindly anything, not striking out wildly and in vain [.]

For a final example, we will turn to the last chapter, the *Exhortatio ad capessendam Italiam in libertatemque a barbaris vindicandam* ("Exhortation to seize Italy and to free it from the barbarians"). Within this chapter, Machiavelli quotes Livy's *Ab urbe condita* in an effort to justify war under a particular circumstance:

> Qui è giustizia grande: "Perche quella guerra è giusta, che gli è necessaria; et quelle armi son pietose, dove non si spera in altro, che in elle." Qui è dispositione grandissima; né può essere, dove è grande dispositione, grande difficultà[.] (Macchiavelli fol. 40v)
> Here is great justice: Because "those wars that are necessary are just, and arms are sacred when hope lies in nothing else, but in them." Here the conditions are most favorable, and where circumstances are favorable, there cannot be great difficulty[.]

The Latin quote is again presented in Italian, but in the early print editions, it is clearly marked typographically by quotation marks in the margins of the printed text. Even to a reader who would not recognize the reference in an unmarked or vernacular form, it must have been clear as a quotation from an authoritative (Latin) text. It is noteworthy that Machiavelli also modified the quote: In Livy, this sentence is spoken by General Gaius Pontius to his fellow Samnites, justifying war against the Romans.[42] In *Il Principe*, however, the

42 Livius, *Ab urbe condita* IX, 1, 10: *iustum est bellum, Samnites, quibus necessarium, et pia arma, quibus nulla nisi in armis relinquitur spes* ("Samnites, war is just for those for whom it is necessary, and righteous are their arms to whom hope only remains, if in arms").

quote is presented without the original address, as the specific context of the statement is not referenced. Still, it is used as a *sententia* or *locus communis* to underline and affirm Machiavelli's own argument for justified war action.

Table 4: Latin translations in chronological order for a comparison of the integrated Livian quote from Machiavelli's Il Prinicpe.

Tegli (1560, fol. 171)	
Hîc iustitia summa est. Nam id bellum est iustum, quod est neccessarium: & ea arma pietatem redolent, cum nulla alia in re, quàm in illis spes omnis vertitur. Hîc summa rerum dispositio est, quae maxima vbi cernitur, nulla difficultas, quae magna esse possit, inesse videtur, […].	Here is the highest justice. As that war is just, which is necessary: and these arms smell of religious faithfulness, if all hope lies in no means other than them. Here are the best conditions, in which when perceived as the greatest, there seems to lie no difficulty within, that could be a great, […].
Conring (1660, fol. 106–07 [O2v–O3r])	
Hic Justitia summa est: quia id bellum est justum, quod est necessarium: & ea arma pietatem redolent, cum nulla alia in re, quam in illis spes omnis vertitur. Summa haec rerum dispositio est, quae quando maxima cernitur, nulla difficultas, quae magna esse possit, superesse videtur; […].	Here is the highest justice: since that war is just, which is necessary: and these arms smell of religious faithfulness, if all hope lies in no means other than them. Here are the best conditions, in which since perceived as greatest, there seems to remain no difficulty within, that could be a great; […].
Langenhert (1699, fol. 156)	
Caussa justissima est vestra, cum omne bellum bellum sit justum, quod est necessarium, arma sint aequa, nec non pia semper ea, in quibus unis unicè omnis vertitur salutis spes.	Your cause is a very just one, since every war is just, that is necessary, arms are adequate, and those are always righteous, in which alone as only choice lies all hope for welfare.

The text follows the critical text editions by Walters and Conway. For the broader Roman context of that statement and the close connection of *pius* and *iustus*, see Oakley (46–48).

This episode of the disaster at Caudium and the conflict with the Samnites has been accessible in various contemporary editions, and the text is presented congruent with modern critical text editions. See, for instance, the editions printed in Venetia in 1501, reprinted also in 1511, of *Titi Livi Decades* (1501, fol. 68 [liiiiv], digitized by Bayerische Staatsbibliothek: 2 A.lat.b.416, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10140713-1).

At first glance, it becomes evident that none of the translators reinstates the Latin quote in the original Latin wording that Machiavelli chose for his treatise. Contrary to the clear emphasis that is found in the original Italian print edition, which is due to the difference in language and the typographical markings, no typographical solutions, such as quotation marks or key phrases, are deployed in the printed Latin translations to mark the sentence as a quote or reference. Instead, a new rendering of the famous quote is created by Tegli and then afterward modified by each of the subsequent translators, coalescing the original quotation with Machiavelli's thought a little bit more with each printed translation.

Tegli's new version of the Livian quotation keeps the sentence structure to the paratactic order of Machiavelli's Italian passage. As we can observe, the original wording in Livy, as well as in Machiavelli, is changed from "war is just for those for whom it is necessary" to "the war which is necessary is just" by substituting the *quibus* of the original quotation with a *quod*, and thus making the statement much more absolute and less tied to the perspective of an involved party. Two additional subtle changes can be observed: First, Tegli renders *justizia grande* as *iustitia summa,* which then is echoed in the subsequent *summa rerum dispositio* (*disposizione grandissima*); second, he slightly attenuates Machiavelli's train of thought by choosing for the Italian phrasing *grande disposizione* the more reserved Latin phrasing *maxima (sc. dispositio) cernitur* and for the absolute *ne può essere* the Latin *inesse videtur*—hereby softening the prediction of the proposed undertaking's success.

In 1660, Conring changed the *nam* to *quia*, strengthening the causal connection to the introductory statement (*Hîc Justitia summa est*), as if answering an unasked question, while again keeping the greater part of Tegli's translation. He also introduces a semantic shift into the text by substituting Tegli's *inesse* with *superesse*.[43]

Finally, Langenhert, who is, as we have seen, much more prone to a substantial rewriting of Machiavelli's *Il principe*, changes the segment significantly and even shortens it by cutting off the sentence following the Livian quote. His translations show a much more interpretative handling of Machiavelli's texts. Langenhert changes the sentence and adds pieces of information showing his reading of Machiavelli: Instead of an absolute *Justizia*, Langenhert chose *caussa*

43 He also chose the temporal *quando* (if once) instead of the quite literal rendition of Tegli's *ubi*.

[sic!] vestra est justissima.[44] Interestingly, he keeps the superlative that had already crept into the text through the earlier translations. This introductory statement is then directly connected to the Livian statement with a *cum causale*. He also augments the original statement by adding *omne*, now referring to *every* war, and by emphasizing the criteria for such a war. In his reading, the weapons are *aequa*, allowing fair game or giving equal strength to both sides in a conflict.[45] In the second part of his translation, he adds three words to really spell out the meaning of a necessity for war only in that case (*unis unice*); he also specifies *spes* (*salutis*). Despite changing the translation significantly, Langenhert has kept the basic structure and translation choices introduced by Tegli (*omnis spes vertitur*).

Reading this segment in the three different versions from 1560 to 1699 demonstrates how the Livian quote becomes more and more part of the Machiavellian thought presented in Latin translations. This handling of the original passage stands in quite some contrast to the *fides* invoked by Conring for the "good translator," particularly since he did know the Italian print editions, as the Latin print edition was oriented closely around the early Italian print editions. So why did he decide not to change it back to how it was presented within the Italian prints? Did he infer that those typographical markings might have been the printer's interventions? Last but not least, particularly in Langenhert's translation, one might ask whether a contemporary reader was able to perceive the distinction between Machiavelli's argument and the literary reference concealed in the translation.

Experimental Translation as an Approach for Early Modern Translations

Bringing those results back into the theoretical framework of retranslation and experimental translation, the following conclusions can be drawn: Machiavelli's *Il Principe* was subject to retranslation, allowing for actualized readings of his controversial treatise, while simultaneously enforcing re-readings and reinterpretations of the text. Each translation followed a different approach. The translations of Conring and Langenhert show enough indicators to conclude that, whether it is explicated or not, both translators build upon the

44 This is in congruence with Machiavelli's preceding argument.

45 OLD *ad loc.*: esp. no. 4.

first translation made by Tegli.[46] As discussed in other studies as well, the retranslation hypothesis cannot be simply affirmed. Although the two subsequent translations are dependent on the first, the introduction of actualizing changes, with the receiving system (the Latin *res publica litteraria*) now having become familiarized with Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, particularly in Langenhert's approach, fundamentally contradicts the assumption that subsequent translations have to become more source-text oriented.

Turning from the umbrella phenomenon of retranslation to the phenomenon of translating Latin quotations back into Latin, experimental translation is a useful concept to discuss the results of this case study, and even more so, it proves a worthwhile concept for approaching early modern translations in general.

Following Robert-Foley's broad array of potential experimental translations (401), text segments that have been wrongly translated also fall into this category. This would constitute a rather involuntary translation practice that plays on the contingencies of textual transmissions.

However, the case study might also be considered under the "ludic aspect" ascribed to experimental translation: Luhn (65–66) and Lee (1–3) emphasize the ludic aspect of experimental translation. For instance, Lee emphasizes that translation has to be seen as a risk-taking adventure that can also result in an unfinished translation due to frustration. For the case discussed in this paper, I think it is safe to argue that the first two translations do not actively indicate any particularly ludic aspect (aside from the inherent playfulness of translation itself as a process); we might, however, argue that there is something playful in the approach of Langenhert (*genio linguae indulgere*).[47]

If we look at the broader field of early modern translations into Latin, we might notice a ludic aspect inherent to the topos of erudition: Within the *res publica litterarum*, the knowledge of the Latin literary tradition, along with the (re)cognition of intertextual references, was a key element of showing off learnedness and partaking in the early modern *lingua franca*. In the context of early modern scholarly practices, *sententiae* or commonplaces were part of textual production. Although the reproduction of excerpts, *sententiae*, and intertextual references denoted an author's erudition, they always constituted

46 We also have a dual dependency not only on the first Latin translation but also on the authority that seems to have been attributed to the earliest Italian print editions.

47 In a way, Langenhert also represents a stronger form of "inserting the translator's self," as Marília Jöhnk discusses for Wright's approach in the Introduction to this volume.

a textual basis for different writing techniques, enabling textual transmission and knowledge production (Blair, "Humanist Methods"; Moss, *Printed Common-Place Books*; Blair, *Too Much to Know*). With this, rewriting, cento-writing, and, overall, forms of experimental translation can be observed throughout the early modern period (generally, Burke 32–33; for political writings, De Bom; for herbals, Heideklang, "Hos Centones").

Although reconstructing specific norms and boundaries is challenging—for instance, only a few focused treatises discuss translation norms for Latin translations—reviews, critical distinctions, and approaches voiced in translators' prefaces and paratexts allow us to grasp transgressions by contextualizing specific translations.[48] The observed experimental translation decisions then implicitly raise the question of what has to be translated by early modern translators and how. Can we separate normative aspects of early modern translations from optional aspects of or potential experimental approaches to translation? Do the results of this case study suggest that the argument of the translated author was valued more or was seen as more normative for the translation process than were the integrated *sententiae*? In turn, this might lead to questions about what did not fall within the normative realm of translation in the early modern period, such as, in our case, the typographical markers of the used print version.

Finally, the retranslations of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and the curious case of the translation of ancient quotations emphasize an important aspect of early modern translations: translations are collaborative processes that are impacted by the various actors involved. As I have shown above, an early modern printed translation comprises more than the text; it also includes the presentation of this text on the printed page, including quotation marks, footnotes, and emphasis through size, font, or the usage of white space. The distinction between text segments can be emphasized, as shown for the quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid*, or a previous distinction can be dissolved, as in the quotations from Tacitus and Livy. Although the translators assume a central role, they are not the only actors involved, and we have to consider the decisions made by printer-publishers as well.

Experimental translation, as it presents itself in this case study, opens up the text for translation as a communicative process, enabling dialogue between the author of the translated text, the translator(s), and the readers; it also em-

48 This leads back to the introductory remarks by Jöhnk in the Introduction to this volume.

phasizes the potential for manipulation, by shifting meanings, or even concealing translation processes before the reader's eye.

Works Cited

Almási, Gabor. "Experientia and the Machiavellian Turn in Religio-Political and Scientific Thinking." *History of European Ideas*, vol. 42, no. 7, 2016, pp. 857–81.

Anselmi, Gian Mario, and Nicola Bonazzi. *Niccolò Machiavelli*. Mondadori Education, 2011.

Austin, R. G. P. *Vergili Maronis Aeneidos Liber Primus: With a Commentary*. Oxford Clarendon Press, 1971.

Bassnett, Susan. *Translation*. 4th ed., Routledge, 2014.

Bausi, Francesco. *Machiavelli*. Salerno Editrice, 2005.

Bensimon, Paul. "Présentation." *Palimpsestes*, no. 4, 1990, pp. ix–xiii.

Berman, Antoine. "La retraduction comme espace de traduction." *Palimpsestes*, no. 4, 1990, pp. 1–7.

Bernhard, John. "Writing and the Paradox of Self: Machiavelli's Literary Vocation." *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2006, pp. 59–89.

Bietenholz, Peter. *Der italienische Humanismus und die Blütezeit des Buchdrucks in Basel. Die Basler Drucke italienischer Autoren von 1530 bis zum Ende des 16. Jahrhunderts*. Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1959.

Blair, Ann. "Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book." *Journal for the History of Ideas*, no. 53, 1992, pp. 541–51.

———. *Too Much to Know: Managing Scholarly Information before the Modern Age*. Harvard UP, 2010.

Bondanella, Peter. *Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince*. Edited and translated by Peter Bondanella, with an Introduction by Maurizio Viroli, Oxford UP, 2005.

Brink, Charles Oskar. *Horace on Poetry: The "Ars Poetica."* Cambridge UP, 1971.

Brownlie, Siobhan. "Narrative Theory and Retranslation Theory." *Across Languages and Cultures*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2006, pp. 145–70.

Burke, Peter. "Cultures of Translation in Early Modern Europe." *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Peter Burke and R. Po-Chia Hsia, Cambridge UP, 2007, pp. 7–38.

Cadera, Susanne M., and Andrew S. Walsh. "Retranslation and Reception – a Theoretical Overview." *Retranslation and Reception: Studies in a European Context*, edited by Susanne M. Cadera and Andrew S. Walsh, Brill, 2022, pp. 1–20.

Cappel, Guillaume. *Le Prince de Nicolas Machiavelle secretaire et citoyen de Florence, traduit de l'Italien en Françoise par Guillaume Cappel*. Charles Estiénne, 1553.

Celenza, Christopher S. *Machiavelli: A Portrait*. Havard UP, 2015.

———. "Petrarch, Latin, and Italian Renaissance Latinity." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2005, pp. 509–36.

Chouit, Abderraouf. "An Overview of Contemporary Research on Retranslations and Retranslation Theory." *Fittardjama*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2017, pp. 182–99.

Comiati, Giacomo. "Translating Petrarch's Vernacular Poems in Latin in Early-Modern Italy." *Gelehrte Liebesnöte – Lateinischer Petrarkismus in der Frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Beate Hintzen, De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 215–38.

Conring, Hermann. *Nicolai Machiavelli Princeps aliqua nonnulla ex Italico Latine nunc demum partim versa, partim infinitis locis sensus meliorism ergo castigata*. Henning Müller d. J. VD17 23:243953S, 1660.

Conte, Gian Biagio. *P. Vergilius Maro. Aeneis recensuit G. B. Conte*. De Gruyter, 2005.

Cosentino, Paola. "Un plagio del *Principe:* il 'De regnandi' di Agostino Nifo." *Semestrale di Studi (e Testi) italiani*, no. 1, 1998, pp. 139–70.

Dauber, Noah. "Anti-Machiavellianism as Constitutionalism: Hermann Conring's Commentary on Machiavelli's 'The Prince.'" *History of European Ideas*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 102–12.

D'Auvergne, Gaspard. *Discours de l'estat de paix et de guerre de messirs Nicolas Machiavelli … sur la première decade de Tite-Live, traduict d'italien en Françoys, plus un livre de mesme auteur intitulé: le Prince*. H. de Marnef et G. Cavellat, 1571.

De Bom, Erik. "Political Advice." *The Oxford Handbook of Neo-Latin*, edited by Sarah Knight and Stefan Tilg, Oxford UP, 2015, pp. 135–49.

De Pol, Roberto, editor. *The First Translations of Machiavelli's Prince: From the Sixteenth to the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*. Rodopi, 2010.

———. "Lebens- und Regierungsmaximen eines Fürsten: Die erste gedruckte deutsche Übersetzung des 'Princeps.'" *Daphnis*, no. 32, 2003, pp. 559–610.

Döhring, Erich. "Conring, Hermann." *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 3, 1957, pp. 342–43. *Deutsche Biographie*, https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd11852190X.html#ndbcontent. Accessed 17 Apr. 2025.

Dreitzel, Horst. "Hermann Conring und die politische Wissenschaft seiner Zeit." *Hermann Conring (1606–1681). Beiträge zu Leben und Werk*, edited by Michael Stolleis. Duncker & Humblot, 1983, pp. 135–72.

Fournel, Jean Louis. "Is 'The Prince' Really a Political Treatise? A Discussion of Machiavelli's Motivations for Writing 'The Prince.'" *Italian Culture*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2014, pp. 85–97.

Furneaux, Henry. *Cornelii Taciti. Annalium ab excessu Divi Augusti libri. The Annals of Tacitus, edited with an introduction and notes by H. F. vol. II: Books XI–XVI.* 2nd ed., revised by H. F. Pelham and C. D. Fisher, with a map, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1951.

Gipper, Andreas. "Von der Translatio zur Traductio. Zur problematischen Entdeckung des Kulturfaktors beim Übersetzen im italienischen Frühhumanismus." *Kultur und Übersetzung, Studien zu einem begrifflichen Verhältnis*, edited by Lavinia Heller, transcript, 2017, pp. 13–35.

Guggisberg, Hans R. *Basel in the Sixteenth Century: Aspects of the City Republic before, during, and after the Reformation*. Center for Reformation Research, 1982.

Heideklang, Julia. "Hos Centones: Brunfels' Herbarum vivae eicones (1530) and Contrafayt Kreütterbuch (1532)." *Cento-Texts in the Making: Aesthetics and Poetics of Cento-Techniques from Homer to Zong!*, edited by Manuel Baumbach, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2022, pp. 63–88.

———. "Recreations of Machiavellian Thought in Latin: *Il Principe* (1513) and its Multiple Translation Processes." *The Italianist*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2024, pp. 467–84.

Heubner, Heinrich. *P. Cornelius Tacitus. Tom. I: Annales edidit H. H.* Teubner, 1994.

Hinckers, Sandra. *Lateinische Übersetzungsreflexion in der Römischen Antike. Von Terenz bis zur Historia Augusta*. Frank & Timme, 2020.

Hosington, Brenda M. "Textual Standard-Bearers: Translated Titles and Early Modern English Print." *Thresholds of Translation, Paratexts, Print, and Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Britain (1473–1660)*, edited by Marie-Alice Belle and Brenda M. Hosington, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 75–100.

Jaworzyn, Michael. "Caspar Langenhert's Parisian 'School of Egoists' and the Reception of Geulincx's Physics from Occasionalism to Solipsism." *History of the Universities*, vol. 33.2, edited by Mordechai Feingold and Andrea Sangiacomo, Oxford UP, 2021, pp. 113–42.

Kaegi, Werner. "Machiavelli in Basel." *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, no. 39, 1940, pp. 5–52.

Langenhert, Caspar. *Nicolai Machiavelli Florentini Princeps*. Johannes Janssen-Waesberge, 1699.

Lee, Tong King. *Translation as Experimentalism: Exploring Play in Poetics*. Cambridge UP, 2022.

Luhn, Anna. *Spiel mit Einsatz. Experimentelle Übersetzung als Praxis der Kritik*. Turia+Kant, 2022.

Machiavelli, Niccolò. *Il Principe*. Bernardo Giunta, 1532.

Mahlmann-Bauer, Barbara. "Tegli, Silvestro." *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS)*, version from 29 Oct. 2013, https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/042838/2013-10-29/. Accessed 18 Apr. 2025.

Marcus, Hannah. *Forbidden Knowledge: Medicine, Science, and Censorship in Early Modern Italy*. The U of Chicago P, 2020.

Martelli, Mario. *Niccolò Machiavelli. Tutte le Opere*. 2nd ed., Giunti Editore S.p.A/ Bompiani, 1971.

McEldruff, Siobhán. *Roman Theories of Translation: Surpassing the Source*. Routledge, 2013.

Mordeglia, Caterina. "The First Latin Translation." *The First Translations of Machiavelli's Prince: From the Sixteenth to the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Roberto de Pol, Rodopi, 2010, pp. 59–82.

Moss, Ann. "Locating Knowledge." *Cognition of the Book: Typologies of Formal Organisation of Knowledge in the Printed Book of the Early Modern Period*, edited by Karl A. E. Enenkel and Wolfgang Neuber, Brill, 2005, pp. 35–49.

———. *Printed Common-Place Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*. Oxford UP, 1996.

Mynors, R. A. B. *P. Vergili Maronis: Opera, recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit R. A. B. Mynors*. Oxford UP, 1969.

Nahrendorf, Carsten. "Conring, Hermann." *Frühe Neuzeit in Deutschland 1620–1720. Literaturwissenschaftliches Verfasserlexikon*, vol. 2, edited by Stefanie Arend et al., De Gruyter, 2020, col. 334–63.

Oakley, S. P. *A Commentary on Livy, Books VI–X*. Oxford Clarendon Press, 2005.

OLD = Glare, Peter G. W. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. 9th ed., Oxford UP, 1997.

Pasterk, Christina Stephanie. *Die Rolle von Übersetzern und Druckern beim Transfer von Machiavelli's Il Principe im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert.* 2019. Universität Wien, Master's thesis.

Perini, Leandro. *La vita e i tempi di Pietro Perna.* Edizione di storia e letteratura, 2002. Studi e testi sul rinascimento europeo 17.

Petrina, Alessandra. "A Florentine Prince in Queen Elizabeth's Court." *The First Translations of Machiavelli's Prince: From the Sixteenth to the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Roberto de Pol, Rodopi, 2010, pp. 83–115.

Poucke, Piet van, and Guillermo Sanz Gallego. "Retranslation in Context." *Cadernos de Tradução*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2019, pp. 10–22.

Reske, Christoph. *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet*. 2nd (revised and extended) ed., Harrassowitz, 2015.

Robert-Foley, Lily. "The Politics of Experimental Translation: Potentialities and Preoccupations." *English*, vol. 69, no. 267, 2020, pp. 401–21. *Oxford Academic*, https://doi.org/10.1093/english/efaa032.

Shackleton Bailey, D. R. *Quinti Horati Flacci Opera*. Edited by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, Teubner, 1985.

Soll, Jacob. "Introduction: Translating 'The Prince' by Many Hands." *The First Translations of Machiavelli's Prince: From the Sixteenth to the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Roberto de Pol, Rodopi, 2010, pp. 9–13.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Politics of Translation." *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, edited by Spivak, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2009, pp. 200–26.

Starnes, D. T. "The Figure Genius in the Renaissance." *Studies in the Renaissance*, no. 11, 1964, pp. 234–44.

Stolleis, Michael. "Die Einheit der Wissenschaften." *Hermann Conring (1606–1681)*, edited by Stolleis, pp. 11–31.

———, editor. *Hermann Conring (1606–1681). Beiträge zu Leben und Werk*. Duncker & Humblot, 1983.

———. "Machiavellismus und Staatsräson. Ein Beitrag zu Conrings politischem Denken." *Hermann Conring (1606–1681)*, edited by Stolleis, pp. 173–99.

Stolze, Ragundis. *Übersetzungstheorien. Eine Einführung*. 7th ed., Narr, 2018.

Stoppani, Giovanni Niccolò. *Nicolai Machiavelli Princeps ex Sylvestri Telii Fulginati traductione diligenter emendata*. Pietro Perna VD16 M10, 1580.

Susam-Sarajeva, Şebnem. "Multiple-Entry Visa to Travelling Theory: Retranslations of Literary and Cultural Theories." *Target International Journal of Translation Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 1–36.

Tegli, Silvestro. *Nicolai Machiavelli Reip. Florentinae A Secretis, ad Laurentium Medicem de Principe libellus: nostro quidem seculo apprime utilis & necessaries, non modo ad principatum adipiscendum, sed & regendum & conservandum. Nunc primum ex Italico in Latinum sermonem uersus per Syluestrum Telium Fulginatem*. Pietro Perna VD16 M9, 1560.

Thilo, Georg, and Hermann Hagen. *Servii Gramatici qui feruntur in Vergili carmina commentarii recensuerunt G. Th. and H. H. Vol I: Aeneidos Libri I–V Commentarii recensuit Thilo*. Teubner, 1881.

TLL = *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (1900 ff.), *editus iussu et auctoritate consilii ab academiis societatibusque diversarum nationum electi*, https://thesaurus.badw.de/tll-digital/tll-open-access.html. Accessed 17 Apr. 2025.

Toepfer, Regina. "Sektionseinleitung II: Anthropologie und Wissen." *Übersetzen in der Frühen Neuzeit – Konzepte und Methoden / Concepts and Practices of Trans-*

lation in the Early Modern Period, edited by Toepfer, Burschel, and Wesche, pp. 205–19.

Toepfer, Regina, Peter Burschel, and Jörg Wesche, editors. *Übersetzen in der Frühen Neuzeit – Konzepte und Methoden / Concepts and Practices of Translation in the Early Modern Period*, Metzler, 2021. Übersetzungskulturen der Frühen Neuzeit 1.

Valetta, Giovanni. "A Proposito di un Plagio di Agostino Nifo." *Lettere Italiane*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1951, pp. 65–82.

Walters, Carl Flamstead, and Robert Seymour Conway. *Titi Livi ab urbe condita recognouerunt et adnotatione critica instruxerunt C.F.W. et R.S.C. Tomus II: Libri VI–X*. 1919. Oxford Clarendon Press, 1965.

Wellesley, Kenneth. *Cornelius Tacitus, tom. I, pars secunda, Annales XI–XVI edidit K. W*. Teubner, 1986.

Williams, R. D. *The Aeneid of Virgil, Books 1–6: Edited with Introduction and Notes*. 1972. St. Martin's Press, 1977.

Wolkenhauer, Anja. *Zu schwer für Apoll. Die Antike in humanistischen Druckerzeichen des 16. Jahrhunderts. Einführung, Einzelstudien*. Katalog, 2002.

Wurm, Christoph. "Die Römer nicht bewundern, sondern nachahmen. Machiavelli als Leser des Livius." *Forum Classicum*, vol. 4, 2011, pp. 278–84.

Zwierlein, Cornel. "French-Dutch Connections: The Transalpine Reception of Machiavelli." *Fruits of Migration: Heterodox Italian Migrants and Central European Culture, 1550–1620*, edited by Cornel Zwierlein and Vincenzo Lavenia, Brill, 2018, pp. 320–61.

Baudelaire in Portuguese

Maria Gabriela Llansol as Translator of *Les Fleurs du mal*

Marília Jöhnk

Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* and Translation/ Writing Experiments

Important European critics, such as Walter Benjamin, Jean Starobinski, or Hugo Friedrich, have produced extensive research on *Les Fleurs du mal*, the lyrical collection that is said to have started off literary modernity. The same can be said for the Brazilian context: There are few texts that have had an effect on Brazilian and Portuguese literature comparable to that of Charles Baudelaire's lyrical collection. Antonio Candido, for instance, commented on the influence of the French poet in his essay "Os primeiros baudelairianos" ("The First Successors of Baudelaire"), where he explores the early reception of Baudelaire in the work of devoted, but lesser-known poets in nineteenth-century Brazil. Despite its poetical and critical influence, the first complete translation of Baudelaire was not published until 1958, by the Brazilian-Lebanese poet and literary critic Jamil Almansur Haddad (Faleiros, "Retraduções" 27).[1] However, the belated translation is not a surprise, given that most members of the Brazilian elite were fluent in French.

My article will shed light upon a lesser-known translation that was neglected by the public due to its experimental nature. It was produced by Maria Gabriela Llansol (1931–2008), a Portuguese writer, critic, and translator who lived for many years in exile in Belgium during the Portuguese dictatorship, the so-called Estado Novo (1933–74). As is commonly known, the peaceful Carnation Revolution ended the dictatorship in 1974—eleven years after that, in 1985, Llansol returned to Portugal. She spent her last years in Sintra, where

1 This article panoramically addresses the influence of Baudelaire on Brazil's and Portugal's literary landscape (Faleiros, "Retraduções" 27–28).

her translation of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* was published in 2003, five years before her death. According to scholarship, the public's reaction to Llansol's translation was defined by "distress," "shock," and "anger" ("en désarroi, en choc, voire en colère"; Coelho, "Les Fleurs").[2] According to Faleiros, critics felt confusion when reading the translation and acknowledged her to be the "boldest" of those who have translated Baudelaire into Portuguese ("a tradutora mais audaz," "mais ousada"; "Llansol retradutora" 113, 114, 121).[3] Therefore, I consider Llansol's translation as another example of a scandal of translation, as Lawrence Venuti has famously portrayed in his book *The Scandals of Translation*. But could this translation really surprise anyone familiar with Llansol's writing? Her writing style per se is experimental and characterized by transgression of form and genre. Criticism outside of Portugal has completely neglected Llansol, which might be symptomatic of the way Portuguese literature is generally treated, since it still remains poorly translated, as well as little read and studied. It was only in the context of the Leipzig Book Fair that some parts of her oeuvre were brought into German (Llansol, *Lissabonleipzig*; Llansol, *Ein Falke*), although most of her books remain hard to access. Llansol is not one of the most renowned authors within national Portuguese literary historiography either—this is certainly due to her writing style, which does not intend to please a mass audience (Moser).

Contrary to most existing scholarship on Llansol's translations, I will approach her Portuguese version of *Les Fleurs du mal* primarily from the point of view of Baudelairean research. This, I argue, is consistent with Llansol's translations: Firstly, because they do not follow a unique clear line (Faleiros, "Llansol retradutora" 120; "Tradução poética" 20); secondly, because Llansol's translations are the result of an intense reading and interpretation of Baudelaire. Following this line of thought, I will argue that the present translation tells us more about a certain reading of Baudelaire than it tells us about Llansol's own aesthetic. Of course, this is not to deny that her translations are deeply connected to and embedded in her own literary work as well. Situating the translation in the context of Llansol's own oeuvre has been

2 I am citing the open access edition of this essay without pagination. All translations into English are my own. I will mostly provide translations of primary sources and theory directly in the text; in some instances, when larger passages are cited, I will use footnotes.

3 Faleiros has published several essays on Llansol as a translator. I am citing three of his essays but not alluding to the recurrence of some ideas and interpretations.

the predominant approach taken by scholarship thus far (see, for example, Coelho, "Les Fleurs"). For instance, the concept "imposture" repeatedly appears in the translations of Baudelaire and is connected to Llansol's own writing, in which the impostor syndrome of language is recurrently discussed (Coelho, "Les Fleurs").[4] However, when her translation work is connected solely to her own written work, the relationality that Llansol exposes in her translations is completely neglected. The translations are not—only or primarily—about her "own" "writing"; they reveal her intense engagement with another text.

My article will concentrate on two poems translated by Llansol, namely "La Beauté" and "Hymne à la beauté." I will argue that these two highly self-referential poems of Baudelaire contain many aspects that characterize Llansol's experimental approach to translation. My thesis will be that this experimental approach is not a contrast to the often-proclaimed attribute of "fidelity," which is frequently applied to (judging) translations. The experimental character of Llansol's translation is simply consistent with Baudelaire's own approach to writing and aesthetics. It is the result of her own reading and interpretation of Baudelaire and is a consistent transposition of the French lyrical collection into the Portuguese realities of the early 2000s— in the sense that it re-enacts an aesthetic experience.[5] The experimental character therefore does not (solely) consist in gaining and reclaiming authorship in translation, but primarily in serving the original and giving it a new form in the new millennium. Therefore, my contribution shows how the notion of fidelity can interact differently

4 Llansol's application of this concept—which is not evoked in Baudelaire's own text—can be observed in poems such as Baudelaire and Llansol, "Au lecteur / Ao leitor" (29) or Baudelaire and Llansol, "LXXXIX Le Cygne / LXXXIX O cisne" (195). See also the reference to "língua de imposture" in Baudelaire and Llansol, "XCIV Le Squelette laboureur / XCIV O esqueleto jornaleiro" (217).

5 In the same year that Maria Gabriela Llansol published her translation of Baudelaire, on the other side of the Atlantic another Portuguese translation came to light, produced by Juremir Machado da Silva. Interestingly, he wrote a preface to his translation, called "Reescandalizar Baudelaire ou como ser fielmente infiel," in which he already alludes, through the title, to the ambivalence between free, experimental translation and a more precise philological approach. Faleiros states that this project has similarities to Llansol's approach, while also stressing the importance of "scandal" for Baudelaire's own aesthetics (Silva; Faleiros, "Llansol retradutora" 121). In his foreword, Silva describes how he paradoxically translated in an unfaithful way in order to act faithfully towards Baudelaire: "Fui terrivelmente infiel em nome da mais absoluta fidelidade" (17).

with the concept of experimental translation, which was also an idea presented by Robert-Foley in "The Politics of Experimental Translation" (417–18).

One could argue that taking an experimental approach to translating Baudelaire is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, the German-speaking tradition of Baudelaire translation shows that two of the most renowned early translators, Walter Benjamin and Stefan George, already used the Baudelairean lyrical collection as a playground for their own experimental approach to translation, and probably no other translation was more experimental than Oskar Pastior's.[6] Even in the most recent translation, from 2017, Simon Werle makes bold decisions in his German version of Baudelaire.[7] In a way, Baudelaire himself was an experimental writer.[8] He broke new ground with his lyrical collection, which founded modernity through the combination of old literary traditions and forms with new subjects—cadavers, beggars, and lesbian women, as well as Satan, were declared to be subjects of aesthetical reflection.

---

6 On Walter Benjamin's translations of *Les Fleurs du mal*, see Sauter, and on the experimental character of Oskar Pastior's translation, see Strässle.

7 In his translations, Simon Werle recurrently opts in favor of estranging his German text, and this lexical decision makes him sound more French. For instance, his translation of "Pour moi, poëte chétif, / Ton jeune corps maladif" contains the outdated and French-sounding word "malad": "Für mich, Poet von eigener Gnad, / Besitzt dein Leib, jung und malad" (Baudelaire and Werle vv. 5–6, 239).

8 The concept of experimental writing was not new to French literature in the nineteenth century. As was explored in the Introduction, it was strongly associated with Baudelaire's contemporary, Emile Zola. In his manifesto *Le Roman expérimental*, he alluded to the writings of the doctor Claude Bernard. In his own novels, Zola sought to demonstrate the effect of certain human conditions (see Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*; on the historical dimension of the concept, see Schwerte). My use of the concept "experimental" is therefore anachronistic. It relies on an understanding of the way that the vanguardist movement, due to its exploration of new aesthetic grounds, was declared experimental (Berg 143). In my book, *Poetik des Kolibris*, I give a detailed analysis of the meaning of experimentalism in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century literature (Jöhnk 211–18). In this context, it is also interesting to note that Hugo Friedrich defined "Überraschung" ("surprise") and "Befremdung" ("disconcertment") as common characteristics of modern poetry. The experimental character of Llansol and Baudelaire might therefore also be consistent with the modernity of both texts (Friedrich 18). Westerwelle (511) also mentions how Baudelaire experiments with rhymes and meter. In her analysis, Robert-Foley describes an example that questions in a similar vein the distinction between "experimental translation" and "the translation of experimental and untranslatable texts" (*Experimental Translation* 164).

The experimental character of Llansol's translation is thus intrinsically linked to the translated poems.

Re-Enacting *Les Fleurs du mal*

Apart from her literary work and her contribution to theory, Llansol was a prolific translator from French to Portuguese. Among her translated works one can find authors such as Paul Verlaine, Rainer Maria Rilke, Arthur Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire, Paul Éluard, and Pierre Louÿs, as well as the mystic Thérèse de Lisieux. This shows Llansol's preference for poetry and the literature of France's belle époque. Baudelaire does not stand out in this collection. On the contrary, his lyrical collection is—apart from that of Thérèse de Lisieux—the oldest among these works, and it influenced poets such as Rimbaud and Verlaine and founded, as the already cited book by Friedrich has argued, modern European poetry. For all of her translations, Llansol chose the Lisbon-based and vanguardist publishing house Relógio D'Água, which, according to their own portrayal on their website, sees itself as a "cultural project" that "does not limit itself to works that it assumes the reader wants to read" ("Perguntas Frequentes").[9] In other words, this publishing house is open to vanguardist and experimental literature that seeks new paths and thus was probably the ideal choice for Llansol. However, this translation project is not elitist either, bearing in mind that Llansol's *Fleurs du mal* was included in a governmental campaign promoting reading in Portugal (the so-called "Plano Nacional de Leitura") and therefore addressed and still addresses a broad audience.[10]

Llansol was not a writer who aimed for a big stage and public appearances (Moser). In this sense, her literary persona does not differ from Baudelaire's. His self-fashioning as *poète maudit* is consistently reflected in *Les Fleurs du mal*. He was comfortable playing *l'enfant terrible* of French literary scenes and he depicted in his writing many figures considered outsiders of French nineteenth-century society, such as sex workers, beggars, and chiffoniers, amongst others. When Baudelaire tried to apply for membership in the Académie Française, the

9 The original wording is: "É também um projecto cultural, não se limitando a publicar as obras que pensa que o leitor quer ler."

10 This detail is included in the publishing house's 2021 catalogue. All translations by Llansol published with Relógio D'Água can be seen in this catalogue ("Catálogo 2021").

literary scene was shocked that a marginal poet dared to claim his place in this elitist institution (Westerwelle 37). Throughout his poetic collection, Baudelaire fashions the poet as exiled and marginalized, for instance in "Le Cygne" or "Le Vin des chiffoniers." Baudelaire lived in poverty and precarity, and he was never appreciated in his lifetime, but he remains one of France's most recognized authors (Westerwelle 37, 304). Nowadays, one can hardly think of a more canonical writer, as he is celebrated by later generations of poets, both in France and abroad.

Llansol was literally exiled and writing from a marginal position. She is said to have "cultivated her own isolation, by her scant public appearances and interviews, and by her dense, erudite, and impenetrable text, which did not encounter a popular readership in Portugal" (Ribeiro). In "Llansol, Poet of the Posthumous," the writer and translator Benjamin Moser admired her courage to write the way she did, consciously opting for a style that would not attract a wide readership. Research has stated that Llansol chose for her translations authors who could be seen in the same line of outcast writing (Coelho, "Baudelaire" 72).[11]

When I depict Llansol's translations as experimental in what follows, I will repeatedly consider the element of aesthetic and moral transgression.[12] In this sense, her translations are consistent with Baudelaire's conception of beauty and re-enact the aesthetic effect his lyrical collection had on his contemporaries. I will use the concept of "re-enactment," since the much more frequently applied term "actualization" does not seem extensive enough to characterize Llansol's translation practice and the performative character it possesses. As is commonly known, Baudelaire, unlike Gustave Flaubert, did not win when he was put on trial for obscenity charges, and several poems were excluded from

11 Coelho writes in "Baudelaire, Pierre Louÿs e Mallarmé": "Não estranhei esta escolha da autora porutguesa, tratando-se de uma linhagem de marginais, de rebeldes, a que afirma pertencer a mais que rebelde Maria Gabriela" (72). Coelho also remarks in the mentioned essay that in Llansol's own writing, there are several allusions and references to Baudelaire (73).

12 The concept of "transgression" was used by Michel Foucault in order to describe the aesthetic characteristic of the work of Georges Bataille ("Préface à la transgression"). Coelho has also expressively alluded to the transgressive character of Llansol's translations of Mallarmé alongside her appropriation, which I will also consider an important characteristic ("Baudelaire" 81). On transgression as element of Baudelaire's poetry, see Jamison.

the poetic collection. They were published separately in Belgium in his collection *L'Épave*. Baudelaire lived two years in Belgium, where he tried to earn more money with his writing, but he did not succeed and had to return to Paris in a miserable state of health (Westerwelle 304–05, 317). Brussels was the place where many exiled French authors lived (319), and, interestingly enough, Belgium was also the country Llansol chose for her exile.

I have no knowledge of Llansol's role in editorial decisions, such as those concerning the cover of the lyrical collection. However, it is curious that the publishing house used Paul Rodin's illustrations of *Les Fleurs du mal*, and particularly his illustration of one of the most discussed poems, namely the poem literally addressed to carrion (Baudelaire and Llansol, "XXIX Une charogne / XXIX Corpo que apodrece"), which Llansol translated in an unconventional manner as well (a point to which I will return later). In this morbid poem, the lyrical voice describes a dead body he sees while walking with its (still alive) lover, who is then reminded of her own mortality. The poem is an example of the shocking and transgressive character of Baudelaire's lyrical collection, to which Karin Westerwelle (8, 42, 44, 140) also alludes repeatedly in her study on Baudelaire. This transgressive character is re-enacted by Llansol, but it goes without saying that the provocative elements in *Les Fleurs du mal* are specific to its historical moment. In her re-enactment of Baudelaire, Llansol searched for other means to re-enact Baudelaire's transgression—it is this transgressive re-enactment in Llansol's translations that I will define as experimental.

Experimental translations contradict normative concepts of translations and common expectations the reader might have (Robert-Foley, "Politics" 401; *Experimental Translation* 11; Luhn, *Spiel* 119).[13] They can be considered as a "form of research," as they question the "theoretical substrate of translation" itself (Robert-Foley, "Politics" 405); they possess an epistemic drive and "Begehren" ("desire"), and they often understand themselves as providing a critical engagement with and reading of the original (Luhn, "'Dieses Spiel'"). Throughout this collected volume, contributions have shown that the notion of "experimental" translation contrasts with the notion of fidelity.[14] In my article, however, I will

13 The Introduction of this volume contains an extensive definition and history of the concept of experimental translation. In this article, I will only include references that strengthen my argument. While Robert-Foley reiterates some ideas from "The Politics of Experimental Translation" in *Experimental Translation*, I will avoid excess references by referring only to one source.

14 This is also explored by Robert-Foley: "It [experimental translation] poses a threat to the mainstream dogma of translation, in particular, the place of fidelity, equivalence,

show how in the case of Llansol, experimentalism is compatible with the idea of fidelity in the sense of continuity.

Although the notion of "fidelity" is criticizable and by no means a value I wish to perpetuate, it becomes more difficult to define a translation as experimental when the translated text itself contains an experimental character (on this point, see Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 164, 215). Fidelity is a concept that has strongly limited translation's value as a *sui generis* textual genre. It is, apart from that, connected to a gendered notion of possession, which was, decades ago, famously explored by Lori Chamberlain. The connection between translation and marriage is power. Chamberlain explains: "I would further argue that the reason translation is so overcoded, so overregulated, is that it threatens to erase the difference between production and reproduction which is essential to the establishment of power" (466). In this sense, my aim is neither to show how experimental translation is a counter term to "fidelity," nor to use the term simply to suggest that a free translation possesses authorship in contrast to a conventional, "faithful" translation. Such a point of view would only affirm the power relation between original and translation, instead of questioning aesthetical hierarchies, authorship in the sense of possession, and the allegedly secondary and subordinate character of translation. The case of Maria Gabriela Llansol will therefore be helpful in developing a more nuanced concept of experimental translation.

"Hymne à la beauté" and "La Beauté": Experiments with Beauty

The highly experimental character of Llansol's translation can easily be discerned in a couple of poems that Llansol translated in two versions. This applies for instance to "Correspondances" (Baudelaire and Llansol, "IV Correspondances / IV Correspondências") and to the "Litanies de Satan" (Baudelaire and Llansol, "CXX Les Litanies de Satan / CXX Prece a Satã").[15] In the case of "Correspondances," Llansol created two versions, one literal ("versão literal") and

accuracy, transparency, smoothness, and legibility" ("Politics" 405; see also *Experimental Translation* 13). However, as shown in the Introduction, faithfulness to a marginal text can subvert power relations (Robert-Foley, "Politics" 417)

15 In former versions of this lyrical collection, it also applies to "XCIII A une passante / XCIII A uma transeunte." This is suggested by research that repeatedly treats the two versions of this sonnet; this translation seems to have been changed into a single version in the present edition of Llansol.

one that she called "outra versão" ("another version"; 39). It is no surprise that precisely those poems have been of interest for the few researchers who dived into Llansol's universe (Faleiros, "Llansol retradutora" 115; "Tradução poética" 20). As I have argued in the Introduction, when a translation is more experimental, it receives more attention from scholarship and less attention from broad readership. One could also argue that Llansol is acting experimentally in a literal sense, since she is taking her object—Baudelaire's poem—and creating a setting in which she can contemplate this poem in Portuguese in two versions.[16] This experimental approach in the literal sense also contradicts one of the golden rules of translation: It is necessary to make decisions. Llansol refuses to make decisions when offering two versions of the same poem. She thus subverts the norm, and this is, according to recent definitions, a decisive characteristic of experimental translation (Robert-Foley, "Politics" 401).[17]

In "Spleen et idéal" ("Spleen and Ideal"), the first section of his lyrical collection, Baudelaire dedicated a hymn to beauty. While the poem "Hymne à la beauté" is not as renowned as other poems in the collection, such as "Le Cygne" ("The Swan"), "À une passante" ("To the Passing Lady"), and "Rêve parisien" ("Parisian Dream"), the question of beauty is inherent to the lyrical collection and was excessively important to Baudelaire, who is often considered as one of the representatives of "l'art pour l'art" (Benjamin, *Baudelaire* 10). The allegorical depiction of beauty is as ambivalent as humankind itself. Baudelaire depicts this ambivalence of humanity, torn between Satan and God, on several occasions, such as in the theoretical reflections on laughter and the comic that

16 In this sense, Max Bense understood experimental writing in his essay on the essay, where he wrote: "Essayistisch schreibt, wer experimentierend verfaßt, wer seinen Gegenstand nicht nur hin und her wendet, sondern diesen Gegenstand während des Schreibens, während der Bildung und während der Mitteilung seiner Gedanken findet, oder erfindet, befragt, betastet, prüft, durchreflektiert und zeigt, was unter den ästhetischen und ethischen manuellen und intellektuellen Bedingungen des Autors überhaupt sichtbar werden kann" ("One who writes in an essayistic manner is one who produces experimentally, who does not only simply turn their object back and forth, but finds this object during the writing, the formation, and the communication of their thought, or invents, questions, touches, verifies, reflects, and shows what can become visible under the aesthetic and ethical manual and intellectual conditions of the author"; 28).

17 This experimental character is also in line with Anna Luhn's recently offered definition of experimental translation in terms of systematicity ("'Dieses Spiel").

are found in his essay "On the Essence of Laughter" ("De l'essence du rire" 532, 534, 543).

Referring to his verses in terms of "hymn" in "Hymne à la beauté" is characteristic for Baudelaire's aesthetics, which have famously been described by Friedrich as "ruinöses Christentum" ("ruinous Christianity"; 45). This description refers to the way that Baudelaire's approach to aesthetics exposes the remnants, traces, ruins, and shards of Christianity while being aware of its own Christian ground.[18] The poetical voice addresses beauty directly in the poem. The same dialogical structure can be seen in poems such as the already mentioned "Les Litanies de Satan" or "Le Reniément de Saint Pierre" ("The Denial of St. Peter), which provoked religious feelings through the liturgical praise of Satan and the praise of Saint Peter's denial of Jesus Christ. Striking, however, is the abundance of questions:

XXI
Hymne à la beauté

Viens-tu du ciel profond ou sors-tu de l'abîme,
Ô Beauté? ton regard, infernal et divin,
Verse confusément le bienfait et le crime,
Et l'on peut pour cela te comparer au vin.

Tu contiens dans ton œil le couchant et l'aurore;
Tu répands des parfums comme un soir orageux;
Tes baisers sont un philtre et ta bouche une amphore
Qui font le héros lâche et l'enfant courageux.

Sors-tu du gouffre noir ou descends-tu des astres?
Le Destin charmé suit tes jupons comme un chien;
Tu sèmes au hasard la joie et les désastres,
Et tu gouvernes tout et ne réponds de rien.

Tu marches sur des morts, Beauté, dont tu te moques;
De tes bijoux l'Horreur n'est pas le moins charmant,
Et le Meurtre, parmi tes plus chères breloques,
Sur ton ventre orgueilleux danse amoureusement.

18 Bernhard Teuber depicted how Baudelaire used "sacred hypotexts" (in the original: "sakralen Hypotext"; 627) in order to forge his own poetic universe and decompose sacred and Christian forms.

L'éphémère ébloui vole vers toi, chandelle,
Crépite, flambe et dit: Bénissons ce flambeau!
L'amoureux pantelant incliné sur sa belle
A l'air d'un moribond caressant son tombeau.

Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l'enfer, qu'importe,
Ô Beauté! monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénu!
Si ton œil, ton souris, ton pied, m'ouvrent la porte
D'un Infini que j'aime et n'ai jamais connu?

De Satan ou de Dieu, qu'importe? Ange ou Sirène,
Qu'importe, si tu rends, — fée aux yeux de velours,
Rythme, parfum, lueur, ô mon unique reine! —
L'univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds?

(Baudelaire, "XXI Hymne à la beauté")

The poem is translated by Llansol in the following way:

XXI
Hagiográfica beleza

Vens de um buraco negro ou do céu profundo _____?
Ignoro mas sei-te Hermafrodita e Extrema
Lanças à toa no mundo ricos e mendigos
Tal um vinho que abre ao aberto, embora ao perigo

O sol nasce nas tuas pupilas e nelas falece Vórtice intempestivo
difundes perfumes
Teu beijo feitiço torna os homens frágeis Tua boca cornucópia
faz as crianças nuas

És fruto da lixeira cósmica ou fragmento estelar _____?
Ignoro mais sei que o Destino fascinado te caiu nos braços
Fortuna e desaire semeias improvável
Não és democrática, tudo reges a teu bel' modo

Espezinhas os mortos e vem-te o riso O Horror é uma das tuas jóias
mais famosas
Matas com quem agita guizos e a morte dança sobre teu pénis-clítoris

langorosa

O efémero é para ti que corre em febre
Surge brama breve e exclama extinto 'bendita chama'
É ver o amanta palpitante inclinado sobre a sua dama
Um moribundo que beijasse seu esquife fá-lo-ia exactamente

Venhas de onde venhas _____ é indiferente
Monstro potente terrível e ingénuo És belo ó beleza
Se olhando e sorrindo com esse teu jeito
Me abres a porta do Infinito que amo e desconheço
Que mais me importa?

Anjo ou Sereia _____ vens de Um ou de Outro?
Pergunta inócua Fada com olhos de veludo
Trazes-me ritmo perfume vislumbre
Um menos de fealdade no todo
E mais leveza no resto.
A teus pés me lanço.

(Baudelaire and Llansol, "XXI Hymne à la beauté / XXI Hagiográfia beleza")

My argument will repeatedly connect this poem to another one on beauty, "La Beauté," and analyze both Llansol's and Baudelaire's poetic reflection on aesthetics:

XVII
La Beauté

Je suis belle, ô mortels! comme un rêve de pierre,
Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour,
Est fait pour inspirer au poète un amour
Éternel et muet ainsi que la matière.

Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx incompris;
J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes;
Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes,
Et jamais je ne pleure et jamais je ne ris.

Les poëtes, devant mes grandes attitudes,

Que j'ai l'air d'emprunter aux plus fiers monuments,
Consumeront leurs jours en d'austères études;

Car j'ai, pour fasciner ces dociles amants,
De purs miroirs qui font toutes choses plus belles:
Mes yeux, mes larges yeux aux clartés éternelles!

(Baudelaire, "La Beauté")

Llansol translates:

XVII
A beleza

Bela sou ___ mortais __ como um sonho de pedra
E meu seio __ onde todos enfim se ferem ___
Inspira ao poeta um amor vero ____
Tão Eterno e mudo como a matéria --
Híbrida sou ___ coração de neve num alvor

De cisne ___ num empíreo de azur ___
Odeio o movimento que o linear reduz ___
Nem denso, nem leve ___ por puro ardor ___

Os poetas __ fascinados pela minha pose
Com que pareço imitar __ o mármore mais altivo ___
Consumirão seus dias em áridas gnoses __

Meus dóceis amantes ___ quero-os seduzidos
Por olhos meus __ seu ver claro feito de Certeza
Porque espehlo sou __ sem fim geram beleza

(Baudelaire and Llansol, "XVII La Beauté / XVII A beleza")

Beauty is one of the often-encountered allegories in *Les Fleurs du mal*. As previously stated, "Hymn to Beauty" is not amongst the most widely read and discussed poems of the collection. However, it is often discussed in relation to "La Beauté," where beauty speaks for herself. This poem appears before the hymn, in the same cycle, namely "Spleen et idéal." In "La Beauté," beauty defines herself, relying on multiple images encountered in *Les Fleurs du mal*, such

as the swan, the Azur, or the sphynx, metaphors that can be found in "LXXXIX Le Cygne," "II L'Albatros" (vv. 6, 9), and "Spleen LXXVI" (vv. 22, 73). "Hymne à la beauté" was first published in 1860 in order to replace one of the condemned poems (Zimmermann 239). In the poem, the lyrical voice itself is questioning beauty about its character. Here lies the profoundly self-referential worth of this poem, given that the idea that beauty can be "extracted not only from horror but from evil itself" (Hyslop 207) is at the core of this poetical collection: "le meutre parmi tes plus chères breloques / Sur ton ventre orgueilleux danse amoureusement" ("the murder amongst your most dear charms / Dances vividly in love on your proud belly"). This idea is expressed not only by the title *Fleurs du mal*, but also by drafts of the preface, in which Baudelaire wrote (Hyslop 207): "Il m'a paru plaisaint, et d'autant plus agréable que la tâche était plus difficile, d'extraire la *beauté* du Mal" (Baudelaire, "[Projets de préfaces]" 181).[19]

My analysis will begin with "Hagiográphica beleza" before returning to "A beleza." I have decided to interpret Llansol's Baudelaire translation by focusing on these two poems because, as I will argue, they contain many characteristics of her experimental approach to translation. This is consistent with Baudelaire himself, given that his poetic collection is a complex construction, in which one poem could not be interpreted without reference to another poem. Friedrich has called attention to this characteristic of Baudelaire's lyric collection, which he considers a systematic composition, divergent from a loose anthology.[20]

The title of Llansol's translation already indicates her interest in theory. The "hymn to beauty" becomes "hagiographic beauty." The title "hymn" could be interpreted in a Christian or an antique sense: On the one hand, a hymn is an ancient poetic form, epitomized in one of the most famous poems of world literature, Sappho's hymn to Aphrodite. On the other hand, the term "hymn" refers to a musical praise of God as part of Christian liturgy. But Llansol does not maintain the "hymn"; she switches to the meta-category of "hagiography." This title is hence provocative, as it elevates beauty into the position of a saint and worships art as religion. Llansol shows that her reading is a meta-reading, a translation that expressively designates itself as an interpretation, since the

19 On this quote, see Hyslop (207) and Teuber (615). My translation: "It has appeared to me enjoyable, and even more pleasing since the task was more difficult, to extract the *beauty* from the Evil."

20 Friedrich (38, see also 39) repeatedly alludes to the systematic composition of *Les Fleurs du mal*.

"hymn" becomes "hagiography" and thus the teaching, knowledge, or theory of the lives of Saints.

This meta-level is also expressed by the fact that Llansol—contrary to other translations she made—did not include a preface to her writing. She rather relied on a preface written by Paul Valéry, who, in many ways, embodies the opposite of Baudelaire. As a very recognized public figure and the president of the Académie Française, Valéry was well-established and couldn't be further away from the image of *poète maudit* that Baudelaire cultivated. In his essay, Valéry positions Baudelaire in the literary field of his own time. He describes Baudelaire's role as translator and reader of Edgar Allan Poe, and it is ironic that Valéry compares him to Victor Hugo (359, 366). This comparison seems almost sarcastic from today's perspective, considering that Hugo was significantly more successful than Baudelaire and was appreciated in his own time (Westerwelle 38). One might wonder if the dialogue between Valéry and Baudelaire does not reflect Llansol's own position in the literary field and the poor appreciation of her texts throughout her lifetime. The foreword possesses allegorical value in that it shows that this translation does not hide the time that has passed or the developments in literary and human history.

The form of the translated poem instantly reminds readers of the way that the poems of Stéphane Mallarmé used space. Mallarmé was deeply indebted to Baudelaire and is considered another milestone in the development of modern European poetry (Friedrich 95–139). Presenting a translation of Baudelaire that incorporates elements of his literary successors, such as Mallarmé or Valéry, produces a translation that exhibits the afterlife of *Les Fleurs du mal*. This could be seen as an interesting perspective on the temporality of translation, since it questions the linear progression of time. The formal conception of Llansol's translations is the key to comprehending this temporal dimension.

Experimentation with Form

Many of Llansol's translations experiment with form: in addition to her punctuation, Llansol decomposes the very strict poetical forms Baudelaire uses, such as the sonnet or the Alexandrine-meter, which are characteristic of his poetic universe. On many occasions, the decentering of the graphic structure creates new narratives, as for instance in a poem on lighthouses, "VI Les Phares / VI Os luminares," where, through the alternation of the verses, the importance of the names and historical figures is highlighted. The dashes,

which are also prominent in the present poem, are typical for Llansol's aesthetic, and Moser has connected them to Emily Dickinson, who, like Llansol, also wrote for the sake of writing, without having a broad audience in mind (Moser).

The experimental approach to form also characterizes Llansol's poetic reflections on beauty. At first sight, the punctuation employed by Llansol characterizes the predominant aesthetic effect of the poem. The dashes expressing an omission are generally employed in every verse that articulates a question (one exception is verse 21, although in this case the expression "[v]enhas de onde venhas" ("wherever you might come from") also implies a lack of knowledge and an indirect question: where do you come from?). The dashes therefore illustrate the dialogical structure of her translation, which, on a meta-level, also expresses the dialogue between Llansol, Baudelaire, and the reader. This dialogical structure is by no means foreign to Baudelaire, who begins his poetic collection with a poem addressed to the readers, reminding them of the similarities to the author while also applying dashes: "– Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!" ("Au lecteur" 6, vv. 40).[21] With this dialogical structure, Llansol illustrates her idea of translation as a polyphonic process.

This is already hinted at through the inclusion of the original poems by Baudelaire and the extensiveness of her volume of *Les Fleurs du mal*. There is nothing left to be covered in Llansol's complete and thorough translation of Baudelaire: All the different versions of the foreword are included, all the condemned poems, the three most iconic pictures of Baudelaire (photographs by Nadar and Étienne Carjat as well as a painting by Émile Deroy), even drafts of the poems in Baudelaire's own handwriting ("XXXVII Le Possédé / XXXVII O possesso"). Nothing is left out—except the foreword of the translator (Faleiros, "Llansol retradutora" 113). As is often the case, this absence becomes very present. In such an experimental translation, the reader probably expects a foreword—an explanation, an interpretation—and thus this omission leads to a sense of loneliness and disorientation.

Another striking element in Llansol's translation is her divergent use of capitalization. As is commonly known, Baudelaire applied capitalization to ex-

21 However, Westerwelle (162–63) shows how this communicative dimension is subverted. The reinforcement of the dialogical structure in Llansol's translation can be observed in numerous examples. See, for instance, Baudelaire and Llansol, "LV Causerie / LV Diálogo," or "LIX Sisina / LIX Sisina." My translation: "Hypocrite reader—my kind—my brother!"

press the importance of selected substantives and characterize their allegorical meaning (Benjamin, *Baudelaire* 99). While Baudelaire highlights the substantives "Beauté," "Horreur," "Meurtre," "Satan," "Dieu," "Ange," and "Sirène," Llansol opts for "Hermafrodita," "Extrema," "Vórtice," "Tua," "Destino," "Horror," "És," "Sereia," "Um," "Outro," "Fada." Her capitalization is not only divergent, but also without pattern and, quite frankly, sense. Llansol does not use capitalization to give the reader orientation or direction. Rather, she tries to confuse through her use of capitalization: as is apparent in the following poem, the use of capital letters does not help in the reading process, it rather confuses and goes against any hermeneutic value. Its resistance to interpretation is similar to what Susan Sontag, in "Against Interpretation," describes with regard to modern art: "In fact, a great deal of today's art may be understood as motivated by a flight from interpretation" (10). It is the same flight from interpretation, meaning, and hermeneutics that the reader encounters in Llansol's Portuguese Baudelaire. Translation has repeatedly been defined as a hermeneutic act (Schleiermacher 72–73). Llansol is an intense and precise reader of Baudelaire, but, following Sontag's critique of hermeneutics, she does not serve as an interpreter. As is known, Sontag criticized the hermeneutic drive to explain a work through interpretation; she characterized this movement as a usurpation and a power struggle. Instead of hermeneutics, she pleads in favor of an "erotics of art" (14).

When I characterize Llansol's translation as experimental, I am mostly referring to form (recalling that Benjamin declared translation as a form per se in "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," 9). Llansol was not primarily a poet; most of her work is prose, although its density is strongly associated with poetry. Llansol completely decomposes the lyrical form of Baudelaire, which is an inherent characteristic of *Les Fleurs du mal*. The rhythm and meter in themselves contain semantic value for the interpretation of each poem. In "À une passante," Baudelaire evokes the form of the sonnet, which is deeply connected to European love lyric (Westerwelle 509–11); on the other hand, "Le Cygne," like so many other poems, is written in Alexandrine, and it contrasts the classical poetic form with the new urban content. "Rêve parisien" is written in a much shorter metric, creating a different setting for the dreamlike landscape. This dimension is completely neglected by Llansol—again, this can be regarded as a way of adapting the poetic collection to the twenty-first century, where free verses are predominant in poetry. As research has highlighted, Llansol's play with form can also be observed in her translation of "XXIX Une charogne / XXIX Corpo que apodrece," where the poetic form decomposes in the same way as the dead body

(Faleiros, "Llansol retradutora" 114). In Llansol's translation there is nothing left of Baudelaire's lyrical composition: no meter, no verse, no rhyme.

Misogyny in Llansol and Baudelaire

Llansol provokes not only through her rejection of any hermeneutic value, but also through the misogynistic and, above all, pornographic dimension of her translation: "a morte dança sobre teu pénis clitoris / langorosa" (on these pornographic elements, see Coelho, "Baudelaire" 78).[22] Again, this characteristic does not draw Llansol away from Baudelaire but instead brings her closer to his poetic universe and aesthetic experimentalism. Baudelaire provoked through his depiction of lesbianism in "II Lesbos," which in consequence had to be excluded from the collection. The misogynistic portrayal of women has repeatedly been the subject of research (Chatterjee). Baudelaire's relation to women is complex and ambiguous (Chatterjee 18).[23] It is known that Baudelaire remained dependent on his mother (or to be precise, his legal guardian, a lawyer) throughout his life, despised his stepfather, and was amorously attached to Jean Duval (Westerwelle 31–34). There are many female figures in Baudelaire's poetic universe, from poor, old women, to lesbian lovers, sex workers, and beggars, to allegorical figures and adored women. In "A une mendiante rousse," a red-haired beggar becomes subjected to the flâneur's male gaze and objectification: "Que des nœuds mal attachés / Dévoilent pour nos péchés / Tes deux beaux seins, radieux / Comme des yeux" (Baudelaire, "LXXXVII A une mendiante rousse" vv. 21–24, 84).[24] In his reflection, Baudelaire was even clearer in his stand on women: "La femme est *naturelle*, c'est-à-dire abominable. Aussi est-elle toujours vulgaire, c'est-à-dire le contraire du Dandy" ("Journaux intimes" 677).[25] But although Baudelaire's depiction of women is misogynistic, it is also, from the aesthetic point of view, complex. Benjamin has called attention to the interconnection of lesbianism, amongst

22 My translation: "and death dances on your penis-clitoris / languorous."

23 This essay consists of a thorough analysis of the importance of femininity in *Les Fleurs du mal*.

24 My translation: "Let the poorly knitted knots / Reveal for our sins / Your two beautiful shining breast / Like eyes."

25 My translation: "The woman is *natural*, which is to say abominable. She is also always vulgar, which is to say the contrary of the Dandy."

other traits, and allegory, which hints at a more complex interrelation of images and rhetorical figures that escapes quick conclusions.[26]

Although she is a woman, Llansol remains faithful to the misogynistic original. The depiction of sex workers cannot shock the public in the early millennium, but its importance in Baudelaire's poetic universe cannot be overestimated and is connected to the social conditions and poverty in nineteenth-century Paris (Pfeiffer 32). Benjamin has repeatedly alluded to the importance of prostitution in Baudelaire's writing (*Baudelaire* 55), and Baudelaire himself commented suggestively in his personal annotations: "Qu'est-ce que l'art? Prostitution" ("Journaux intimes" 649).[27] Llansol must create a vulgar and sexist vocabulary to be able to attain the same level of linguistic violence and provocation in today's world. After Baudelaire, innumerous artists sought to provoke through the exposure of sex, drugs, and rock' n' roll, from Charles Bukowski to Vladimir Nabokov and Arthur Schnitzler. Llansol searched for new means of provocation, which inevitably had to be different. The fact that she is a woman translator and refers to this sexist vocabulary might be considered an essential part of her provocation. I can imagine that her aim is to call attention to the sexist double standards of language, without perpetuating them—that is, to dwell on how curses and swear words are judged differently according to the gender of the person speaking and are often, falsely, attributed to male speech (research has shown that women do not swear less than men).[28]

---

26 Benjamin writes: "Das Motiv der Androgyne, der Lesbischen, der unfruchtbaren Frau ist im Zusammenhang mit der destruktiven Gewalt der allegorischen Intention zu behandeln" ("The motif of androgynous, lesbian, infertile woman has to be regarded in connection to the destructive violence of allegorical intention"; *Baudelaire* 157). Baudelaire notes: "La femme ne sait pas séparer l'âme du corps. Elle est simpliste, comme les animaux." ("The woman does not know how to separate the soul from the body. She is simplistic, just like the animals"; "Journaux intimes" 694). See also the critical research on this subject, such as Chatterjee.

27 My translation: "What is art? Prostitution."

28 I have found many studies that dwell on the gendered perception and use of vulgar language (see, for instance, Gauthier and Guille). The present study alludes to the common perception that men use more curse words. However, different linguistic inquiries have shown that at least in very specific linguistic contexts the use of curse words for men and women is not so different.

Llansol repeatedly speaks of "puta" ("whore") and does not shy away from inserting more sexist language on other occasions.[29] Again, this is a pattern, and not an isolated occasion of integrating vulgar vocabulary into her own poetic, Portuguese Baudelairean universe. Llansol, for instance, also vulgarly translates the admiration of Death in "Danse macabre" into "A morte gosta do cu que ofereces" ("XCVII Danse macabre / XCVII Dança macabra" 227), which means quite literally "Death is pleased by the asshole you offer." In other poems, one could argue that Llansol reinforces misogynistic description, for instance in "CVI Le Vin de l'assassin / CVI O vinho do assassino," where a "still pretty / Albeit very tired" woman ("encore jolie, / Quoique bien fatigue") turns into "a pretty women, albeit already very used" ("uma mulher bonita, apesar de já muito usada") and a simple woman ("femme") turns into the pejorative word for woman, "gaja" (247, 245).

Intersexuality and Ambiguity

A famous instance—perhaps the most famous one—of literary resistance to Portuguese dictatorship was the feminist collective oeuvre *Novas cartas portuguesas*, in which the three Marias, as they are called, opposed the dictatorship through their rewriting of the seventeenth-century classic *Lettres portugaises*. Following the tradition of the three Marias—Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta, and Maria Velho da Costa—, Llansol continues to provoke in her translation. This provocation takes place through vulgarity, pornography, and a refusal of hermeneutics. In a culture shaped by centuries of heteronormativity and anti-feminism, gender ambivalence is a provocative element and today obviously still shakes people's personal beliefs about themselves and their sense of identity (not just in Portugal, of course).

29 For instance, she describes "La Muse vénale" as "A musa venal [uma puta de musa]" ("VIII La Muse vénale / VIII A musa venal [uma puta de musa]" 47) and refers to "putas finas" ("fine whores"; "XCI Les Petites vieilles / XCI As velhotas" 209). Llansol inserts more references to prostitution—and makes the connection to this shadowy part of Paris's economy more visible—in poems such as "CVI Le Vin de l'assassin / CVI O vinho do assassino" (247); see also "XLV Confession / XLV Confissão" (111). It is important to note that Baudelaire himself also mixed linguistic registers in his poetry (on this aspect, see Westerwelle 27; Coelho "Baudelaire" 78). See, for instance, the poem "Au Lecteur" (5–6), where Baudelaire uses colloquial terms such as "catin" (vv. 18), another pejorative and abusive term for a sex worker.

Llansol inserts a reference to "Hermafrodita," the mythical figure of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As Benjamin stated (*Baudelaire* 89), the antiquity encountered in *Les Fleurs du mal* is Roman and not Greek. Ovid was an important subject for Baudelaire, who referred to several myths in his poems, such as Proserpine in "Sed non satiata" ("But Not Satisfied"), and openly reflected in "LXXXIX Le Cygne": "Vers le ciel quelquefois, comme l'homme d'Ovide" ("Towards heaven, sometimes, just like mankind in Ovid"; vv. 25, 86). The swan in this poem looks up to heaven, exactly in the way humankind does in Ovid. Inserting Ovid does not move Llansol further from Baudelaire, but once again closer.[30] It shows Llansol's attentive reading of Baudelaire and confirms that she was well aware of how predominant intertextuality was in his work. In this context it is also worth mentioning that there is another recurrent pattern in Llansol's translations. She repeatedly inserts Latin phrases into poems, where Baudelaire, by no means a foreigner to the *sermo patrius*, does not insert them. For instance, she alludes to "[t]urris ebernuea" and "mater" ("ivory tower," "mother"; "XXXVI Le Balcon / XXXVI A veranda" 91, 93), and adds the noun "*quidditas*" ("XLII / XLII" 103) in order to question the "essence."

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hermaphroditus is a young boy who rejects a nymph. He is one of the few masculine figures in this collection of myths who suffers a sexual assault by the nymph Salmacis. Due to his resistance, Salmacis prays for their unification, and in consequence both are transformed into one being, into a lake which feminizes men. It is only after his metamorphosis that Ovid mentions the name of the figure, Hermaphroditus. In referencing "Hermaphrodita" as a female adjective, Llansol is alluding to a historical term used to describe intersexuality. In her study on intersexuality, Anne E. Linton evokes carefully and only in quotation marks the concept "hermaphrodism," which is a term rooted in the context of nineteenth-century Europe.[31] By using this term, Llansol is citing a very specific historical setting and the fascination for intersexuality in nineteenth-century France. Linton has given a portrait of this fascination, for which no other figure is as important as Herculine Barbin, who lived around the same time as Baudelaire and died one year after the poet. Barbin was the first known person to write an autobiographical account of their experience as an intersexual person, and, as is often observed, Michel

30 Again, this is another element that can be observed in different instances; see, for example, the poem "XLIII Le Flambeau vivant / XLIII A chama viva," where Llansol adds a reference to Orpheus (105).

31 See her comments on both terms in Linton (3–5).

Foucault ("Le vrai sexe") took a great interest in them (Linton 122). Honoré de Balzac, Théophile Gautier, Gustave Flaubert, Emile Zola—the list of those who have portrayed intersexual figures is extensive (Linton 22, 124, 127). Baudelaire himself alluded to "hermaphrodism" in his short story "La Fanfarlo," where one of the characters reflects: "Les anges sont hermaphrodites et stériles" (577; Marder 8; Linton 6).[32]

As stated before, Baudelaire's poetic universe is profoundly ambiguous and ambivalent (Westerwelle 28). In his analysis, Friedrich has underlined the importance of "Dissonanzen" ("dissonances") as an aesthetic device (45). In his own theoretical work, Baudelaire constantly repeated this ambiguous and torn characteristic of beauty, for instance in the already mentioned essay "De l'essence du rire," or in "Le Peintre de la vie moderne" ("The Painter of the Modern Life"): "Le beau est fait d'un élément éternel, invariable, dont la quantité est excessivement difficile à déterminer, et d'un élément relatif, circonstanciel, qui sera, si l'on veut, tour à tour ou tout ensemble, l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion" (685).[33] He gives this definition greater precision:

> C'est ici une belle occasion, en vérité, pour établir une théorie rationnelle et historique du beau, en opposition avec la théorie du beau unique et absolu; pour montrer que le beau est toujours, inévitablement, d'une composition double, bien que l'impression soit une […]. Le beau est fait d'un élément éternel, […] et d'un élément relatif […]. La dualité de l'art est une conséquence fatale de la dualité de l'homme. (685–86)[34]

In this sense, the gender ambivalence of beauty ("Hermafrodita," "pénis-clítoris") that Llansol uses reflects the hybrid character of beauty itself and gives

32 My translation: "The angels are hermaphrodites and sterile."

33 On the morally ambiguous character of beauty, see Hyslop (206, 209). See also Baudelaire, "Journaux intimes" (657–58). My translation: "The beautiful is composed of one eternal, invariable element, whose quantity is excessively difficult to determine, and of a relative element, circumstantial, which will be, if you wish, alternately or altogether, the era, the fashion, the morale, the passion."

34 My translation: "This is truly a wonderful occasion to establish a rational and historical theory of the beautiful, in opposition to the theory of the unique and absolute beauty, in order to show that the beautiful always possesses, inevitably, a double composition, even if it gives the impression of unity […] The beautiful is made by one eternal element […] and by one relative element […]. The duality of art is a fatal consequence of man's duality."

it a modern incorporation. In her translation of the poem "La Beauté" Llansol expressively exclaims: "Híbrida sou" ("Hybrid I am"), which serves as a very free translation of the verses "Je trône dans l'azur comme un sphinx incompris; / J'unis un cœur de neige à la blancheur des cygnes[.]"[35] It is worth mentioning that the ambivalence of gender is also used by Llansol as an aesthetic device in other poems, such as "Sed non satiata," where a "Bizarre déité" ("strange goddess") becomes "Uma *deus morena*" ("XXVI Sed non satiata / XXVI Sed non satiata*" 74–75). The sole application of italics to highlight those words gives them special emphasis and calls attention to the bad sound and deliberate grammatical mistake of applying the feminine uncertain pronoun "uma" to the masculine substantive for god, "deus," which is then paired with the feminine adjective "morena" (in the sense of dark-haired). The same gender ambivalence is also expressed linguistically in the present translation of "Hagiográfica beleza," when beauty, a feminine substantive in Portuguese, is paired with a male adjective: "És belo ó beleza." The odd sound cannot be perpetuated in English, where the grammatical discordance between the male adjective ("belo") and the feminine substantive ("Beleza") results in the simple statement "You are beautiful oh beauty." In my own translation of this poem, I would try to express the uncomfortable sound by inserting another linguistic mistake: "You are beautifully oh beauty." The lyrical voice in Llansol's poem does not follow the gender of Baudelaire's universe: Beauty, which is clearly feminine in both of Baudelaire's poems, cannot be assigned to binary gender codes.

Against Fado, Fátima, Futebol

Baudelaire is considered to be one of the discursive founders of modernity. Research has repeatedly observed that his poetry used ancient and traditional poetic forms in order to express modernity. His already quoted essay "Le Peintre de la vie modern," on Constantin Guys, defined modernity with the following words: "La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable" (695).[36] Thus, referring to Llansol's own time and contemporariness would be another impor-

35 My translation of Baudelaire: "I am enthroned in the *azur* like a miscomprehended sphinx; / I unite a heart of snow with the whiteness of swans."

36 My translation: "Modernity consists of the transitive, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art; its other half is eternal and immutable."

tant element in bringing Baudelaire consistently into European realities of the twenty-first century. This contemporary character is achieved by Llansol's references to her own time in "Hagiográphica beleza," such as "lixeira cósmica" ("cosmic waste disposal") or "democrática" ("democratic").[37] The political context is important for Baudelaire, who lived through the end of the Second Republic and the regime of Napoleon II. He famously portrayed the changes of Paris in "LXXXIX Le Cygne" (Westerwelle 226–27), which also give testimony to Napoleon's imperialistic fantasies and the changes of Paris brought about by the architectural reconstructions of the prefect Baron Haussmann, which had a political dimension.

Employing a reference to democracy is a clear allusion to the Portuguese dictatorial past. In contrast to poets such as Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (1919–2004), who stayed in Portugal, Llansol never seems to have received much attention for her own—subtle—resistance to the Estado Novo, and she never aimed for it either.[38] Her poetic resistance was more discreet, but it was nevertheless palpable, and it is therefore no surprise that her historical experience should also shape her work as translator.

Following this line of thought, I read Llansol's resistance to Christological images as a way to oppose the dictatorship and its afterlife: In her translation, what Baudelaire calls an angel is repeatedly redescribed as a "*m*ensageiro" or "mensageiro," which means a simple "messenger" ("XLIII Le Flambeau vivant / XLIII A chama viva" 105; "XLIV Réversibilité / XLIV Reversibilidade" 107). Angels are reduced to their mere function and are separated from every religious and mythological implication.[39] This is another recurring pattern. In other poems, one can observe how the angels are simply omitted: "Je suis l'Ange gardien, la

37 Another striking example of this tendency is the translation of "salpêtre" ("saltpeter") as "bombas molotov" ("Molotov bombs") ("CXX Les Litanies de Satan / CXX Prece a Satã" 279). In her essay "Les Fleurs du mal 'traduites' par Maria Gabriela Llansol," Coelho also alludes to another example of contemporary vocabulary in "Au lecteur / Ao leitor," where Llansol refers to "sem abrigos" ("homeless") instead of using the more obvious "mendigos" ("beggars").

38 On the political dimension of the poetry of Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, see Ascenso, and on the influence of the Portuguese dictatorship on other works by Llansol, see Moser.

39 However, there are examples of poems where Llansol maintains the reference to angels in Portuguese ("XXIX Une charogne / XXIX Corpo que apodrece" 81). In her discussion of Llansol's translations of Baudelaire, Coelho describes a process of secularization in "Les Fleurs du mal 'traduites' par Maria Gabriela Llansol": "Nous remarquons, tout comme nous l'avons fait à propos du premier poème analysé, la croissante matériali-

Muse et la Madone" is translated into "de que sou Musa e Senhora" ("XLII / XLII" 105; "XLV Confession / XLV Confissão" 111).[40] The Christian concept of "soul" used by Baudelaire is transformed into the Greek concept "daimon" ("CIV L'Âme du vin / CIV O daimon do vinho" 241). And in "CIX La Destruction / CIX A destruição," the word "Dieu" is replaced by the concept of "*aesteticum convivium*" (251).

As in the case of Andresen, the reference to Greek antiquity serves as an opposition to the dictatorial use of *Fado*, *Fátima*, *Futebol*—the state ideology that expresses the importance of Catholic values, family, and national folklore as well as *panem et circenses*.[41] Critical engagement with antiquity can be seen in poems such as "Catarina Eufémia," where Andresen evokes the fate of an agricultural worker in the rural and impoverished region of Alentejo who in 1954 was murdered through police violence. In this poem, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen might indirectly refer to Maria through the evocation of themes such as motherhood (the alleged pregnancy of the victim), innocence, and purity. But she expressively rejects a reference to Maria and instead draws attention to Antigone:[42] "Antígona poisou a sua mão sobre o teu ombro no instante em que morreste" (Andresen 164).[43] In "Hagiográphica beleza," Llansol deliberately omits "ciel" ("heaven") and "enfer" ("hell") as well as "Satan" ("Satan") and "Dieu" ("God"). The historical context also becomes a playground for experimenting in translation and inserting a political dimension into a work that is often read purely in its aesthetic and poetic dimension, despite the political references and depictions of poverty and misery. When the allegory of beauty confuses "ricos e mendigos" ("rich and poor people") instead of "le bienfait et le crime" ("righteousness and crime"), Llansol is engaging with the realities of her own

---

sation de certains concepts, ici on pourrait même parler de laïcisation, de mise à l'écart du spirituel."

40 My translation of Baudelaire's verse: "I am the Guardian Angel, the Muse, and the Madonna." Translating Llansol's translation: "of which I am Muse and Senhora."

41 See the different close readings of the re-writing of Deus, Pátria, Família within Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen's poetry in Ascenso (19–90), especially the chapter on Greek antiquity (110–36).

42 For a close reading of this poem, see Ascenso (82–90). In her reading, Ascenso does not contrast Maria with Antigone, as I do in my interpretation. Despite my reading of Llansol, it is important to note that Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen also relies on mythological Christian figures in order to resist the dictatorship in her poetical world (Ascenso 137–47).

43 My translation: "Antigone put her hand on your shoulder in the moment you died."

time, writing in a country shaped by decades of a dictatorship that kept its population in poverty and misery.

Llansol does not end her translation with a question, as Baudelaire did. Instead, she chooses to add another sentence that clearly expresses the subordination of the poetical voice to beauty: "A teus pés me lanço," which means "To your feet I throw myself." It seems that Maria Gabriela Llansol's commitment to beauty and aesthetics needed a stronger emphasis. It is worth remembering the gender and power dynamics at play: A formerly exiled Portuguese woman writer translates the condemned misogynistic poet Baudelaire and appropriates his poetry into her own universe. In theoretical reflection on experimental translation, there is a constant and latent presence of power. When describing a translation as bold ("ousada") or provocative —power is at play. It is only when one is in the position of the underdog defeating a greater power that one can be bold. In German, the adjective "frech," which I often heard as a descriptive adjective when presenting experimental translations, is most often applied to children who transgress moral and normative behavior roles. While the idea that translation is connected to power and violence is not a new one (Samoyault), it lies, as is also shown by Llansol, at the heart of experimental translation (see also Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 216). The translator usurps the position of the author and, seemingly, leaves behind the position of the unseen—but only seemingly, because, as in every translation, relationality and intense intertextuality (Luhn, "Dieses Spiel") are still at play. Translation and source text are intrinsically linked, in the sense that there might be a "beyond the original" in experimental translations, but certainly never a beyond the source-text. The experimental translations of Baudelaire re-enact *The Flowers of Evil* in the context of the Portuguese realities of the early 2000s. They offer visibility not only to "language difference" (Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 20), but also, and especially, to a difference in historical time and place. Llansol translated boldly, without respect, and transgressively, and hence, ironically, exactly in the way Baudelaire might have wished.

Works Cited

Andresen, Sophia de Mello Breyner. "Catarina Eufémia." *Obra Poética*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., Caminho, 1996, p. 164.

Ascenso, Diana Gomes. *Poetischer Widerstand im Estado Novo: Die Dichtung von Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen*. De Gruyter, 2017.

Barreno, Maria Isabel, Maria Teresa Horta, and Maria Velho da Costa. *Novas cartas portuguesas*. Todavia, 2024.

Baudelaire, Charles. "Au lecteur." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 5–6.

———. "De l'essence du rire: et généralement du comique dans les arts plastiques." *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 2, pp. 525–43.

———. "LXXXIX Le Cygne." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 85–87.

———. "LXXXVII À une mendiante rousse." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 83–85.

———. "La Fanfarlo." *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 553–80.

———. *Les Fleurs du mal*. 1861. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196.

———. "Journaux intimes." *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 647–708.

———. *Œuvres complètes*. Edited by Claude Pichois, vol. 1, Gallimard, 1975.

———. *Œuvres complètes*. Edited by Claude Pichois, vol. 2, Gallimard, 1976.

———. "CXVIII Le Reniément de Saint Pierre." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, p. 121–22.

———. "Le Peintre de la vie moderne." *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 2, pp. 683–724.

———. "[Projets de préfaces]: [I] Préface des *Fleurs du mal*." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 181–82.

———. "XVII La Beauté." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, p. 21.

———. "LXXVI Spleen." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, p. 73.

———. "II L'Albatros." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 9–10.

———. "II Lesbos." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 150–52.

———. "XXI Hymne à la beauté." *Les Fleurs du mal*. *Œuvres complètes*, edited by Pichois, vol. 1, pp. 1–196, pp. 24–25.

Baudelaire, Charles, and Maria Gabriela Llansol. "Au lecteur / Ao leitor." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 26–29.

———. "VIII La Muse vénale / VIII A musa venal [uma puta de musa]." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 46–49.

———. "LXXXIX Le Cygne / LXXXIX O cisne." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 194–99.
———. "LV Causerie / LV Diálogo." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 132–33.
———. "LIX Sisina / LIX Sisina." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 140–43.
———. *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol: Posfácio de Paul Valéry*. Relógio D'Água, 2003.
———. "XLV Confession / XLV Confissão." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 108–11.
———. "XLIV Réversibilité / XLIV Reversibilidade." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 106–09.
———. "XLIII Le Flambeau vivant / XLIII A chama viva." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 104–05.
———. "XLII / XLII." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 102–05.
———. "IV Correspondances / IV Correspondências." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 38–39.
———. "XCIV Le Squelette laboureur / O esqueleto jornaleiro." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 216–19.
———. "XCI Les Petites vieilles / XCI As velhotas." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 204–11.
———. "XCVII Danse Macabre / XCVII Dança macabra." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 222–27.
———. "XCIII À une passante / XCIII A uma transeunte." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 212–15.
———. "I Bénédiction / I Benção." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 30–35.
———. "CIV L'Âme du vin / CIV O daimon do vinho." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 240–41.
———. "CIX La Destruction / CIX A destruição." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol*, by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 250–51.
———. "CVI Le Vin de l'assassin / CVI O vinho do assassino." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 244–47.
———. "CXX Les Litanies de Satan / CXX Prece a Satã." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 272–81.
———. "VI Les Phares / VI Os luminares." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 42–47.

———. "XVII La Beauté / XVII A beleza." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 58–61.

———. "XXIX Une charogne / XXIX Corpo que apodrece." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 78–83.

———. "XXXVII Le Possédé / XXXVII O possesso." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 92–93.

———. "XXXVI Le Balcon / XXXVI A veranda." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 90–93.

———. "XXI Hymne à la beauté / XXI Hagiográfia beleza." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 66–67.

———. "XXVI Sed non satiata / XXVI Sed non satiata*." *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol,* by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 74–75.

Baudelaire, Charles, and Juremir Machado da Silva. *Flores do mal: O amor segundo Charles Baudelaire*. Translated by Juremir Machado da Silva, 4 th ed., Editora Sulina, 2003.

Baudelaire, Charles, and Simon Werle. "LXXXVII À une mendiante rousse / LXXXVIII An eine rothaarige Bettlerin." *Les Fleurs du mal. Die Blumen des Bösen: Gedichte neu übersetzt von Simon Werle*, Rowohlt, 2017, pp. 238–43.

Benjamin, Walter. "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers." *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1, edited by Tillman Rexroth, Suhrkamp, 1981, pp. 9–21.

———. *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann, 10th ed., Suhrkamp, 2013.

Bense, Max. "Über den Essay und seine Prosa." *Plakatwelt*, by Bense, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, pp. 23–37.

Berg, Gunhild. "Experimentieren." *Über die Praxis des kulturwissenschaftlichen Arbeitens: ein Handwörterbuch,* edited by Ute Frietsch and Jörg Rogge, transcript, 2013, pp. 140–44.

Candido, Antonio. "Os primeiros baudelairianos do Brasil." *A educação pela noite e outros ensaios*, by Candido, Ática, 1987, pp. 23–38.

Chamberlain, Lori. "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation." *Signs,* vol. 13, no. 3, 1988, pp. 454–72.

Chatterjee, Ronjaunee. "Baudelaire and Feminine Singularity." *French Studies,* vol. 70, no. 1, 2015, pp. 17–32.

Coelho, Paula Mendes. "Baudelaire, Pierre Louÿs e Mallarmé: a 'fabulosa montagem' de Maria Gabriela Llansol pelo desejo de traduzir animada." *Transdizer: Llansol tradutora, traduzida, trans-criada,* edited by João Barrento and Maria Etelvina Santos, Mariposa Azual, 2014, pp. 71–87.

———. "Les Fleurs du mal 'traduites' par Maria Gabriela Llansol ou l'hospitalité d'une 'mère porteuse.'" *Traduction et lusophonie: Trans-actions? Trans-missions? Trans-positions?*, edited by Marie-Noëlle Ciccia, Ludovic Heyraud, and Claude Maffre, Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2015, pp. 379–96. *Open Edition Books*, https://books.openedition.org/pulm/971.

Faleiros, Álvaro. "Maria Gabriela Llansol retradutora de Charles Baudelaire." *Cadernos de tradução*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2010, pp. 113–26.

———. "Tradução poética e xamanismo transversal: correspondências entre Llansol e Baudelaire." *Revista brasileira de literatura comparada*, vol. 16, 2014, pp. 16–32.

———. "Retraduções de *As flores do mal* uma viagem entre Brasil e Portugal." *Cadernos de tradução*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2018, pp. 26–53.

Foucault, Michel. "Préface à la transgression." *Dits et écrits: 1954–1988. Vol. 1: 1954–1969*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, Gallimard, 1994, pp. 233–50.

———. "Le Vrai sexe." *Dits et écrits: 1954–1988. Vol. 4: 1980–1988*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, Gallimard, 1994, pp. 115–23.

Friedrich, Hugo. *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik: von der Mitte des neunzehnten bis zur Mitte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts.* 22nd ed., Rowohlt, 1996.

Gauthier, Michael, and Adrien Guille. "Gender and Age Differences in Swearing: A Corpus Study of Twitter." *Advances in Swearing Research: New Languages and New Contexts*, edited by Kristy Beers Fägersten and Karyn Stapleton, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2017, pp. 139–58.

Jamison, Anne. "Any Where Out of This Verse: Baudelaire's Prose Poetics and the Aesthetics of Transgression." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 29, 2001, 256–86.

Jöhnk, Marília. *Poetik des Kolibris: Lateinamerikanische Reiseprosa bei Gabriela Mistral, Mário de Andrade und Henri Michaux*. transcript, 2021.

Linton, Anne E. *Unmaking Sex: The Gender Outlaws of Nineteenth-Century France*. Cambridge UP, 2022.

Llansol, Maria Gabriela. *Ein Falke in der Faust: Tagebuch*. Translated by Ilse Pollack and Markus Sahr, Leipziger Literaturverlag, 2021.

———. *Lissabonleipzig: Ein Projekt.* Translated by Markus Sahr, 2nd ed., Leipziger Literaturverlag, 2021.

Hyslop, Lois Boe. "Baudelaire's 'Hymne à la beauté.'" *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 7, nos. 3–4, 1979, pp. 202–12.

Luhn, Anna. "'Dieses Spiel ist keine Spielerei': Experimentelle Übersetzung, Übersetzung als Experiment." *Babelwerk*, June 2023, https://www.babelwe

rk.de/essay/dieses-spiel-ist-keine-spielerei-experimentelles-uebersetzen-uebersetzung-als-experiment/.

———. *Spiel mit Einsatz: Experimentelle Übersetzung als Praxis der Kritik*. Turia+Kant, 2022.

Marder, Elissa. "Inhuman Beauty: Baudelaire's Bad Sex." *differences*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–24.

Moser, Benjamin. "Llansol, Poet of the Posthumous." *The New York Review*, 28 Oct. 2018, www.nybooks.com/online/2018/10/28/llansol-poet-of-the-posthumous/.

Ovid. "Liber IV/Buch 4, vv. 288–388." *Metamorphosen: Lateinisch-deutsch*, edited and translated by Niklas Holzberg, De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 208–15.

Pfeiffer, Ingrid. "Esprit Montmartre: Die Bohème und der Blick auf ein wenig vertrautes Paris." *Esprit Montmartre: Die Bohème in Paris um 1900*, edited by Ingrid Pfeiffer and Max Hollein, Schirn Kunsthalle, 2014, pp. 25–37.

Relógio D'Água. "Catálogo 2021," relogiodagua.pt/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Cat%C3%A1logo-2021-1.pdf. Accessed 12 Dec. 2024.

———. "Perguntas fequentes: história da editora," www.relogiodagua.pt/perguntas-frequentes/. Accessed 12 Dec. 2024.

Ribeiro, Raquel. "Maria Gabriela Llansol." Centre for the Study of Contemporary Women's Writing, ilcs.sas.ac.uk/research-centres/centre-study-contemporary-womens-writing-ccww/ccww-author-pages/portuguese/maria-0. Accessed 16 Dec. 2024.

Robert-Foley, Lily. *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production*. Goldsmiths Press, 2024.

———. "The Politics of Experimental Translation: Potentialities and Preoccupations." *English: Journal of the English Association*, vol. 69, no. 267, 2021, pp. 401–19.

Samoyault, Tiphaine. *Traduction et violence*. Seuil, 2020.

Sappho and Anne Carson. "[1]." *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, by Sappho and Carson, pp. 2–5.

———. *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Translated by Anne Carson, Vintage, 2002.

Sauter, Caroline. *Die virtuelle Interlinearversion: Walter Benjamins Übersetzungstheorie und -praxis*. Winter, 2014.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich Daniel Ernst. "Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzens." *Akademievorträge*, edited by Martin Rößler, De Gruyter, 2002, pp. 65–93.

Schwerte, Hans. "Der Begriff des Experiments in der Dichtung." *Literatur und Geistesgeschichte. Festgabe für Heinz Otto Burger,* edited by Conrad Wiedemann and Reinhold Grimm, ESV, 1968, pp. 387–405.

Silva, Juremir Machado da. "*Reescandalizar* Baudelaire, ou como ser fielmente infiel." *Flores do mal: O amor segundo Charles Baudelaire*, by Baudelaire and Silva, pp. 15–19.

Sontag, Susan. "Against Interpretation." *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*, by Sontag. 2nd ed., Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988, pp. 3–14.

Strässle, Thomas. "Traduktionslabor. Oskar Pastiors oulipotisches Übersetzungsexperiment." *"Es ist ein Laboratorium, ein Laboratorium für Worte." Experiment und Literatur III, 1890–2010*, edited by Michael Bies and Michael Gamper, Wallstein, 2011, pp. 432–45.

Teuber, Bernhard. "Nachahmung des Bösen bei Baudelaire." *Mimesis und Simulation,* edited by Andreas Kablitz and Gerhard Neumann, Rombach, 1998, pp. 603–30.

Valéry, Paul. "Posfácio." Translated by Manuel Alberto. *As flores do mal. Versão de Maria Gabriela Llansol*, by Baudelaire and Llansol, pp. 359–71.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Scandals of Translation: Towards an Ethics of Difference*. Routledge, 1998.

Westerwelle, Karin. *Baudelaire und Paris: Flüchtige Gegenwart und Phantasmagorie*. Brill/Fink, 2020.

Zimmermann, Eléonore M. "'Hymne à la beauté': un art poétique." *Cahiers de l'AIEF,* vol. 41, 1989, pp. 237–50.

Zola, Émile. *Le Roman expérimental*. Edited by Guedj Aimé, Garnier-Flammarion, 1971.

———. *Thérèse Raquin*. Librairie Générale Française, 1997.

"Sublime Mockery"

Carson's Translations of Sophocles's *Antigone*

Judith Kasper

Translation as Experiment

In the narrow sense of the word, an experiment is a scientific attempt to discover, confirm, or show something.[1] In a broader sense, it describes a daring, uncertain undertaking with an exploratory character. Speaking of experimental translation (which is not an established term) in the field of (literary) translation suggests two things: First, that there is such a thing as non-experimental translation (i.e., translation that is not daring, that finds itself on supposedly solid ground, that does not provide any new insights—neither in relation to the translated original nor concerning the activity of translation itself). However, used in this way, it becomes apparent that, second, every translation—at least every literary translation—is per se an experiment: a transversing of manifold difficulties, an adventure that leads to discoveries. Translation means constantly uncovering new insights, namely through the act of conveying a text from one language into another. Thus, if translation is in almost all cases an experiment with epistemic character, then it should also be acknowledged as an independent scholarly and/or artistic activity—which still happens far too seldom.

It is not really possible to gauge how daring, exploratory, and experimental a translation is by comparing it with the original; the best way to make such a determination is by comparing it with other translations of the same work. This kind of question can be asked, and this kind of investigation carried out,

1 This publication was funded through a fellowship at the Käte Hamburger Centre for Cultural Practices of Reparation (CURE) by the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) under funding code 01UK2401. The author is solely responsible for the content of this publication.

where broad corpora of translations of one and the same work already exist. This is primarily the case when it comes to older, canonized texts, which, thanks to their intensive reception, have remained topical: Homer's ancient epics; Sophocles's tragedies; Dante's *Commedia*; Shakespeare's dramas and sonnets. Intensive hermeneutical engagement implies more rigorous translation work and vice versa. My thesis is that the degree of risk involved with the experiment increases when the translation takes leave of the compromises that it is initially bound by and sets its own emphases—for instance, by modernizing a work's vocabulary, by creating archaisms, or by favoring prosodic over semantic aspects. All of this has consequences for how we view a work ethically, politically, and aesthetically.

Anne Carson and Sophocles's *Antigone*

One of the most important contemporary actors in the field of "experimental translation"—though she is still rather less well-known in the German-speaking realm—is Canadian author, classical philologist, and translator Anne Carson. As a classical philologist, Carson is primarily concerned with ancient texts. For example, her translation and edition of the fragments of Sappho (*If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, 2002) did not just paint a completely new picture of Sappho but also launched a new Sappho sound and a new understanding of the history of her transmission as a history of destruction. In addition, under the title *Grief Lessons* (2006), Carson published her translation of four lesser-known tragedies by Euripides, while in *Bakkhai* (2017), she presented a new, unconventional translation of Euripides's mysterious tragedy.

Her experimental efforts should be viewed against the backdrop of the long history of editing and translation practice that she challenges. She adds something to the plurality of existing translations without blending in. Rather, her translations represent an interruption to tradition. This becomes particularly evident in her attempts to translate Sophocles's *Antigone* (2012 and 2015), which are the focus of this chapter.

It is widely known that the status of an "original" ancient Greek text is highly questionable. What has been transmitted to us through a reception history that has lasted thousands of years has been pervaded by gaps, variants, and mistakes, often resulting from manipulation by philologists and editors.

And, in relation to Sophocles's *Antigone*, too, it can be said that "[t]he history of the Ancient Greek and Latin canons is a history of appropriation

and transposition of stories, determined and accidental preservation, distortion, pastiche, parody, and staged intertextuality" (Coles 178). Thus, when it comes to translating ancient texts, we are always "beyond the original." While most translations conceal this aspect, Carson's translations demonstrate the fragility and instability of the source material to a contemporary reading audience and raise their awareness of it. So far, her work, that of a philologist and translator working in the largely male-dominated field of ancient text translation, stands alone.

Carson's work on Sophocles's *Antigone* has manifested in three publications to date. 2012 saw the publication of *Antigonick*: as an artistic comic book (referred to in the following as version A) and as an unillustrated reading text (referred to in the following as version B; accompanied by a preface by the translator that is absent in version A). Three years later, she published another translation, *Antigone* (version C), which she produced at the request of Belgian theater director Ivo van Hove. Version C formed the basis of a successful staging of the play, with Juliette Binoche cast in the main role. Version C is accompanied by a new translator's preface.

With this plurality of *Antigone* versions, Carson has made her mark on a field that has been shaped by an almost overwhelming reception and translation history, above all in Europe. *Antigone* has drawn more philosophical interest than most other literary works in the modern age, from Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger to Žižek, Butler, Irigaray, and Cavarero, to name but a few.

Comparatist George Steiner provided a clear overview and critical commentary on this broad field of reception in his extensive monograph *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought* (1984). He did so in the awareness that all he could provide was a provisional stocktake. The final sentences in his book read: "All I can be certain of is this: what I have tried to say is already in need of addition. New 'Antigones' are being imagined, thought, lived now; and will be tomorrow" (304). A few pages earlier, he even concedes that "[a] comic-strip *Antigone* can exist" (295).

This is where Carson's version A of *Antigonick* seems to pick up. Let us begin by considering some of the paratextual elements of this version—such as the cover design (which was retained in version B).[2] Everything is slightly offset: The title of Sophocles's tragedy—*Antigone*—changed to *Antigonick* (I will ad-

2 For the visualization of the text-image design of version A, see, for example, https://nonsuchbook.typepad.com/nonsuch_book/2012/05/antigonick-by-sophokles-translated-by-anne-carson-illustrated-by-bianca-stone.html (Evangelista).

dress the suffix "nick" in more detail below). The author of the original—Sophocles—can be found lower down in parentheses. In the bottom left-hand corner of the cover, the name of the translator is noted together with that of the illustrator, artist Bianca Stone. It is still somewhat unusual to name the translator on the cover. But here it is about more than a question of institutional politics, for the special arrangement of the names quite fundamentally raises the question of the relationship between the translator and the author. Who is the author here if the author we believe to be the author has been put in parentheses? And what is the relationship of the translation to the original if the translation announces itself with an altered title—which is in principle an untranslatable proper name?

It is not just the drawings by Bianca Stone, but also the text's graphic design that points to the fact that this is a comic book: a hand-printed text in squeaky chalk font resembles chalk handwriting on a blackboard. The font is another comic signal, but also a signal that here (even if it is a print we have before us) something has been written down provisionally, and that we possibly even have to acoustically imagine the writing process as "squeaky."

The text and drawing form palimpsests, before being separated out and set in opposition to each other on the following page. I read this game of overlapping image and text, followed by their separation, as one that reflects on the legibility of the ancient text, which constitutes a kind of palimpsest.[3] However, these illustrations do not illustrate the text (from *illustrare*: enlighten, clarify); rather, they tend to obscure it. If there is any kind of semantic interaction—indeed, translation—between image and text, then it is deeply disturbing and defamiliarizing (one might think here of Brechtian *Verfremdung*). This process defamiliarizes not least the comic genre itself, which is conventionally based on a text-image semantics rooted in mutual reinforcement and equivalence.

3 Steiner on this aspect: "The play is, unavoidably, embedded in the long history of its transmission and reception. Because this history is so extensive, because variants and adaptations have been both so numerous and of significant quality, Sophocles' text runs the danger of receding into context. It can only be by a deliberate and, more or less, fictive exercise of purification, not unlike that of a restorer moving levels of varnish and previous restorations from a canvas, that one can attempt to isolate the Sophoclean play from the interpretations and uses made of it"—Steiner then goes on to immediately interrupt himself: "The analogy with the restorer is, moreover, deceptive. It is quite often possible to bring the original design and coloration back into view. But no *Ur-Antigone* can exist for us" (*Antigones* 296).

Though they have a book in contemporary English before them, the readers of this edition are confronted with a foreign language that they have yet to learn.

The unillustrated reading version, version B, which was published in parallel, makes another suggestion, set in Traditional Arabic Regular Font. The text is exactly the same. However, divested of its striking graphic and typographic elements, it makes a different impact and becomes legible in a different way—indeed, perhaps at all legible in the first place. The translator's preface that has been added to version B can be viewed as reading instructions. Let us start by turning to this preface. It is titled "The Task of the Translator of Antigone," a clear allusion to Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator." But here, the accent is now on the singular act of *this* translation: "of Antigone."

Does "Antigone" refer to the title of Sophocles's tragedy (which was defamiliarized on the cover of *Antigonick*) or the protagonist of the play? Because "Antigone" is not set in italics, as per the convention for naming titles, we cannot exclude that it denotes the name of the protagonist. And, in fact, the preface begins by addressing Antigone directly. The protagonist is thereby called onto the stage, as it were, and the preface itself becomes that stage. Thus, nothing that is said here can be read in a purely propositional sense; it must be read performatively. Even the preface is theater:

> dear Antigone:
> your name in Greek means something like "against birth" or "instead of being born" (B, 3)

The playful address even opens itself up to a philological question: the question of the meaning of the name, that is, of the name that has been changed and defamiliarized on the cover to "Antigonick." Is the translation intended, and is it trying, to change something about the omen of the protagonist? The question of birth inscribed into and laid bare in the name alludes to the curse under which the Labdacides have toiled for generations—with Antigone a member of the final generation. At the same time, further questions are raised. To what extent is the philological search for etymological roots not just a doomed yearning for origins and ultimate truths?

The preface—taking the name at its word, hearing in it a call—turns against the question of birth and thus against the question of origin as well:

> What is there instead of being born?
> It's not that we want to understand everything

Or even to understand anything
We want to understand *something else* (B, 3)

To me, it seems like the "something else" set in italics is to be interpreted not just as another or a new interpretation of the tragedy, but as a fundamentally different approach to the text, an approach that understands it differently. This would imply that the text must also be translated differently. Where are the starting points for this kind of endeavor? In the preface, the translator makes reference above all to Brecht:

I keep returning to Brecht
Who made you do the whole play with a door strapped to your back (B, 3)

Here she alludes to Bertolt Brecht's 1948 production of *Antigone*. Returning from American exile to Switzerland, this was one of his first theater productions after World War II. Brecht's staging was based on Hölderlin's translation; the protagonist is equipped with a supplement, a door strapped to her back. Carson writes:

A door can have diverse meanings
I stand outside your door
the odd thing is, you stand outside your door too (B, 3)

In Brecht, the door, weighing heavily on the protagonist's back, points to what is unattainable. And if we apply the measure of etymology here, we go from "door" to *dhwer*, and from there to the meanings *foreclose*, *foreign*, *forensic*.[4]

that door has no inside
or if it has an inside, you are the one person who cannot enter it
for the family who lives there, things have gone irretrievably wrong
to have a father who is also your brother
means having a mother who is your grandmother

a sister who is both your niece and your aunt
and another brother you love so much you want to lie down with him
"thigh to thigh in the grave" (B, 3)

4 See: https://www.etymonline.com/word/*dhwer-. Accessed 22 Nov. 2024.

In just a few lines, the conflict at the center of the tragedy is brought into focus: the incestuous backstory, the unburied brother, Antigone's insistence on a burial, exhibited here as the continuation of incestuous desire, Antigone's ostracization from the community of the *polis*.

With Hegel, Carson addresses Antigone as the "eternal irony of the community"—even this she does ironically. Just as ironically, she cites further attributions and allegorizations that have been made by Butler, Lacan, George Eliot, and Anouilh, concluding with an imagined "eye roll" from Antigone:

> I don't know what color your eyes were
> but I can imagine you rolling them now (B, 4)

With womanly solidarity and shared irony, Carson, over the course of just one page, sets the protagonist apart from the most important moments in her reception, adaptation, and appropriation since Hegel. Carson's Antigone is someone who is aware of this history of appropriation and will always reflect it. The opening dialogue between the two sisters begins accordingly:

> [enter Antigone and Ismene]
> Antigone: we begin in the dark
> And birth is the death of us
> Ismene: who said that
> Antigone: Hegel
> Ismene: sounds more like Beckett
> Antigone: he was paraphrasing Hegel (B, 9)

Antigone's discursive appropriation, which achieved "a rarely equalled force" in Hegel and has had an enduring impact on our understanding of tragedy (Steiner, *Antigones* 28), is thus immediately enfolded into and exhibited within the play itself—and therefore both integrated and isolated, called up and suspended. In contrast to allegorical interpretation, Carson's translation is clearly about what seems to be a more simple, namely translational problem:

> to get you and your problem
> across into English from ancient Greek (B, 4)

She derives her method from Beckett and John Cage. For Carson, drawing on the former, it is about penetrating deep into language in order to lay bare an

"other organization […] that lies just beneath what we see or what we say" (B, 5). Translation can accordingly be understood as an act of peeling away layers of meaning.

> what happens
> when everything normal/musical/careful/conventional or pious is taken away. (B, 6)

Some dominant attitudes to translation and the interpretations they imply can be identified in this series of attributes. In Antigone's autonomy, Carson discovers not "freedom" but a radical grief that, according to her, ultimately goes unarticulated. This state of grief is made up of many "pieces of silence," she writes, thereby taking up a concept from John Cage. Applied to translation, making silence audible means precisely not translating "artistically," but making fragments, voids, ruptures legible. For Carson, "pieces of silence" also refers to what cannot be translated, what remains untranslated, which she explains in her essay "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent," specifically by looking at the example of Hölderlin's *Antigone* (20–24). For Carson, subjecting translation to its impossibility means allowing something else to be heard—making "silence" audible. When the preface ends with a summary of the task of the translator as the "task to forbid that you should ever lose your screams" (B, 6), it means that screams and silence must be thought of together. They are only ostensible opposites: the two meet where they point to what is unarticulated and what cannot be articulated, which persists just as silently as it does loudly in language, in words, and between the lines, perhaps between languages too—and forces any conclusive political, ethical, or aesthetic judgments rendered on the protagonist of the play to burst open again.

Carson is therefore concerned with stripping back the layers of interpretative glue that have become stuck to the play in the act of translation and opening the character back up to her unarticulated core. This core is touched upon in Sophocles's tragedy itself when the chorus makes the following comment after Eurydices's desperate lament, shortly before her suicide:

> Chorus:
> οὐκ οἶδ'· ἐμοὶ δ' οὖν ἥ τ' ἄγαν σιγὴ βαρὺ
> δοκεῖ προσεῖναι χὴ μάτην πολλὴ βοή. (1251–52)

> I do not know; but to me both excessive silence and loud crying to no end seem grievous. (trans. Lloyd-Jones)

In Carson, the chorus itself exhibits a tendency for silence when it says:

> too big a silence (B, 41)

This translational reduction plainly shows that Carson is less interested in striking a semantic balance in the linguistic or symbolic field than she is in exploring the transition to what is no longer language: silence and scream. The translation therefore explicitly throws itself off balance: it exposes itself to the extreme ends of language. Here, the fundamental problem of understanding and translating Ancient Greek texts, especially those as dense as Sophocles's *Antigone*—the problem Steiner is referring to when he writes that "to 'understand' […] is to oscillate between poles of immediacy and of inaccessibility" (*Antigones* 201)—becomes the actual engine, the method of translation.[5]

So, when Carson addresses Antigone seemingly directly—"dear Antigone"—she is always addressing a mask over which other masks have already been laid. The effect is that her Antigone gives voice to these masks. Even if Carson removes some layers, there is no "right" Antigone in the "wrong one." This is the grief that is expressed in Carson's "sublime mockery." With "sublime mockery," I am adopting one of the paradox formulations that Hölderlin used to characterize Antigone's attitude.[6] To me, it seems that—even in its reversal, the ridiculing of the tragi-sublime—this can be applied to describe Carson's translational gesture and her ethical and political impulse.

---

5 Carson thereby openly embraces *Antigone's* untranslatability, which is also the starting point for Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's deliberations on Hölderlin's translation, which he categorizes as a deconstruction of tragedy. "*Antigone* incarne l'essence même de la tragédie, s'il est vrai que la tragédie est à tout jamais un genre spécifiquement grec et, à ce titre, 'irreconstituable,' sinon tout à fait intransposable. […] c'est aussi pourquoi […] la traduction doit être d'autant plus violente et transformatrice qu'elle concerne un texte plus proprement grec" (Lacoue-Labarthe 52).

6 In German, "erhabener Spott" (Hölderlin, "Anmerkungen zur Antigonä" 414).

Carson's Translational Subterfuges

German classical philologist and translator Wolfgang Schadewaldt writes that there have been four main types of Sophocles translation since the beginning of the nineteenth century: the balanced, classicist translation (with its tendency to beautify the seriousness of the tragedy); the didactic, conscientious translation (which all too often comes off as excessively bourgeois and old-fashioned); the eloquent, nuanced translation (which runs the risk of sounding pretentious); and the "fresh," updated translation (which can tip over into the mundane) (316). Hölderlin occupies a special place for Schadewaldt: "far removed from the pathos of lofty words and contrived or inflated ideas," Hölderlin prefers "the simple word, from which he nevertheless […] draws the full force of expression" ("fern vom Pathos hoher Worte und geschraubter oder geschwollener Vorstellungen"; "das einfache Wort, dem er indessen […] die volle Kraft des Sagens abgewinnt"; 322).[7] Hölderlin commented on his extremely literal, and therefore frequently distorting translation in his notes. He talked about how the Greek world can only be understood from a "clumsy perspective" (Hölderlin writes: "nur vom linkischen Gesichtspunct kann gefaßt werden"; "Anmerkungen" 421)—that is, one that is necessarily awkward and bumbling, but also sinister: dark and foreboding.

There is no way that Carson's translation can be described as balanced or equivalent, which have long been the translation studies ideal. However, her insistence that it is a translation, not a postmodern adaptation or rewriting must be noted.[8] It seems to me that she continues Hölderlin's gesture of translation, pursuing it under twenty-first-century conditions of reception. In the following, I would like to take a closer look at how she does this.

Citation and Meta-Reflection

The opening verses of *Antigonick* that I have already quoted and commented on make a strong impression. The characters that appear in Carson reflect on their reception by ironically citing moments from it and weaving them into their speech. They thereby illustrate, as Butler writes, "that our only access to this

7 Unless noted otherwise, translations into English are made by the author.

8 Zawacki, on the other hand, steps away from considering it an act of translation in the course of his reading and describes the work bluntly as a "postmodern adaptation" (160).

play is through this present time," while "showing that this time is still bound to that classical one." The meta-reflexive citations indirectly question the authority through which interpretations are brought forth, repeated, and stabilized. Who, we might ask, is the "Kreon" of philology, theory, and philosophy? Who says what the correct understanding is? Ismene's question "Who said that?" is a question that resounds throughout the text. As Coles writes, "*Antigonick* presents an Antigone transfigured: not by changing the story, but by importing into its present tense a long and complex history of appropriation" (179). It must be added that the characters, too, resist this history of appropriation, distancing themselves from it in the act of citation. This citational method reveals that reception history consists of layers of interpretation that have been glued over the text. These kinds of meta-critical speech acts inscribe a distancing, even ironic, ridiculing tone into the tragic events, not least by means of their comic, desublimating effect.

Linguistic Hybridization

Carson operates at the extreme margins of the translation tradition by blending archaizing and modernizing gestures of translation. Thus, verses like

> Ismene: Your heart is hot, thou sister
> Antigone: O one and only head of my sister … (B, 11)

stand alongside verses in which the everyday register of contemporary English openly breaks through.[9] For example, when Kreon asks her whether she was the one who buried Polyneikes's body, Antigone simply replies with "Bingo" (B, 18).

Carson—like Hölderlin—illuminates the etymological depths of language, but she also plays with homophonic assonances. For example, from Antigone's name she draws not just the etymon *against birth* but also the key term *to go*. Again and again, puns and wordplay interrupt the allure of accessing a layer of original meaning through roots.

Like Hölderlin, Carson too comes up with neologisms. She deploys these above all in the passage in which the guard reports on Antigone bent over the body of Polyneikes, grieving. This passage has been damaged in the various

9 In Hölderlin, Swabian dialect breaks through in some places. See Steiner, *Antigones* (87).

surviving versions of the Greek text; there are a number of competing interpretations.[10]

In Lloyd-Jones's translation, the verse reads as follows. The contentious word is the final πικρῶς.

> ἡ παῖς ὁρᾶται κἀνακωκύει πικρῶς. (423)

Steiner comments:

> Where Jebb and Mazon read *πικρᾶς* where Bothe and Bruhn emend to *πικρῶς*, Dawe, in his edition and commentary proposes *πικρά*. The distinction is, in fact, far-reaching: in the one case, "bitterness" is a moral-psychological trait […]. Müller's analysis and Dawe's emendation, on the other hand, make of the word an adjective pertaining strictly to the bird-like quality of the cry, to its specific avian shrillness and sharpness. It is this latter reading which would underwrite the recent Bernard Knox-Robert Fagles version: "And she cried out a sharp, piercing cry." (*Antigones* 224–25)

Carson, I would argue, aligns herself with the latter reading and translates the no-longer-human bird's screech into neologisms:

> Childreftgravecry
> Birdgrief the bird (B, 18)

The words here lose the distinctiveness that usually maintains them as separate units of meaning; the signifiers are so compressed that they essentially sound: one long cry.

Parataxis and Reduction

Schadewaldt has pointed out that only paratactic reduction, without any unnecessary filler words, can come anywhere near to the "clear, hard language of Sophocles" (279). Carson's translation style pushes this principle to its limits: "The lines often stand alone, as if broken off from the original text, stricken

10 Steiner discusses these readings explicitly in relation to verses 423–24. He points to the paratactic construction in the Greek and to the onomatopoeia, which allows it to extend far out over its proportional content—into language that is no longer human. See Steiner, *Antigones* (223–24).

monuments. Stanzas comprising twenty or thirty lines in the original are distilled into single words and staccato exclamations" (Butler). At its most extreme, this can be seen in Kreon's first appearance. Kreon re-cites himself, but only in keywords:

> Kreon: Here are Kreon's verbs for today
> Adjudicate
> Legislate
> Scandalize
> Capitalize
> Here are Kreon's nouns
> Men
> Reason
> Treason
> Death
> Ship of State
> Mine (B, 14)

Here, Carson quite consciously shatters every rationale, every antithetical construction, exhibiting the skeleton of Kreon's speech and ideology.

In another passage, she intensifies the reduction to the point of sheer omission. For example, the verbal sparring between Kreon (who reacts with defensive aggression) and Teiresias after his prophecy is presented in such a way that the latter's responses are left as nothing but blank lines:

> Kreon: you fake
> Teiresias:
> Kreon: you profiteer
> Teiresias:
> Kreon: you entrepreneur
> Teiresias:
> Kreon: you are too quiet (B, 35)

This broken dialogue, in turn, can be read, or rather heard, on three levels: substantively as an indirect comment on Kreon's deafness; philologically as an allusion to the corruption of the transmitted text (Steiner, *Antigones* 206–08); and, in terms of translation theory, as a spelling-out of the virtual interlinear translation that Benjamin, in connection with Hölderlin, references at the end of his essay as the unattainable ideal of every translation. Accordingly, in Carson's

politics of translation, it is also another variant of the paradox of screaming silence or the unheard scream.

Carson's Approach to Notorious Translation Problems

Even though Carson, as it seems to me, builds on Hölderlin's translation poetics in order to take it further, it is still striking that she tends to avoid him in the most-widely discussed passages of his translation. Hölderlin extracted his extravagant neologism "Gemeinsamschwesterliches!" (literally: "that which is commonsisterly"; 319) from the very first verse of the drama;[11] Carson, on the other hand, translates the passage simply and almost monosyllabically:

> Antigone: we begin from the dark (B, 9)

The adjective "dark," in turn, can be read on both a diegetic and a metadiegetic, i.e., philological and translational level, as the siblings' dark origin, as the text's dark background, on which we must always reflect.

Hölderlin translated Ismene's question

> τί δ᾽ ἔστι; δηλοῖς γάρ τι καλχαίνουσ᾽ ἔπος. (20)

as

> Was ist's, du scheinst ein rothes Wort zu färben? (Hölderlin's translation 319)
>
> [Literally: "What is it, you seem to dye a word red?"][12]

The etymological literalness he applies here made him an object of much ridicule from his contemporaries.[13] Carson, on the other hand, exits the realm of colorful imagery prompted by καλχαίνειν completely, instead positing

11 David Constantine, who translated Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles's *Antigone* into English, translates Hölderlin's "Gemeinsamschwesterliches! o Ismenes Haupt!" as "O common sisterly Ismene's head" (Hölderlin, "Sophocles' Antigone" 438).

12 Constantine translates this passage as "What is it? You seem to dye your words with red" (Hölderlin, "Sophocles' Antigone" 439).

13 Carson addresses Hölderlin's translation of this passage in detail in her essay "Variations of the Right to Remain Silent"; see also Hamilton.

an acoustic paradox that allows her to tackle the task she set herself in the beginning, namely of making scream and silence audible in this play:

> Ismene: What's the matter
> you have your thunder look (B, 9)[14]

One of the most controversial passages for understanding and translating is verses 331–32, with which the first stasimon begins, where the chorus makes a statement about the essence of humanity:

> πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ κοὐδὲν ἀν-
> θρώπου δεινότερον πέλει (331–32)

The first question concerns the meaning of τὰ δεινὰ. Examining different translations reveals that there is an enormous diversity here. In his discussion of Hölderlin's translation, Koppenfels shows how Hölderlin, at various stages of his translation, tends to shatter the syntactic tension in the Ancient Greek text into parataxis (353).[15]

In order to determine how Carson approaches this passage, it is helpful to look at versions B and C. In B she translates it as:

> many terribly quiet customers exist but none more
> terribly quiet than Man (B, 15)

Here, so it seems to me, she is targeting silence, "Man's" expressionlessness. In version C, which she finished three years later, she nonetheless fans out the semantics of the word, leaves the translation undecided, and thereby allows the untranslatable to reach full volume:

> Chorus: many things strange
> terrible
> clever

14 There is a possibility that Carson is also referring to Murray's English translation of *Antigone* here: "What is it? Some dark cloud is o'er thy thought." However, in Carson, the dark cloud explodes.

15 Hölderlin translates the verse in question as "Ungeheuer ist viel. Doch nichts / Ungeheurer, als der Mensch"; Constantine translates Hölderlin's translation as "Monstrous, a lot. But nothing / More monstrous than man" (Hölderlin, "Sophocles' Antigone" 457).

wondrous
marvellous
dreadful
awful
and
weird
there are in the world
but none more
strange
terrible
clever
uncanny
wondrous
monstrous
marvellous
dreadful
awful
and
weird
than Man (C, 23)[16]

Nick: Carson's Translational Invention

Carson derives "Nick"—this supplement, linguistic suffix, and silent presence on the stage, which is said to remain at the end once the few surviving characters have left, in order to continue "measuring"—from her translation of the Greek word τύχη. Kreon is the first to speak the word. The verse

τί δ᾽ ἔστι; ποίᾳ ξύμμετρος προὔβην τύχῃ (387)

is translated by Hölderlin as "welch gemeßner Fall geht vor?" (literally: "which measured case occurs?"; 332),[17] while Lloyd-Jones translates it as "What is the

16 Is Carson taking a swipe at men when she writes "Man"—with a capital M—where Sophocles refers to man, as in humanity? Does it mean vindication for Antigone? But how "womanly" is Antigone? In any case, Carson's translation brings forth gender questions that tend to remain concealed in the classical text.

17 Constantine translates this passage as "What thing and I occur together here?" (Hölderlin, "Sophocles' Antigone" 459).

matter? What is the event that makes my coming opportune?" Carson reduces the passage to:

> Kreon: here's Kreon
> nick of time (B, 17)

τύχη does not just denote the right moment; *tyché* is not *kairos*. Rather, it is the right moment as one that has always been missed, one that has never been realized. The word opens up the temporal perspective of retrospectivity.[18]

Carson's use of "nick" and, in particular, the specific way that it develops dynamically in her translation, raises a series of questions relating to (1) the semantic spectrum of "nick"; (2) the *krasis* of "Antigo…" and "nick," the title of the play; and (3) the fact that Carson derives from the word "nick" a supplementary character in the play named Nick.

Regarding (1): The happy moment, "in the nick of time," the certainty of victory (after the Greek goddess of victory, Nike), proves to be a "nick," i.e., "a notch," "a gap," "a crack." Further signifieds are invoked: "nick" as slang for "prison"; the British "to nick," a colloquialism meaning "to steal." "Nick" is a knot in which the tragedy's unresolved ethical questions converge with questions relating to the poetics of translation.

Regarding (2): "Nick" might also call to mind the masculine first name Nick (would Nick then be a name for the unconscious Other *in* Antigone herself?) as well as the word "nickname." If that is what *Antigonick* is, then it is the nickname that does not just *tease* (the German for *tease* is *necken*), but the one that inscribes into the name of the play the traumatic dimension of the right moment as one that has always passed, thereby emphasizing time as a central topic. However, in my opinion, there is another important element at play here, namely the paronomastic shift to "neck" that Carson employs—the "neck" by which Antigone hangs herself. Whereas the messenger's words in Hölderlin's final act read

> Am Nacken hängend, sie, am Gürtelbande (363)
> [Literally: "By her neck hanging she, on the belt strap"][19]

18 Lacan reads *tyché* as the real, the trauma (53–66).

19 Constantine translates this passage as "hanging / Her, by the neck, by the belt of her linen dress" (Hölderlin, "Sophocles' Antigone" 504).

in Carson, they become

> the girl hanging (B, 41)

But before that, the chorus makes the following quip, which is decisive for Carson's translation poetics:

> a now
> a nick
> a neck (B, 37)

Carson transforms the tragic internal inversion of *tyché* into a linguistic disaster, a shibboleth: Antigone's death results from the mere slip of a letter. In relation to *Antigone*, Hölderlin spoke of the "tödlichfactische(n) Wort" (literally: "fatalfactual word"; "Anmerkungen" 418); the tragedy reveals the performative side of language, a speaking that kills. Carson reduces the violence of language to one vowel. "A nick / a neck"—we hear the cracking of the cervical vertebrae on the rope.

Regarding (3): Nick, the silent character in the play, comes from the cover, from the kink in language. The fact that it is this character that remains on stage at the end, measuring, demonstrates the shock of realizing that the right moment is one that has always already passed. At this point, I cannot but think of the silent, "umnachteten" ("shrouded in night") Hölderlin who did not stop looking for "the measure on Earth," even though he knew: the measure is always missing ("In lieblicher Bläue" 1011–12).[20]

Consequences

Antigonick premiered at the Sorbonne in Paris in 2014 as a "Philo-Performance": its cast included Judith Butler—who had herself written an important essay about Antigone and who is mentioned in Carson's play—in the role of Kreon and literary theorist Avital Ronell in the role of Antigone.[21] Even the casting

20 I am referring here to verse 26, "Giebt es auf Erden ein Maaß? Es giebt keines" ("Is there a measure on Earth? There is none").

21 The performance was curated by Ben Hjorth and held on 26 June 2014 at the University of Paris-Sorbonne in collaboration with the University of Paris-Diderot, Paris-Ouest, the University of Avignon, the Laboratory of the Arts and Philosophies of the Stage

shows this was a matter of academic self-reflection—and Carson's translational meta-recalibration was especially well-suited to this purpose. Steiner, on the other hand, rejected Carson's offer with a rather scathing review of *Antigonick*. He accused Carson of taking a contingent, vulgar approach to the original and the highly ethical and political questions it addresses:

> Translation should embody an act of thanks to the original. It should celebrate its own dependence on its source. It concentrates scruple and trust, however recreative or anarchic its instincts. It is an informing craft which, sometimes enigmatically, reveals within or adds to the original what was already there—particularly where the text has been translated, imitated, adapted a hundred-fold. Anne Carson has often achieved this exigent ideal. But not this time. (Steiner, "Marrow Versus Merrow" 8–9)[22]

Avant-garde Belgian theater director Ivo van Hove was not a fan of *Antigonick* either. It was at his urging that Carson translated the play once more, resulting in version C, which adopts important elements from B but, on the whole, proceeds in a more linear, narrative fashion.[23]

(Labo LAPS), and the International Performance Philosophy Network. The performance can be viewed online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ygeQDu-4EU (accessed 30 June 2024).

22 Steiner is writing about the comic edition (version A).

23 In an interview, Carson addresses the circumstances in which the new version came about. "Carson: Perhaps I should say why I translated the play twice, because that's confusing for people. *Antigonick* was meant to be a comic book, and not scrupulously faithful to the original text. Bianca Stone did the illustrations. After it was published, I met Ivo van Hove. He said he wanted to do a production of *Antigone*. I said, great, I have one. I'll just send it. But he didn't like it. He wanted a new one. I was enraged, and then thought about it, and it seemed worth trying. A neat, defeating thing to try. So I did it again. Seeing the new piece performed was quite the revelation. Because I frankly thought I would hate it. I've seen lots of Greek plays and various versions of my own translations, and most of them were awful. This one wasn't *awful*. […] One thing Ivo specified when asking me to translate the play again—he said the Kreon role in Antigonick is too spare, almost symbolic. At the time, I think I was trying to do the translation kind of the way John Cage makes his mesostics—he always said he was trying to 'demilitarize language.' Maybe the difference between Ivo and me is that he wants to remilitarize language. He wants it fleshed out for conventional audience expectations and conventional capacities of an actor. I didn't appreciate that until I was translating the work again. The Kreon I had originally given him wouldn't have worked on stage—demilitarized grieving wouldn't work as a theatrical experience. Patrick O'Kane, who plays

After analyzing Carson's method, it is worthwhile to reflect back on the most important statements that she makes in her preface "The Task of the Translator of Antigone" to see whether she manages to accomplish the task she sets herself: "to forbid that you should ever lose your screams" (B, 6). This idea was inspired by a late poem written by Ingeborg Bachmann, in which the Austrian author laments this very loss of self.[24] No longer screaming means resignation and consenting to existing power relations, be they Kreon's, contemporary sociopolitical relations, or even the philological and academic laws of translation that Carson poetically rebels against.

Thus, the task of the translator here is to uncover what is irreparable and scandalous in the tragedy, to perpetuate Antigone's grief, and to silence rationalizing interpretations in order to allow a suppressed scream to become audible. This scream—if we follow Carson's poetics—can no longer be perceived in the tragic register; rather, it must be revealed by "decreating" the tragic, by perforating it, inserting voids and defamiliarizations that, again and again, reveal strange effects. Desublimated, the untransformable scream becomes even shriller.

Significantly, Carson's *Antigonick* (version B)—as a translation—has become so independent that it has itself become a starting point for further translations, an honor that, as far as I can see, had only been bestowed on Hölderlin's translation before it.[25] In 2019, a French translation was published by writer Édouard Louis. The cover positions Anne Carson as the author of *Antigonick*. In parentheses below Carson's name, we read: "(d'après *Antigone* de Sophocle)," and, beneath that, "Traduit par Édouard Louis." The cover carries out a clear recoding, blunting Carson's intervention by framing it not as a

---

Kreon, is amazing. After Antigone leaves the stage. It becomes his tragedy, and he fills the space. You almost forget Antigone. […] Lack of balance was what he objected to in *Antigonick*" (O'Neill-Butler).

24 "Meine Schreie verlier ich / wie ein anderer sein Geld / verliert, seine Moneten, / sein Herz, meine großen / Schreie verlier ich in / Rom, überall, in / Berlin, ich verlier auf / den Straßen Schreie, / wahrhaftige, bis / mein Hirn blutrot anläuft / innen, ich verlier alles, / ich verlier nur nicht / das Entsetzen, daß / man seine Schreie verlieren / kann jeden Tag und / überall" (Bachmann 145). To clarify: Carson does not cite the poem, she merely alludes to it.

25 Lacoue-Labarthe translated Hölderlin's *Antigone* into French in 1998 (Hölderlin, *L'Antigone de Sophocle*). As already mentioned, Constantine translated Hölderlin's *Antigonä* into English (Hölderlin, "Sophocles' Antigone").

translation, but as a liberal adaptation. Louis's translation is itself conventional; at no point does he pursue Carson's experiments. For example, he could have translated the English "nick" into French as "niquer" ("to fuck"), but he did not.

I was wondering how a German translation of Carson's translation would and could sound. In terms of continuing Carson's experiment, my own idea would have been to develop Carson's title into *Antigenick*, thereby literally conveying her wordplay into German while also shifting it by one letter. Moreover, I thought it would have been worthwhile to bring out some of Carson's latent nods to Hölderlin's translation, which I have drawn out here, in a more pronounced, palimpsestic manner—perhaps by translating the English Hölderlin translation into an estranged idiom that sounds only faintly German.

To my surprise, a German translation was published right in the moment when I was about to finish this article. Just as Édouard Louis does, Marcus Coelen, the German translator, puts Anne Carson in the position of the author and treats *Antigonick* as a primary text. One of Coelen's surprising moves is his translation of the title as *An Antigone* (*To Antigone*). Coelen does not pick up on the wordplay of "Nick," "nick of time," and "Genick," but he succeeds in two respects: not only does he emphasize the appellative quality of Carson's rewriting, but he also inscribes Anne Carson's first name into Antigone's name: *An Antigone* reads also *Anne Antigone*.

Translated from German by Lydia White

Works Cited

Bachmann, Ingeborg. *Ich weiß keine bessere Welt. Unveröffentlichte Gedichte*. Edited by Isolde Moser, Piper, 2000.

Butler, Judith. "Can't Stop Screaming." Review of Anne Carson's *Antigonick*. *Public Books*, 5 Sept. 2012, https://www.publicbooks.org/cant-stop-screaming/. Accessed 7 July 2024.

Carson, Anne. *An Antigone (Sophokles)*. Translated by Marcus Coelen, Turia+Kant, 2024.

———. *Antigonick (d'après Antigone de Sophocle)*. Translated by Édouard Louis, L'Arche, 2019.

———. "Variations on the Right to Remain Silent." *Nay Rather*, by Carson, Sylph Editions, 2013, pp. 4–41.

Coles, Elizabeth Sarah. *Anne Carson: The Glass Essayist*. Oxford UP, 2023.

Evangelista, Frances. "antigonick by sophocles translated by anne carson illustrated by bianca stone." *Nonsuch Book*, 13 May 2012, https://nonsuchbook.typepad.com/nonsuch_book/2012/05/antigonick-by-sophokles-translated-by-anne-carson-illustrated-by-bianca-stone.html.

Hamilton, John. "Carmina carnis: Der rote Ursprung der lebendigen Sprache bei Hölderlin." *figurationen*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2018, pp. 46–63.

Hölderlin, Friedrich. "Anmerkungen zur Antigonä." *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurter Ausgabe), vol. 16, edited by D. E. Sattler, Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1988, pp. 409–21.

———. *L'Antigone de Sophocle*. Translated by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Christian Bourgois, 1998.

———. "In lieblicher Bläue." *Sämtliche Werke. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurter Ausgabe), vol. 8, edited by D. E. Sattler, Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 2000, pp. 1011–12.

———. "Sophocles' Antigone." *Selected Poetry*, translated by David Constantine, Bloodaxe Books, 2018, pp. 436–510.

Koppenfels, Martin von. "Der Moment der Übersetzung. Hölderlins 'Antigonä' und die Tragik zwischen den Sprachen." *Zeitschrift für Germanistik. Neue Folge*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1996, pp. 351–67.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: Seminar XI*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Norton & Company, 1981.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. "La césure du spéculatif." *L'imitation des modernes*, by Lacoue-Labarthe, Galilée, 1986, pp. 39–69.

O'Neill-Butler, Lauren. "Freaks and Greeks: Antigone: A Roundtable with Anne Carson, Simon Critchley, and Trajal Harrell." *artforum.com*, https://www.artforum.com/columns/antigone-a-roundtable-with-anne-carson-simon-critchley-and-trajal-harrell-225772/. Accessed 8 Apr. 2024.

Schadewaldt, Wolfgang. "Hölderlins Übersetzung des Sophokles." *Hellas und Hesperien. Gesammelte Schriften zur Antike und zur neueren Literatur in zwei Bänden*, vol. 2, by Schadewaldt, Artemis, 1970, pp. 275–331.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Translated by George Gilbert Aimé Murray, George Allan & Unwin, 1941.

———. *Antigonae*. Translated by Friedrich Hölderlin. *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, by Friedrich Hölderlin, edited by Michael Knaupp, vol. 2, Hanser, 1992, pp. 317–68.

———. *Antigone, The Women of Trachis, Philoctetes, Oedipus at Colonus*. Edited and translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Harvard UP, 1994.

Sophokles. *Antigonick*. Translated by Anne Carson, illustrated by Bianca Stone, design by Robert Currie, New Directions, 2012. (= Version A)

———. *Antigonick*. Translated by Anne Carson, New Directions, 2012. (= Version B)

———. *Antigone*. Translated by Anne Carson, Oberon Books, 2015. (= Version C)

Steiner, George. *Antigones: The Antigone Myth in Western Literature, Art and Thought*. Oxford UP, 1984.

———. "Marrow Versus Merrow." Review of Anne Carson, *Antigonick*. *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 Aug. 2012.

Zawacki, Andrew. "Standing in / the Nick of Time: Antigonick in Seven Short Takes." *Anne Carson: Ecstatic Lyre*, edited by Joshua Marie Wilkinson, U of Michigan P, 2015, pp. 156–64.

Oulipian Networks in Search of an Author
Hervé le Tellier Translates Jaime Montestrela

Anna Luhn

Side Entry: Troubled Orientation

In his 1991 essay on poetic translation, with the telling title "L'attore senza gesti" ("The Actor without Gestures"), the prolific and renowned critic, translator, and writer Cesare Garboli maps poetic translation qua metaphorical analogy onto the art of theatrical performance while emphasizing what he sees as the primary function (or: virtue) of an actor as well as a translation.[1] According to Garboli,

> [l]a qualità di una traduzione sta tutta nella sua virtú mediatrice, sta *solo* nella disponibilità a rendere un servizio. Come une attore che abbia finite di recitare la parte, la traduzione si ritira, ricevuti gli applause, a struccarsi nel camerino. Ha gìa smesso di esistere. La sua vita è tutta là, nel breve spazio in cui ha reso il servizio, durante lo spettacolo […]. Solo nel momento fugace in cui sta rendono un servizio, la traduzione non è più una "traduzione"; ma un corpo, un testo, una scrittura a sua volta […]. (197)[2]

1 The analogy of acting and translating has been and remains a *topos* in meditation on poetic translation, and was famously brought forward for example by Jiří Levý in his seminal work on literary translation *Umění překladu* (1963; 31–32). See also Prammer (39–44) and Leupold and Raabe.

2 In the English rendition that is published alongside: "The quality of a translation lies entirely in its mediating virtue, lies *only* in its willingness to render a service. Like an actor who has finished to play his role, the translation, having been applauded, retires to the dressing room to take off its makeup. It has already stopped existing. Its life is all there, in the brief space of its performance, during the show […] Only in the fleeting moment of its performance is the translation no longer a 'translation': but a full body, a text, in its turn a writing […]" (Garboli 196).

Far from being a rhetorical gesture, the employment of such an analogy carries strong theoretical statements. The assumptions implied in the flowery comparison inscribe themselves in a field of debate touching on the relation between a text and its translation.[3] This debate regards not only the hierarchical dynamics between them, but also their respective (and distinct) medial qualities and, concludingly, their different modes of access to materiality. Leaving aside for a moment questions regarding the hierarchical dynamics between original and "derivative" writing and the concurrent demand for a "serving" translation,[4] it is remarkable that Garboli's equation of a translation with a performing actor contains a number of troubling assumptions, starting with the underlying suggestion of a change of medium that occurs when a translation takes over: It is classified as belonging not to the realm of poetic "scrittura," writing, but to mimic speech. Whereas the "original" is characterized as a *text*, and therefore a (more or less) stable material entity, the translation as *performance* can gain that same materiality, a "body," only in the moment of the medial act, the "service." This means that in a rather radical gesture, Garboli hands over translation to absolute ephemerality, denying it, if not a material existence at all, at least a material *persistence* beyond the act of reading. There might exist a textual artefact that links to another via a concept and cultural practice called "translation"; the ontological status of this artefact, however, is somewhat dubious.

We need not follow Garboli in his overall rather conservative conception of the relation "translation"–"original" to see the value of his metaphorization in putting the finger right on the peculiar, precarious mode that being a "translation" (as creation-as-medium-as-artefact) demonstrates. Firstly, in regard to the temporal dimension: even as a palpable artefact, Garboli marks it—in contrast to a text that is *not* translation—as essentially ephemeral. It manifests itself, but only for an instance. The appropriate question to ask might then be not *what*, but *when* a translation is.[5] From a number of sophisticated (and less sophisticated) meditations on "translation," I suggest that the difficulty in grasp-

3 Whenever the term "translation" is mentioned throughout the article, it refers to a translatory treatment of works/texts in a poetic context: *of* or *as* textual work that is considered as part of the artistic sphere, in contrast— at least apparently—to translational work that is primarily put forward with a pragmatic objective.

4 For a discussion of the latter through the lens of feminist translation theory, see the ground-laying article by Chamberlain. See also Prammer (45–47).

5 Theo Hermans polemically criticized his colleagues in contemporary translation studies as early as 1985 for "continuing to ask similarly unproductive essentialist questions

ing translation's *when-ness* might indeed essentially be related to what Lydia H. Liu has, in another context, called the "multiple temporalities of translation" (15). We find complications of the temporal dimension of translation in a number of seminal and by no means congruent twentieth and the twenty-first century theorizations that deal with translation as both a textual and an imagined entity and form. Walter Benjamin famously reflects on the "essentiality" of translation within certain poetic works and on a "Fortleben" of the original within a translation (11), questions which Jacques Derrida further complicates in his discussion of Benjamin in "Des Tours de Babel" (1985). We encounter a layering of temporal dimensions in Judith Butler's critique of Anne Carson's translation of Sophokles's *Antigone* and in Naoki Sakai's rigorous reconfiguring of translation as social action ("Translation"). While these authors' foci and their approaches to translational temporality differ, and while their conceptions of translation are by no means alike or even compatible with one another, what these authors have in common is a take on the translational form, practice, or event as something that defies a clear-cut temporal relation (as in *before*, or *after*, or *simultaneously*) to the text(s) it relates itself to as translation: its "origin/al."

The rather banal observation that when we talk about *a* translation we are addressing at minimum two texts at once, namely the so-called source text and the textual form in which it appears *as* translation, illustrates that "translation" not only, by definition, sails the waters of a precarious in-between mode—trans-latio, from the Latin *trans* ("across") and *ferre* ("to carry," "to bring")[6]—, but also inhabits a confusing plural on a very fundamental level. Translation's complicated timeframes might then well be connected with the question of what has for example been discussed under the terms "ré-écriture" (Berman 40), "ré-énonciation" (Meschonnic 309), or "recriação" (Campos 34), that is, the "troubling doubling" that translational practice brings into life. In his essay, Garboli grasps the essential diplopia (and its temporal scandal) once more by evoking the realm of the performance:

> Ha scelto [il traduttore], chissà perché, di creare, inventare, fare esistere una cosa che già c'è, già esiste, già è stata scritta. Di farla esistere *come* è stata

(how is translation to be defined?, is translation actually possible?, what is a 'good' translation?)" (9).

6 For an enlightening critique and complication of this traditional image, see Naoki Sakai's discussion of "translation as a filter" (*Schematism*).

> scritta, e come mai nessuno aveva pensato che fosse, prima de lui che la recita. (203)[7]

To bring into existence "a thing" that is already there, to make a text exist *as* it was written: if, according to Liu, "all acts of translation […] are mediated by temporality and spatiality" (15), then the translational mode brings into existence not only "a" translation, but a somewhat paradoxical dissolving of dimensions: a destabilization of the categories of unity, originality, and creation, which are at work—at least since the eighteenth century—when we are confronted with poetic text and/in translation,[8] and which are usually regulated by regimes and rules of (chronological) succession, (spatial) distance, and (physical) differentiation. Brazilian neo-vanguard poet and translator Haroldo de Campos uses the chemical image of isomorphism (34)—Garboli uses metaphorical comparison—to grasp the complex net of seemingly paradoxical relations that come into being when a translation comes into being: as an idea, as an artefact, as a claim.

Being and Time: Dis-locating *Contes liquides*

In 2012, a small volume was published at the Éditions de l'Attente. Its turquoise cover unsurprisingly states the author's name, Jaime Montestrela, and the French title, *Contes liquides*. In smaller letters, some additional information is given that discloses the work as a translated work, names the translator, and points to the peritexts the book contains: "Traduit du portugais et prefacé par Hervé Le Tellier" with a "Postface de Jacques Vallet."

Apart from the mentioned foreword and epilogue, the volume also contains, directly following the preface and without clearly assigned authorship, a short biographical overview of Montestrela's life. The preface seems to first and foremost serve as an introduction to an author who, as Hervé le Tellier writes,

---

7 "He [the translator] has chosen, who can say why, to create, invent, bring into existence a thing that is already there, already exists, has already been written. To make it exist *as* it was written, and as no one ever imagined before him, the one who is performing it" (Garboli 202).

8 For a discussion of how the paradigm of the "original" shapes the modern idea and notion of translation, see Nebrig and Vecchiato.

has left only few traces.[9] All those (potential) readers who are not familiar with the author learn from the foreword that Montestrela was born in 1925 in Lisbon, that he published under the Salazar regime a book of engaged poetry that led to his imprisonment and torture, and that he went into exile in Rio de Janeiro in 1951, where he published his only novel. When Brazil was taken over by the military, Montestrela is said to have traveled to Paris, where in 1968 he started to write his *Contos aquosos* and made the acquaintance of a number of French writers, among them several members of the Ouvroir de littérature potentielle (Oulipo), before dying from an aneurism in 1975 (Le Tellier, "Préface" 10–12).

Le Tellier's peritext is concerned with laying open various relations with the French literary scene of the time and connecting Montestrela's oeuvre to a peer group of well-known authors and eminent leftist intellectuals who apparently held his work in high esteem. Writer, adventurer, and politician André Malraux is cited with praise for Montestrela's essay *Cidade de lama* (11), and Marguerite Yourcenar, the first woman ever to enter the Académie française, is cited with praise for his early poetry collection (10). Le Tellier himself compares the tales he translated as *Contes liquides* to the sharp, humorous writing of Max Aub and Roland Topor (8), with whom Montestrela was, as Le Tellier points out, well acquainted (11). He also points to Montestrela's friendship with Portuguese surrealist Jorge de Sena and Belgian writer Jacques Sternberg (11). Jacques Vallet, founder of the French humorist journal *Le fou parle* and provider of the postface of the *Contes liquides* in Le Tellier's French rendition, is said to have published for the first time translations of some of Montestrela's *contos* after his death in that very magazine (11–12). Even Montestrela's sudden decease, in 1975, happened in the bosom of members of the French literary scene, among them the Oulipians Jacques Bens and Raymond Queneau.

As far as Le Tellier's foreword tells, Montestrela himself, although connected with several Oulipian writers and even figuring as an honorary guest for one Oulipo meeting in 1974 (12–13), was not a genuine member of the famous literary group that was founded in 1960 by François Le Lionnais and Raymond Queneau—a group concerned, up until the present day, with experimental poetic creation according to self-given "*contraintes*," that is, formal rules. The eighty numbered, ultrashort stories that Montestrela collected, according to the foreword, under the original title *Contos aquosos*—each story consists of one to four sentences (with only one exception) and rarely exceeds

9 "J'ai trouvé très peu d'informations sur Jaime Montestrela, même à la Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal" (Le Tellier, "Préface" 10).

half a page—nevertheless dispose of a number of qualities that suggest that at least a loose set of rules assisted at their creation.

I will not discuss these qualities in detail here; suffice it to say that the texts relate to each other by a certain regularity regarding not only length but also style and narrative scope. Usually, a conte begins by referring to a certain event at a certain historical moment, to a particular person (in the past or in the future), people, or social group (terrestrial or extraterrestrial), or to a specific place (real or invented). It then notes—in a dry, straight style that recalls ethnographic discourse—an incidence, situation, or circumstance that tends to lean towards the absurd:

> La ligne droite est taboue dans la ville d'Along Ulang (Birmanie). Le rues y sont courbes, les trottoirs arrondis, les immeubles bombés ou cintrés. Le fil a plomb est interdit, et nulle ficelle n'est autorisée à pendre aux fenêtres. Et quand filent dans la poussière, rectilignes et provocateurs, les rayons du soleil, on voile les yeux des enfants. (conte n°158) (Montestrela 56)

> Depuis que toute vie s'est éteinte sur la planète X34, à la suite d'incessantes guerres de religions, elle n'est plus peuplée que par des dieux dont le nombre est difficilement quantifiable. Ceux-ci, incapables depuis longtemps de la moindre création, passent le temps en jouant aux dés. (conte n°173) (Montestrela 57)

> Les chercheurs de l'Université de Leipzig, qui travaillent sur la discontinuité entre l'homme et l'animal, ont pu prouver qu'une rupture fondamentale s'est produite le 18 janvier 142 152 avant J-C, à 16h24. Ils cherchent désormais la nature exacte de l'événement. (conte n°429) (Montestrela 83)

> Lorsque les premiers extraterrestres, les Uhus, débarquèrent sur Terre, en 2045 de notre ère, ils prirent d'abord les dauphins comme la race intelligente de la planète. Les Uhus s'aperçurent néanmoins assez vite de leur erreur et entrèrent aussitôt en relation télépathique avec les fourmis. (conte n°186, à J.S.) (Montestrela 61)

Eight of the contes are not only numbered but, as in n°186 cited above, provided with a dedication that gives an abbreviated name. These dedications are without exception commented on by the translator Le Tellier, who at the lower end of the page not only suggests written-out versions of the abbreviations, but also occasionally adds further biographical information to support his specu-

lations. These would indeed, if they proved correct, show Montrestrela's deep investment in the Paris-based (male) literary circles of the 1960s and 1970s:[10] conte n°9 is dedicated to a certain J. T., referring "sans doute" to Jean Tardieu (22), n°51 to G. P., "[p]ossiblement Georges Perec, rencontré en 1967 à Avignon" (35), n°113 to J.-M. D., "[s]ans aucun doute Jean-Marie Domenach, qui dirigea la revue [*Esprit*] de 1957 à 1976" (49). Conte n°186 is dedicated to J. S., "très certainement l'écrivain Jacques Sternberg qui, comme lui, collaborait a la revue *Mépris* et affectionnait ces formes courtes" (61), n°231 to P. R., referring, according to Le Tellier, without any doubt to the painter Puig Rosado : "Le conte de Montestrela pourrait même être postérieur au dessin de Rosado" (69).[11] The dedication of conte n°431 to H. M. is accompanied by the longest commentary of the collection : "Ce conte, dédie par J.M. à H.M., n'est pas, comme on l'a longtemps cru, un hommage à l'auteur du *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*, Henri Michaux. Il s'agirait plus surement de l'écrivain américain Harry Mathews, rencontré à Paris, qui reprend d'ailleurs ce thème, presque inchangé, dans une de ses nouvelles" (84). Conte n°473 is dedicated to R. Q., "Raymond Queneau, avec qui Jaime Montestrela déjeunait parfois au restaurant *Polidor*" (90), and n°515 to R. T., who is identified by Le Tellier as the writer and "dessinateur Roland Topor" (95).

One could even suspect more connections between Montestrela's persona and the illustrious network of France-based intellectuals of the time, ready to be uncovered by his custom of dedication. For if one is to believe the foreword, Le Tellier's translation only covers a small fraction of Montestrela's original work:

> Il s'agit d'un recueil de plus de mille contes baroques, de quelques lignes a peine, sous-titré *Atlas inutilis* (il manquait deux cahiers de 32 pages a cet exemplaire, et les contes numérotés de 263 à 406) […]. Enfin, je n'ai choisi pour cette édition qu'une sélection de contes de la première moitié du volume. (Le Tellier, "Préface" 7–8)

That is, what the reader holds in her hands as *Contes liquides*, she learns, is just a more or less random fragment of a fragment of the original Le Tellier decided to translate. Le Tellier claims not only that the copy he borrowed from a friend

10 This investment is also confirmed in the postface by Jacques Vallet (99–100).

11 After Le Tellier's foreword and before the first of the *contes liquides*, there is a small sketch that is separately inserted, glued to a page, and signed "Puig Rosado."

in order to do so was already missing two volumes, but also that the eighty tales printed in the book are only a selection of the first half of Montestrela's *contos*: the first tale printed in the French edition published by Éditions de l'Attente bears the n°1, the last one the n°519.

If this circumstance may leave a philologically invested reader somewhat dissatisfied, the preface has in store a far greater scandal, when the status of Le Tellier as translator becomes, at least in traditional terms, more than problematic, as he admits that his Portuguese is rather bad (8). The back cover presents the facts more bluntly, simply stating that the translator of the here-published tales does *not* speak Portuguese.[12] The reader's suspicion is triggered by minor peritextual inconsistencies that catch the eye,[13] and she will be able to discover, even with superficial research, that the original author sketched out in the foreword as well as the afterword has (as such) never existed. The publication *Contes liquides*, translated by Hervé Le Tellier, is the only (attainable) version of the—now marked as fictious—Portuguese *Contos aquosos*.[14]

Contes liquides could, in this regard, be classified as "pseudo-translation"—a term that was brought to the translation studies debates by Gideon Toury (1984) and that designates a poetic original that fraudulently masks itself as its translation—and be placed as such within a considerable group of literary predecessors (see Apter; Jenn). Emily Apter has identified pseudo-translations as "scandals of textual reproduction" (159), and undoubtedly they prove to be an intriguing and challenging topic not only in the context of translation theory in general, but especially with regard to genre definition and the relation between

12 See the presentation on the back cover of the publication: "L'écrivain lisboète exile Jaime Montestrela (1925–1975) écrivit ces 'contes liquides' à Paris, de mai 1968 à juin 1972, au rythme de deux ou trois par semaine. Plus de mille, donc. Nous en présentons ici quatre-vingts, ce qui n'est pas mal, compte tenu du fait que le traducteur ne parle pas portugais."

13 To name only one example: the foreword mentions Montestrela's guest appearance at an Oulipo meeting, of which a record is said to exist in the Oulipo archive at the Bibliothèque d'Arsenal, on 12 September 1974 (Le Tellier, "Préface" 12), whereas the listed biographical elements date it to 12 December 1974 (Le Tellier, "Préface" 13). A look into the archive, however, which is now located at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, shows that there was no scheduled meeting on either date (see http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc98168h/cd0e3869; http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc98168h/cd0e3922; accessed 20 Nov. 2024).

14 This makes the only tale that Le Tellier cites in Portuguese in his foreword a sort of ex-post original (see Le Tellier, "Préface" 8).

translation and experimentality. In the following paragraphs, I will nevertheless focus on *Contes liquides* less as a "pseudo-translative" original, and more as a text that is not only essentially motivated by and imbued with a translation imaginary but also bound to its "actual" realization on various levels. It is in the schizophrenia of (only) performing translation while at the same time manifesting it—by *staging a translation*—that *Contes liquides* enters into a critical discussion of the expectations, hierarchies, and dogmas that surround the field of poetic "translation." As such, I want to posit it within a field of texts I consider as *experimental translation*. Within recent research,[15] this term has often—though not coherently—been employed with a view to forms of poetic production that are marked by a heightened level of intertextuality: texts that are intrinsically connected to the normalized, sanctioned practice of translation while also undermining, expanding, challenging it.

Manipulation as Critique: Experimental Translation

Starting with the highly interconnected avant-garde movements of the twentieth century, a heightened attentiveness to translation began to (re-)install itself in various fields and contexts especially during and following from the 1960s and 1970s. Transnationally, an immense number of authors invested themselves in theorizing translational practice, problematizing hegemonic views on translation, and developing other (in their turn normative) perspectives. On the one hand, this activity was significantly fueled by the linguistic turn in the humanities; on the other hand, it undoubtedly has to be placed in the context—and against the backdrop—of machine translation developments (see Luhn, "Literary/Machine/Translation"). It was also against that very horizon (see Luhn, *Spiel* 39–47; Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation*, 9–10, 16) that an exploration of rather unorthodox forms of poetic-translational practice started to proliferate, thereby going far beyond the idiosyncratic play of a chosen few.

Taking as a foundation Lily Robert-Foley's lucid elaboration in her 2020 paper "The Politics of Experimental Translation: Potentialities and Preoccupations," which has been expanded only recently by a more detailed discussion in her monograph *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production* (2024), I have proposed elsewhere to subsume a certain

15 Notably and substantially, the term is used by scholars Lily Robert-Foley and Douglas Robinson.

type of poetic practice under the umbrella of *experimental translation*, labeling as such those texts and activities that refer to themselves as "translation" while employing methods that go far beyond the scope of what the translational doxa of a certain time and culture allows and defines. I understand the "experimentality" of these types of inter- or intralingual activity in a double sense (Luhn, *Spiel* 58–66).[16] On the one hand, in the context of playful unorthodoxy, the obvious connotation of the adverb "experimental" is that of the modalities of "experimental art" or "experimental literature" that come into life at latest with the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century. "Experimental" here refers to the turning away from established formal principles, conventions, and traditions in order to invent artistic techniques that drastically challenge the limits and laws of art and its genres that are at work at a given moment. In that sense, the experimental horizon is, simply put, substantially concerned with questions of form and method, and "experimental translation" links to the playful forms of experimental literature, its norm-violating and delimiting de-automatization processes. Closely related to forms, poetics, and methods of experimental and avant-garde literature, experimental translations make a text undergo experimental procedures. That is, their translational "rewriting" (Lefevere 241) comprises a practice of excessive text manipulation that breaks with the ruling translation paradigm of a given time (Robert-Foley, "Politics" 401) by "entering," carving out, and reproducing certain hidden structures, patterns, textures, and dimensions of an "original," and often by emphasizing some of its features grotesquely at the dispense of others.

Beyond this, however (and at the same time inextricably linked to it), the adverb "experimental" points first and foremost to the *scientific* experiment, in the sense of those experimental arrangements that became the dominant paradigm of scientific knowledge production from the modern era onwards.[17] The scientific experimental design has an epistemic horizon: as practice-based research, the elaboration and systematic execution of an experiment obligatorily aims at generating a gain in knowledge. Its planning and usually meticulously exact realization are followed by evaluation and—ideally—new

16 The potential pitfalls of the word "experimental" in the context of poetic creation/translation are discussed in Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* (19–20).

17 A development particularly set in motion by the publication of Francis Bacon's epoch-making *Novum Organum* in 1620.

insights.[18] Accordingly, texts I refer to as "experimental translations" are essentially bound to a certain—if at times idiosyncratic—degree of systematicity: Their experimental set-up is characterized by a clear-cut, if not always recognizable, set of regulations for textual manipulation, a set that is not infrequently highlighted and explained via peritexts. The playfulness (Lukes 8–9) that is usually—and rightfully—attributed to experimental translation then becomes apparent not as an end in itself, but rather as a result of boundedness to constraints and rules that determine the experiment as well as the game. In the spirit of the scientific experiment as a knowledge-generating instrument, this orderly, designed textual manipulation under an experimental regime is then conceptually driven by an *epistemic* rather than an interpretative desire.[19]

The sort of experimental poetic manipulation described above has long found a home in scholarly discussion under the umbrella of avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, or postmodern "conceptual writing". The added value of examining a certain number of texts under the *translational* paradigm now lies exactly in being able to discuss them within a specific analytic frame, i.e. within the spectrum of heightened intertextuality that is commonly referred to as "translation." Such an endeavor is only legitimate if we consider translation—as, of course, it has been done by various strands of modern translation studies—not as an ontological category but as a categorical tool that can be used to relate two (or more) textual entities to one another. And it requires that the texts in question are explicitly labeled, categorized, and referred to by their authors *as translations*, or as being produced by translational practice. In other words: an "experimental translation," at least in the argumentative framework I'd like to suggest, can only exist where there is a claim that a certain text *is* a translation.

In that regard, the label "translation" functions as a claim that deliberately, and decisively, performs theoretical work. To carry, adopt, and appropriate translation as a designation of one's own choice—and not as a functional term that is assigned and assignable by others—manifests a critical *telos* directed not only at a specific poetic work (as an object of translational desire), but also at the frameworks, paradigms, and phantasms that are named "translation,"

18 Drawing on Vincent Broqua's "Temporalités de l'expérimental" (2018), Lily Robert-Foley refers to this dimension in her 2024 monograph (18–19).

19 It is clear, though, that the separation between those two desires can be only a heuristic one, in the sense that the wish to gather knowledge about a subject is to make sense of it, to *explain* it—thus: a desire of interpretation.

and that have the power to structure the relationships and hierarchies between textual forms and languages, as well as between modes, subjects, and objects of writing.[20] It is only by taking seriously the self-descriptions of the textual experiments in question and their appropriation of the term "translation" that one is able to recognize and value as such their critical engagement with and problematization of particular concepts, traditions, and normative settings of artistic (re-)production.

Un-authorial Actors and Hypertextual Performance

It is exactly in this regard that *Contes liquides* belongs to the realm of "experimental translation": in the very moment the publication claims to be a translation, it enters into a critical relation with the ways literary translation is perceived, and expected, to function in a certain moment in history.[21] It is crucial in this context not only that the work was initially coherently presented *as translation* by all peritextual and editorial instances,[22] but also that this

20 In this regard, Lily Robert-Foley's take on *experimental translation* as a "creative-critical, practice-based research interrogating translational norms and epistemic virtues, in their relationship to experimentation in the hard sciences, and in particular to developments in MT [machine translation]" (Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 19), overlaps crucially with the here-suggested scope of the term. However, in my rendition of the term as well as in the scope I give it, I do insist to a much greater extent on the systematic, rule-bound aspect than Robert-Foley does.

21 Robert-Foley rightly notes that experimental translation procedures are always addressed to "translational norms, as they are fixed by a certain, specific, translational climate: historically, culturally, linguistically and technologically. The critique of norms in experimental translation is profoundly situated, in its language and in its cultural and historical specificity" (*Experimental Translation* 11). See also Luhn, *Spiel* (101–03).

22 However, this was only the case for the first edition of *Contes liquides*, published by Éditions de l'Attente. A second edition, published in autumn 2024 by Gallimard, re-attributes, for better or worse, the author position to Hervé Le Tellier, a decision that considerably alters the way in which the narrative construction of *Contes liquides* is able to work. Before this second account, Hervé Le Tellier's authorship of *Contes liquides* was disclosed not by the publishing house Éditions de l'Attente, but by secondary sources who name him as the author of *Contes liquides* (see Cabana), pointing for example to the fact that he has been awarded the Grand prix de l'humour noir Xavier-Forneret for this work in 2013. The webpage of the prize as well as the Wikipedia entry, however, lists *not* Le Tellier, but Jaime Montestrela as its recipient. Accordingly, Le Tellier's profile page on the Oulipo web presence does not mention *Contes liquides* under his authored works.

claim was put forward without a particularly strong effort to maintain this illusion—something that would, in the age of digital information retrieval, prove challenging, but not impossible. Precisely in its sloppiness, the masquerade works as a disruptive element. Even if it is plausible to identify the translator with the creator of the ultrashort tales, we cannot now just read the eighty "liquid tales" simply as an original account, since surrounding the "main text" of the contes there is a whole apparatus of peritexts that suddenly change their status as well. For if, to begin with the obvious, Hervé Le Tellier is not the translator, then his elaboration on Montestrela's work is no longer a commentary on a work of fiction, but instead a part of this work of fiction itself, as are the translator's notes regarding the dedications. With the fictional status of the publication-as-translation so easy to discover, all commentary notes and all peritextual information by Le Tellier join the corpus of what is held together by the title *Contes liquides*. And once the authorial stability is undermined on one level, the doubt infiltrates the whole publication: How sure can the reader be, after all, that the afterword was actually written by Jacques Vallet, and not again Le Tellier? In this regard, what Lily Robert-Foley has noted for Douglas Robinson's 2020 pseudo-translation, or "transcreation,"[23] of Volter Kilpi's *Gulliver's Voyage to Phantomimia* applies to *Contes liquides* as well: it is primarily through the set of paratextual phenomena that a clear

---

The comparison between the two editions of *Contes liquides* deserves its own detailed discussion. A few brief observations are worth further consideration: While the 2012 edition contains 80 contes, the 2024 edition contains 366, but not all of the 80 contes of the first edition appear in the second (four are missing). In quite some cases, the numbering of the *contes* has changed: conte n°1 in the 2024 edition, for example, is identical to conte n°11 in the 2012 edition, except for a very small lexical variation. In many cases, the contes of second edition are subtly modified versions of the first edition. There are cases where a name, a place, or the sentence structure has been changed. Dedications have been added (conte n°3) and comments have been modified (conte n°9). The postscript by Jacques Vallet does not appear in the 2024 edition. Instead, the last conte (n°999) is followed by three indexes: "index des dédicataires," "index des personnes citées à l'existence attestée," and "index thématique" (167–69), which are not part of the first edition. The 2024 edition includes 24 illustrations by comic artist Patrice Killoffer, but not the drawing by Puig Rosado from the 2012 edition. The preface and the "éléments biographiques" figure in both editions, but with a number of significant changes and additions regarding Montestrela's biography, oeuvre, and networks.

23 This term, which originally stemmed from Haroldo de Campos, is used in the peritext of the work: "transcreated by Douglas Robinson" (see Kilpi).

allocation of authorship(s) is confused, twisted, and obfuscated (see Robert-Foley, *Experimental Translation* 174).

If the confusion of authorial positions infiltrates the work via its carelessness in creating the translational illusion (in the sense that Jenn speaks of pseudo-translation as a "texte hyper-illusioniste, un paroxysme de traduction"; 24), this confusion is spelled out and reinforced, paradoxically, precisely by the excess of markers that point to a distinctive author figure throughout the meticulous (re-)construction of Montestrela's social network, which is found in Le Tellier's foreword, Jacques Vallet's afterword, and the commented upon dedications of the contes. In the abundance of the biographical connections, traced hints, and name-dropping, what is brought forward instead of an authorial portrait, then, is the exposure of an expectation of, if not *longing* for an author figure that holds a work together: the custom—which despite all poststructuralist attempts is still pertinent and emerging anew—of projecting (pseudo-)biographical specters on poetic textures to assign to them a certain stability, reliability, genuineness, "authenticity."[24] Going back to Garboli's attempt to metaphorically get hold of the ways and procedures that materialize as translation, which ends up with the paradox of an ephemeral, strangely doubled coming-into-existence, *Contes liquides* acts out the dissolution of authorial substantiality and origin/ality within the genre "translation," thus pointing us to the contradictory, or at least arbitrary categorical matrix of so-called "original" and "derivative," substantial and ephemeral textual existence: and isn't it in the end exactly by claiming to be a translation that *Contes liquides* imposes on itself a translational taboo, and therefore, paradoxically, emerges as an ever untranslatable original?[25]

---

24 These are naturally more or less phantasmagoric virtues that are problematized *eo ipso* by any practice of translation whose very task it is—at least according to a hegemonic understanding—to genuinely *not* speak for itself. In her discussion of Robinson's pseudo-translation of Kilpi, Robert-Foley concisely notes that "it is indeed the suspicion of translation—the idea that translation betrays its original—that allows pseudotranslation in the contemporary era to be set up not to prove a text's authenticity but precisely the opposite: to call attention to the hoax that is translation (although this does not necessarily mean debunking it), and to give the 'translator' license to play and to stray, often under the auspices of heteronyms that liberate him from the unmanageable expectations placed on translators in our contemporary climate (to be both ultimately faithful and yet ultimately readable and perfectly productive)" (*Experimental Translation* 175).

25 If we do not necessarily (and normatively) have to consider poetic translation, with Benjamin, as essentially "untranslatable" (Benjamin 20; see also Derrida 236) outside

On another level, the excessive referential framework backing the pseudo-translational set-up of *Contes liquides* also comments on the disturbing complication of temporal frames within translational writing, the precarious "when" of a translation that Robert-Foley (via Elisa Sampedrín) refers to as the "time-travelling paradox": "[T]ranslation again is what 'destroys time' [*O Resplandor* 6] in Sampedrín's words, what takes us out of time and confounds then and now, makes another time to speak through the body, the mouth of the translator: a paradox" (*Experimental Translation* 179).

It is the way in which temporally conditioned relationality is almost obtrusively inscribed in the textual body of *Contes liquides*, constantly signaled in the interplay of the supposed peritext and the main text, that renders this relationality profoundly precarious. As the paratextual body supporting the work draws so heavily on individual links and networks of admiration, influence, and inspiration that Hervé Le Tellier—an Oulipo member since 1992—and Jaime Montestrela most likely share, any established chronological order instantly undoes itself once the reader realizes that the translational framing is porous. A blatant example, raising the topic of intersemiotic translation (which I will leave aside here), is a constellation set in motion via the illustration with which *Contes liquides* opens. The drawing, by painter Puig Ruisado (1931–2016), shows the infant Jesus, spotted with red dots, in a manger. Conte n°231, which is dedicated to "P.R.," reads: "Selon le professeur Friedhof Schwartz, épidémiologuiste à l'université de Dortmund, à moins d'un miracle, le petit Jesus a eu la rougeole" (69). The translator's note states that Montestrela's tale might have existed prior to Rosado's drawing. This comment on a potential chronology leaves the reader in a temporal impasse: Even if she can assume that, leaving the fictional frame, Montestrela's prose could for obvious reasons not precede Rosado's drawing, should she nevertheless situate the drawing historically in the 1970s? Or more readily in the 2010s? Was the tale modeled on the drawing, or did Rosado produce it for the publication of *Contes liquides*, by request of Le Tellier?

The eroding of *Contes liquides*' temporal framework from within is even more obvious in the case of what I see as one key section of the work regarding its dimension of translational experimentality, namely conte n°431, dedicated

---

the scope of experimental translation, it at least resides outside the habitual interests of translational activity. In other words, and conventionally, all translation practice needs to consider the text it works on as "original" in order to legitimize itself: What value would lie, to speak with translational doxa, in translating *a translation* of Dante?

to "H.M." This tale signals its special status not only by being followed by the longest (by far) of all explanatory comments. It also diverges from the formal cadre of *Contes liquides*, a factor that should not be underestimated in an Oulipian, rule-bound context. While all other 79 stories consist of one to four sentences, n°431 counts five:

> Le peuple Oho de Nouvelle-Guinée, découvert par Harry Matthew Botherby, utilise la parole, mais réduite au minimum. La langue oho n'a qu'une phrase: "Rouge égale mal". Découvrant dans une vallée toute proche un second peuple, les Ouhas, a la langue non moins rudimentaire (leur seule phrase est "Ici pas là"), H. M. Botherby leur apprit l'existence de leurs voisins les Ohos. Voulant traduire en ouha le oho "Rouge égale mal", il dut se réduire à l'unique option: "Ici pas là". La langue dit ce qu'elle peut et c'est tout. (Montestrela 84)

In the accompanying translator's note, cited above, Le Tellier deciphers that the salutation of this tale is not, "as one has for a long time believed,"[26] to Belgian author and painter Henri Michaux, but to Harry Mathews, an American writer and member of Oulipo since 1972 who would, according to the note, take up the theme of the conte, "almost unchanged, in one of his short stories" (Montestrela 84, as cited in French above). Visibly, this reference is yet another example of cross-temporal confusion of origin/al and adaptation that is produced in the interplay between the ostensible main text and its peritext, pointing this time to a 1996 talk (not a short story!) by Harry Mathews at the French Institute in London, where he held a St. Jerome lecture on the topic of translation, published later under the title "Translation and the Oulipo: The Case of the Persevering Maltese."[27] Here, the narration of the two "tribes," the "Ohos" and "Uhas,"

26 The reader is inclined to ask: by whom? And how could this misappropriation have possibly happened, given the fact that Mathews's name appears literally, if misspelled, in the text?

27 The talk was reprinted in a collection of Mathews's essays in 2003. Remarkably, the paratextual remark works as yet another source of uncertainty due to its questionable reliability: it is not a "nouvelle" by Mathews, but a talk/essay that sketches out the story of the Uhas and Ohos. Reversely, there exists a related *story* in Mathews's work. "The Dialect of the Tribe" tells the story of the mysterious dialect Pagolak (discovered again by the fictitious ethnographer Botherby), which is gifted with extraordinary, paradoxical procedures of translation, while defying all attempts to be translated itself (Mathews, "Dialect" 8–9). That translation here figures again as a core topic makes it unlikely that

takes up approximately four times the space of Montestrela's version. Essentially though, it is possible to conflate the two stories:

> They [the Ohos] also used speech, but speech reduced to its minimum. The Oho language consisted of only three words and one expression, the invariable statement, "Red makes wrong." […] in another valley, he came upon his second tribe, which he called the Uhas […]. like the Ohos, they had a rudimentary language used invariably to make a single statement. The Uhas' statement was, "Here not there." As he was expounding this information with gestures that his audience readily understood, Botherby reached the point where he plainly needed to transmit the gist of the Uhas' one statement […]. How do you render "Here not there" in a tongue that can only express "Red makes wrong"? […] There was only one solution. He grasped at once what all translators eventually learn: a language says what it can say, and that's that. (Mathews 68–69)

Recognizably, whole sentences in the French and the English version are very much alike in the two versions ("La langue dit ce qu'elle peut et c'est tout." / "a language says what it can say, and that's that."), making it legitimate to classify them as linked via a translational relation. Insofar as the accounts differ in length and detail, other forms of intertextual relations from the realm of "secondary" literary practices can also apply: variation, for example, or adaptation; concision (in the case that Mathews's text was formulated before that of *Contes liquides*) or extension (in the opposite case). Genette lists in *Palimpsestes* a whole bunch of possibilities for how reduction or augmentation can take form in an intertextual (with Genette: "hypertextual") constellation (321–95).[28]

As much as a comparative discussion of the two respective accounts would undoubtedly prove fruitful and deserve, as a meditation on the theme of translation, substantial commentary (for Mathews's version, see James; Gervais), what I especially want to point to in this context is that, at the heart of the (deliberately!) poorly masked pseudo-translation *Contes liquides*, an instance of "true" translation can be discerned[29]—only to be instantly confounded again,

---

Le Tellier's flawed reference, pointing to a "nouvelle," is merely due to scholarly sloppiness.

28 Regarding the relevance of Genette's work on "hypertextualité" in *Palimpsestes* for a theoretical grounding of experimental translation, see Luhn, "Intraliguale Übersetzung."

29 "True" in the sense of what Mathews has coined "translation's customary *raison-d'être*: the [intralingual] communication of substantive content" ("Dialect" 10).

as it is difficult to stabilize the temporal (and therefore functional) vector needed in order mark one of the two texts as a translation of the other.[30] It seems decisive in this context that the brief dis-/appearance of "proper" translation in conte n°431 is bound to the very topic of the translational practice's paradoxical nature, which defies theorization, or even proper grasping.

It is also worth noting that the (pseudo-)paratextual comment, by allegedly ruling Henri Michaux out as addressee of the dedication, is what brings his *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* (1936) into play as an intertextual reference in the first place. There is indeed an undeniable resemblance between the style, scope, and imagery of the ethnographically imbued short tales in *Contes liquides* and Michaux's *carnet de voyage*, which describes in a sober manner the ways and habits of a number of invented people, flora, and fauna in the fictive region of "Grande Garabagne" (echoing, of course, the French "Grande Bretagne"),[31] making it an obvious point of reference for analysis of Montestrela's tales. Fittingly, the compilation *Ailleurs* (1948)—in which Michaux adds to the *Voyage* his later works *Au pays de la Magie* (1941) and *Ici, Poddema* (1946)—opens (from the 1967 edition on) with a page-long preface qualifying the three works as the author's attempt to (of all activities) *translate* "the world that he wants to flee from":

> L'auteur a vécu très souvent ailleurs: deux ans en Garabagne, à peu près autant au pays de la Magie, un peu moins à Poddema. Ou beaucoup plus. Les dates précises manquent […]. Il traduit aussi le Monde, celui qui voulait s'en échapper. Qui pourrait échapper? Le vase est clos. Ces pays, on le constatera, sont en somme parfaitement naturels. On les retrouvera partout bientôt… […] Derrière ce qui est, ce qui a failli être, ce qui tendait à être, menaçait d'être, et qui entre des millions de "possibles" commençait à être mais n'a pu parfaire son installation… H.M. (Michaux 7)

30 If one might agree that Mathews could not possibly have had access to the written work of the persona Montestrela after 1972, can the same be said regarding the writing of Le Tellier, which entered Oulipo circles at latest in 1992?

31 To cite only one example: "Les Omobuls vivent dans l'ombre des Émanglons. Ils ne feraient pas un pas sans les consulter. Ils les copient en tout et quand ils ne les copient pas, c'est qu'ils copient les Orbus. Mais quoique les Orbus soient eux-mêmes alliés et tributaires et race parente des Émanglons, les Omobuls tremblent qu'imitant les Orbus, les Émanglons ne soient mécontents. Mais les sentiments des Émanglons restent impénétrables, et les Omobuls se sentent mal à l'aise, louchant tantôt vers les Orbus, tantôt vers les Émanglons" (Michaux 27).

The temporal confusion reigning in Michaux's first sentence—where the precise timespans the narrator H. M. has spent, according to himself, "elsewhere" fall apart instantaneously after they have been given—surely resonates with the temporal instability of *Contes liquides*. But it is even more tempting to read the last sentence of Michaux's foreword, with its reference to the millions of "possibles" that lurk everywhere, in connection with the ever-growing, inter-relational, inter-translational texture that is unfolded in *Contes liquides* by following its (always partly fraudulent) leads.

A paradigmatic element and conceptual nucleus of this unfolding is the second explicit interlingual translation that lies quite literally at the core, the non-existing authorial origin of the work: the translation of the German name *Sternberg* (star-hill), borrowed from Jacques Sternberg, into the Portuguese equivalent *Montestrela*. Le Tellier mentions the writer in the foreword as one of Montestrela's acquaintances, and conte n°186 is—supposedly, or, with Le Tellier, "très certainement"—dedicated to him.[32] It may not come as a shock, then, that there exists an account of 270 trenchant short stories by Jacques Sternberg, published in 1974, illustrated by Roland Topor, under the title *Contes glacés*. Unsurprisingly, the stories relate to Montestrela's *contes* in that they are written in a dry, at times ethnographic style, and at least a number of them can be said to resonate very strongly on a formal level, but also on a verbal level,[33] with Montestrela's *Contos aquosos*/*Contes liquides*—a title transformation designating quite literally a Benjaminian "Fortleben," a becoming of the original in its translation, when the tales that are *iced* with Sternberg become *aqueous*/*liquid* with Montestrela.

From Original Text to Translational Textures

In a weird movement, a paradoxical back and forth, the discernible spectrum of translational, hypertextual traces of *Contes liquides* thus does at the same time counter *and* support the fictitious biographical relationality laid out

32 "Lorsque les premiers extraterrestres, les Uhus, débarquèrent sur Terre, en 2045 de notre ère, ils prirent d'abord les dauphins comme la race intelligente de la planète. Les Uhus s'aperçurent néanmoins assez vite de leur erreur et entrèrent aussitôt en relation télépathique avec les fourmis" (Montestrela 61).

33 Compare the previously cited conte n°186 with the beginning of Sternberg's "La verité": "Quand enfin, au XXIIe siècle, les premiers extra-terrestres débarquèrent sur la planète Terre, ils furent assez étonnés de voir que cette planète était verte. […]" (60).

throughout the text. This is not the only regard in which *Contes liquides*' status as a pseudo-translation allows it to belong in the realm of (at least experimental) translation. The whole textual artefact is motivated, set in motion, and fueled by the conglomerate of practices, artefacts, and ideas that are found together in a collective imaginary subsumed under the signifier "translation." This is the case, firstly, in the sense that what is usually understood by interlingual translation *is* actually, essentially traceable in (at least) two very crucial instances of the work: in the author's name Montestrela (from Sternberg) and in the central conte n°431 (see Mathews, "Translation"), where translation as a practice and as a problem is explicitly thematized. This is the case, secondly, in the sense that *Contes liquides* lays out a dense network of textual relations that constantly negotiates the levels and forms of intertextual relatedness of which translation is only one mode, yet also the very framework that sanctions, categorizes, and labels whether (and the ways in which) literary forms belong to the "first" or the "second degree." This is the case, thirdly, in the sense that *Contes liquides* points to the clandestine subversion of the established frames of hierarchy and succession that any translational artefact inevitably produces. In other words, it spotlights the temporal ambiguity of translation (*when is a translation?*).[34]

It might be disputable whether Le Tellier does, in the strict sense, *translate experimentally* within the framework of *Contes Liquides*—although there are, I would say, a few indications that the "contes baroques" are baroque, especially insofar as they are a result of combinatorics and lose Oulipian constraint.[35]

---

34 It is in that sense that *Contes liquides* performs the very process of textual palimpsest, the ubiquitous movement of hypertextuality Genette marks as the principle of literature in *Palimpsestes*. It is worth noting in this regard that, almost parallel to the publication of Genette's influential book discussing hypertextual practices, of which he considers translation to be one (central) among others, Brazilian translation and literary scholar Rosemary Arrojo uses "palimpsest" in 1986, especially in the context of translation. In her *Oficina de tradução* (1986), under the chapter headline "O texto original redefinido," she proposes: "Ao invés de considerarmos o texto, ou o signo, como um receptáculo em que algum 'conteúdo' possa ser depositado e mantido sob controle, proponho que sua imagem exemplar passe a ser a de um *palimpsesto*" (23).

35 For the close interconnections between Oulipo and translational thought, see Mathews, "Translation"; James; Bary. It would be very worthwhile to examine further, in this context, the explicit hints to other works of short, sharp, pseudo-ethnographic writing laid out in *Contes liquides*, including Michaux, Sternberg, Mathews, but also Aub (who in turn produced several pseudo-translations; see Martin). These links form indeed a constellation of their own, opening up to a whole set of questions regarding forms of

What the publication surely does, though, is stage *translation as experiment*. In claiming translation as its mode of existence, in carrying a double translation at its core and on its cover, *Contes liquides*, in its entirety as a textual artefact, experiments with the norms, expectations, and values projected on what we usually encounter, without further thought, as the material text-in-translation—it carries with it questions about the hierarchical distribution of "original" speech and the conditions that allow "original" speech to be pronounced.[36] It is in this experimenting with the conditions, constellations, and configurations that make a literary text a translation, thus performing it as a material artefact, that *Contes liquides* manifests itself both as playful research and as critique of those configurations.

Garboli, in his 1991 essay, characterizes translation as an "attore senza gesti," as an actor who performs their act, gestureless, in the black on white of a page—an ephemeral, medial existence that fades out the moment the reading (the being read) has come to an end: what settles in the reader's mind is the impression, the imprint not of the translation, but of the text that it so readily mediated. Hervé le Tellier's experiment, his *stagings* of translation operate in reverse: They produce, using an inconsistent wordplay, "gesti senza a*u*tore," gestures (that is: textual bodies, poetic manifestation) that are without the necessity, the existence of one (original) author and are instead built by plurality and on multifarious forms of relating. If Garboli's translation performs a *body of work* (the "original in translation"), Le Tellier's experimental translation performs *texture*: by dissolving the solitary text, liquifying it into a web of hypertextual encounters, of communal ground. It is in that sense, then, that *Contes liquides* is essentially conditioned by, while working critically on, the phantasma of translation—translation as a potential mode and spectrum, or, as Mathews formulates it, "the paradigm, the exemplar of all writing" ("Dialect" 7).

---

poetic interrelatedness and the constant negotiation of their delineations (as translation, homage, epigonal writing, pastiche, parody…).

36 See conte n°413: "Sur la planète HC678, toute personne usant d'une phrase déjà prononcée—des scribes en gardent trace sur d'immenses registres—doit régler des droits d'auteur a son premier locuteur. Seuls les riches ont ainsi la parole, mais n'est-ce pas partout pareil?" (Montestrela 79).

Works Cited

Apter, Emily. "Translation with No Original: Scandals of Textual Reproduction." *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, edited by Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood, Princeton UP, 2005, pp. 159–73.

Arrojo, Rosemary. *Oficina de tradução. A teoria na prática*. Editora Ática, 1986.

Bary, Cécile de. "L'Oulipo. Ou l'écriture comme traduction." *Revue des sciences humaines*, vol. 338, 2020, pp. 101–12.

Benjamin, Walter. "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers." *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1, edited by Tillman Rexroth, Suhrkamp, 1981, pp. 9–21.

Berman, Antoine. *La traduction et la lettre ou l'auberge du lointain*. Éditions du Seuil, 1991.

Broqua, Vincent. "Temporalités de l'expérimental." Miranda, no. 16, 2018. *Open Edition Journals*, https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.11342. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

Butler, Judith. "Can't Stop Screaming." Review of Anne Carson's *Antigonick*. *Public Books*, 5 Sept. 2012, https://www.publicbooks.org/cant-stop-screaming/. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

Cabana, Anna. "Hervé Le Tellier. Le conte est bon." *Lire*, July 2022, p. 56.

Campos, Haroldo de. "Da Tradução como Criação e como Crítica." 1963. *Metalinguagem & Outras Metas: ensaios e teoria e crítica literária*, by Campos, São Paulo, 2006, pp. 31–48.

Chamberlain, Lori. "Gender and Metaphorics of Translation." *Signs*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1988, pp. 454–72.

Derrida, Jacques. "Des Tours de Babel." *Difference in Translation*, edited by Joseph F. Graham, Cornell UP, 1985, pp. 209–48.

Garboli, Cesare. "L'attore senza gesti | The Actor without Gestures." *In un altra lingua | In another language*, edited by Ann Goldstein and Domenico Scarpa, Einaudi, 2015, pp. 190–203.

Genette, Gérard. *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*. Éditions du Seuil, 1982.

Gervais, Bertrand. "Here not There: la traduction comme métaphore. 'The Dialect of the Tribe' de Harry Mathews." *Cahiers ReMix*, no. 7, 2018, https://oic.uqam.ca/publications/article/here-not-there-la-traduction-comme-metaphore-the-dialect-of-the-tribe-de-harry-mathews. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

Hermans, Theo. "Translation Studies and a New Paradigm." *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, edited by Theo Hermans, Croom Helm, 1985, pp. 7–15.

James, Allison. "The Maltese and the Mustard Fields: Oulipian Translation." *SubStance*, issue 115, vol. 37, no. 1, 2008, pp. 134–47.

Jenn, Ronald. *La pseudo-traduction, de Cervantès à Mark Twain*. Peeters Louvain-la-Neuve, 2013.

Kilpi, Volter. *Gulliver's Voyage to Phantomimia: A Transcreation by Douglas Robinson*. Zeta Books, 2020.

Lefevere, André. "Why Waste Our Time at Rewrites? The Trouble of Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm." *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, edited by Theo Hermans, Croom Helm, 1985, pp. 215–43.

Le Tellier, Hervé. *Contes liquides de Jaime Montestrela*. Gallimard, 2024.

———. "Préface." *Contes liquides*, by Jaime Montestrela. Translated by Hervé Le Tellier, Éditions de l'Attente, 2012, pp. 7–13.

Leupold, Gabriele, and Katharina Raabe. "Zur Einführung." *In Ketten tanzen. Übersetzen als interpretierende Kunst*, edited by Leupold and Raabe, Wallstein, 2008, pp. 7–29.

Liu, Lydia H. "The Eventfulness of Translation: Temporality, Difference, and Competing Universals." *At Translation's Edge*, edited by Nataša Durovicova, Patrice Petro, and Lorena Terando, Rutgers UP, 2019, pp. 13–30.

Luhn, Anna. "Literary/Machine/Translation: Übersetzungstechnologien und avancierte Übersetzungstheorie als Modelle literarischer Zirkulation, ca. 1960–1975." *Der Wert der literarischen Zirkulation / The Value of Literary Circulation*, edited by Michael Gamper et al., Metzler, 2023, pp. 365–84.

———. *Spiel mit Einsatz. Experimentelle Übersetzung als Praxis der Kritik*. Turia+Kant, 2022.

———. "Zwischen allen Stühlen spielen. Intralinguale Übersetzung als poetisches Experimentierfeld und Erkenntnisformat." *Zwischenspiele*, edited by Johannes Ungelenk, Kadmos, forthcoming.

Lukes, Alexandra. "Translation Needs an Avant-Garde." *Avant-Garde Translation*, edited by Alexandra Lukes, Brill, 2023, pp. 1–25.

Martin, Gabriella. "The Mask of the Translator: Exile, Memory, and (Pseudo) Translation in Max Aub's *Antología traducida*." *Hispania*, vol. 102, no. 4, 2019, pp. 547–58.

Mathews, Harry. "The Dialect of the Tribe." 1980. *The Human Country: New and Collected Stories*, by Mathews, Dalkey Archive Press, 2002, pp. 7–14.

———. "Translation and the Oulipo: The Case of the Persevering Maltese." 1997. *The Case of the Persevering Maltese: Collected Essays*, by Mathews, Dalkey Archive Press, 2003, pp. 67–89.

Meschonnic, Henri. "Propositions pour une poétique de la traduction." *Pour la poétique II*, Gallimard, 1973, pp. 305–23.

Michaux, Henri. *Ailleurs*. Gallimard, 1967.

———. *Voyage en Grande Garabagne*. Gallimard, 1936.

Montestrela, Jaime. *Contes liquides*. Translated by Hervé Le Tellier, Éditions de l'Attente, 2012.

Nebrig, Alexander, and Daniele Vecchiato. "Einleitung: Translatorische Kreativität um 1800." *Kreative Praktiken des literarischen Übersetzens um 1800*, edited by Nebrig and Vecchiato, De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 1–15.

Prammer, Theresia. *Übersetzen, Überschreiben, Einverleiben. Verlaufsformen poetischer Rede*. Klever, 2009.

Robel, Léon. "La traduction en jeu." *CHANGE*, vol. 19, 1974, pp. 5–8.

Robert-Foley, Lily. *Experimental Translation: The Work of Translation in the Age of Algorithmic Production*. Goldsmiths Press, 2024.

———. "The Politics of Experimental Translation: Potentialities and Preoccupations." *English*, vol. 267, no. 69, 2020, pp. 401–19.

Robinson, Douglas. *The Experimental Translator*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

Sakai, Naoki. "Translation and Image: On the Schematism of Co-figuration." *At Translation's Edge*, edited by Nataša Durovicova, Patrice Petro, and Lorena Terando, Rutgers UP, 2019, pp. 79–97.

———. "Translation and the Schematism of Bordering." Presentation at "Translating Society: A Commentator's Conference," University of Konstanz, 29–31 Oct. 2009, https://www.translating-society.de/conference/papers/2/. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

Toury, Gideon. "Translation, Literary Translation and Pseudotranslation." *Comparative criticism*, vol. 6, 1984, pp. 73–85.

Vallet, Jacques. "Postface." *Contes liquides*, by Jaime Montestrela. Translated by Hervé Le Tellier, Éditions de l'Attente, 2012.

L'amour, la mort, la mère

Works of Mourning and Labors of Love between Bella Cohen and Albert Cohen

Caroline Sauter

In loving memory of my mother,
Irmgard Leo-Grunwald ,
a woman of the word
who taught me the love of language.

Le livre de ma mère has been said to be the most beautiful love story in Albert Cohen's eccentric, excessive, exuberant work. First published under the title *Chant de mort* (*Song of Death*) as a four-part serial in the London-based, French-language journal *La France libre*, during the Second World War (1943–44), the book mourns the death of his mother in January 1943,[1] crying out raw emotions of pain and love in a tone pregnant with biblical language. Ten years later, in 1953, reworking his earlier journal fragments for a book publication that would appear with Gallimard in 1954, Albert Cohen literally dictated the text to his then-companion and later wife Bella Berkovich. According to his own words, he wanted her to meet his dead mother in the space of literature, so that they could "love her together."[2] In this sense, *Le livre de ma mère* is very much Bella's book: written for Bella, dictated to Bella, and typed by Bella. And it was Bella Cohen née Berkovich, his third wife, introduced to Albert as "une

1 For biographical details, see Médioni (200, 201, 209).

2 In *Magazine littéraire* (Apr. 1979), Cohen states: "Le livre de ma mère, je l'ai écrit pour ma femme qui n'a pas connu mon admirable mère à qui je voulais la faire connaître afin que nous l'aimions l'ensemble" (qtd. in Médioni 211).

jeune Anglaise […] bilingue" in the year of his mother's death (Médioni 194),[3] who would translate this most intimate book of his into English. By the time she translated her husband's *Livre de ma mère*, he was long dead. Albert Cohen passed away in 1981; his wife's translation of *Le livre de ma mère* appeared in England in 1997, under the title *Book of My Mother*.[4]

The mother of *Le livre de ma mère* is a figure of otherness. Her manners and her speech are marked by strange rituals and unfamiliar gestures, by a foreign accent and faulty language.[5] Even her kiss is foreign and unique, "un baiser étranger, un baiser à elle" (*Carnets 1978* 36). Bella Cohen translates her husband's book that is all about the mother's foreign French into eclectic English. For this reason, her *Book of My Mother* has been first ignored, and then harshly criticized.[6] In fact, it is not what one would commonly consider a "good" translation. It is clumsy, awkward, and unidiomatic; it contains many grammatical and orthographic errors and numerous mistakes. In particular, Bella Cohen's many Gallicisms sometimes make it difficult to grasp the content in English without comparing it to the original French.[7]

I will, in what follows, offer detailed, comparative close readings of a few passages in Albert Cohen's French *Le livre de ma mère* and Bella Cohen's English *Book of My Mother*. Rather than pointing out shortcomings and failures of the English translation, my aim is to consider the courageous, painful, loving act of translation as a work of mourning: a space of transmissions and transfers.

---

3 Beila (Bella) would become Albert's third wife in February 1955 (aged thirty-five, he was sixty years old). In contrast to his two previous, Protestant wives, Bella is, according to Albert, "l'épouse juive parfaite" (Médioni 216).

4 The German translation was made—coincidence or not?—by Lilly von Sauter, in the year of my birth. See Cohen, *Das Buch meiner Mutter* (referenced with the abbreviation *BuM*). Even if it seems so, "Sauter" is not, strictly speaking, "my" name, but my husband's; it is neither my maiden name, the name of my father (Grunwald), nor the name of my deceased mother (Leo). Incidentally, *leo*, the lioness, is a leitmotif associated with the mother in Cohen's *Livre de ma mère*: "elle me bénissait […] presque animalement, avec une attention de lionne…" (22).

5 See Sauter (165–79, esp. 173–78).

6 See, for instance, Langille (191–93).

7 For a detailed (even if petty) list of Gallicisms in Bella Cohen's *Book of My Mother*, see Langille (193).

"Accent oriental": Translation and (M)Othering

French is the language that Albert Cohen uses as his mother tongue, even though it never was his mother's mother tongue. Throughout her life, his mother, "the eternal foreigner" (*Book of My Mother* 70), spoke (as the narrator says in Bella's incorrect English) "incorrect French" (73).[8] Again and again, the narrator emphasizes his mother's strong "foreign accent" (56)—a great source of embarrassment for the young man who wants to belong to the "vile tribe of the well-bred" (72), "cette sale bande de bien elevés" (*Livre de ma mère* 83). The mother admires her son's "fables" (*BM* 70), as she calls his published work in French, but claims that she herself is unable to find "des mots profonds" (71) in French. The narrator relates how his mother writes a few pages of a book of his "at [his] dictation" ("sous ma dictée") that come out "with so many spelling mistakes and so much goodwill" (*BM* 86; *LM* 97–98). French is the language that mother and son speak throughout the narrative, but it is never really a language that mother and son share.[9]

For the narrator, his mother's French is "sententious," and her "awkward, poetic" gestures "hailed from our Orient" (*BM* 76). The cakes she baked for him are "poèmes d'amour" (*LM* 80), but he leaves her waiting and sewing all alone in his apartment while he himself goes from "grand reception[s]" to "smart dinners" (*BM* 72), attempting to hide his mother, her foreign accent, her "oriental" gestures from his acquaintances. And only belatedly, only after her death, does his embarrassment at her foreignness end. Now he proudly presents his deceased mother to the crowd, albeit transformed into a literary figure: "Ma bien-aimée, je te présente à tous maintenant, fier de toi, fier de ton accent oriental, fier de tes fautes de français [...]" (*LM* 83).

Bella Cohen translates: "My darling, I am introducing you to everyone now, proud of you, proud of your accent, proud of your incorrect French [...]" (*BM*, 73). Tellingly, her English translation omits the very word that is at the heart of

8 Quotes from Bella Cohen's translation are taken from Cohen, *Book of My Mother*, and will be referenced with the abbreviation *BM* and page numbers. The French version is quoted according to Cohen, *Le livre de ma mère*, and will be referenced with the abbreviation *LM* and page numbers.

9 With my mother, who was a translator and author, I shared a precarious home in (foreign) language(s). In my early childhood, she read her translations of Japanese children's books to me; we also shared a lifelong at-homeness in French, and later, I learned Hebrew together with my mother.

the mother-son relation: "oriental."[10] In Albert Cohen's French version, the narrator declares himself proud of her "accent *oriental*" (my emphasis), while the narrator in the English version is simply "proud of her accent." In the French version of *Le livre de ma mère*, the mother is the embodiment of "the Orient." Observing her arrive on a train from Marseille to Geneva, the narrator beholds his mother as "[…] Jérusalem vivante. Elle est déguisée en dame convenable d'Occident mais c'est d'un antique Chanaan qu'elle arrive et elle ne le sait pas" (*LM* 79).[11] As the embodiment of a long-gone, ancient, "oriental" past, even her own origin is marked by a permanent crossing between different times and different worlds: a daughter of Venetian Jewish immigrants to Corfu, Louise Judith Coen née Ferro becomes a Greek Jewish immigrant to France.[12] Before migrating to Marseille in 1900, the Coen family lived in the Jewish ghetto of the island of Corfu, at the "oriental" margins of Western Europe.[13] Albert Cohen was born

10 I am of course aware of the offensiveness of the term "oriental," its colonial, othering, racializing, and exoticizing undertones, and its deeply problematic history, especially when relating the term "oriental" to a person's Jewishness. For a cultural history of "the Jew in the history of Orientalism" (2) that also engages with prominent readings such as Edward Said's, Susannah Heschel's, and Jonathan Boyarin's and "questions the way we understand the construction of otherness, particularly as this pertains to Jews" (9), see Kalman (3–10). In my reading, I am using the term "oriental" merely as a quotation from Cohen's work; whenever it is used, it appears in quotation marks. It nevertheless features very prominently in my analysis, because I am focusing on a mother-son(-wife) relationship in which the term "oriental" is central. Applying it to the narrator, the mother, and the relationship itself in *Le livre de ma mère*, Cohen uses it in a self-conscious and self-ironic gesture—as he does in other works of his. Prominently using this term and all the colonial, othering, racializing stereotypes associated with it—especially in regard to the Sephardic Jewish Cephalonian relatives, "les Valeureux," who appear frequently in most of his other novels—, Cohen exposes the othering, racializing, anti-semitic viewpoint associated with it.

11 "[…] —living Jerusalem! She is disguised as a respectable lady of the West, but she hails from Canaan of ancient days and she does not know it" (*BM* 70).

12 For a detailed family history of the Coen family in Corfu, see Médioni (25–29).

13 The Jewish history of Corfu is long and turbulent. Geographically located between East and West, the island of Corfu was, in the course of history, conquered or occupied by the Byzantine Kingdom, Sicily, Venice, Anjou, Naples, France, and England, and finally (re-)annexed to Greece. The Jewish population consisted mostly of refugees from Spain and Portugal, Italy, and mainland Greece, and it was divided into two strictly distinct Jewish communities on the island, Greek Romaniote and Italian. Albert Cohen's Corfu-born parents represent those two communities: his mother, Louise Judith Coen née Ferro, originated from an Italian-speaking family; his father, Marco Coen, from a Romaniote, Greek-speaking background. Corfu had a substantial and thriving Jewish

on the island of Corfu in 1895 as Alberto Abraham Caliman Coen, and would return only once to Corfu, in the summer of 1908, after his bar mitzvah (Médioni 69–72). Even if it was a short stay of only two weeks, Corfu plays a decisive role in all his novels' imagery. Quite a number of his novel chapters are set entirely in "Céphalonie" (Corfu), and many chapters set in Western Europe feature "les Valeureux," Solal's Cephalonian relatives.[14] In *Le livre de ma mère*, the mother's stories from "the ghetto where I was born" (*BM* 83) are the greatest source of comfort and imagination for the narrator.[15] It is only in his student years in Geneva that Alberto Abraham Caliman Coen would change his name to Albert Cohen.[16] In 1919, he obtained Swiss citizenship in exchange for his Ottoman passport.

Within the narrative, we never hear or read the actual common (m)other tongue[17] of mother and son. French is the language that mother and son use throughout the narrative, but it is actually not the language they speak. We read their dialogues in translation. The actual common mother tongue of mother and son—an age-old dialect, imported by Venetian Jews to Corfu, which then migrated with the Cohen family to 20th century France—is secretly, silently, mournfully haunting the novel's French. This (m)other tongue remains unspoken, hidden, secret, private. And it is only after his mother's death that the narrator begins speaking "the Venetian dialect of the Jews of Corfu, which I sometimes used to speak with my mother" (*BM* 71), again—yet he only ever uses

---

population in the mid-nineteenth century. In an outburst of considerable hostility, a dramatic pogrom arose in 1891, not long before Albert Cohen's birth in 1895, which led many Jewish families (among them the Cohens) to migrate in the early-twentieth century. The remaining Jewish population was almost entirely deported and murdered by the Nazis in 1944. See Médioni (29–31), as well as "Corfu, Greece."

14 For details, see Zard (16–17).

15 "Parfois, comme je voudrais returner dans ce ghetto, y vivre entouré de rabbins, […] y vivre cette vie aimante, passionnée, ergoteuse, un peu […] folle" (*LM* 93).

16 See Médioni (27–28).

17 On the otherness inherent in any tongue, even or especially those that are supposedly one's mother tongue, see Prade (2–4; 5–7). Juliane Prade points out that a "mother tongue always remains an 'other' tongue, comprising forms other than the familiar ones" (2); she emphasizes the "irreducible need to differentiate between the mother tongue and other tongues" (3–4), remarks that "every language is linked to other tongues" (5), and raises awareness of the fact that a "language only becomes a mother tongue by way of altering it, by creating new forms, by making it an 'other' tongue" (6). The irreducible otherness of the so-called mother tongue is embodied in the figure of the mother in Cohen's work, who is a figure of (not least linguistic) "otherness."

it "in secret," and only with his cat, "mon ersatz de mère" (*LM* 81). This is, as the narrator states, "the only fake happiness left to me" (*BM* 71), "le seul faux bonheur qui me reste" (*LM* 81). The "original" language of mother and son is a dialect marked by a threefold difference: "Venetian" in then-Greek Corfu, "Jewish" among the Orthodox in Corfu, the Catholics in Marseille, and the Protestants in Geneva, and "from Corfu" in France, Switzerland, and England. Mother and son share a language without a home, a non-original language, a language of loss, an un-homely language of lost origins, an "accent oriental".

Bella Cohen's *Book of My Mother* omits or suppresses references to the "oriental" aspect of otherness that is so pronounced in the French version. During one of his mother's visits to Geneva, the narrator observes:

> Je me faisais tout oriental avec elle. Il nous est même peut-être arrivé de manger subrepticement des pistaches salées dans la rue, comme deux bons frangins méditerranéens qui n'avaient pas besoin, pour s'aimer, d'avoir une conversation élevée […]. (*LM* 69)

Bella Cohen's English version renders this passage as:

> I would become quite Balkan when I was with her. We may even have eaten salted pistachio nuts surreptitiously in the street, like a couple of cronies from the Mediterranean whose affection did not need high-minded talk […]. (*BM* 61)

In the French version, the narrator is willfully *making* himself oriental with his mother: "je me faisais tout oriental." In the English version, however, the narrator is not "oriental," but rather "Balkan,"[18] and the agency of this willful act of making himself entirely oriental is not his own: the speaking self "would" passively "become Balkan" in the company of his mother, rather than willfully turning *himself* oriental ("je *me* faisais…"). It also seems that there is a bit of a reservation towards "becoming Balkan" in Bella Cohen's English version: the narrator would only turn "*quite* Balkan," whereas in the French version, he is making himself "*tout* oriental," *entirely* "oriental." Slowly walking the streets of Geneva with his aging mother, Albert Cohen's French-speaking narrator transforms his entire being into his Mediterranean, "oriental" other.

---

18 This omission of the very word "oriental" can be observed throughout Bella Cohen's *Book of My Mother*. For instance, "splendeurs orientales" (*LM* 46) becomes "Eastern wonders" (*BM* 40).

In this "oriental" otherness, love is not dependent on eloquence: "pas besoin, pour s'aimer, d'avoir une conversation élevée." This almost sentence-like wisdom strongly opposes mutual love ("s'aimer") with highbrow conversation, reinforced by the rhyme *s'aimer – élevée*. Silent, non-intellectual, "oriental" love reigns over elevated, cultured, "occidental" eloquence.[19] In the French version, the verb *s'aimer* is reflexive, a form which grammatically constitutes a twofold pair that is mutually loving each other. Tellingly, Bella Cohen's English version omits the reflexive verb form as well as the very word "love," and replaces it with "affection." The translation inserts distance into the closeness of the dyadic mother-son couple. Or is their "oriental" love dyad so "other" that the translator-wife seems unable or unwilling to enter that space of the (m)other?

Is the translator inscribing herself in this intimate scene between mother and son? Her name, Bella, begins with a B, and the maiden name she still had when Albert Cohen dictated *Le livre de ma mère* to her is Berkovich. With "*b*ecoming *B*alkan" (my emphasis) instead of "se faire oriental," the translator is inscribing her own initials—a double B—into the translation. Moreover, Bella Cohen's translation lends her narrator *another* otherness—not an "oriental" one, but a "Balkan" one. Is it possibly her own? Bella's parents were Jewish migrants from Romania to England. Growing up, Bella Berkovich herself must

19 In an earlier episode, the narrator contrasts his mother's "amour biblique" with his own "passions occidentales" (*LM* 19; translated as "Western passions" by Bella Cohen; *BM* 15). The stark contrast between the silent, "oriental," motherly love and the narrator's eloquent, "occidental," erotic passion is striking when comparing *Le livre de ma mère* to Albert Cohen's later masterpiece, the novel *Belle du Seigneur*. The sheer length of *Belle du Seigneur* stems from the fact that the passionate adulterous love affair between Solal des Solal, the "oriental" Jew, and Ariane d'Auble, the "occidental" Protestant, is constantly talked through: temptation, seduction, and consummation of love are expressed in beautiful, elegant, excessive, well-phrased dialogues. In fact, the protagonists' love slowly withers as soon as they do not find a subject for *conversations élévées* anymore: Solal prolongs his kisses "parce qu'il ne trouvait rien à lui dire" (Cohen, *Belle du Seigneur* 618), he pretends to sleep "pour n'avoir plus besoin de poésie" (620), and he desperately tries to find subjects for conversation: "Eh bien, parler. Mai de quoi? Lui dire qu'il l'aimait ne lui apprendrait rien de nouveau. D'ailleurs, il le lui avait dit trois fois tout à l'heure, une fois avant le coït, une fois pendant, une fois après. Elle était au courant" (622). Slowly the lovers fall silent for lack of conversation topics, "toujours en silence, car il ne trouvait pas grand-chose à lui dire" (623), until their common suicide, and their joint silence in death, seems to be the only option to save their passionate love.

have felt "quite Balkan" in the London area. Whose voice is speaking in the translation?

Whose voice is speaking, indeed? The mother's displaced mother tongue, her "accent oriental" seems to be the secret, hidden, slightly shameful origin of the narrator's beautiful, powerful, generous French. In *Le livre de ma mère*, the narrator even imitates her accent to have a conversation with his dead mother that would turn into a book, the book of his mother: "Assis devant cette table, je fais la conversation avec elle […]. Mais ce n'est que moi qui radote, imitant son accent" (*LM* 162).[20] Is the entire book *Le livre de ma mère* indeed imitating the mother's accent?[21]

Speaking French with an "accent oriental," the narrator's mother might have pronounced *la mère* ("mother"), *l'amour* ("love"), and *la mort* ("death") exactly the same way, or at least very similarly. There is an episode in the famous *Derrida* film, by Amy Kofman and Kirby Dick, in which the director asks Jacques Derrida if he has anything to say about love (*l'amour*). Tellingly, Derrida "mishears" her at first, and asks back: *la mort* (instead of *l'amour*)?[22] *La mère, l'amour, la mort* are uncannily similar, if one is willing to listen to their reverberations in a foreign language, in an "accent oriental," perhaps. Is it in this French with an "accent oriental," in which *l'amour*, *la mort*, and *la mère* are almost indistinguishable, that the narrator chooses to write his book of the mother—*sa livre de la mère, sa livre de la mort, sa livre de l'amour*?

Albert Cohen's "song of death," his *chant de mort* (the original title of *Le livre de ma mère*) is composed around two *refrains* that painfully echo throughout the narrative: "Ma mère est morte, morte, morte, ma mère morte est morte, morte" (*LM* 174) and "Amour de ma mère, à nul autre pareil" (*LM* 88, 89, 90, 93, 94, 96, 98, 103).[23] Grave poems in and of themselves, those two leitmotifs gracefully and heartbreakingly interweave *la mère*, *l'amour*, and *la mort*. At the end of a dense and beautiful episode that could be called a hymn to motherhood, the narrator

20 Bella Cohen translates: "Seated at the table, I converse with her […]. But it is only me rambling on, imitating her accent" (*BM* 150).

21 The following section follows and at times quotes my earlier reading in Sauter (168); however, it is substantially revised here.

22 See Ben-Naftali (221–37). In fact, *la mort* and *l'amour* have an uncanny kinship in Derrida's philosophy. It is, for instance, not surprising that he devoted an aphoristic commentary to Shakespeare's tragedy of the "star-cross'd lovers," *Romeo and Juliet* (see Derrida, "Aphorism Countertime" 414–33).

23 "My mother is dead, dead, dead. My dead mother is dead, dead" (*BM* 161); "My mother's incomparable love" (*BM* 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 86, 90, 92).

comes to a halt at the culminating point, a dream-like dialogue between the deceased mother and her living son, in a dream world, a dream mode, in which they would still call each other by name:

> Mon fils, se serait-elle dit avec foi. Eh bien, moi, je t'envoie, les yeux ennoblis par toi, je t'envoie à travers les espaces et les silences, ce même acte de foi, et je te dis gravement: ma Maman. (*LM* 105–06)

> "My son," she would have said trustingly to herself. And so, lifting up my eyes, which bear the noble mark of your goodness, and cutting through the immensity of space and silence, I reciprocate that act of faith, and I say to you gravely, "Maman." (*BM* 92) [24]

The English translation chooses to omit or suppress the possessive pronoun "*ma* maman" in "I say to you gravely, 'Maman.'" The translator distances herself, again, from the closeness between mother and son: "Maman" in the English translation is not "*ma* maman," as in the French version. *His* mother is not *my* mother, the "maman" evoked here is not *her* "maman." In fact, the translation seems to want to bury the mother anew. The English word "grave" in the adverb "gravely" literally points to the grave, to death. This word spoken gravely, with gravity, this grave word, "Maman," could be the inscription on the mother's tombstone. "Maman," a word coming from the first stages of language acquisition, is spoken with the gravity of the grave. "Ma maman": this grave babble, gravest of all acts of babbling, joyful yet painful syllables. First words, and last words: "Ma maman." "Ma maman" reposes, gravely, in her grave.

There is a substantial difference between the adverb "gravement," gravely, and the childish expression, almost indistinguishable from a baby's playful babble, that this gravity is ascribed to: "ma maman." The childish expression "ma maman" is the most eloquent, the gravest, in fact, the only possible utterance that an eminent, aging poet in 1953 can always and only and still find to address his deceased mother, many years after her death. Like a small child, the narrator pronounces what could be understood as being merely a string of resounding syllables: *mamaman*. In the instance of this repetition, their

24 Lilly von Sauter translates into German: "Mein Sohn, hätte sie voller Vertrauen gesagt. Die Augen von dir geadelt, sende ich nun durch Raum und Schweigen das gleiche Glaubensbekenntnis zu dir und sage in tiefem Ernst: meine Mama" (*BuM* 74). "Meine Mama" are the last words I remember myself (as an adult woman, a mother to two daughters of my own) uttering to my dying mother, whom I also used to call *maman*.

semantic quality becomes doubtful—are those two words, *ma maman*? One word, *mamaman*? Any word or words at all? Is it babble? Does it have meaning? Does it matter if it does or does not?

Is the narrator imagining going back to what is lost, the pre-linguistic babble of a child? Is this an attempt at re-finding his original mother tongue, in those grave words, buried under his powerful French? The mother tongue that was there before there was meaning? Possibly the first meaning-filled, meaningful words he ever uttered? But: Did he even ever say those words in French? After all, Albert Cohen did not live in France, but on the island of Corfu when he was a little child first learning to speak. And he certainly did not speak French, but "the Venetian dialect of the Jews of Corfu" (*BM* 71) with his mother. Did he ever call his mother "ma Maman" at all?

Labor of Love: Translation and Haunting

The blurb of Bella Cohen's translation of her late husband's *Livre de ma mère* states: "Her translation of *Book of My Mother* […] was a labor of love." "Labor" is a metaphor of childbirth, *Geburtsarbeit*, a metaphor that connects the most intimate love and the most intense pain, and a metaphor by which her, Bella Cohen's, motherhood claims the translated text as her own. Within the narrative, the narrator identifies the mother entirely with her motherhood. For him, the mother is literally nothing but a mother. Even her selfhood is denied for the sake of her motherhood—or rather, for the sake of her son: "Ma mère n'avait pas de moi, mais un fils" (*LM* 101); "My mother had no *me*: she had a son" (*BM* 89). Emphasizing the "*me*" in the English translation by setting it in italics, the speaking I of the translator, who imagines birthing the work, points to herself while denying the self on a semantic level. In other words, the "*me*" that is denied within the text ("my mother had no *me*") is simultaneously emphasized in the translation, by setting it in italics.

Is it the abusive conception of self-less motherhood ("no *me*") that the translator is claiming for herself by speaking of a "labor of love"? In real life, Bella Cohen née Berkovich never was a mother, she never had a child. But she was extremely devoted to her husband and his work, even beyond his death, pouring herself entirely into it, to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion.[25]

25 Apparently, an extreme form of devotion and submission was what Cohen tyrannically expected of all women in his life—mother, lovers, and wives. In a letter, Albert Cohen's

In the blurb, it is the translator who depicts herself as painfully laboring towards, and possibly eventually birthing, the translated text.

Bella Cohen's "labor of love" implies the agony of birth pangs. The metaphor of translation as labor is already used in Walter Benjamin's 1923 text, "The Task of the Translator." According to Benjamin, translation is "charged" with "the special mission of watching over the maturing process [Nachreife] of the foreign word and the birth pangs [Wehen] of its own [des eigenen]" (256).[26] At the moment of translation, the "foreign word" of the original is "still there"—it matures, grows, flourishes—, while "its own" word already announces itself painfully. Yet in translation, the "own" word is still in the process of being born. Translation is "in labor," but the birth of "its own word" has not taken place yet, it is still—and probably always—laboring towards the birth of "its own word." In "Conclusions," his reading of Walter Benjamin's "Task of the Translator," Paul de Man famously translates Benjamin's metaphor of "birth pangs" or labor pain into "death pangs," "and the stress," for him, "is perhaps more on death than on life" (25). De Man then goes on to say: "The process of translation, if we can call it a process, is one of change and of motion that has the appearance of life, but of life as an afterlife, because translation also reveals the death of the original" (25). In de Man's reading, translation is connected to a certain belatedness. In the moment of translation, the original is dead, or at least, "it is disarticulated in a way which imposes upon us a particular alienation, a particular suffering" (25).

There is indeed a particular disarticulation at work in *The Book of My Mother*, which sounds so strangely awkward in English. And, in fact, judging from the harsh resentment against Bella Cohen's translation, this "disarticulation" of a language that one might conceive as one's own also can bring about a certain

---

second wife Marianne would justify their divorce (pronounced in October 1947) in quite drastic terms: "[…] ce n'est qu'au prix d'une soumission, d'un écrasement total qu'on peut être heureux avec lui. […] On n'a aucun droit auprès de lui à être un être humain" (qtd. in Médioni 197). This abusive, dictatorial, excessive, tyrannical demand of total devotion casts a dark shadow on Cohen's entire work, which revolves around, craves, demands, and praises love in the most lyrical, hymnic, biblical tone.

26 The German original reads: "[…] auf jene Nachreife des fremden Wortes, auf die Wehen des eigenen zu merken" (Benjamin, "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" 13). Harry Zohn's English translation, quoted above, is problematic in so far as he suppresses the foreignness, rendering "foreign words" as "original language"; my own paraphrase, quoted above, re-inserts the "foreign words." The German "Wehen," translated as "birth pangs" by Zohn, could also be rendered as "labor pain."

"suffering" (to paraphrase de Man again). Readers and critics have indeed "suffered" from Bella's English. One reviewer, in fact, articulates that his—very detailed and harsh—criticism is quite painful for himself: "It is not pleasant to criticize the work of a widow of a favourite author […]. It is even more difficult to give only mitigated praise when the work in question is so obviously a labour of love" (Langille 193).

A "labor of love"? Bella Cohen, the translator of *Book of My Mother*, played a decisive role not only as the one laboring towards, and eventually possibly birthing the translation, but also as the one conceiving *Le livre de ma mère*. In fact, Bella Berkovich first served as his secretary before becoming Albert Cohen's lover, and then his wife. Their first encounter literally took place in the space of dictation—he dictated *Le livre de ma mère* to her. In fact, Albert Cohen dictated all his works, many of them several times, mostly to his wives or lovers (Médioni 159). A dictator in love relationships, the act of dictating his literary creations has a strongly erotic component for Albert Cohen. In his autofictional journal *Carnets 1978*, Cohen recalls dictating his first novel to "une femme aimée": "Tous les soirs, je lui dictais des pages […]. C'était un don à l'aimée. Certains offrent des fleurs. Moi, je lui offrais un livre […]. La bien-aimée se rejouissait du don dicté de chaque soir et elle m'en chérissait" (30–31) .[27] In the case of *Le livre de ma mère*, the eroticized ritual of lengthy dictation sessions, "jouissif à l'extrême" (Médioni 164–65), is a scene of "haunted writing."[28] The mother's specter is always there as Albert Cohen dictates *Le livre de ma mère* to Bella Berkovich. It is in the haunted, eroticized space of dictations that their love affair begins. The pain of the mother's death, the pleasure of writing, and

27 Cohen also calls his beloved "mère de mon premier roman," mother of my first novel, and continues in an almost caressing tone: "Notre enfant, nous l'avons fait ensemble […]." (*Carnets 1978* 30, 31). Begetting the text, conceiving a text, and birthing a text are eroticized metaphors of motherhood that are brought up in this equally eroticized phantasy of dictation.

28 On the notion of "haunted writing," see Ronell (xviii). In her book, Ronell applies the "ethics of haunting" that she is sketching out to the relation between Goethe and Eckermann, which is also defined by dictation: "Eckermann, who wrote under dictation, completed Goethe's oeuvre. The completion of Goethe however implies the sacrifice of another: the disaster of Eckermann" (xxvii). Her psychoanalytically informed reading of Goethe's writings in light of Eckermann's effacement is an uncanny gesture in itself. Albert Cohen's demand for an "écrasement total" (see n25 above) on the part of his wives or lovers, who are also the recipients of his dictations, is, in that sense, reminiscent of the Goethe/Eckermann relationship described by Ronell in terms of disaster and catastrophe.

the passion of the erotic merge in the haunted—and strangely oedipal—scene of dictation, this dictatorial scene.

Albert Cohen's act of dictation, haunted by the mother's specter, births *Le livre de ma mère* (and a love affair that would become a marriage) while mourning the death of his mother. Pain and pleasure, death and birth, the work of mourning and the work of creation, merge. The very first paragraph of *Le livre de ma mère* and *Book of my Mother* reads, in French and English respectively:

> Chaque homme est seul et tous se fichent de tous et nos douleurs sont une île déserte. Ce n'est pas une raison pour ne pas se consoler, ce soir, dans les bruits finissants de la rue, se consoler, ce soir, avec des mots. (*LM* 9)

> Every man is alone and no one cares a rap for anyone and our sorrows are a desert island. Yet why should I not seek comfort tonight as the sounds of the streets fade away, seek comfort tonight in words? (*BM* 3)

It seems that these opening lines of Albert Cohen's book of mourning defy the famous opening lines of John Donne's "Meditation XVII": "No man is an *Iland* intire of it self; euery man is a piece of the *Continent*, a part of the *maine*…" (394). In Cohen's conception, being alone is an essential part of the human condition ("Chaque homme est seul"), and it is pain—possibly conceived as too personal and too subjective to share—that is "une île déserte," "a desert island," isolating human beings from each other.[29] In which way are words a consolation ("se consoler") or a comfort ("seek comfort")? The answer differs considerably in the French and English versions.

Albert Cohen's French narrator does not use any personal pronouns. The only exception is a collective *nous* in "nos douleurs" ("our sorrows"), otherwise the narrator seems very careful to avoid saying "I." Impersonal, passive formulations are used instead: "Ce n'est pas une raison pour ne pas se consoler, ce soir, […]" The homophony of the reflexive pronoun "se" and the demonstrative pronoun "ce," as well as the strong pattern of hissing S-sounds (*s*eul, *s*ont, *ce*, *se*,

29 On the notion of the linguistic unsharability of pain, see Scarry (esp. 4: pain "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it," pain "ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language"); for a critique of Scarry, see Ferber (8–14). Rather than focusing on its isolating moments, Ferber points out the aspect of community in experiencing pain: for her, all human beings "share […] vulnerability to pain, regardless of linguistic or cultural differences," and hence, "it has an equal power to completely open us up to the possibility of sharing […]" (13).

soir, finissants, consoler), add to the impression that this soundscape is producing many words and phrases, only to arrive at the same sound patterns—patterns that avoid voicing personal pain. In Cohen's voicing of words, they are a material, used with skill, and it is their very beauty and harmony that might be a "consolation": the pain of death turns into the pleasure of artistic, literary creation.

Bella Cohen's translation, in contrast, does inscribe a personal speaker, a self, an "I" from the very beginning. And, in contrast to the French, the I in the English version asks a question: "Yet why should *I* not seek comfort tonight [...]?," thus implying a "you" that this question is directed at: a dialogic situation. The English version opens a conversation, a dialogue, whereas the impersonal, sentence-like formulations of the French original ("ce n'est pas une raison...") avoid one. Yet this personal, dialogic self stands in contrast to the sentence-like, impersonal opening formula, "Every man is alone [...]." The speaking voice is not "every man," it is a distinguishable, a personal self, an "I" that voices her pain. It seems as if Bella Cohen, the translator who is the author's widow as well as the recipient of his first dictations, is insisting on her right to voice her own sorrow and pain, and to find consolation in translating the very book of his that her husband loved most: Why should *I*, Bella Cohen, not seek comfort in (translating) his, Albert's, words? After all, she is reviving his voice, long silenced by death, with her translation. The pain of death turns into the pleasure of creation—but that creation speaks in the voice of the dead.

For Albert Cohen, it is the physical aspect of the activity of writing that turns pain into pleasure and suffering into beauty. In that sense, there is joy and jouissance in writing, even if it is writing in pain, and hence, there is a meaning behind suffering: it can be turned into something beautiful.[30] In the act of writing, "douleur" is turned into "jouissance." Hubert Nyssen, an eminent French editor and founder of Actes Sud, who published his *Lectures d'Albert Cohen* with Actes Sud in 1987, recalls a conversation he had with Cohen after *Le livre de ma mère* was published, well-received, and highly praised: "Et il [Albert Cohen] me disait: 'Hubert, quelle jouissance j'ai eu d'écrire sur la mort de ma mère avec ma belle plume en or!'" (Médioni 210). It is the beauty of the physical object, the golden fountain pen, that makes the act of writing about his

30 Myriam Champigny-Cohen, Albert Cohen's daughter, stated in an interview that her father saw the power of turning pain into pleasure as the heart of artistic creation: "il fallait souffrir utile ou aimer utile grâce à la création artistique. La souffrance, autrement, elle est insupportable" (qtd. in Médioni 209–10).

mother's death pleasurable—even to the point of erotic pleasure ("jouissance"). And it is this very fountain pen—golden, eroticized, phallic—that the narrator addresses lovingly on the very first pages of *Le livre de ma mère*, almost caressing it with words as he is touching it with his writing hand, holding it gently:

> Somptueuse, toi, ma plume d'or, va sur la feuille, va au hasard tandis que j'ai quelque jeunesse […]. Va, je t'aime, ma seule consolation, va sur les pages où tristement je me complais et dont le strabisme morosement me délecte. Oui, les mots, ma patrie, les mots, ça console et ça venge. Mais ils ne me rendront pas ma mère. Si remplis de sanguine passé battant aux tempes et tout odorant qu'ils puissent être, les mots que j'écris ne me rendront pas ma mère morte. Sujet interdit dans la nuit. Arrière, image de ma mère vivante lorsque je la vis pour la dernière fois en France, arrière, maternel fantôme. (*LM* 10)

> Sumptuous, O my golden pen, roam over the page, roam at random while I yet have some youth […]. Roam on, pen, I love you, my sole consolation; roam through the pages which give me dismal delight and in whose squinting eye I gloomily revel. Yes, words are my homeland, words console and avenge. But words will not bring back my mother. Brimful though they be of the vibrant past drumming at my temples and distilling its fragrance, the words I write will not bring back my dead mother. That subject is banned in the night. Begone, vision of my mother living when I saw her for the last time in France. Begone, maternal wraith. (*BM* 8)

The golden, eroticized, phallic fountain pen, a source of pleasure, jouissance, and even love ("je t'aime"), paradoxically conjures up visions and produces specters and nightmares in this eroticized scene of writing. In the French version, the narrator weaves a dense carpet of motherly M-sounds around the apparition of his mother, the "maternal"—or, perhaps, motherly—"wraith," which is haunting the narrative: *m*ais, *me*, *ma*, *m*ère. He wraps the words "mère" in a fabric of words that also contains the possessive pronoun "ma," and the reflexive pronoun "me"—words connected to a speaking "I," a personal self who is voicing his pain and claiming the right to speak of "*my* mother," "*ma* mère." In the repeated M-sounds, "*m*a *m*ère *m*orte" appears (all emphases mine).

In the English version, the soundscape is completely different, and the "motherly wraith" turns into another ghost, by insisting on B-sounds: "*B*ut words will not *b*ring *b*ack my mother" (my emphasis). Bella Cohen omits the

reflexive pronoun ("ils ne *me* rendront pas ma mère") as if she would say: this mother of *his* cannot be brought back to *me*. Instead, her sentence (again) insists on B-sounds: *b*ut, *b*ring, *b*ack, *b*rimful, *b*egone. Is it a coincidence? Is Bella Berkovich (again) inscribing her own initials into this intimate scene of mourning that gives rise to an actual apparition of the mother's ghost? In other words, is Bella's name—Bella's maiden name: Bella Berkovich, the recipient of Albert Cohen's dictations—haunting the *Book of My Mother*? Is it the ghost of the translator-wife rather than that of the mother that haunts the pages of the English translation?

Translation could indeed be read as a haunted space, and the language of translation could be read as a ghostly, spectral language. This has to do with its essential belatedness. Every translation must come after the "original." For Benjamin, translation therefore is "a continued life," an "afterlife" ("Task of the Translator" 254). Like a revenant, translation continues the life of the original beyond death. However, for Benjamin, translation is entangled not only with the past, but also with the future: it is to-come, or in-coming, *à-venir*, it anticipates a future insofar as it is an "anticipative, intimating realization" of the expression of "the innermost relationship of languages" (255). In that sense, translation has a double commitment to both the future and the past. Intertwining different layers of time, in translation the simultaneity of past (in the afterlife or survival of the original) and future (in the directedness of the translation) is enacted. In that sense, translation suspends temporal linearity and operates in an in-between time.

The in-between time of translation is the uncanny time of ghosts, revenants, who belong to past and future simultaneously. Having lived already, ghosts are at the same time ahead of presence and lagging behind; they are *re-venants*, "again-comers." In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida speaks of the "deferred time" of ghosts, and states:

> If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents, and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality […] (39).

The "border" between past, present, and future, and between "reality" and non-reality becomes doubtful once the ghost enters the stage—as he does, famously, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, another work of mourning and melancholy. Similarly, in the act of translating, a past (the original) points to what

is to come (the translation), yet it merges those two times without establishing a clear-cut "reality" of its own. On the contrary: Walter Benjamin calls translation "only a somewhat provisional way" of coming to terms with "the foreignness of languages" ("Task of the Translator" 257), and Derrida speaks of "a non-present present" of ghosts (*Specters of Marx* 6).

In this sense, every translation is the revenant of the original, for it materializes—without ever being able to be present—a disembodied original that no longer exists (it is in this sense that Derrida speaks of the "non-presence" of spectral apparitions). The form of translation is a ghostly visitation of language. Avital Ronell remarks that "hauntedness allows for visitations without making itself at home" (xviii). Similarly, a translation is a form of un-homely (an uncanny "translation" of the German *unheimlich*) transience: it is never a "final rather than temporary and provisional solution" (Benjamin, "Task of the Translator" 257). The complex temporal structure of translation, its transience and belatedness, is a ghostly time which is "out of joint," as Hamlet famously has it in a ghostly play of Shakespeare's.[31] Translation, then, could be seen as haunted language. It opens time and inscribes an uncanny, spectral other, the revenant of a foreign text, into itself.

Bella Cohen's *Book of My Mother* is a piece of haunted writing: "Haunted writing writes on this limit, which is that of our time" (Ronell xviii). In fact, Bella Cohen only published her translation long after her husband's death, about forty years after the "original." Is her translation a work of mourning? And the belatedness a sort of symptom? Belatedness is not only an essential temporal quality of translation, but also the most decisive narrative feature of *Le livre de ma mère.* Its narrative situation is belated because death has silenced all protagonists (including the narrator). Throughout the narrative, again and again, the narrator reiterates that it is too late to express his regrets, make up for past hurts, or continue an interrupted conversation. This gives way to what one could call the "spectrality" of the narrative situation.

Similarly, on the protagonist level, it is undecidable whether both the narrator and his mother dwell in the realm of the living or the dead—"Moi, un peu mort parmi les vivants, toi, un peu vivante parmi les morts" (*LM* 32); "I am part dead among the living, you are part alive among the dead" (*BM* 27)—, just as "one does not know if it is living or if it is dead" in the case of ghosts and specters (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 6). In the translation, even the narrator is dead: in

31 For a detailed reading focusing on the difficulty of translating the expression "out of joint" in *Hamlet*, see Derrida (*Specters of Marx* 19–29).

Bella Cohen's *Book of My Mother*, everyone speaking in the book—apart from the translator—is long dead, and their speech is gone (and from our vantage point, even the translator's voice has been silenced by death).[32] All voices—apart from the translator's at the time of translation—are voices from the grave. And in this sense, birth pangs might indeed be death pangs, and the "labor of love" might never lead to motherhood, but remain in labor, painfully and permanently.

Sink, Sank, Sonk: Translation and Song

In a decisive scene of *Le livre de ma mère*, the narrator looks in a mirror and sees himself reflected not as himself, but as a reflection of his mother:[33]

> Je me regarde dans la glace, mais c'est ma mère qui est dans la glace. J'ai un chagrin qui devient ce corps, je suis blanc et tout moite. Sur ma joue, ce ne sont pas des larmes, ce privilège des peu malheureux, mais des gouttes qui coulent du front. Ces sueurs de la mort de ma mère sont glacées […]. Il me reste une glace et mon égarement que j'y regarde […]. (*LM* 129–30)[34]

> I stare in the mirror, but it is my mother who is in the mirror. My grief becomes physical, and I am pale and clammy. My cheeks are wet not with tears—the privilege of those who suffer little—but with drops trickling down from my forehead. The sweat of the death of my mother is ice-cold […]. What is left to me is a mirror and the bewilderment which I contemplate in it […]. (*BM* 117–18)

32 The idea of a conversation with the (voices of) the dead—his mother and father, his friend Marcel Pagnol, his lovers and wives—runs as a red thread through *Carnets 1978*, a late diary of Cohen's, and sometimes the narrator includes himself in their symphony: "En mon vieil âge, je retourne vers toi, Maman morte, […] à qui absurdement j'aime parler. J'ai quatre-vingt-deux ans et je vais bientôt mourir. Vite me redire […]" (9).

33 I have commented extensively on this scene in an earlier publication of mine (Sauter 169–71). I am drawing on my earlier analysis here, yet I am also pointing out different aspects.

34 This uncanny reflection of the dead mother in the mirror is reflected in his *Carnets 1978* as a reflection of Marcel Pagnol, Cohen's close friend, who died in 1974. Almost literally, the narrator here repeats the words of *Le livre de ma mère*, albeit with very distinctive and significant modifications: "Jamais plus Marcel, jamais plus, et j'ai une douleur qui devient ce corps. Ce ne sont pas des larmes mais une sueur dans le dos et j'ai un égarement dans la glace que je regarde pour me tenir compagnie" (*Carnets 1978* 51).

The mirror reflects something uncanny—the narrator looks at himself in the mirror, but he sees his mother:[35] "Je me regarde dans la glace, mais c'est ma mère qui est dans la glace." Bella Cohen translates: "I stare in the mirror, but it is my mother who is in the mirror." In the French, the narrator here uses "glace," instead of "miroir," for mirror.[36] The word "glace" is echoed later in the adjective "glacée": "Ces sueurs de la mort de ma mère sont glacées," the narrator says, and he continues again: "Il me reste une glace […]." In French, "glacées" ("ice-cold") and "glace" ("mirror") are almost the same word, yet "glace" is missing an *accent* to spell "glacée." In other words, "glace" is "glacé" minus an *accent*. "Glace" is what is left after the *accent* is taken away. "Glace," the mirror, might be what is left of the narrator's language after his mother's ("foreign," "oriental") accent has forever been silenced and taken away. It is spelled and pronounced slightly differently. This simultaneity of identification and difference, epitomized in "glace" and "glacé," captures the experience of the narrator, who sees his mother's mirror image: "glacée," ice-cold as her death drops is the mirror;[37] "la glace," whose reflection is mirroring not his own body, but hers.

And this spectral body of his mother's becomes the narrator's own grief embodied. "J'ai un chagrin qui devient ce corps." My grief, my sorrow, my affliction become "*this* body" ("*ce* corps"; my emphasis), the narrator says: his "chagrin" turns into the very body that stares at him in the mirror—his mother's (French) "corps" that is now a corpse (English). Bella Cohen translates: "My grief becomes physical." The act of merging with a lifeless body, which the French emphasizes, is kept at a distance by omitting the demonstrative pronoun *ce* and inserting the almost technical term "physical" in the English version. It seems to be impossible for the translator to capture *this* body, the very body in the

35 In Freud's "The Uncanny," a telling—and actually the last—footnote relates an uncanny experience of Freud's that involves looking at his own reflection in a mirror: "I soon realized to my dismay that the intruder was my own image, reflected in the mirror on the connecting door. I can still recall that I found his appearance thoroughly unpleasant" (162). The uncanny in Freud's experience consists in failing to recognize his own double, while for Cohen's narrator, the uncanny consists in seeing *not* his own double, but a reflection of an other: his (dead, or ghostly) mother. Or is he failing to recognize himself in her, as his own double?

36 In Cohen's later novel *Belle du Seigneur*, in which mirrors are a leitmotif, he usually uses the word "psyché" instead of "glace" or "miroir." The different choice of words for the identical object seems deliberate.

37 For an extensive reading of the Christian iconography of "sweating blood" and its relation to life in the Hebrew Bible, see Sauter (170–71).

mirror, and to have her own pain turned into the mother's body. After all, Bella never saw Albert's mother's body, neither dead nor alive.

"Ces sueurs de la mort de ma mère sont glacées," says the narrator; "the sweat of the death of my mother is ice-cold," says the translator. The demonstrative "ces" refers to the sweat drops flowing from his forehead that he has described before ("gouttes qui coulent du front," "drops trickling down from my forehead"). It is *those* sweat drops, the very sweat drops on his cheeks, that are the sweat drops of "ce corps," "this body," his mother's body that merges into his own.[38] And again, Bella Cohen's translation into English refuses to let that merging happen and distances the speaking voice from the dead body. For her, it is merely "*the* sweat drops of my mother's death" (my emphasis), not *those* drops—the very drops that are on the speaker's own forehead and cheeks. The translation keeps the mother's body at a distance.

What is left to the narrator, then, is a looking glass: "il me reste une glace et mon égarement que j'y regarde." Bella Cohen translates: "What is left to me is a mirror and the bewilderment which I contemplate in it." In a passage that I left out in my quote above, the narrator amuses himself in front of the mirror with creating an optical illusion by pressing his own eyeball: "ça fait une illusion d'optique et je vois dans la glace deux orphelins. Et avec moi, ça fait trois et ça tient compagnie" (*LM* 130); "this creates an optical illusion and I see two orphans in the mirror. And with me that makes three, which is company" (*BM* 117). "Mon égarement" refers most likely to those illusions: the creatures who are reflections of his own image, yet optically doubled or even tripled in his sight by his act of willfully inflicting physical pain upon himself, pressing hard on his eyeballs.

Perhaps symptomatically, it is "*mon* égarement" (my emphasis) in the French version, and "*the* bewilderment" (my emphasis) in English: the possessive pronoun pointing to the speaking self (*mon*) is replaced by a seemingly neutral definite article, *the*. In the French version, the narrator sees himself as his own *égarement*—his aberrance, aberration, errancy, or obliquity—in the

38 The body, perhaps, always stood between my mother and myself. Like Franz Rosenzweig, my mother suffered from Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis for the last sixteen years of her life; she—who used to be a vital, physically active person throughout my childhood—was confined to a wheelchair; a breathing machine and voice recognition software took the place of her own bodily functions and expressions. The motherly body of my earliest childhood memories was frail, motionless, speechless for most of my adult life. And it was only in my work with and on Rosenzweig, later on, that I was able to find words for how the power of speech and speechlessness can also belong together.

mirror. He sees a double or triple version of his own reflection, another self that does not really exist and that is a product of his willfully and painfully manipulating the clarity of his vision. In a way, by inflicting pain on himself, he is making himself clairvoyant: after pressing his fingertips against his eyeballs, he is seeing things that are not actually there. He sees another, purely illusory, non-embodied version of himself—he sees himself as a specter. Bella Cohen's translation, in contrast, only sees a neutral "bewilderment," with no optical illusion, no other of herself. Does the translator even see herself? "What is left to me is a mirror and *the* bewilderment which *I* contemplate in it" (my emphasis). There is a stark contrast between the bewilderment and the speaking I. The I is merely an observer of the bewilderment reflected in the mirror, she is not part of it, and it is not part of her. Where is this bewilderment coming from? What does it reflect? Or whom? Something uncanny is lurking behind the translation.

The uncanny reflection in the looking glass, the "glace," artificially created by the narrator's act of willfully inflicting pain on himself, manipulating and twisting his eyeballs, reflects itself in an uncanny, twisted language. A strange presence appears in his words, and it is inserted in the form of a musical quote. "Il me reste une glace et mon égarement que j'y regarde," writes the narrator, and he continues:

> […] que je regarde en souriant pour avoir envie de faire semblant de vivre, tout en murmurant avec un petit rire un peu fou que tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise, et que je suis perdu. Perdu, perdi, perdo, perda. (*LM* 129–30)

> What is left to me is a mirror and the bewilderment which I contemplate in it, which I contemplate with a smile so as to want to simulate living, while I murmur with a slightly mad little laugh that everything in the garden is lovely and that I am sunk. Sunk, sank, sink, sonk. (*BM* 118–19)

The phrase "avoir envie de" in the rather complex French phrase "pour avoir envie de faire semblant de vivre" bristles with life: it literally entails the words *en vie*, "in life." Yet this literal meaning is already taken back right after pronouncing it, because "envie" is refering to "faire semblant de vivre," "to simulate living." To be *en vie*, to—literally—be "in life," is only a semblance, a simulation of life. The reality lurking behind life is still death. Life is nothing but a dissimulation of death. The ever-present death in his own life makes the narrator "un

peu fou," "slightly mad," and he murmurs something that sounds completely nonsensical at first: "tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise."

"Tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise" is a musical quote: a famous line from a very popular 1935 chanson written by Paul Misraki, a songwriter, pianist, singer, comedian, and filmmaker, who happens to be the son of Jewish immigrants from the Ottoman Empire to France, like Albert Cohen himself. Popularized as a musical sketch by Ray Ventura—a classmate and colleague of Misraki's, incidentally also of Sephardic Jewish origin—and his band, the Collégiens (which Misraki was part of), the chanson "Tout va très bien (Madame la marquise)," was, almost immediately, very popular in France and abroad (there was a Russian version of the chanson in 1935 and a Hebrew one in 1938).

The chanson's content seems to be pure slapstick: A worried noblewoman repeatedly calls her butler James at home ("Allô, allô James! Quelle nouvelle?") and learns about a series of calamities that occurred during her two-week absence—from her favorite horse's death to her castle's complete destruction in fire, the loss of her entire fortune, and finally her husband's despair and suicide. All those horrible facts are called "un tout petit rien," "un incident, une bêtise" by her butler James, who reassures her each time she calls: "Cela n'est rien, Madame la Marquise, / Cela n'est rien, tout va très bien," and continues cheerfully and happily:

> Tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise,
> Tout va très bien, tout va très bien.
> Pourtant il faut, il faut que l'on vous dise,
> On déplore un tout petit rien:
> Si l'écurie brûla, Madame,
> C'est qu'le château était en flammes.
> Mais à part ca, Madame la Marquise,
> Tout va très bien, tout va très bien.[39]

In Misraki's chanson, form and content consciously clash: the series of deaths and catastrophes is recounted and sung in a cheerful, upbeat mode, and the line "Tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise" is constantly repeated, sounding more and more absurd as the catastrophes pile up, getting more and more serious. The foolish and not-at-all-reassuring harmlessness of the phrase "Tout

39 All quotations for "Tout va très bien (Madame la Marquise)" are from Misraki et al.

va très bien, Madame la Marquise," together with the music's annoying, almost unnerving cheerfulness, stands in sharp contrast to the horrible facts that are being recounted. It is therefore unsurprising that the line from Misraki's 1935 chanson was already a proverbial phrase in the late 1930s, used to describe the attempt to consciously blind oneself for the realities of a desperate situation—most obviously, the deliberate blindness in regard to Nazi Germany in pre-war France. In the 1940s, there were headlines like *Tout va très bien Monsieur Mussolini* in leading French-speaking newspapers, radio broadcasts, and magazines, and finally *Tout va très bien mon Führer* in 1944 on Radio Londres, a French-language, London-based radio broadcast to Nazi-occupied France (Klein 185). Albert Cohen lived in London between 1940 and 1946, working for the Jewish Agency, and was actively involved in Free French and Résistance circles—he would most likely have known about this usage of the phrase while reworking his 1943 version of *Chant de Mort* (first published in the London-based, French-language journal *La France libre*) for and with Bella in 1953.

The line from Paul Misraki's chanson therefore introduces an element of instability into Cohen's already instable haunted mirror scene. The protagonist seems to be losing himself in the reverberations of what the musical quote might (not) or could (not) mean. With a "slightly mad little laugh," "un petit rire un peu fou," he murmurs "que tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise, et que je suis perdu. Perdu, perdi, perdo, perda" (*LM* 129–30). In the playful yet uncanny closing phrase of the mirror scene, even the meaning of *perdre*, losing, is *perdu*, lost. The narrator feels lost ("perdu") because his mother's loss (*perte*) might resound in his head in an accent that might resemble his mother's. In a famous recording of "Tout va très bien (Madame la Marquise)" by Ray Ventura et ses Collégiens, over the course of the song, the butler develops an accent that is getting stronger and stronger—more "oriental" perhaps— every time the indeed more and more meaningless line "Tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise" is repeated. The Rs are increasingly rolled and the nasals are increasingly hard, until the singers all sing in strong "foreign accents." Might Louise Judith Coen have had a similar accent, in her unique, distinctive, and singular "foreign French"? Conjuring up Misraki's ghost, and blurring it with the "maternel fantôme," the mother's foreign accent is, again, haunting *Le livre de ma mère*—even if we cannot literally hear it or read it within the narrative—through the echo and the implications of Misraki's chanson.

Albert Cohen's proverbial musical quote "tout va très bien, Madame la marquise" is translated as "everything in the garden is lovely" in Bella Cohen's version. Her English translation also quotes a popular piece of music—yet it is a

musical allusion that stems not from Albert Cohen's world, but from Bella Cohen's world and her own life experience. "Everything in the garden is lovely" is a line from a song by the music-hall artist Miss Marie Lloyd (1870–1922) that had become a catchphrase in early-twentieth-century London—the London Bella Berkovich grew up in. In this song, written by J. P. Harrington and composed by Georges Le Brun, perfect outward appearances gradually reveal their true, ugly character: a "dossy youth in all his extra best" with "a pair of patents, a pair of kids, and a lovely flowered vest" is soiled by a painter's pot flying down a ladder; a "young maiden" confesses "with blushes on her face": the "lad who said he would marry me, [who] bought presents and pressed me to his breast," merely impregnated her; a lady "on her Gee-Gee canters down a country lane," "but suddenly her horse takes fright" and she has a serious accident while her "smart young groom" only laughs at her "till tears fall from his eye"; and finally, corrupt "powers" decide about the destiny of a beautiful piece of China—or the fate of the poor country of China: "They want sixteen million cash / Else the China goes to smash / And everything in the garden's lovely."[40]

Similarly to "Tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise," the line "Everything in the garden's lovely" is repeated almost annoyingly often, literally in every second line of the song, and the chorus goes: "Everything in the garden is absolutely grand / Everything in the garden is great, you'll understand." The image of a beautiful, idyllic garden in which "everything is lovely" and "absolutely grand" stands in sharp contrast to the emotional suffering (and the serious political threats) contained in the song's lyrics.

This piece of music was written for as well as performed and popularized by Marie Lloyd. One of the most famous and highest-paid female variety artists of her time, Marie Lloyd was known for the sexual innuendo of her performances, giving suggestive interpretations to seemingly innocent lyrics in her distinctive Cockney accent. Born in the London area in 1919, Bella Cohen would have been familiar with the popularity of Marie Lloyd's "Everything in the Garden's Lovely," first performed in 1898, and its later proverbial use. She would most likely also have known that Marie Lloyd first performed under the stage name "Bella Delmere." Quoting one of the most famous lines of Marie Lloyd's, it seems that Bella Cohen née Berkovich is entering the stage here through the back door of translation: Bella Cohen might be performing under a pseudonym, as Bella Delmere. The French word for mother, *mère*, is literally

40 All quotations for "Everything in the Garden's Lovely" are from Harrington.

inscribed into the (or her) (fake) stage name, "Delmere." Yet it is clearly "Bella" who is speaking, even if under a fake name, a pseudonym.

Like Marie Lloyd's performances, the translation here becomes erotically charged. The quote "everything in the garden is lovely" in Bella Cohen's translation is—unlike in the French original, which makes no mention of a garden—directly related to the narrative context. Within the narrative, after uttering the phrase "everything in the garden is lovely," the narrator literally steps out into the garden:

> […] while I murmur with a slightly mad little laugh that everything in the garden is lovely and that I am sunk. Sunk, sank, sink, sonk […]. Night has fallen. To stop thinking of my mother I went into the garden […]. A stray dog looked at me with the eyes of my mother and I came back inside. (*BM* 118–19)

> […] tout en murmurant avec un petit rire un peu fou que tout va très bien, Madame la Marquise, et que je suis perdu. Perdu, perdi, perdo, perda […]. Maintenant, c'est la nuit. Pour ne plus penser à ma mère, je suis sorti dans le jardin […]. Un chien errant m'a regardé avec les yeux de ma mère, et je suis rentré. (*LM* 131)

Just like in Marie Lloyd's song, the garden here is a fake idyll. It does not offer solace and comfort, let alone loveliness. On the contrary, the garden becomes an uncanny place haunted by "a stray dog," or, in French, "un chien errant," clearly reminiscent of the problematic topos of *le Juif errant*, with the eyes of the dead mother. Literally a *juive errante*—a Jewish woman erring between the living and the dead, haunting the narrator's nightly visions—the mother's un-dead eyes watch the narrator stumble out into the garden. In the English version, the garden's hauntedness seems to shake the ground under the translator's feet and lets her sink deep: "[…] I murmur with a slightly mad little laugh that everything in the garden is lovely and that I am sunk. Sunk, sank, sink, sonk."

In the words the narrator utters in French, we can hear echoes of the father (*père*) and not the mother (*la mère—l'amour—la mort*). Again and again, the father figure that is so strikingly absent within the narrative appears, insisting, in the repeated, broken line "perdu [*père*-du], perdi [*père*-di], perdo [*père*-do], perda [*père*-da]." In the absence of the dead mother, the lost son seems to be haunted by the living father, who—in contrast to the mother—is still *da* [*père-da*], alive, still "en vie" (at least in the 1943 version of his work; Marco Cohen died

in June 1952). And yet the father is almost entirely absent, narratively speaking, as if the son were trying to take revenge for the death of his mother by killing the father as well by erasing him entirely from the narrative. In contrast, Bella Cohen's English translation literally and strikingly inscribes the son instead of the father: "Sunk, sank, sink, *sonk*" (my emphasis).

While the narrator in the French version does not even attempt to create semantic sense or coherence ("Perdu, perdi, perdo, perda"), the English translation here uses correct grammatical verb forms of the verb "(to) sink": except for "sonk," all other words uttered here are correct conjugations of "(to) sink." But the fake and faked verb "sonk" is phonologically very close to an existing English word, namely the word *song*. With this, echoes of the title of the first published version of *Le livre de ma mère* in *La France libre*, in 1943–44, reappear: *Chant de mort*, Song of Death. This Song of Death might resound in the nightly garden, yet it is uncannily distorted in Bella Cohen's translation and comes out as an almost violent sound: *sonk*.

In biblical tradition—a tradition that Albert Cohen is very familiar with—the song and the garden are closely connected. In the biblical book Song of Songs, the garden is a major leitmotif, a famous and prominent metaphor for erotic love, usually read as an allegory of the beloved woman's body: "A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed" (*King James Version*, Song 4.12). The biblical Song of Songs has a decisive place within Albert Cohen's entire oeuvre. In 1969, Albert Cohen answered the famous "questionnaire de Proust" for *Journal de Genève*, and lists as his favorite poets: "King David, *the author of Song of Songs*, Ronsard, Baudelaire, Rimbaud" (qtd. in Médioni 246; my emphasis). Most famously and prominently, the language of his 1968 masterpiece *Belle du Seigneur* (dedicated to his wife Bella, whose name is resounding in the *Belle* of the title) is overflowing with allusions to this heartbreakingly beautiful erotic poem from the Hebrew Bible. But, perhaps quite surprisingly, it is equally prominent within *Le livre de ma mère*. Even on the very first pages, the sleep of the mother's death is guarded with words quoted from the Song of Songs: "Chut, ne la réveillez pas, filles de Jérusalem, ne la réveillez pas pendant qu'elle dort" (*LM* 12); "Hush, do not awaken her, daughters of Jerusalem. Do not awaken her while she sleeps" (*BM* 9). Towards the end, the narrator twists the rose metaphor that the Song so famously unfolds ("I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters"; Song 2.1–2; *King James Version*) and turns it into an image of death: "ces roses sont des bouts de cadavres qu'on force à faire semblant de vivre trois jours de plus dans de l'eau" (*LM* 134); "those

roses […] are precorpses forced to simulate life three days longer in water" (*BM* 122). Exasperated, he throws the bouquet of fragrant roses "out of the window on a beribboned old lady with a shopping bag" (*BM* 122), an image that could very well be part of the series of mishaps and accidents in Marie Lloyd's "Everything in the Garden's Lovely."

Bella Cohen's translation picks up on the Song and its erotically loaded garden imagery in the passage quoted above. The translation connects the garden image directly to the Song in a twofold way—first, by literally quoting a line from a literal song ("Everything in the garden is lovely"), and second, by linking the fake verb "sonk," very close to the existing word *song*, to the narrator's stepping out into the garden within the narrative: "I went out into the garden," almost a quote from, but at least an allusion to Song of Songs: "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song. 5.1).

Linking the garden and the "sonk"/song, Bella Cohen's translation substitutes the praise of motherly affection that culminates in a bodily, physical identification between mother and son in the mirror scene—a love "as strong as death," as Song 8.4 has it—with an image of erotic love: the merging of the bodies of a man and a woman, husband and wife, in lovemaking. In Bella's translation, motherly affection and sexual attraction, the mother and the wife, constantly blur.[41] The translation might sing Bella's song of love, rather than a "song of death" (*chant de mort*) for a mother-in-law that she never knew. Inscribing erotically charged allusions into Albert Cohen's work of mourning, Bella Cohen's translation seems to rule out the mother (symptomatically implied by her

41 From the beginning of the first "dictations," the wife and the mother, erotic love and motherly affection, blur in Bella, and towards the end of his life, in his last will (1977), Albert Cohen declares: "ma femme [Bella] a été pour moi la meilleure et la plus dévouée des épouses, et je puis ajouter la meilleure des mères […]" (qtd. in Médioni 203–04). Again, I do not wish to follow the psychoanalytic implications of that highly dubious statement here, but I would like to point out the closeness between erotic and motherly love in Cohen that the translation reinforces. Albert Cohen, in fact, explicitly spelled out the connection between erotic and motherly love in a 1974 interview. For him, sexual attraction is only the first step to "true," motherly love: "Et cet amour-là […] est très proche de l'amour maternel, […] celle qui a été au début attiré par la passion et par les charmes et les gloires de la sexualité […] devienne à la fois la mère […]" (Médioni 203–04).

omission of all personal and possessive pronouns pertaining to the mother figure), instead claiming Albert as the biblical lover from the Song of Songs—the one who may "enter the garden" of her body, and "gather her myrrh and her spice" (Song 5.1). In that sense, the translation would turn the Song of Death, *Chant de Mort*, into a belated love song.

Translation as a Work of Mourning

Bella Cohen's *Book of My Mother*, her translation of her late husband's *Le livre de ma mère*, decades after his death, experiments with language and with the form of translation; her translation twists and turns the English language, othering it, inflicting pain. Inscribing and reviving the voices of the dead in her translation, her work is a form of (m)othering language, a haunted space located in between life and death that resounds and echoes with strange, foreign voices.

In English—a language that is not my mother tongue, nor Albert Cohen's, but that is the language of Bella Cohen's translation—the "other" is uncannily inscribed into the very word *m-other*. To mourn his mother's death, Albert Cohen chose French: a language that was not his mother tongue, nor his mother's mother tongue.[42] The feeling of linguistic foreignness and estrangement is thematized in the original and enacted in the translation. The figure of the (dead) mother is the epitome of linguistic strangeness and foreignness. She says things differently. In a way, this makes her a figure of translation. Translating *Le livre de ma mère* into English, Bella Cohen engages with the otherness of the mother figure, making Albert Cohen's book of his mother, literally, *an other* book, a different book.

By adopting an English language that has been termed "unidiomatic," "infelicitous," "awkward," "problematic," and "unfortunate" (Langille 193), Bella Cohen occupies the speaker position of the mother within the translation: she speaks English strangely, with unidiomatic words and phrases, with a "foreign accent," if you will. It is highly unlikely that Bella just "could not do it any better"—after all, she was a professional interpreter, and perfectly bilingual in French and English (Médioni 274). In fact, it seems that her own "faulty" speech

42 The horror of not speaking any word of French at all ("pas un mot de français") upon arriving in Marseille is described very powerfully in *Le livre de ma mère*: "épouvanté, ahuri"—"in a state of horror and bewilderment"—, the boy is left alone at school, bereft of language (*LM* 34; *BM* 30).

emulates the "foreign accent" of the mother-in-law that she never knew. At times, it is hard to understand Bella Cohen's English without comparing it to the French of her husband. It is her English translation's incompleteness, its incapacity to speak for itself, its deliberate strangeness, clumsiness, and awkwardness, that makes it "faithful" to her late husband's "original," because the mother that Albert Cohen's *Le livre de ma mère* mourns is returning in it, speaking her (m)other tongue.

Book of My Mother, translated by Bella Cohen née Berkovich, is a work of mourning—a work that is mourning the absence of the voice that is mourning the absence of his mother. Both the writer and the translator are voicing their pain of loss in (translated) language while reviving the language of the dead other: Albert Cohen is quoting his mother's "foreign French," her "accent oriental" throughout the narrative, and Bella Cohen's "awkward" English possibly reflects her husband's foreign, "Gallicised" English—and his mother's "foreign French." The work therefore mourns the death of a certain kind of language—an *other* language, a (m)other tongue, a strange language, a foreign accent—while enacting it: it mourns and revives the way the mother talks, the way a husband used to shape his own language by way of distorting the English language of the translation. Translation as a form lends itself to the process of mourning, because of its essential "un-finishedness."

Works Cited

Benjamin, Walter. "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers." 1923. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1, edited by Tillman Rexroth, Suhrkamp, 1972, pp. 9–21.

———. "The Task of the Translator." Translated by Harry Zohn. *Selected Writings Vol. 1 (1913–1926)*, edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Harvard UP, 2002, pp. 253–63.

Ben-Naftali, Michal. "'I Have an Empty Head on Love': The Theme of Love in Derrida, or Derrida and the Literary Space." *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2018, pp. 221–37.

Cohen, Albert. *Belle du Seigneur*. Gallimard, 1968.

———. *Book of My Mother*. Translated by Bella Cohen, First Archipelago Books, 1997.

———. *Das Buch meiner Mutter*. Translated by Lilly von Sauter, Klett-Cotta, 1984.

———. *Carnets 1978*. Gallimard, 1954.

———. *Le livre de ma mère*. Gallimard, 1954.

"Corfu, Greece." *Jewish Virtual Library*, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/corfu. Cited from *Encyclopedia Judaica*, The Gale Group, 2007. Accessed 8 Oct. 2023.

de Man, Paul. "Conclusions: On Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator.'" *Yale French Studies*, vol. 96, 1985, pp. 25–46.

Derrida, Jacques. "Aphorism Countertime." *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, Routledge, 1992, pp. 414–33.

———. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, 1994.

———. *Spectres de Marx. L'État de la dette, le travail du deuil et la nouvelle Internationale*. Galilée, 1993.

Donne, John. *Deuotions vpon emergent occasions, and seuerall steps in my sickness Digested into 1. Meditations vpon our humane condition 2. Expostulations, and debatements with God 3. Prayers, vpon the seuerall occasions, to him. By Iohn Donne, Deane of S. Pauls*. Thomas Iones, 1627.

Ferber, Ilit. *Language Pangs: On Pain and the Origin of Language*. Oxford UP, 2019.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." 1919. *The Uncanny*, by Freud. Translated by David McLintock, with an Introduction by Hugh Haughton, Penguin, 2003, pp. 123–62.

Harrington, J. P. Lyrics. "Everything in the Garden's Lovely," composed by George Le Brunn. Francis Day & Hunter, 1898, https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1243651/everything-in-the-gardens-lovely-sheet-music-john-p-harrington/everything-in-the-gardens-lovely-print-john-p-harrington/. Accessed 6 Oct. 2023.

Kalman, Julie. *Orientalizing the Jew: Religion, Culture, and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century France*. Indiana UP, 2017.

Klein, Jean-Claude. *Florilège de la chanson française*. Bordas, 1990.

Langille, Édouard M. "Review of Albert Cohen, *Book of My Mother*, trans. Bella Cohen." *Dalhousie French Studies*, vol. 55, 2001, pp. 191–93.

Médioni, Franck. *Albert Cohen*. Gallimard, 2007.

Misraki, Paul, et al. Lyrics. "Tout va très bien (Madame la Marquise)," music by Paul Misraki. Éditions Ray Ventura & Cie, 1935, https://bibliotheques-specialisees.paris.fr/ark:/73873/pf0001493035/v0001.simple.selectedTab=thumbnail. Accessed 6 Oct. 2023.

Prade, Juliane. "(M)Other Tongues: On Tracking a Precise Uncertainty." *(M)Other Tongues: Literary Reflections on a Difficult Distinction*, edited by Prade, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp. 1–21.

Ronell, Avital. *Dictations: On Haunted Writing*. U of Nebraska P, 1993.

Sauter, Caroline. "The Mother Tongue of Love and Loss: Albert Cohen's *Le livre de ma mère*." *Untying the Mother Tongue*, edited by Antonio Castore and Federico Dal Bo, ICI Berlin Press, 2023, pp. 165–79.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford UP, 1987.

Zard, Philippe. *La fiction de l'Occident: Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Albert Cohen*. PUF, 1997.

Verstellte Sicht

On Collective Translation[1]

Melanie Strasser

A word whose meaning we do not know becomes a body of sound. It does not mean, it sounds. It evokes associations, images, remembrances. It resonates. When meaning is obscured, space is created: space for the materiality of the letters, for the flesh of the words. A desert for sound. No meaning that leads astray. The connection between signifier and significate is cut, the languages' tangible potential breaks open. Embracing non-understanding—or rather: taking the slow path to understanding—makes for overtones. It means to listen. It means to see: you look at the word and it looks back. It can be seen without its hull, its reference. The word remains within itself, it no longer strives towards its meaning. It lays bare. It sounds. The difference becomes perceptible between how it is and how it says itself. Without the weight of meaning, it reveals what it is made of. It is material. It uncovers layers: layers of sound, layers of letters, layers of possibilities. When you read or hear a word in another language, in an unknown language, you read it and listen to it differently. You inscribe in it the difference your own language makes. Italian wrings other ideas and images from a Norwegian word than Georgian or German. An unknown Greek word will be read in another way by somebody shaped by Portuguese or by Hebrew. Inscribing difference is a slow approach towards (non-)understanding. The discovery of slowness. Where does understanding come from? What does it mean to understand? What do you stand under? Does it mean you submit? To what? Or is understanding what in German is called "Unterstand," a shelter, a refuge?

1 A translation of the present text into Norwegian by Arild Vange was published in February 2025, under the title "Forhindret sikt. Om kollektiv oversettelse," in the online literary journal *Krabben. Tidsskrift for poesikritikk*. Available at: https://www.krabbenpoesikritikk.no/arkiv/forhindret-sikt-om-kollektiv-oversettelse/. Accessed 28 Apr. 2025.

It is not necessary to not know a language for it to become foreign. In certain moments, our own language, too, our so-called mother tongue, undresses and reveals its materiality, in other words, its unfamiliarity, its strangeness. They are moments when a word suddenly reveals facets that are usually hidden by its meaning. (Why does "mean" mean "to signify" and, at the same time, "vile"?) When you understand a word, you usually do not look at it closer. It is strange to stop the chain of meaning: to look and to listen. (And then suddenly, the German "Stelle," the place, the position, evokes the Italian stars, "stelle.") To unsee, to unknow. To mishear: mother, la mer, das Meer. To stop meaning. Isn't this what happens in poetry? In poetry you are tempted to unsee meanings. To uncover difference. To detect sounds. Relations, paths between words, between languages. Ties between the words and yourself.

When you do not know the language you are about to read, a whole cosmos opens up for sound, for mishearing, for productive misunderstanding. A network of relations is created. Our own language, our own readings and experiences read along. You read what you hear. You hear what you see. What you are. You invent connections between letters, between punctuation marks. You see sound. Meaning does not come from the inside of a word or a text, it comes, to speak with Saussure, always from the side. From the side: like a gust. Sometimes it comes from the person sitting next to you. Among other people, within a group with different languages and different stories, words are heard and read differently. Reading together makes a whole difference. Everybody reads differently. Everybody understands and translates differently. It is a bodily experience because everybody experiences words in another manner. It is an experience of language becoming strange. Not only the foreign language, but also one's supposedly own language. Mother. La mer. Das Meer. Translating as an act of strangeness.

Each week, a group of different people from various countries and languages, called *Versatorium*, gathers in Vienna to experience the strangeness of language. We sit, we read, we listen. We translate Arild Vange's poems from Norwegian, from Bokmål, to be more precise: *Fjordarbeid* (Vange). A translation of fjords, a *rite de passage*. Our project description says:

> Perhaps the Norwegian word fjord is a fjord in itself, a place of passage. The word itself a rich passage. A patron saint or simply a companion for those that translate, for those who are underway, travelling and moving, trading, seeking, fleeing, thinking, for all those engaged in something that probably is not progress but transgress, an upsetting instead of setting forth. Doing

> something that does not become more and more and evermore successful, full of aftermaths. Forming instead of advancing […]. *Fjord* is more than a Norwegian word. In different shapes it belongs to many languages of the world. It can be seen in *Stratford* and *Oxford* as well as *Firth of Forth* or in *porous*. It is expressed in *afford* and *further*, in *pro* and *progress* and *form*. *Prose* is a fjord. *Ford*, *foreword* and ფონი are fjords. Fjord can be traced back to Latin *per* (across) and *portus* (port), even to *Bosporus* right in the middle of Istanbul. And to Greek *poros*. The origin is said to be Sanskrit *pàri*. (Waterhouse, Reinstadler, and Füchsl 6)

So, we do upset fjords, and words. The language of the poems is permeated by other languages. Languages mingle: one sentence, three languages. Or four? Where are the borders between languages? Can poetry ever not be plurilingual? Can there ever be one language? How to translate an English verse inside a Norwegian poem? As the lyrical I travels through the continent, from Norway through Germany towards Vienna, the poems become more and more German. They incorporate what they hear. The last poem, with the title *(Wien: 2)*, apparently contains more German than Norwegian words. Still, we do not understand it better. "Franz / und Milena machen Urlaub / getrennt" (Vange 59). How can we trace, how can we reflect the becoming-German of a Norwegian poem with a translation into German?

We translate sonnets by four poets (Octavio Paz, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti, Charles Tomlinson), written collectively in four languages. *Renga*, a Japanese chain poem. We let ourselves be guided by the sound of the sonnets, we build poems with the sound material of the words. We translate the form. We find German haikus. We sit in an old Viennese café as they were then, in the year 1969, sitting in a Paris basement, and we have fun.

We translate poems by Andrea Zanzotto. We find words that only exist in the Zanzotto cosmos: "sposa-folla" (24), "intergamie" (15), "terapizzano" and "terapizzino" (34–35). We find "case-dicibilità" (17) (and somebody suggests translating it as "Hausdruckskraft"). We find words like "indisseppellibili" (45). Seven syllables. Two negative prefixes after each other. Does a double negation make a positive? The dictionaries do not know. They know "seppellire," to bury. They know "disseppellire," to unearth. Are the silences of the poem, hence, unexcavatable, "unausgrabbar," "unentbergbar"? Do silences that are stuck beneath the earth not ensure that there is language, that there is speaking? Or is it the contrary? Do silences that nobody can dig out overshadow any attempt

of speech? There is a lot of silence in these opaque poems. And at the same time, there is a lot of light: it sparkles, it shines, it shimmers: "luccichi" (34), "scintillamento" (45), "confronti astrali" (34), "lucente" (22), "stelle" (13). There is lightning. One poem is interspersed by a plea at the margin on the right: "non abbaiare" (11). No barking! In defiance of the negation, it is the poem in which we hear it barking, it is the poem that barks.

After reading Zanzotto's poem "Silicio, Carbonio, Castellieri," which ends with the word "omertà" (18)—isn't it the law of silence?—, Peter Waterhouse, in *Language Death Night Outside*, notes:

> The poem spoke of nothing limited. The poem spoke of something illimitable. Everything in the poem was in transition. Nothing in the poem rested in itself. […] There was in the poem no move toward placement. There was in the poem a move toward replacement. (29)

Is the translation of poetry not a constant slipping away? A constant displacement, a movement toward banishment, toward exile?

You often hear that translating is about mastering a foreign language. As if language were an empire over which you could reign. As if the opposite were not true. Sometimes, to be true, to translate, it is necessary to let one's language be "violently moved" by the other language—"durch die fremde sprache gewaltig bewegen zu lassen"—as Rudolf Pannwitz (242), quoted by Walter Benjamin (20) in his essay on translation, affirms. In other words, it means to let one's own language be "expanded" and "deepened" by the foreign language. Mother, la mer, das Meer. It is beyond the idea of reigning over a language. It is beyond the idea of seaming a text together, the contrary of bridging languages. It is more about falling apart.

We translate Rosmarie Waldrop's *A Key into the Language of America* (1994). We have been translating it for years, the translation does not come to an end. We continue. We stop. We resume. It is written in English, but nobody masters English. The text is pervaded by Naragansett, a language first studied and documented in English by Roger Williams in his book *A Key into the Language of America* (1643). Waldrop, a palimpsest of Williams. We find a key, we lose it.

There is something strange about assuming that a language can be mastered. As if it were something external to us, an outside. Isn't it more accurate to say that it is the language that masters us? And what about languages that pervade a world that does not exist anymore, such as the language of Dante? *Volgare*, a language that had not yet existed in a literary form during Dante's

lifetime, the spoken language of a people that does not exist anymore. A language that still had to be forged. A language bound in a complex verse structure—*terza rima*—that was apparently invented by Dante. How can such a language be translated into German, seven hundred years after the exiled Florence poet's death?

"Lectura Dantis in 33 Gesängen" is the name of the project, initiated and accompanied by Theresia Prammer. On the occasion of the seven-hundredth anniversary of Dante's death in 1321, she invited thirty-three German-speaking poets and translators to engage with a canto from the *Commedia*. The experiment resulted in translations in the broadest sense of the word. Acts of carrying bodies. Word-bodies. Bows.

The German poet Anja Utler comments on her task as follows: "I am translating a canto from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. I do not speak Italian. Taken separately, each of these two sentences is okay. Together, they are absurd."

Indeed, it seems absurd, impossible to translate from an unknown language, when translating is bound to notions such as fidelity, or equivalence. If translating, however, means to create something on and out and of the source material, translation turns into a potential even when the material remains strange. Isn't this what Dante himself did? According to Pasolini, Dante's work is characterized by plurilingualism, a form of a Realism opposed to Literature: "Il suo plurilinguismo, le sue tecniche poetiche e narrative, erano forme di un realismo che si opponeva, ancora una volta, alla Letteratura" (1648). Wasn't it Dante's task to create a new language from the ruins of various varieties, of different dialects, daily spoken words, unwritten meanings? To create an original scheme of verses that is characterized by an incessant movement, as Dante and Vergil walk up and down and down and up, without pause, through the realms of the world beyond?

This is how *Versatorium* is found in front of the twenty-sixth canto of the *Inferno*, like being in front of a yet closed door to an unknown world. We meet every week in a park, we sit in the grass, or, when the regulations during the pandemics would allow it, in an old Viennese café. During one session, which usually takes two to three hours, we usually translate three verses. One *terza rima*. We read, we listen. It happens that we spend a whole evening around two words. We try to follow the traces of their history, to skim possible strata of relationships. We carry huge dictionaries. Latin, Italian, German. But first, we try to hear the words, the verses. We look at the letters. We try to hear the sound without sense. Those who do not know Italian, hear and see most. Those who know Italian often do not find an "Unterstand" either. Do we go under? It is not

strange that the mother becomes strange. It is not strange to lose one's tongue. The combination of not knowing and knowing, a form of understanding that can never be sure of itself, is fruitful for a translation that is not meant to stop, that seeks to trace possible movements of the text, that seeks to answer.

The grammar of Dante's *Commedia* is rough, impassable, it stumbles, it falters, just as Dante and Vergil on their passage through the inferno. The text, too, with its innumerous accents pointing to different directions, with its commas and semicolons, seems to form a pathless terrain: "la solinga via" (Inf. XXVI, 16), "unwegsamer weg." The punctuation marks that run and break through the textmesh take the shape of dense underbrush. They are stones, "scharten und zacken aus fels," that we stumble upon. The syntax is vertiginous. The text feels like falling.

In his "Conversation about Dante," Osip Mandelstam writes:

> Every word is a bundle and the meaning sticks out of it in various directions, not striving toward any one official point. When we pronounce "sun" we are, as it were, making an immense journey which has become so familiar to us that we move along in our sleep. What distinguishes poetry from automatic speech is that it rouses us and shakes us awake in the middle of a word. Then the word turns out to be far longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak means to be forever on the road. (13)

So we let ourselves be shaken. We stop at the words. We try to stumble also in German. "Allor mi dolsi, e ora mi ridoglio / quando drizzo la mente a ciò ch'io vidi / e più lo 'ngegno affreno ch'i' non soglio" (Inf. XXVI, 19–21), Dante writes, as he remembers—i.e., he relives physically (in his members) what he had suffered—what he now sets out to write about. During a ghostly Viennese summer, centuries after that, it will be relived again, and it will become as follows: "damals litt ich abermals erleid ich jetzt / da ich spitz das denken auf das was ich sah / und mehr hemme die gabe ich wie ich's nicht kenne."

Before the end of our canto, Ulysses pleads to his companions not to stop, to continue the journey, despite all dangers, in defiance of death: "Considerate la vostra semenza: / fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza" (Inf. XXVI, 118–20).

The word "semenza" is charged with meaning: sperm, sprout, germ, descent, parentage, origin, nature. Or "considerare": isn't there a star shining forth in the word?: "sider," "sidus": "star," "constellation." We collect variations, possibilities: "gewahrt eure saat," "kennt euren kern," "beseht euren kern,"

"gewahrt euren kern," "das mark eures seins," "den semen eures seins," "euren ursprung," "eure bestimmung," "denkt an euer sein."

The translation changes, moves, so many different versions appear, ideas, images, so that it is hard to say where a final version might come from. Also, a final version is provisionary. "The ground begins to slip. Rhythm of swallows seen from below. It is a strange truth that remains of contentment are yet another obstacle," Rosmarie Waldrop (6) writes. The version that remains on the paper, the version that is finally sent, is when no one objects anymore. Or when everybody laughs. When it seems to sound good. When it can be read aloud. When we see and hear, in the case of Dante, the text stumbling and stuttering as hell.

The translation that is passed on, at the end, is "sendung," whose combination of letters is similar to "semenza." It does not only mean "consignment," "shipment," but also "mission," "task." It combines with "geschickt," to send, to be destined. Where are Ulysses and his companions sent to? To death? And with it, at the same time, to immortality? What remains, at the end, is: "erkennt eure sendung / ihr seid nicht geschickt zu leben als köter / sondern auszufahren um ehre und kenntnis."

Staying on the road, passing the impassable, the open sea, in order to know is what differentiates the human core from pure animality. "bruti" turned into "köter," an old, pejorative word for an ugly, neglected dog. A stray dog. We found the dog—"canis," "cane"—in "canoscenza," the word Dante uses instead of "conoscenza." To maintain "per" we decided for "auszufahren," since it suggests a movement, a crossing, an expansion. A fjord.

At the end of the canto, there is drowning. It is no longer possible to say where is up, where is down. You do not know any longer where the light comes from: "lo lume era di sotto da la luna / poi che 'ntrati eravam ne l'alto passo" (Inf. XXVI, 131–32). We write: "das licht unterseits der leuchte war / da wir eingegangen waren die über setzung"—"Alto passo": a deep pass, a high pass. A passage into the unknown. "Alto passo" reminds of "alto mare," the deep sea, the high seas. La mer. There is no more difference between above and below, between deep and high. To translate means to err, to no longer know where the occident is, which way is up and which way is down. Translating is not, as it has been said, a crossing of a river, it is a journey "per l'alto mare aperto" (Inf. XXVI, 100), durch die hohe, die offene see. It means to drown.

"Il trapassar del segno" (Par. XXVI, 117), the transgressing, the piercing (with the eyes: to see), the penetrating and permeating of the sign is the cause of "tanto essilio" (Par. XXVI, 116), exile, death, as it says in the *Paradiso*.

Traduttore, traditore. This is the echo of the translator's purgatory. You know that translation is always betrayal. The question, however, is: who is being betrayed? It is not the source text, it is not the other, the author who is going to be betrayed. It is oneself. The mother. La mer. You betray your own language, yourself, by deepening it—violently?—by means of the other language, by the strange world created by somebody who did indeed live a different life. The translation betrays, it strays. Translation, a stray dog. We Danteize the German language until it is hardly recognizable. The language of translation remains "gewaltig und fremd," says Benjamin (15), "tremendous and strange." Perhaps such an alienating translation that lets the target language turn into something strange is the most faithful, canine translation—betray, be true—because it means to give oneself over to the other, the mother, moving oneself violently, allowing oneself to be led astray.

What is a collective translation? It does not mean that everybody makes a suggestion and then it is decided whose version to take. There would not be a suggestion without the others. The others are the condition for a suggestion to be made. But at the end, when there is a result, a final translation, there is no individuality anymore, no authorship. It is a ship that goes under. It merges, it disappears with the others. During the process, during translating, individuality is necessary, essential. Then it is about letting it go. A singular reflection, a reading leads to the next, one association leads to another, until it is no longer distinguishable who said what, who found what. It does not matter either. There is no beginning, there is no end. There is no translation without all these ideas and readings and interpretations, all of them valid in themselves. Without all these other eyes and ears that hear and see all differently. A collective translation is a conglomeration of all these eyes and ears and in-betweens. At the end, there is a text in a language that did not exist before, a mingling of views, of readings. The translation is a life whose future is yet to realize itself, it is future that is to become: "infuturarsi," to "infuture oneself," as it says in Canto XVII of the *Paradiso*. The translation is, as Benjamin writes, a form of "survival," an "afterlife" (10–11). "Überleben": it surpasses life, it goes beyond mere life. Meerleben. Translation is a form of infuturization of the original.

A translating collective collects words, insights, surprises. A surprise is literally an overtake, something that grasps you. A collective is a space that is open for the unexpected. For something that had not been looked at or looked out for before. Should we rather say, it is open for the strange(r), the unseen, the unforeseeable? Perhaps, to translate together from various languages and times, from continents and words that shall never be reigned over, means to evoke the

untranslatable, which is to be defined, with Barbara Cassin, as "what one keeps on (not) translating" (xvii).

It is what keeps us going. It is what does not stop moving us. We stop only to move in a different direction. It is what leads us astray. To read is to err. And the untranslatable is what keeps us straying, stumbling, stammering, wandering, wondering.

"Wir gehen so lala," Franz Kafka (12) writes in his "Contemplation." We go just so-so? It serves as a motto for *Versatorium*. Like a huge flag it waves white above the door of our Viennese premises, in black Georgian letters.

Works Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *Commedia*. Edited by Giorgio Petrocchi, Mondadori, 1967. Dante Lab, dantelab.dartmouth.edu. Accessed 7 June 2024.

Benjamin, Walter. "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers." *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 4.1, edited by Tillman Rexroth, Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 7–21.

Cassin, Barbara. "Introduction." Translated by Michael Wood. *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, edited by Emily Apter, Barbara Cassin et al., Princeton UP, 2014, xvii–xx.

Kafka, Franz. "Betrachtung." *Sämtliche Erzählungen*, edited by Paul Raabe, Fischer, 1987, pp. 7–22.

Mandelstam, Osip. "Conversation about Dante." Translated by Clarence Brown and Robert Hughes. *Selected Essays*, edited and translated by Sidney Monas, U of Texas P, 1977, pp. 3–44.

Pannwitz, Rudolf. *Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur*. Hans Carl, 1917.

Pasolini, Pier Paolo. "Dante e i poeti contemporanei." *Saggi sulla letteratura e sull'arte*, edited by Walter Siti and Silvia De Laude, Mondadori, 1999, pp. 1643–48.

Paz, Octavio, Jacques Roubaud, Edoardo Sanguineti, and Charles Tomlinson. *Renga*. Gallimard, 1971.

Utler, Anja. "Hölle Nr. 13. Ein Reisebericht zu Dantes Divina Commedia, Inferno XIII." *Toledo Journale*, 2021, www.toledo-programm.de/journale/3170/hoelle-nr-13. Accessed 7 June 2024.

Vange, Arild. *Fjordarbeid. Dikt.* Aschehoug, 2007.

Waldrop, Rosmarie. *A Key into The Language of America*. New Directions, 1994.

Waterhouse, Peter. *Language Death Night Outside: Poem Novel*. Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop, Burning Deck, 2009.

Waterhouse, Peter, Felix Reinstadler, and Franziska Füchsl. "*Fjord. Eine Übersetzung von Versatorium*." Project description for the translation of Arild Vange's Fjordarbeid, 2018.

Zanzotto, Andrea. *Fosfeni*. Mondadori, 1983.

Selected Publications and Translations by *Versatorium*

Alighieri, Dante. "Inf. Canto XXVI." *Lectura Dantis. Zeitgenössische Dichtung im Dialog mit Dantes Commedia*, edited by Theresia Prammer. Urs Engeler, 2025, pp. 107–14.

Europäisches Laboratorium, Versatorium (eds.) *parole: dante. quaderni*. Edition Europäisches Laboratorium. 2022.

Bernstein, Charles. *Gedichte und Übersetzen*. Vol. 1.1, Edition Korrespondenzen, 2013.

Bernstein, Charles = Karl Elektric. *Gedichte und Übersetzen*. Vol. 1.2, Quintano Forlag, 2017.

Dapunt, Roberta. *dies mehr als paradies | la terra più del paradiso*. Folio, 2016.

Dapunt, Roberta. *die krankheit wunder | le beatitudini della malattia*. Folio, 2020.

Jelinek, Elfriede, with DramaForum. *Die Should Sea Be Fallen In. Die Schutzbefohlenen*. UniT, 2015.

Luhn, Anna, and Lena Hintze, editors. *Renga. Übersetzung als Modus*. With contributions by Dagmara Kraus, Felix Schiller, and Versatorium. Urs Engeler, 2023.

Vange, Arild. *Fjordarbeit.* Matthes & Seitz Berlin, forthcoming.

Waldrop, Rosmarie. „Falls ob, wie wenn." *Schreibheft, Zeitschrift für Literatur*, edited by Norbert Wehr, Rigodon-Verlag, 2025, pp. 114–23.

Measuring Up

Goethe's Diderot Translations and the Diversification of Originals

Stefan Willer

For Johann Wolfgang Goethe's literary work, his engagement with texts in other languages and their translation into German play an important role—an aspect often underestimated or overlooked, even in the extensive research on Goethe. He undertook translations from various languages and textual traditions, among them a German version of the Song of Songs from the Hebrew Bible and translations from the most effective literary hoax of the eighteenth century, James MacPherson's *Ossian* (which he also incorporated into his first novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*), but also fragmentary attempts to translate Homer's *Odyssey* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Fuhrmann). Yet the most numerous—and this may well come as a surprise—are from Italian and French. Goethe translated, among others, the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini and Voltaire's tragedy *Mahomet*. Particularly noteworthy are his translations of the writings of one of the most astute and intellectually agile authors of the French Enlightenment, Denis Diderot. There are two texts involved in this ongoing interest: "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" ("Diderot's Essay on Painting," 1799), a partial, commentating translation of the *Essais sur la peinture* (1766), and *Rameaus Neffe* (*Rameau's Nephew*, 1805), the German version of the previously unpublished philosophical dialogue *Le Neveu de Rameau* from the 1770s.

The volume of text may be modest, but the literary relationships that can be found in them and that emerged from them are complex. In the case of "Diderot's Essay on Painting," this applies to the relationship between translation and editorial interventions. Here, Goethe engages with the subject of his translation in a competitive way, seeking to correct Diderot's reflections on the theory of painting in the context of debates on art that were current

around 1800. The second case, *Rameau's Nephew*, became the starting point of a curious episode in French-German literary history, in which the ratio of original and translation was suspended for a considerable amount of time. In fact, Goethe's translation held the status of an original for some time, for it served as the basis for the first French publication of this text in 1821. With no original in hand, the publishers looked to Goethe's German version and silently translated it "back" into French, i.e., they created their own version that they passed off as the Diderot original.

In what follows, I will discuss each case study in turn, emphasizing the experimental nature of the respective constellations. In the first case, this concerns Goethe's constructivist approach to Diderot's text, which I will highlight with an analysis of his programmatic statements and of some examples. In the second case, the experimental character can be found in the shifts between original and translation, which I will examine both in the multiple versions of *Rameau's Nephew* and in the public debate that resulted from them—a debate in which Goethe participated with several essays in the 1820s. In these writings, he reflects on what makes something an original and what it means to be "originalmäßig." This neologism, invented by Goethe at a certain point of the debate, signifies "original-esque" or "based on the original," but also "measuring up to the original." The title of this paper, "Measuring Up," thus stands for the multiplication and diversification of originals, which will prove to be a special feature of Goethe's thoughts on translation, but also for the agonistic character of his earlier Diderot translations in their problematic engagement with the notion of fidelity and adequacy.

Competition and Necromancy: Translating Diderot's *Essais sur la peinture*

Denis Diderot's *Essais sur la peinture* were contributions to the German-French aesthetic debate long before Goethe's translation. Diderot wrote them in 1766 for several issues of the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, a magazine that had been edited since the 1750s by the German journalist and diplomat Friedrich Melchior Grimm. Copied by hand in very small numbers, it transmitted news from the Parisian literary and art scene to German courts (Hock). Diderot contributed to this project for many years, thus acting as a mediator of French culture in Germany. Goethe's translations of Diderot also fall into the category of mediation, although they were undertaken from the other,

German side and, furthermore, a whole generation later, well after Diderot's death in 1781. In the meantime, the *Essais* had been published in France as a book in 1795. The plural in the title stood for the compilation character of the publication, which, in addition to essays on various visual arts—drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture—also contained reviews of art exhibitions and individual paintings. A German translation, by Carl Friedrich Cramer (he too a German writer in Paris), appeared as early as 1796, retaining the plural title: *Versuche über die Malerei*. Goethe presumably knew nothing about it; at least his own German version gives no indication.

Goethe's translation was produced in 1798–99 and is far from complete: it comprises only the first two chapters on drawing and coloring. The title is changed to the singular: *Versuch über die Malerei*. The place of publication is the classicistic program of *Propyläen*, an art-theoretical journal of the informal group of the Weimarische Kunstfreunde (Weimar Art Connoisseurs) that Goethe edited together with Johann Heinrich Meyer from 1798 to 1800 and in which he printed his Diderot translation in two installments.[1]

Goethe introduced his translation by a "Confession of the Translator" ("Geständnis des Übersetzers") of about two pages, an intriguing little text in which translation is conceived of as emerging from a dialogic situation and understood as a dialogue in its entirety, which already sheds some light on Goethe's later engagement with Diderot's book-length dialogue *Rameau's Nephew*. The "Confession" begins with the difficulties of someone—an impersonal "man" ("one") in the German text—who has set out to write a "coherent treatise." All of a sudden, someone else enters, who is said to be "a friend, perhaps a stranger."[2] What appears to be a disturbance becomes a lively conversation, which leads to the realization that intellectual productivity can only be found in "action and reaction." Obviously this encourages, or already *is*, translation: "And so this translation, with its continuous annotations, was also

1 All subsequent translations from Goethe are mine. In the notes, the German quotations are supplied and verified according to vol. 7 of the "Münchner Ausgabe" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei"; "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'"). In the following footnotes I will provide the original wording of the citations, while inserting my translations into the text above for better readability.

2 "[E]ine zusammenhängende Abhandlung"; "ein Freund, vielleicht ein Fremder" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 519).

created in good days."[3] In the second half of the short preface, the analogy of translation and conservation is further elaborated, now explicitly by the "I" of the author/translator. Trying to draft a general introduction to fine arts, this ego finds that "Diderot's Essay on Painting happens to fall into my hands again,"[4] and sees his rereading as a polemical discussion: "I talk to him anew […], his presentation carries me away, the argument becomes heated, and I do, of course, have the last word because I am dealing with a deceased opponent."[5] The debate is therefore fundamentally asymmetrical. However, it draws its verve from the fact that the thoughts of the dead Diderot "have been haunting recent times as fundamental theoretical maxims."[6] It has been discussed who Goethe is actually attacking here.[7] But more important is the idea of "haunting" as such, because it makes Diderot appear not as a dead man, but rather as a ghost. All the more abysmal, then, seems the formula at the end of the preface, according to which the following is a "conversation conducted on the boundary between the realm of the dead and the living."[8] Here, translation appears to be virtually necromancy.

Goethe's unusual version of the *Essays on Painting* can thus be interpreted as a kind of banishment of the ghost of Diderot. In both chapters, he makes considerable interventions, which in themselves differ from one another. The first chapter is translated in the order of the original text, but with extensive annotations interpolated. There are also comments in the second chapter, but here Goethe goes on to fundamentally restructure the text, reassembling its sections in a new way. To give an insight into the process, let us start with the opening to the first chapter—with all the difficulties that arise from the fact that Goethe's German translation of Diderot's French text will subsequently

3 "Wirkung und Gegenwirkung"; "und so ist auch diese Übersetzung mit ihren fortlaufenden Anmerkungen in guten Tagen entstanden" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 520).

4 "[…] fällt mir Diderots Versuch über die Malerei, zufällig, wieder in die Hände" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 520).

5 "Ich unterhalte mich mit ihm aufs neue […], sein Vortrag reißt mich hin, der Streit wird heftig, und ich behalte freilich das letzte Wort, da ich mit einem abgeschiednen Gegner zu tun habe" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 520).

6 "[…] daß seine Gesinnungen […] in der neuern Zeit als theoretische Grundmaximen fortspuken" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 520).

7 Décultot (191–93) mentions the Schlegel brothers' early romantic art theory.

8 "Gespräch, das auf der Grenze zwischen dem Reiche der Toten und Lebendigen geführt wird" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 521).

be translated into English. Regarding the typography, the Diderot quotations, which are in italics here, appear in a larger font in the first edition of *Propyläen*.

> *Nature does not produce anything incorrect. Every form, may it be beautiful or ugly, has its cause, and among all existing beings there is none that is not as it should be.*
> Nature does not produce anything inconsistent, every form, be it beautiful or ugly, has its cause, which determines it, and among all the organic natures that we know, there is none that is not as it can be.
> So one would have to change the first paragraph if it is supposed to mean anything. Diderot begins right from the start to confuse the concepts so that he will be proved right in the following, as is his way.[9]

Something idiosyncratic and unusual is happening: the literal translation is declared to be factually incorrect; in contrast, a translation is inserted that differs literally, but is presented as a factual correction. This is all the more important given that the Diderot sentence is already translated, so that its wording also comes from Goethe. Accordingly, we are dealing with a complex relationship between correcting someone else's work and self-correction. The small deviations with which Goethe distinguishes his corrected version from Diderot's are therefore far from insignificant. While the Diderot text begins with two sentences separated by a full stop ("Nature does not produce anything incorrect. Every form…"), the corrected version only has a comma ("Nature does not produce anything inconsistent, every form…"); while the translated original says, "may it be beautiful or ugly," the correction has, "be it beautiful or ugly."[10] Even the differences in content begin with small rewrites: "incorrect" is replaced by "inconsistent"; "existing beings" by "organic natures"; "as it should be" by "as it can be." Furthermore, two small subordinate clauses are added ("which determines it" and "that we know"). These changes are

9 "*Die Natur macht nichts inkorrektes. Jede Gestalt, sie mag schön oder häßlich sein, hat ihre Ursache, und unter allen existierenden Wesen ist keins, das nicht wäre, wie es sein soll.*
Die Natur macht nichts inkonsequentes, jede Gestalt, sie sei schön oder häßlich, hat ihre Ursache, von der sie bestimmt wird, und unter allen organischen Naturen, die wir kennen, ist keine, die nicht wäre, wie sie sein soll.
So müßte man allenfalls den ersten Paragraphen ändern, wenn er etwas heißen sollte. Diderot fängt gleich von Anfang an, die Begriffe zu verwirren, damit er künftig, nach seiner Art, Recht behalte" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 521).

10 The French original, too, has two sentences, and keeps the following even shorter: "La nature ne fait rien d'incorrect. Toute forme, belle ou laide, […]" (Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture* 1).

supposed to clear up the confusion of concepts Goethe sees in Diderot. In his commentary, of which only the beginning is quoted above, he sets out a more detailed explanation. Here, as in the following, he argues along the lines of the correspondences and contrasts between nature and art, and repeatedly accuses Diderot of not sufficiently distinguishing the laws of organic nature from the regularity of art.

All of this is relevant to a discussion of art theory, as is the second essay on color, at the end of which Goethe promises further thoughts of his own, which he was to present about a decade later with his scientific magnum opus, the book on the theory of colors. In view of the experimental character of Goethe's translation, however, the style of the intervention probably outweighs the theoretical content, or at least that will be the focus here. The initial stark contrast between two translation options, one faithful but factually wrong, the other unfaithful but factually correct, is an extreme that will not be repeated.[11] For the remaining part of the first essay, Goethe tries to settle the matter in his lengthy commentaries. They sometimes refer to longer sections, sometimes to individual sentences, and overall exceed Diderot's text by more than half. One can almost speak of a more or less hostile takeover of the text by the notes, which at the same time means that Goethe is much more present as a commentator than as a translator. It could also be deduced that Goethe translates against his will, almost against his better judgment. This case has a kind of parallel a few years later, when Friedrich Schleiermacher's translation of Plato's *Kratylos* dialogue intentionally translates the etymological word explanations in a nonsensical way in order to reinforce his interpretation that Plato could not have taken such explanations seriously (Willer, "Kreuzwege des Philologen" 150–54).

In his translation of the second essay, Goethe takes his interventions, as mentioned, a good deal further by changing the order of Diderot's text. He begins with a short preface to make this approach more plausible. According to this, the "completely different treatment" has arisen from the "comparison of the two chapters," of which the second, in Goethe's words, "has no inner connection" and "only hides its aphoristic inadequacy through an erratic move-

11 The term "faithful," with its normative ethical implications, has been criticized in translation studies. Around 1800, however, the ethical aspect was an essential part of debates about translation.

ment."[12] He now sees his task as a translator to be that of "filling in the gaps" and "completing the work" that Diderot left incomplete. "I have therefore separated his periods and compiled them under certain headings, in a different order."[13] It is thus a critical textual analysis that motivates the significant changes made to the text in the course of the translation. Once again, we encounter the idea of factual adequacy, which is achieved—and appropriately priced—by infidelity to the literalness of the original. The changes to the sequence of Diderot's text have been documented in detail (Zehm). According to Elisabeth Décultot, the result is not so much a translation as a "new text" (188). It is noticeable, however, that Goethe's comments, which he also includes in this section, agree with Diderot much more often than in the first essay. Although one also finds comments here such as "We cannot agree with this at all," the positive responses prevail: "this is true in every sense," "we are in complete agreement with our author," "Diderot is to be praised here too."[14] On closer inspection, this is not so surprising, since Goethe is actually not referring to the original text, but to the version he himself prepared, which could be described as a secondary original.

The commentaries on both parts include occasional remarks on the translation of certain words. Here, Goethe deviates to some extent from his strongly constructivist, interventionist basic stance and gives an account—to himself and the readers of *Propyläen*—of the actual problem of making decisions in the course of the translation. In the first part, such an observation concerns the translation of the French word "attitude," which immediately follows a quote from the original text: "*Something is different in attitude, something is different in ac-*

12 "Aus dieser Vergleichung der beiden Kapitel folgt nun […] eine[] ganz ander[e] Behandlungsart"; "da sein ganzes Kapitel keinen innern Zusammenhang hat und vielmehr dessen aphoristische Unzulänglichkeit nur durch eine desultorische Bewegung versteckt wird" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 542–43).

13 "Lücken auszufüllen und eine Arbeit […] zu vollenden"; "Ich habe daher seine Perioden getrennt und sie unter gewissen Rubriken, in eine andere Ordnung, zusammengestellt" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 542–43).

14 "Hierein können wir keineswegs einstimmen" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 545); "Dieses ist in jedem Sinne wahr" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 548); "Da wir übrigens mit unserm Autor ganz in Einstimmung sind" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 549); "auch hier ist Diderot zu loben" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 551).

tion. All attitude is false and small, every action is beautiful and true."[15] Goethe notes that Diderot uses the word "attitude" several times, and that he, for his part, has translated it differently depending on its context. An example can be found in the directly preceding longer quotation, in which Diderot's "véritable attitude" is translated as "wahrer Ausdruck" (literally "true expression"; Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 536). In the case in question, however, the word "Attitude" appears twice in the German text (in capitals, but otherwise recognizable as a French loanword). As Goethe comments, it is "not translatable" here due to its use in "French academic artificial language," which Diderot both cites and criticizes. This is particularly about the positions that the models would have to take—a highly specific meaning of "attitude" that "cannot be translated into any German word, unless we wanted to say academic position, for example."[16] It is therefore more economical in terms of translation to adopt the original expression as a loanword instead of using an explanatory adjective-noun construction. By contrast, Goethe has no objection to adding an extensive translator's note to the word in question, since he is in the mode of commenting anyway.

In the second essay, there is a comment on the French word "haleter." It refers to a passage that can be found almost at the beginning of Diderot's text, but only towards the end in Goethe's German reordering, where it is entitled with the subheading "Fratzenhafte Genialität." The subheading has been supplied by the translator-editor, and for this he even asks the original author's understanding ("Diderot may forgive us").[17] This title could be roughly translated into English as "Distorted Genius." "Fratze" (from which the adjective "fratzenhaft" is derived) means grimace, and in a broader sense, distortion. This is a borderline concept in visual representations of human beings and a challenge to classicistic aesthetics, all the more so because Goethe associates it with the complex and tendentially disorderly concept of genius in its somewhat dilapidated version of "Genialität." It is under this problematic heading that he places Diderot's sketch of aesthetic enthusiasm, beginning with the phrase: "*The man*

15 "*Etwas anders ist eine Attitude, etwas anders eine Handlung. Alle Attitude ist falsch und klein, jede Handlung ist schön und wahr*" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 537).

16 "[H]ier ist es aber nicht übersetzlich"; "in der französischen akademischen Kunstsprache"; "Sinn[], den wir auf kein Deutsches Wort übertragen können, wir müßten denn etwa akademische Stellung sagen wollen" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 537).

17 "Diderot mag uns verzeihen" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 562).

who has the vivid sense of color fixes his eyes firmly on the canvas, his mouth is half open, he snorts, (groans, longs,) his palette is a sight of chaos."[18] The three alternative verbs offered correspond to only one in the French original, "il halète." In his note, Goethe highlights the limits of translatability: "In vain did I try to express the French word haleter in its full meaning, even the several words used do not quite capture it in the middle."[19] The gap in vocabulary indicates a problem of cultural translation. According to Goethe, seeing an artist "snorting with open mouth" may only be "ridiculous for the German sedateness"—a state of mind to which he himself admits when he repeats the term "Fratze" in his note and speaks of the "französischer Fratzensprung" ("French distorted jump") that "this lively nation cannot always avoid, even in the most serious of matters."[20]

To emphasize the conversational nature of the translation, Goethe repeatedly inserts direct addresses to his "friend and opponent,"[21] the (un-)dead Diderot: "Whimsical, excellent Diderot, why did you prefer to use your great powers of intellect to confuse rather than to clarify?"—"Truly, as badly as you started, you end, worthy Diderot."[22] A last apostrophe occurs at the end of the first chapter, as a farewell to the "venerable shadow" of Diderot, to whom thanks are given for the conversation as such and, hence, "for causing us to argue, to chatter, to get excited, and to cool down again." If we consider the equation of conversation and translation in the introductory "Confession," then here the translator thanks the translated author for his own translation. He even goes further by concluding, "The greatest effect of the spirit is to evoke

18 "*Wer das lebhafte Gefühl der Farbe hat heftet seine Augen auf das Tuch, sein Mund ist halb geöffnet, er schnaubt, (ächzt, lechzt,) seine Palette ist ein Bild des Chaos*" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 563).

19 "Vergebens versuchte ich das französische Wort haleter in seiner ganzen Bedeutung auszudrücken, selbst die mehreren gebrauchten Worte fassen es nicht ganz in die Mitte" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 563).

20 "Vielleicht ist es nur der deutschen Gesetztheit lächerlich einen braven Künstler […] mit offnem Munde schauben zu sehen"; "ein französischer Fratzensprung […], vor dem sich diese lebhafte Nation in den ernstesten Geschäften nicht immer hüten kann" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 563).

21 "Unser Freund und Gegner" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 527, 534).

22 "Wunderlicher, trefflicher Diderot, warum wolltest du deine großen Geisteskräfte lieber brauchen, um durcheinander zu werfen, als recht zu stellen?" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 524); "Fürwahr, so schlimm du angefangen hast, endigst du, wackrer Diderot" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 540).

the spirit."[23] One may be reminded of a scene from the first part of *Faust*, in which the title character conjures up the "Spirit of the Earth" ("Erdgeist"), but is rejected by him because of a lack of mutual resemblance. Here, however, it is somewhat different, perhaps even the other way around: the dead Diderot as the "spirit" is credited with the posthumous power to evoke the "spirit" of his translator. To be sure, all of this is an effect of that necromancy which the translator Goethe had already described in relation to his own approach at the beginning. Under these conditions, he now confirms the communication between the two spirits, albeit without the spirit of the translated dead having the opportunity to speak in reply. Without a doubt, it is the translator who has initiated the conversation on translation and who can also end it. This is the formulation at the end of the second chapter: "And so this conversation is closed for this time."[24] This already suggests that there could be a sequel—which Goethe then implements a few years later with his translation *Rameau's Nephew*.

Lost and Forged Originals, Hidden Translations: Translating *Le Neveu de Rameau*

Denis Diderot wrote *Le Neveu de Rameau* at the beginning of the 1760s, revised it in the 1770s, but then never published it. The dialogue is many things at once: social and literary satire, a treatise on music theory and theories of representation—and all of this in such a self-contradictory, paradoxical manner that *Rameau's Nephew* has often been considered one of the founding texts of modernism. Diderot introduces two speakers: "Me" and "Him" ("Moi" and "Lui"). The "Him" character is the eponymous nephew of the composer Jean-Philippe Rameau, a historical figure, who probably had little in common with the personality that we encounter in the dialogue. But this is precisely what is at stake in the dialogue: the question of personality and *persona*, of societal masks, deception, and the possibility or impossibility of an authentic self hiding behind

23 "Und so lebe wohl, ehrwürdiger Schatten, habe Dank, daß du uns veranlaßtest, zu streiten, zu schwätzen, uns zu ereifern, und wieder kühl zu werden. Die höchste Wirkung des Geistes ist, den Geist hervorzurufen" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 541).

24 "Und so sei auch für diesmal diese Unterhaltung geschlossen" (Goethe, "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei" 565).

all of that. Even before becoming an instance of experimental translation, *Le Neveu de Rameau* takes up the problem of manufactured originality and fabricated authenticity in diverse and complex ways.

I will return to these aspects of the originality problem. Beforehand, it is instructive to discuss the question of the source material, because here, too, the question of originality plays an important role.[25] In 1804, twenty years after Diderot's death, Goethe received a copy of the dialogue through complicated channels. Diderot had already sold parts of his library during his lifetime to the Russian Empress Catherine II, due to financial hardship. After his death, his daughter sent further materials to the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, which consequently became a collection point for Diderot's estate. These papers included not the original manuscript of *Rameau's Nephew*, but a copy that had been authorized by Diderot himself. In 1798, Friedrich Maximilian Klinger, a playwright and friend from Goethe's youth, who was a high-ranking Russian administrative official at the time, found the certified copy of the dialogue, and had a further copy made for himself. After unsuccessfully attempting to publish it, he offered it to the Chamberlain Duke Wilhelm von Wolzogen, a member of the court of Weimar who was passing through St. Petersburg at the time. Back in Weimar in 1803, Wolzogen handed the copy over to his brother-in-law Friedrich Schiller, who had been Goethe's most important literary associate since the mid-1790s.

Schiller recognized the quality of the text and offered it to the publisher Göschen for release in 1804, suggesting Goethe as translator. Goethe did not waste any time with this task; he started to translate the dialogue in November 1804 and published *Rameaus Neffe* in the spring of 1805. The book came with an appendix also written by Goethe, entitled "Commentaries on the People and Objects Alluded to in the Dialogue 'Rameau's Nephew'" ("Anmerkungen über Personen und Gegenstände, deren in dem Dialog 'Rameaus Neffe' erwähnt wird"). This is the first in the extensive history of Goethe's commentaries that was to continue in the 1820s. Göschen had actually also planned a French edition and wanted to have a further copy of Diderot's text made for it, but the plan fell through and the additional copy probably was never made. The one that had been used for the translation—apparently the only one that had been in circulation in Weimar—was sent back to St. Petersburg. All traces of it are

25 For the following see Miller and Neubauer, "Einleitung: Rameaus Neffe" 1064–69 and "Einleitung: Nachträgliches zu Rameaus Neffe" 1131–38; Oesterle 121–24; Jany 12–16 and 90–94.

lost there. However, over the course of the nineteenth century various copies of the manuscript were in circulation, some of which differed significantly from one another. Finally, in 1891, Diderot's signed manuscript was found. In French studies on Diderot, scholars speak with good reason of a "roman bibliographique" (Miller and Neubauer, "Einleitung: Rameaus Neffe" 1068).

The strangest episode in the text's history began in 1819, when the supplement to a multi-volume edition of Diderot's works was published. In the comprehensive introduction, written by Georg Bernhard Depping, a German man of letters living in Paris, there is a passage of about two pages on *Rameau's Nephew* (Depping, "Notice" xliii–xlv). It starts with a note on Goethe's translation and with the remark that the manuscript, despite all research, could not be retrieved. Therefore, only a brief insight into the dialogue is given in the introduction: the content of the dialogue is summarized and a few short passages are provided, rendered as Depping's French translations from Goethe's German translation. Goethe expressly authorized Depping to use his translation, not to create a proxy of the original text but to explicitly indicate its absence. Three years later, in 1821, two other young Parisian men of letters, Joseph-Henri de Saur and Léonce de Saint-Geniès, published the first French edition of *Le Neveu de Rameau*. This was now a complete translation of Goethe's 1805 version; it was done tacitly, without any prior consultation with Goethe or his German publisher; and it was not labeled as the effect of a double translation. De Saur and de Saint-Geniès thus created a new work in French under Diderot's name, but not one written by him—they remained invisible, as there is no mention of their authorship of the translation. First of all, this is obviously a literary forgery: the editors claimed to present an original text by the author Diderot, although it was the result of a double translation. Furthermore, it appears to be a dispossession of the translator Goethe, whose product was used to create the supposed original. This is how it is put, for example, in the first monograph on Goethe's translation of *Rameau's Nephew*, Rudolf Schlösser's study published in 1900: "It would be difficult to find anyone who has treated the intellectual property of others more carelessly and frivolously than these two young Frenchmen" (Schlösser 238).

Seen in this light, the story seems to fit into a series of cases in which Goethe was cheated of his copyrights, starting with the countless pirate editions of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (which resulted in a jumble of versions that gave the Goethe philology of the later 19th century a substantial part of its raison d'être—on this subject, see Bernays) and continuing well into the 1820s with a counter-publication of *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* by the

Goethe opponent Johann Friedrich Pustkuchen. However, copyright law, in its specifically German combination with rights of personality, was only just emerging around 1800 (Bosse). The extent to which it also applied to translations was all the more uncertain. In this context it is interesting that Goethe, Schiller, and Göschen wanted to make as little fuss as possible about the legal issues in their translation plans at the end of 1804, because that would have meant also asking Diderot's descendants for permission. They deliberately avoided contacting Friedrich Melchior Grimm, who was now over eighty years old, lived not far from Weimar in Gotha, and had good contacts with the heirs in Paris.[26] As will be explained in more detail below, the aged Goethe of the 1820s (in his own seventies) had little interest in claiming his authorship of the translation in the form of a personal legal entitlement. He was much more intrigued by the many and varied contacts between languages and cultures that were set in motion by de Saur's and de Saint-Geniès's appropriation.

To give an initial indication of this productivity, let us look at a small passage and see how Diderot's original, Goethe's German translation, and the two French translations create something like a multilingual prism.[27] The passage—one of the few that are also translated by Depping—is from the beginning of the dialogue, and it deals with "originals," here in the sense of eccentrics who live on the fringes of society, like the eponymous nephew of Rameau. For clarification, I am also inserting a recent English translation.

> Diderot:
> Je n'estime pas ces originaux-là; d'autres en font leurs connaissances familières, même leurs amis. Ils m'arrêtent une fois l'an, quand je les rencontre, parce que leur caractère tranche avec celui des autres, et qu'ils rompent cette fastidieuse uniformité que notre éducation, nos conventions de société, nos bienséances d'usage ont introduite. (Diderot and Goethe 12)

> Goethe:
> Dergleichen Originale kann ich nicht schätzen; andre machen sie zu ihren nächsten Bekannten, sogar zu Freunden. Des Jahrs können sie mich einmal

26 It has even been speculated that Grimm himself was in possession of the original manuscript of *Le Neveu de Rameau* at the time (cf. Miller and Neubauer, "Einleitung: Rameaus Neffe" 1068).

27 For the concept of translation as prism, see Reynolds. In this volume, I published my initial thoughts on the case of "back-translation" (Willer, "Original-esque: Diderot and Goethe in Back-Translation").

> festhalten, wenn ich ihnen begegne, weil ihr Charakter von den gewöhnlichen absticht und sie die lästige Einförmigkeit unterbrechen, die wir durch unsre Erziehung, unsre gesellschaftlichen Konventionen, unsre hergebrachten Anständigkeiten eingeführt haben. (Diderot and Goethe 13)

> Depping:
> Je ne saurais estimer, ajoute Diderot, de pareils originaux: mais ils peuvent m'arrêter une fois l'an quand je les rencontre, parce que leur caractère contraste avec les caractères ordinaires, et qu'ils rompent l'uniformité fatigante introduite par notre éducation et nos conventions sociales. (Depping, "Notice" xliv)

> De Saur and de Saint-Geniès:
> Il y a beaucoup de gens dans le monde qui s'amusent de pareils originaux, qui aiment à les voir souvent, qui même ne peuvent s'en passer. Pour moi, je l'avoue, habituellement je ne les goûte point; mais, une fois l'an, pas davantage j'aime à les rencontrer, parce que leur caractère tranche avec le commun des hommes, et qu'ils rompent l'ennuyeuse monotonie de forme et de langage à laquelle nous condamnent notre éducation et nos bienséances sociales; monotonie dont on finit par être bien las. (Diderot, *Le Neveu du Rameau* 6–7)

> Turnstall and Warman:
> I have no respect for such oddballs. Other people make close acquaintances out of them, even friends. But they do stop me in my tracks once a year when I meet them because their character is so unlike other people's: they disrupt that annoying uniformity which our education, social conventions, and codes of conduct have inculcated in us. (Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* 8)

As short as this section is, the deviations are many and varied. They begin with Goethe's twofold insertion of auxiliary verbs in places where Diderot goes straight for the verb: "Je n'estime pas" becomes "kann ich nicht schätzen"; "ils m'arrêtent" becomes "können sie mich festhalten." In the concluding relative clause, Goethe adds a "wir" as subject, and the abstract nouns acting as subjects in Diderot ("notre éducation, nos conventions […], nos bienséances") become prepositional objects ("*durch* unsre Erziehung," etc.). Depping, translating from Goethe, adopts the auxiliary verbs ("je ne saurais estimer" and "ils peuvent m'arrêter"), but he deletes the "wir" and instead introduces the possessive pronouns ("notre education," "nos conventions") that had already been there in Diderot's original. That Depping does not translate exactly,

but rather paraphrases loosely, can be seen from the inserted in-quotation formula ("ajoute Diderot"), but also from the omissions of some expressions, even entire half-sentences. The finding that some people make friends with the "Originale" is left out, and from the triad "Erziehung, Konventionen, Anständigkeiten" Depping drops the last item. But that is nothing compared to the arbitrariness with which de Saur and de Saint-Geniès treat their source text. In the quoted passage, they considerably lengthen the introduction and reverse the argument (first: many people enjoy originals; then: I have no taste for them). As for the mentioned "monotony," they add that it concerns form and language, and they emphasize it by repeating the word "monotony" towards the end of the sentence and attaching a new subordinate clause to it. However, there is something that both French translations "recover" from the original French (if the expression were not so misleading), and that is the literalness and grammatical construction of the causal clause, "parce que leur caractère tranche/constraste […] et qu'ils rompent […]."

To further demonstrate the deviations at play, here is another short sample passage, this time only from three versions, since it is not contained in Depping's overview.

> Diderot:
> MOI. Il n'y a personne qui ne pense comme vous, et qui ne fasse le procès à l'ordre qui est; sans s'apercevoir qu'il renonce à sa propre existence.
> LUI. Il est vrai. (Diderot and Goethe 30)

> Goethe:
> ICH. Jeder denkt wie Ihr, und doch will jeder an der Ordnung der Dinge, wie sie sind, etwas aussetzen, ohne zu merken, daß er auf sein eigen Dasein Verzicht tut.
> ER. Das ist wahr. (Diderot and Goethe 31)

> De Saur and de Saint-Geniès:
> MOI. Chacun pense comme vous, et cependant chacun veut critiquer quelque chose à l'ordre de la nature tel qu'il est, sans se douter qu'il renonce par-là à sa propre existence.
> LUI. C'est vrai. (Diderot, *Le Neveu du Rameau* 30–31)

> Turnstall and Warman:
> ME – There isn't a single person who doesn't think like you, and who doesn't criticize the way things are, without thereby wishing himself out of exis-

tence.
HIM – True. (Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* 15–16)

Here, too, the differences can be described in detail. Goethe translates the double negation ("Il n'y a personne qui ne pense comme vous"), a characteristic grammatical feature of the French language, as a simple affirmation ("Jeder denkt wie Ihr"). This is reproduced by de Saur and de Saint-Geniès ("Chacun pense comme vous"), who are faithful to their original—the German translation—while deviating from the unknown French original, and also, to some extent, from idiomatic French. Continuing the sentence, Diderot keeps up the double negative structure ("[Il n'y a personne] qui ne fasse"), whereas Goethe constructs a more complicated follow-up ("und doch will jeder"); so does the French translation, which turns Goethe's "doch" into the more circumstantial "cependant" ("et cependant chacun veut"). It is telling that the third version becomes longer than Goethe's translation, which already stretches Diderot's original. Also, in this passage, we find one of many semantic divergences, when Diderot's "l'ordre qui est" becomes "Ordnung der Dinge" in Goethe and "l'ordre de la nature" in de Saur and de Saint-Geniès. But it also needs to be stressed that there is an almost perfect "recovery" (wrong term, again) of Diderot's text at the end of the "Moi"-sentence when "qu'il renonce à sa propre existence" becomes "qu'il renonce par-là à sa propre existence" in the French translation.

A third and very short sample, now again from all four versions. It is the phrase that gives the most concise formula for the problematic originality of the nephew's character, which is both utterly specific and utterly elusive, both inimitable and based on the ability to imitate. The sentence encapsulates this in a dazzling paradox that really begins to flicker in translation.

Diderot:
Rien ne dissemble plus de lui que lui-même. (Diderot and Goethe 10)

Goethe:
Und nichts gleicht ihm weniger als er selbst. (Diderot and Goethe 11)

Depping:
Et rien ne lui ressemble moins que lui-même. (Depping, "Notice" xliii)

De Saur and de Saint-Geniès:
Rien ne lui ressemble moins que lui-même. (Diderot, *Le Neveu du Rameau* 4)

Turnstall and Warman:
Nothing is more unlike the man than he himself. (Diderot, *Rameaus' Nephew* 8)

The crux of the matter is the double negation again, supplemented by a scaling according to "more" and "less." The unusual French verb "dissembler," for which an English equivalent such as "to unliken" would have to be found, is strangely intensified by the negating construction "rien ne … plus que," so that the maximum of "unlikening" lies with "himself." According to the *Grand Robert*, "dissembler" is an ancient French verb; Diderot is cited as almost the only modern author (besides André Gide) who uses it. Goethe does not dare to recreate this construction in German, for which a neologism like "ungleichen" would be required. Instead he rewrites the phrase with the usual positive term "gleichen" and a simpler negation, along with a downscaling "less": "Nothing resembles him less than he himself." Both French translations reproduce the construction with the identical wording, with only Depping translating the introductory "and" with which Goethe had created a link to the preceding sentence.

A closer comparison of the three versions is quite illuminating, as Ulrich Ricken demonstrated in the 1970s in his article on this topic (Ricken). His analysis reveals substantial differences between the original, the translation, and the back-translation (Ricken uses the term "Rückübersetzung" throughout, without inverted commas or further discussion of the conceptual problem of "back"). This includes passages that Goethe translates liberally (and sometimes even mistranslates), as well as many passages in which de Saur and de Saint-Geniès intervene very strongly or that they simply added themselves. Incidentally, Ricken, in his comparative approach, always arranges the quotations in the sequence Diderot – back-translation – Goethe. In doing so, he generally emphasizes the contrast between the French original and the French translation, very often to the detriment of the latter, which is criticized for its misunderstandings and stylistic inadequacies—always in direct reference to the original, which de Saur and de Saint-Geniès did not know. Goethe is consulted by Ricken as a third instance, as a kind of arbitrator, although he was of course the filter between the original and the back-translation as far as the historical succession is concerned. Be this as it may; all the more striking are the similarities between back-translation and original. According to Ricken these points of convergence are in fact due to Goethe's, for the most part, highly accurate translation. The French-German author and translator Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt has even claimed that Goethe's translation was "presque identique à l'original" ("almost identical with the original") and hence

an exemplar of faithful translation, otherwise it could have never been utilized to supplement the lost original (77). However, in Ricken's study there are several examples that indicate that Goethe was fairly liberal with the original, yet the back-translators were still able to "retrieve" a more original turn of phrase.[28]

In addition, Alexander Nebrig has shown how Goethe made Diderot's dialogical discourse more restrained in many ways, taming it, as it were, so that it fit the stylistic ideal of Weimar Classicism. This applies to word choice, figuration, and sentence structure, as Nebrig illustrates with numerous details. Here is just one of his examples, which is both striking and complex. It concerns one of those long passages of speech in which the nephew combines mockery of his fellow human beings with their theatrical imitation, thus, on the one hand, animating his own discourse and, on the other hand, continually interrupting it. In the passage in question, this is done in the form of a long parenthesis, which is not easily recognizable as such in the sentence structure. The nephew first gives a list of points characterizing a lady, listed with a series of "items," the last of which opens another list of ways to behave towards her, with a typical *il faut*-construction: "il faut applaudir […], sauter […], se transir d'admiration […] et pleurer de joie" (Diderot and Goethe 96). In English: "you have to applaud, jump, be struck dumb with admiration" and, finally, "weep with joy" (Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* 42; partially altered). However, after "se transir d'admiration," Diderot inserts several lines which are to be understood as a verbal expression of the mentioned "admiration."[29] Only then the *il faut*-series is concluded with "et pleurer de joie," which grammatically and semantically seems almost incomprehensible.[30] Goethe, on the other hand, ends the sentence after the "admiration" part, so that the series of exclamations is not even opened as a parenthesis. Therefore, there is no need for the syntactically suspenseful continuation; instead, a new sentence is simply begun, with a different grammatical construction, which requires a further deviation from Diderot's sentence.

28 "Bemerkenswert, daß R. [Rückübersetzung] trotz einer gewissen Abweichung seiner deutschen Vorlage […] die Formulierung des Originals wiederfindet" (Ricken 110).

29 "That's so wonderful, so exquisite, so beautifully expressed, so subtly observed, it shows such original feeling! How do women learn all that? Untutored, by sheer force of instinct, by natural insight alone: it seems miraculous. And then people come and sob to us about the beauties of experience, study, thought, education, and a whole load of other nonsense" (Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew* 42).

30 The English translation simply leaves out this last part of the phrase, which is why I had to add "weep with joy" above.

In Nebrig's summary: "Goethe is not willing to reproduce syntactically too extravagant constructions without intervention" (73; my trans.). Seen in this light, even with *Rameau's Nephew*, Goethe is an intervening translator.

Precarious Originals

Two years after their edition of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, in 1823, the same duo, Joseph-Henri de Saur and Léonce de Saint-Geniès, published a French version of Goethe's *Commentaries on the People and Objects Alluded to in the Dialogue "Rameau's Nephew,"* which they entitled *Des hommes célèbres de France au dix-huitième siècle, et de l'état de la littérature et des arts à la même époque. Par M. Goëthe: traduit de l'allemand par MM. de Saur et de Saint-Geniès* (*On Famous Frenchmen of the Eighteenth Century and the State of Literature and the Arts during That Same Period: By Monsieur Goëthe: Translated from the German by Messieurs de Saur and de Saint-Geniès*). The French edition not only has a completely different title, but the translators expanded the former appendix to a monograph, four times as long as Goethe's commentaries. In this respect, Goethe's elucidations on the French literary and cultural history of the eighteenth century are nothing more than a façade, behind which the book's true concern reveals itself to be a "reaction to political and literary life in France during the Restoration period" (Hamm 1310).

In the same year, 1823, the French publisher J. L. J. Brière completed his edition of Diderot's works with a volume entitled *Œuvres inédites* (*Unpublished Works*), which included a version of *Le Neveu de Rameau* that was based on a manuscript that Brière had obtained from Diderot's daughter. He changed the printed publication date to 1821, two years prior to its actual publication, in order to mark this edition as predating the one by de Saur and de Sain-Geniès and thus as more authoritative. This set off another controversy in the publishing world. The first publishers now admitted that their version had been a translation of Goethe's translation, but then went on to challenge Brière, claiming that he had done the exact same thing, only with a much worse result. In one of the articles, de Saur points out countless stylistic mistakes allegedly committed by Brière. In reality, these instances were idiosyncrasies in Diderot's own style, but de Saur put them forward as real evidence for his reproach that the text edited by Brière could not be the penmanship of Diderot. Even if these findings were mainly due to polemical and strategic intentions, the very idea that an author's text may be dissimilar to what is otherwise perceived as his

authorship addresses the central issue of self-same identity and the problem of authenticity and originality.

Barely twenty years after commencing his Diderot translation, Goethe resumed the matter in a series of notes and observations, responding to the controversy that erupted in Paris surrounding the authenticity of the different competing editions of Diderot's text. He took up the topic on multiple occasions, repeating the details of the story numerous times. This ongoing involvement was due to his contact with the various parties caught up in the Parisian literary debate. Indeed, as Goethe writes, at the time he had Parisian friends who were following the ordeal as it unfolded "step by step."[31] And thus Goethe was able to provide a continuous commentary during the entire process: from the French version of his translation of the dialogue, to the vastly expanded translation of his own "Commentaries," to the publication of the actual Diderot manuscript, which he knew about beforehand because the French publisher Brière had contacted him. Basically, Goethe was kept up to date, making the most of a French-German network of correspondents and contributing to the bi-national exchange himself. In their proceeding "step by step," the commentaries on *Rameau's Nephew* also evince a complex production history, in terms of both composition and publication, with four published journal articles and one treatise that was left unpublished.[32]

A first short note on the case appeared in Goethe's own journal *Über Kunst und Alterthum* (*On Art and Antiquity*) in 1823. One year later, after Brière had requested an arbitral verdict from Goethe, he published another note in the same journal, referring back to the former article in the very opening lines:

> As in the aforesaid passage, and on several other occasions, it has been more circuitously stated that I translated the above-mentioned dialogue by Diderot from a copy of the original manuscript, while the publication of the work in French remained to be undertaken—a gap in French literature that did not fail to go unnoticed from time to time, until finally two bold, young minds published a back-translation in 1821 that was considered to be the original for quite some time.[33]

---

31 "Schritt für Schritt" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 695).

32 In the quoted "Münchner Ausgabe," the editorial heading "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" ("Supplement to 'Rameau's Nephew'") comprises all five texts.

33 "An vorbemeldeter Stelle, so wie an manchen andern Orten, ist umständlicher ausgesprochen, daß ich obgenannten Dialog von Diderot aus einer Kopie des Original-Manuskriptes übersetzt, daß die Ausgabe des französischen Werkes aber un-

Thus, Goethe's intense engagement in the case was something of a correspondence with himself, in which he responded to a series of self-commentaries, self-paraphrases, and self-citations. This is also true for another essay, published likewise in *On Art and Antiquity*. This is a reprint of one section from the 1805 "Commentaries" on *Rameau's Nephew*, dealing with a satirical play from the 1760s, Palissot's *Les philosophes*. Diderot had casted Palissot, one of the men of letters discussed in the dialogue, in a very bad light; Goethe tries to do him justice in his commentary. The subject matter is remote and occasional, which is even stressed in the title of the article: "Bei Gelegenheit des Schauspiels 'Die Philosophen' von Palissot" ("On the Occasion of Palissot's Play 'The Philosophers'"). But in fact, the ephemerality of both Diderot's polemic and Goethe's apology is considered worthy of being commemorated and refreshed in the ongoing debate of the 1820s. The reprint contains the following concluding lines: "Written and printed in the year 1805. Tried and tested, over and again in 1823."[34] Obviously, for Goethe, the literary combat in Paris is an occasion to re-evaluate his own work as a translator, and to re-frame it as a mutual exchange between him and Diderot. "Tried and tested, over and again" is not just some unimportant side note, a commentary on a commentary, but a highly significant phrase when it comes to experimenting with translations. Goethe's series of commentaries is representative of a certain destabilizing questioning of the status of originals, a distancing from the idea that things can truly exist only once.

In his later years Goethe was more and more interested in the possibility of overcoming such notions of singularity, which explains why the supposed scandal produced by the secondary, derivative original of *Le Neveu de Rameau* motivated Goethe to write a series of reflections that are far from being scandalizable. Consequently, a generous attitude towards the French editors-translators de Saur and de Saint-Geniès permeates his responses. He refers to them in a rather fatherly tone as "bold, young minds," who stirred up a bit of "humorous tomfoolery."[35] It is this very same attitude that characterizes another of his

terblieben, doch von Zeit zu Zeit diese Lücke in der französischen Literatur bemerkt worden, bis endlich ein paar muntere Köpfe, im Jahre 1821, eine Rückübersetzung unternahmen und sie eine Zeitlang für das Original gelten ließen" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 701).

34 "Geschrieben und gedruckt im Jahre 1805. Aber und Abermals erprobt 1823" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 701).

35 "[M]untere junge Köpfe" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 701); "humoristische Schelmerei" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 695).

supplementary Diderot writings: the actual review of de Saur's and de Saint-Geniès's 1823 book *Des hommes célèbres*. The article was published anonymously in the rather catchpenny *Journal für Literatur, Kunst, Luxus und Mode* (*Journal for Literature, Art, Luxury, and Fashion*). As it was Goethe's 1805 "Commentaries" that served as the basis for *Des hommes célèbres*, the article is partly a self-review. One might expect some critical words about plagiarism, or at least about unauthorized appropriation, since the French writers had considerably altered Goethe's text, not only by expanding it, but also by abandoning the alphabetical order of the entries. Indeed, Goethe notes that due to this change, the "comparison of the translated with the original is considerably impeded," to the extent of "blurring what actually belongs to the German and what belongs to the Frenchmen." But it is precisely due to this equivocal quality of the translational re-writing that Goethe's review turns out to be unabashedly positive. He dignifies de Saur and de Saint-Geniès by describing them as "young men with a passionate devotion to German authors"; and although they "unconsciously attest to divergences between the French and German mindsets," they do so with the goal of finding "correspondences wherever possible."[36]

From this perspective, the production of secondary originals still seems a bit cheeky, but not altogether inappropriate or preposterous given that their writings can be integrated into a whole series of literary exchanges. In Goethe's view, at least, de Saur's and de Saint-Geniès's translation is not substantially different from Depping's brief paraphrase with the few back-translated passages. This may well come as a surprise, because both quantitatively and in the naming of Goethe as the authoritative model, these two versions differ considerably. It is all the more remarkable that Goethe, as a direct participant in the ongoing debate, was already able to take a perspective in which he judged the events, from a greater distance, as negotiations between France and Germany on literary relations. From this point of view, the publisher Brière, with his competing Diderot project, could also be seen as a player in the same game, although he contacted Goethe to gain his expert testimony in the public debate.

36 "Durch dieses Umstellen jedoch, wird die Vergleichung des Übertragenen mit dem Original sehr erschwert, und es wird nicht deutlich, was eigentlich dem Deutschen und was den Franzosen angehöre. […] Im Ganzen wird ihm [dem Leser] jedoch höchst merkwürdig und lehrreich erscheinen, wie diese guten jungen Männer, die mit Leidenschaft Deutschen Schriftstellern zugetan sind, oftmals, indem sie manches nach eigenem Sinne vortragen, den Zwiespalt Französischer und Deutscher Denkweise unbewußt aussprechen […]; doch sucht ihr Urteil überall irgend eine Vermittlung" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 697–98).

Goethe indeed confirmed without a doubt that the Brière edition was true to Diderot's primary text that he had translated almost twenty years before. And yet, the faithfulness to the original did not matter to Goethe that much. It was not the only criterion for him, nor the most important one. Significantly, he keeps on mentioning the fact that he translated Diderot's dialogue not from the original manuscript, but "from a copy."[37] Instead of confirming, or even monumentalizing the one and only original, he is much more interested in the circulation of copies and in translation as a historical process, thus stressing the reproducibility and convertibility of texts. This means that the term "back-translation"—which has been used several times here for the sake of convenience—is ultimately misleading. In the field of translation, there is no going "back"; there are only ever new translations.

Here we arrive at the expression mentioned at the outset: "original-esque" ("originalmäßig"), meaning something that measures up to an original. Goethe uses it in the last and most comprehensive of his Diderot supplements, a posthumous memorandum simply entitled "Rameaus Neffe," arguably written only in 1825 and thus indicating Goethe's long-lasting preoccupation with the matter. In this text, he recapitulates a letter from the publisher, in which Brière, trying to gain Goethe as his ally, said: "Your German translation of this remarkable production is so faithful […] that it would allow for an original-esque reconstruction of Diderot's work" (or: "for a reconstruction that could measure up to the original"). This needs to be quoted in the German wording:

> Der Herausgeber H. Brière wendete sich an mich, in einem Schreiben vom 27. Juli 1823, aus welchem ich folgende Stelle mitteile:
> "Als Herausgeber der vollständigen Werke Diderots hab' ich auch […] den *Neffen Rameaus* in meine Ausgabe mit auf[genommen]. Dieses Werk ist noch nicht erschienen, aber Ihre deutsche Übersetzung dieser merkwürdigen Produktion ist so treu […], um darnach Diderots Arbeit originalmäßig wiederherstellen zu können." (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 705)

The expression "originalmäßig," which praises the translator and the act of translation, is ironically itself a product of translation. This can clearly be seen in Goethe's appendix to his final postscript, where he considers it advisable to include the original letter of the French publisher. And so it can be stated

37 "[A]us einer Kopie"; "nach einer Kopie"; "die Kopie, nach der ich übersetzte" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 701, 705, 706).

that the French expression that Goethe translates as "originalmäßig" is not "originalement" nor "d'une manière orginale" but: "textuellement." In the full phrase already quoted in German: "La traduction allemande que vous avez donnée de cet ouvrage remarquable est si fidèle […] qu'il serait très-facile de reproduire textuellement Diderot" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 713). This means that Goethe's translation was "so faithful […] that it would be quite easy to textually reproduce Diderot."

What does Goethe's choice of "originalmäßig" for "textuellement" imply? First of all, it means that "original" refers to a text in this case: the absent original (primary) text, the missing "Urtext," the "Haupt Original" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 705) around which all things revolve and which a fortiori can never be regained as such, but only reconstructed through textual means: "textuellement," in order make it as "original-esque" as possible. One might even say that in the domain of the textual, in this world of circulating copies, duplicate manuscripts, translations, alleged back-translations, and actual retranslations, originality is only ever found in the gray area of the not-quite-original, in the domain of the "original-esque." Thus the Diderot translation with its commentaries and its wide array of various configurations establishes a pattern in the poetological thinking of Goethe later in his life that attends to keywords like "collective authorship" and "world literature" (Lamping). In this context, one could also discuss Goethe's preoccupation with Persian poetry in his *West-östlicher Divan*, specifically in the long commentary appended to it ("Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding"). Particular consideration would have to be given to the section "Translations," which can be found almost at the very end.

These ideas reveal that literature in its worldly relationships, by far transgressing the French-German connections discussed in this paper, is always already translated. And they do so through the munificent expressions characteristic of the late Goethe, who did not have to worry so much about the status of his own authorship anymore. Still, these various statements and formulations cannot, and are not intended to, hide the problems associated with the issue of the original. In one of the few comments that are truly critical of de Saur's and de Saint-Geniès's translation, Goethe speaks of the "damage" caused by "forged, partly or completely made-up writings" that then make it impossible to differentiate "the mediocre from the excellent, the weak from the strong, the absurd from the sublime." But even in this critique of forgery and untruthfulness, originality as such is not emphasized. Instead, Goethe only speaks of "Annäherung an gewisse Originalitäten" ("approximation to certain originali-

ties").[38] This observation could easily be part of Diderot's dialogue, for it also deals with replicating and mimicking originality, along with the difficulty of separating the mediocre from the excellent and the absurd from the sublime. It is, in fact, one of the central themes that "Moi" and "Lui" take up. Their moralistic considerations about what it means to be good and great are constantly interrupted by the nephew's biting comments concerning his subaltern status at the margins of society.

To make matters more complicated, the nephew's strength just happens to be the art of deception, both in his various theatrical impersonations and in other social contexts, which leads to particularly pressing questions, in his case, about the authenticity of one's identity. It is no accident that in his last and longest memorandum on *Rameau's Nephew* Goethe states that in France "doubts arose as to whether Rameau's nephew had ever existed." But fortunately, "a passage was found in Mercier's Tableau de Paris that leaves no doubt as to his existence." Goethe then introduces a rather long quote from Mercier's famous urban description, rendered in German tradition. In the overdetermined discourse of translation, one can hardly be surprised that Goethe explicitly points out this state of being translated. However, it is worth mentioning once more how this is done: "We have included a translation here; it is Mercier who speaks."[39] So, the translated author's self-identity is emphasized directly after the reference to the translation—although the fact that Mercier is now being quoted in German means that it is not Mercier who is speaking. Moreover, Goethe quotes Mercier not directly, but according to a citation found in de Saur's and de Saint-Geniès's *Des hommes célèbres*. On top of it all, the passage by Mercier underscores the overdetermined nature of the question of translation and original, given that the nephew himself, in his idiosyn-

38 "Aus Vorstehendem erkennt man den großen und unersetzlichen Schaden, welchen falsche, ganz oder halb erlogene Schriften im Publikum anrichten […], die durch Annäherung an gewisse Originalitäten gerade das Bessere zu sich herabziehen, so daß das Mittelmäßige vom Vortrefflichen, das Schwache vom Starken, das Absurde vom Erhabenen nicht mehr zu scheiden ist" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 706).

39 "Nachdem die französische Übersetzung des Diderotischen Dialogs erschienen war fing man an zu zweifeln ob dieser Neffe Rameaus jemals existiert habe. Glücklicherweise fand man, in Merciers Tableau de Paris, eine Stelle welche sein Dasein außer Zweifel stellt […]. Auch diese fügen wir übersetzt hier bei, es ist Mercier der spricht" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 709).

cratic (in-)authenticity, is then referred to as an "original."[40] This brings us full circle back to Diderot's dialogue, in which the eponymous nephew is characterized and problematized from the outset as an "original" in his dissimilarity to himself—as already quoted above in multi-translated wording. Apparently, there are complex connections between the circumstantial conditions surrounding the translation and transmission that unfolded around this text and its complex way of dealing with problems of originality and authenticity. *Rameau's Nephew*, in and out of translation, sparked a highly important debate about questions of what it means to be original, originary, and original-esque, and what it means to measure up to an original whose status has become questionable.

Works Cited

Bernays, Michael. *Über Kritik und Geschichte des Goetheschen Textes*. Dümmler, 1866.

Bosse, Heinrich. *Autorschaft ist Werkherrschaft. Über die Entstehung des Urheberrechts aus dem Geist der Goethezeit*. Schöningh, 1981.

Décultot, Elisabeth. "Kunsttheorie als Übersetzung. Goethes Auseinandersetzung mit Diderots 'Versuch über die Mahlerey.'" *Klassizismus in Aktion. Goethes "Propyläen" und das Weimarer Kunstprogramm*, edited by Daniel Ehrmann and Norbert Christian Wolf, Böhlau, 2016, pp. 177–94.

Depping, Georg Bernhard. "Notice." *Supplément aux Œuvres de Denis Diderot*. Berlin, 1819, pp. v–xlv.

Diderot, Denis. *Essais sur la peinture*. Buisson, 1795.

———. Le Neveu de Rameau. *Dialogue. Ouvrage posthume et inédit*, [edited by Henri de Saur and Léonce de Saint-Geniès], Delaunay, 1821.

———. Rameau's Nephew: *A Multi-Media Edition*. Edited by Marian Hobson, translated by Kate E. Turnstall and Caroline Warman, Open Book Publishers, 2014.

Diderot, Denis, and Johann Wolfgang Goethe. *Rameaus Neffe. Ein Dialog von Diderot. Le Neveu de Rameau. Übersetzt von Goethe*. Zweisprachige Ausgabe, edited by Horst Günther, Insel, 1984.

40 "Diese Unterredung Merciers mit dem Neffen Rameaus hat vollkommen den Charakter des Gespräches welches Diderot mit diesem Original durchführte […]" (Goethe, "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe'" 712).

"Dissembler." *Le Grand Robert de la langue française*. Vol. 2, 2nd ed., edited by Alain Rey, Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2001, p. 1573.

Fuhrmann, Manfred, "Goethes Übersetzungsmaximen." *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, vol. 117, 2000, pp. 26–45.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. "Diderots Versuch über die Malerei." *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Münchner Ausgabe, vol. 7, edited by Norbert Miller and John Neubauer, Hanser, 1991, pp. 517–66.

———. "Nachträgliches zu 'Rameaus Neffe.'" *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Münchner Ausgabe, vol. 7, edited by Norbert Miller and John Neubauer, Hanser, 1991, pp. 693–714.

Goldschmidt, Georges-Arthur. "Scènes de la vie d'un traducteur." *Goldschmidt, Un enfant aux cheveux gris. Entretiens avec François Dufay*, by Goldschmidt, CNRS Éditions, 2008, pp. 73–82.

Hamm, Heinz. "Die französische Übersetzung und Kommentierung von Goethes Anmerkungen zu 'Rameaus Neffe' von Diderot." *Weimarer Beiträge*, vol. 29, 1983, pp. 1309–15.

Hock, Jonas. "Das strategische Potenzial des Briefes. Friedrich Melchior Grimms "Correspondance littéraire" zwischen Privatbriefkultur und Pressewesen." *L'art épistolaire entre civilité et civisme de Gellert à Humboldt*, edited by Françoise Knopper and Wolfgang Fink, Aix-Marseille Université, 2016, pp. 71–82.

Jany, Christian. *Strudelgetriebe der Übersetzung. "Rameaus Neffe" und die Erfindung der Weltliteratur*. Kröner, 2020.

Lamping, Dieter. *Die Idee der Weltliteratur. Ein Konzept Goethes und seine Karriere*. Kröner, 2010.

Miller, Norbert, and John Neubauer. "Einleitung: Nachträgliches zu Rameaus Neffe." *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Münchner Ausgabe, vol. 7, edited by Miller and Neubauer, Hanser, 1991, pp. 1131–38.

———. "Einleitung: Rameaus Neffe." *Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Münchner Ausgabe, vol. 7, edited by Miller and Neubauer, Hanser, 1991, pp. 1064–88.

Nebrig, Alexander. *Dezenz der klassischen Form. Goethes Übersetzung von Diderots "Le neveu de Rameau."* Wehrhahn, 2006.

Oesterle, Günter. "Goethe und Diderot: Camouflage und Zynismus. 'Rameaus Neffe' als deutsch-französischer Schlüsseltext." *Volk – Nation – Europa. Zur*

Romantisierung und Entromantisierung politischer Begriffe, edited by Alexander von Borman, Königshausen & Neumann, 1998, pp. 117–36.

Reynolds, Matthew, editor. *Prismatic Translation*. Legenda, 2020.

Ricken, Ulrich, "Die französische Rückübersetzung des 'Neveu de Rameau' nach der deutschen Übertragung von Goethe." *Beiträge zur Romanischen Philologie*, vol. 15, 1976, pp. 99–116.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. "Ueber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersezens." *Das Problem des Übersetzens*, edited by Hans Joachim Störig, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963, pp. 38–70.

Schlösser, Rudolf. *Rameaus Neffe. Studien und Untersuchungen zur Einführung in Goethes Übersetzung des Diderotschen Dialogs*. Duncker, 1900.

Willer, Stefan. "Kreuzwege des Philologen. Über die Möglichkeit und Unmöglichkeit philologischer experimenta crucis." *Konjektur und Krux. Zur Methodenpolitik der Philologie*, edited by Anne Bohnenkamp, Kai Bremer, Uwe Wirth, and Irmgard M. Wirtz, Wallstein, 2010, pp. 142–54.

———. "Original-esque: Diderot and Goethe in Back-Translation." *Prismatic Translation*, edited by Matthew Reynolds, Legenda, 2020, pp. 352–61.

Zehm, Edith. "'Das Werk zu übersetzen und immer mit seinem Texte zu controvertieren.' Goethes Übersetzungs- und Kommentierungstechnik im kritischen Dialog mit Diderots 'Essais sur la peinture.'" *Edition und Übersetzung. Zur wissenschaftlichen Dokumentation des interkulturellen Texttransfers*, edited by Bodo Plachta and Winfried Woesler, Niemeyer, 2002, pp. 105–17.