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*Essais sur la peinture* (1766), and *Rameaus Neffe* (*Rameau's Nephew*, 1805), the German version of the previously unpublished philosophical dialogue *Le Neveu de Rameau* from the 1770s.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.