In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations

edited by
Paul St-Pierre
Prafulla C. Kar
In Translation – Reflections, Refractions, Transformations
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Volume 71

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John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam/Philadelphia
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Acknowledgements

Some of the papers included in this volume were published earlier in a special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Thought* (2002) edited by Paul St-Pierre and devoted to the topic “Paradigms of/for Translation”. Most later appeared in the volume published by Pencraft International, Delhi, in 2005, co-edited by Paul St-Pierre and Prafulla C. Kar. We thank both the Convenors of the Forum on Contemporary Theory of the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, and S. P. Jain and Anurag Jain of Pencraft International for permitting us to include the papers here. For permission to reprint the articles by Probal Dasgupta and Gayatri Spivak, we thank *The Little Magazine* and Taylor and Francis respectively. We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Québec Fund for Research on Society and Culture.
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Introduction

Paul St-Pierre

At some point between the prospective call by James Holmes in 1972 advocating translation studies as a legitimate field of research and the founding in 1987 of the first national association (the Canadian Association of Translation Studies), translation studies gained recognition as a discipline in its own right. Along with this recognition came various forms of institutionalization: new journals and associations, international conferences in greater and greater numbers, graduate programmes in translation studies, etc. More recently, however, and this is perhaps a result of the process of maturation, questions have arisen relating on the one hand to the disciplinary status of translation studies and on the other to its origins. The two are interconnected, the first pointing to the dependence of translation studies on other disciplines and the second questioning the generality of its concepts.

The disciplinary status of translation studies has never ceased to be problematic, as it has attempted to find its way between the Charybdis and Scylla of linguistics and comparative literature. More recently, however, it has given rise to new questioning, of which two recent examples can be cited. In a talk to the European Society for Translation Studies conference in September 2004, Daniel Simeoni asked: “Is there anything, any subject [...] that could not be explored as well, some would say better, by the specialist trained in other disciplines?” A similar interrogation can be found in the paper by Rajendra Singh in this volume (73–74):

Given the contemporary modularization of knowledge and the consequent professionalization, increasingly mimicking the natural and life sciences, some would argue that TS [translation studies] is perhaps the only field in the human and social sciences that seems NOT to focus on theoretical questions of its own. Whereas the now relatively old contemporary linguistic theory, at least in its North-American avatar, established itself on the grounds of a maximalist insistence on its autonomy from other cognitive domains, Translation Theory (TT) seems to want to establish itself on grounds that can be said to be maximally non-autonomist [...].
And while the object of translation studies might seem to some self-evident – ‘translation’ of course, its fundamental ambiguity and the wide range of activities and texts which fall under its purview lie at the heart of the re-evaluation taking place. For what is translation, or, as Harish Trivedi asks here, what is not? Does translation necessitate crossing a boundary; if so, of what nature is that boundary? Purely linguistic? Also cultural? Necessarily temporal? Such questions have always been difficult, even when their difficulty has been avoided (see Lewis in this volume), and they have become more difficult nowadays, as boundaries have become increasingly porous, despite attempts to erect walls and construct fortresses. The difficulty in determining the nature of the object ‘translation’ leads in to another related problem: how to speak of translation with any specificity. As a process and not merely as a product, for example, which, as Buzelin argues here, would require new tools and methods, and new perspectives, most probably originating in other disciplines, as did the tools which until now have made it possible to speak of translations as texts, and which are thus likely to reinforce the questions concerning the disciplinary status of translation studies.

The origins of the discipline, in Europe and North America, and its lack of engagement with practices and theorisations from other parts of the world, have also become an increasing area of concern. Maria Tymoczko, in a paper presented at the University of London in 2003, “Enlarging Western Translation Theory: Integrating Non-Western Thought about Translation”, argues

There is a need in translation studies for more flexible and deeper understandings of translation, and the thinking of non-Western peoples about this central human activity is essential in achieving broader and more durable theories about translation. [...] The consequence will be the refurbishing of basic assumptions and structures of Western translation theory itself.

Daniel Simeoni, in the talk already referred to, links disciplinary autonomy to going beyond exclusively Western contexts:

[...] if there is an absolute specificity of translation studies – against that of all other disciplines in the human sciences (since most disciplines crystallized in the context of nation-states at about the same time) – that specificity demands defining its object beyond itself, that is, beyond what we in most countries of the Western world [emphasis added] conceptualise as trans-/lation, referring simply to a transposition of textual artefacts from one side of a border to another.

Reinforcing these calls for an opening up of translation studies to other linguistic, and more particularly plurilingual, cultures and histories is that of Lewis, who argues here that even the most basic concepts routinely used in translation studies – the concepts of source and target language, for example – are tied to specific,
and specifically European, histories and do not apply to linguistic situations in many (in most?) parts of the world, where creoles, pidgins, and other forms of mixed, non standard(ized) languages, dominate, with the result that translation studies, as a discipline, ends up excluding practices of translation which are in fact commonplace.

The characterisations of cultures as homogeneous and the predominantly Western bias of translation studies have been questioned in work published since the early 1980s. Can be mentioned in this respect, for example, Antoine Berman’s study of the German romantics published in 1984 and translated into English as *The Experience of the Foreign*, which, despite being founded on an analysis of texts which were very much part of, and important to, the development of the European tradition, also paved the way for a recognition of alterity in the practice, and theorisation, of translation; Lawrence Venuti’s various publications (1992, 1995, 1998a) with the influential, if at times contested, distinction between *domesticating* translation (assimilating the original text to the norms, values and expectations of the target culture) and *foreignizing* translation (maintaining a certain distance from such norms, values and expectations, resisting assimilation to the target culture); and publications examining the functions attributed to translation(s) in colonial and postcolonial contexts (for example, Cheyfitz 1991; Niranjana 1992; Tymoczko 1999a; Simon & St-Pierre 2000). This volume constitutes a continuation and extension of this questioning.

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‘Reflection’, ‘refraction’, ‘transformation’ are all words which have been used to describe the practice of translation and the varying degrees and types of connection established between texts. Equipollence, compromise, conversion – all ways of designating what is essentially a *relational* equation. The first – reflection – refers to the invisibility of the act of translation (see Venuti 1995); the second – refraction – to the negotiation between systems, texts and cultures, often involving misunderstandings and misconceptions (see Lefevere 2000: 234). As for the third possibility – translation as transformation – consider the following definition of translation by Gideon Toury in the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics*:

> Translating is an act (or a process) which is performed (or occurs) over and across systemic borders. In the widest of its possible senses it is a series of operations, or procedures, whereby one semiotic entity, which is a [functional] constituent (element) of a certain cultural (sub)system, is transformed into another semiotic entity, which forms at least a potential element of another cultural (sub)system, providing that some informational core is retained ‘invariant under transformation,’ and on its basis a relationship known as ‘equivalence’ is established between the resultant and initial entities. (Sebeok 1986: 1112)
Certain elements of this definition are, at the very least, debatable, most notably the notions of ‘informational core’ and ‘equivalence’, and its structuralist emphasis on the complete separation of entities and of systems from each other is highly questionable. Nevertheless, the definition of a translation as a sign and of the process of translation as a semiotic activity is useful, and can help give substance to the notion of transformation.

There are at least two traditions which can be identified within the discipline of semiotics: the first, which looks to Charles Sanders Peirce as its founder, is based on a philosophical (and more specifically categorial) approach to the sign; the second, the bases of which were put forward by Ferdinand de Saussure, takes the linguistic sign as its model. While the two traditions are not incompatible, their presuppositions are quite different, as are the concepts which each has developed. Definitions of the sign at their most general, such as a sign is “that by knowing which we know something else”, or a sign “is a referral (renvoi)”, are pertinent to both; but the specific definitions of the sign within each tradition are more notable for their differences than their similarities. Because of the essentially static nature of Saussurean semiotics, evident above in Toury’s emphasis on discrete entities and structures, it is the work of Peirce which can be of the most use here.

In Peirce’s work there are many definitions of ‘sign’, and somewhat arbitrarily I cite the following, which Peirce provided for the Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology: a sign is “[a]nything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum”. For Peirce then, there are three elements to a sign: the sign itself, the object to which the sign refers, and the interpretant, which the sign causes to refer to the object in the same way as the sign itself does. Thus, writes Peirce in one of his earliest works, On a New List of Categories, giving an example which is not unrelated to translation, “[...] suppose we look out [sic] the word *homme* in a French dictionary; we shall find opposite to it the word *man*, which, so placed, represents *homme* as representing the same two-legged creature which *man* itself represents” (Peirce 1984:53). Further in the same text Peirce calls the interpretant a “mediating representation”, and to explain what he means by this provides the following illustration: an interpretant “[...] fulfils the office of an interpreter, who says that a foreigner says the same thing which he himself says” (54). The foreigner and the interpreter are in this comparison the sign and the interpretant respectively. An additional aspect of the sign as defined above is that it is part of an ongoing process, through the conversion of interpretants into signs, which in turn determine further interpretants.

The dynamic nature of Peirce’s approach, with his emphasis on process, makes it more suitable to providing an account of the transformative nature of translation. Here I would like to quote at some length from the original English version
of a text written by eminent Peirce scholar David Savant to introduce the French translation of some of Peirce’s early writings (Fouchier-Axelsen & Foz 1987):

An interpretant is a translation from one way of saying something into another way of saying the same thing. Suppose we translate the English sentence “The diamond is hard” into French. Three factors are necessary. A. There is some actual situation to which a sign could refer – in this case, the diamond’s being hard. B. There is the first sign, the English sentence. C. There is the translation of the English sentence. It is clear that the translation, C, is not the same as a sentence in exactly the same words spoken in ordinary conversation between two French people. In order to be a translation it must be understood to be a translation. The translation – let us now call it the interpretant – must first represent the English sentence. Second, it must represent that it says in French the same thing that the English sentence says. Both sentences, the English one and its French interpretant, stand for the same situation. Third, the interpretant must also carry the message that it is not simply an accident that it says the same thing that the English sentence says. The interpretant follows the English sentence according to a rule, or set of rules, of translation.

There are a number of points of interest here for translation. Firstly, that since “an interpretant is a translation from one way of saying something into another way of saying the same thing”, Peirce’s system is able to account for the various forms of translation (intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic) identified by Jakobson. Indeed, translation at this most general level can be identified with representation, comprehension, and even meaning. This is a position which Peirce explicitly adopts (“‘meaning,’ [...] is, in its primary acceptation, the translation of a sign into another system of signs”) and which is also espoused by Jakobson (“For us, both as linguists and as ordinary word-users, the meaning of any linguistic sign is its translation into some further, alternative sign”, as quoted in Jakobson and Waugh 1984: 412). A second element to be noted here is the difference which exists between the French translation of the English sentence and a French sentence made up of exactly the same words and uttered in conversation, since the translation must represent not only the English sentence but also “that it says in French the same thing the English sentence says”. The consequences of this are that a translation must show itself to be a translation and, in so doing, will never be strictly equivalent to the original text. Additional, new information is provided, in line with Peirce’s conception of genuine thought and semiosis:

[...] a sign is not a sign unless it translates itself into another sign in which it is more fully developed. Thought requires achievement for its own development, and without this development it is nothing. Thought must live and grow in inces-
sant new and higher translations, or it proves itself not to be genuine thought. (Peirce 1960–1966, vol. V:594)

The notion that a translation is a sign which is more fully developed than the original (an interpretant is more fully developed than the original sign) is of interest since it can help explain the nature of their relations. The irreversible nature of the translation process, which Toury emphasizes in a passage later in his entry in the Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics, is in part a result of this further development from one sign to another. The third element is that a translation carries within itself a message that a rule or set of rules has been followed, and that these same rules could be applied in other instances. This observation too is of importance, in that it points to the fact the relations between an original and its translation are rule governed and that these rules, found within the translation itself, can and must be made explicit. Such rules are, I would maintain, historical and contextual in nature. In On a New List of Categories Peirce writes that “we cannot comprehend agreement of two things, except as an agreement in some respect” (Peirce 1984:52). Thus, it becomes important to determine the respect in terms of which such a connection is established, in particular between texts and their translations, and in relation to which the transformative action of translation takes place.

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The common thread linking the articles included in this volume is that translation brings about transformation, that translations are a form of action. As such, they interrogate the hackneyed oppositions of author to translator, translation to original, primary to secondary, target to source, writing to translating – binary oppositions which all point to the disturbing difference introduced through translation, but in the end, only to deplore and deny it. The articles here, on the other hand, acknowledge difference and celebrate it, perceiving translation as a social, political, cultural and ethical act, which, in the process of reconstituting its origin(al)s, leaves them other than what they were. Traditionally, and even within translation studies itself, the operation of translation has often been described in terms of loss, and of course betrayal, and forces have been marshalled to minimise its ‘negative’ effects: translation is reduced to a mere reproduction (or reflection) – of an effect, of an intention, of a message. Paradoxically, however, what is being minimised in such attempts is exactly what is specific to translations, what translation brings that is new, that constitutes growth – an interaction in a new context, a new reading, a new writing. In much of what has been written about translation there seems to be a desire for the certainty of what already exists, even if such certainty constitutes
a form of death (the end of interpretation and engagement, even before they have begun), rather than for the indeterminacy of the future and of life.

The texts here no longer maintain these distinctions: languages are intermixed, translation becomes a form of writing, originality does not depend on anteriority, translations are asked to become visible and play a social role – different paradigms for/of translation are constituted. The prepositional hesitation is perhaps significant, combining the prospective thrust of the first with the descriptive value of the second: paradigms which at once exist and yet do not, at least not yet; paradigms being constituted through contact with other disciplines (critical theory, philosophy, sociology, history, law, psychoanalysis) and with writers and texts (Derrida, “The Task of the Translator,” “The Death of the Author,” Borges, Berman, Riffaterre); paradigms which attempt to go beyond and undo the cognitive confinement that Daniel Simeoni refers to in his paper. Even at the risk of a lack of disciplinary autonomy.

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The first two chapters discuss the origins of the discipline of translation studies. Daniel Simeoni raises the question as to why the linkage of ‘translation’ and ‘society’ took so long to come about, despite the generalization of a sociological viewpoint at the end of the nineteenth century. He sees the delay in integrating translation as an example of cognitive confinement, of paradigmatic blinders based on a national, and nationalistic, view of the world, on a view of languages as closed systems impervious to foreign influence. R. Anthony Lewis looks at the effects of such a view of languages, which he finds at the very basis of many of the concepts used to theorise translation: concepts such as equivalence and faithfulness, but also the very notion of language itself. Working from non-standard continuum varieties of language (creoles) he argues for a reconsideration of translation as a transformation which can take place within, as well as between, languages. Next, Hélène Buzelin explores the reflection which took place in anthropology, in terms of its epistemological bases and its methods, with a view to indicating how this be of help for the evolution of translation studies. She argues against the usual perception of a translation process as the product of a translator acting individually, and substitutes for it that of a collective process, involving networks of relations. Probal Dasgupta’s text constitutes another call for translation studies to examine the foundations on which it is based and go beyond the opposition, present in translation studies, between fundamentalist and foundationalist positions, that is positions which are founded in the remote past and the translation of religious texts, on the one hand, and in the Enlightenment and techno-scientific translation, on the other. Finally, in this section, Rajendra Singh examines the preoccupation of translation studies with, and its use of, other disciplines, pointing out
the necessity for a discipline to define, on its own terms, its own core principles. Translation studies has not, Singh claims, done this yet, which puts in doubt its claim to constitute a discipline.

The chapters in the second section question the separation between the roles of the author, the reader, and the translator. Sukanta Chaudhuri does so explicitly in his examination of the Borges story, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote.” Rewriting and substantiating – that is, translating – Walter Benjamin’s famous article on translation, Chaudhuri explores the relations between the translation and the original, arguing that the former “makes concrete a part of the work’s total promise which would otherwise have remained unrecorded” and in so doing, through this addition, puts into question the primacy of the original. Judith Lavoie studies the rewriting which took place in French of Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn, a rewriting which she shows goes against the values of the original text. Looking in particular at the way dialectal expressions and usages were translated, she illustrates the intricacies and dangers involved in the passage between non-standard and standard languages. Sherry Simon examines the overlap between writing and translation through the prism of one writer’s ‘translational sensibility’, that of Montreal poet Anne Carson, for whom writing and translation are inseparable. By looking at “this creative edge of the translational spectrum”, Simon places the emphasis on the “motives and mental processes that lead to the result”, on the process rather than the finished product. The text by Salah Basalamah takes a critical look at the same opposition, and the tendency, under international copyright law, to consider translation only in terms of its end result. Drawing on a number of notions from the works of Derrida and postcolonial theory, he sees a reflection upon translation as an “occasion for law to reflect upon its foundations and function as an economic and political instrument”. Christi Merrill also takes up the question of copyright, asking how different forms of creativity, and most importantly those in the plural – thus, the interest in translation – are accounted for, ethically, economically and legally, and how, in the way they relate to questions of ownership, they can question and provide solutions for contradictions present in concepts of intellectual property.

The four chapters in the following section all analyse the particular functions and roles translation has had in particular historical situations. The first of these, by Debendra Dash and Diptri Ranjan Pattanaik, provides an overview of (the lack of) translation in ancient India and its relation to caste and hierarchies. In terms of Orissa, in particular, it identifies four successive moments, corresponding to the evolution of caste relationships and a vying for status by the languages, sacred and vernacular, involved. In his text, Saji Mathew focuses on what it means to translate, and in particular to translate into English, in modern-day India. Criticizing a structure of translation which would give too much power to any one
particular language, he proposes the notion of heterographic translation, that is, translation between a multitude of Indian languages, in a multitude of directions, claiming that “the postcolonial Indian translation scene has a mission to fulfill in order to retrieve a more heterogeneous perception of Indian societies, in addition to performing the task of crossing linguistic boundaries.” Luise von Flotow takes up the relation between translation and globalization, examining the use made of literary translation by the government of Canada in its ‘cultural diplomacy’. Her paper demonstrates the importance accorded by Canada to translation as a way of promoting its values and culture, but also the way in which the success of such a strategy depends on the priorities of the receiving culture. Finally, Mark Fettes explores the effects of a double translation, into English and into writing, of the works of Haida mythtellers, showing the deracination from the original community which comes about through translation, in particular when this takes place into a metropolitan language which is also the language of colonization.

The subject of the fourth and last section is the problematic nature of the relation to difference and to the other, under the smooth surface of meaning, that is posed by translation. Through the study of a few brief passages of five French translations of a sixteenth-century Spanish text, Marc Charron raises questions relating to interpretation and meaning in translation, and the various strategies used by critics and translators alike – appeal to authorship, the resolution of ambiguities through historical reference, for example – to produce an acceptable reading. The detailed analysis clearly demonstrates the cost exacted by such strategies. Gabriel Moyal approaches translation through the texts and practice of Freud, and problematizes the notions of relevance and pertinence, arguing that psychoanalysis demonstrates to us that what is most meaningful is not always, not even usually, what appears as such. Despite the resistance this provokes, interruptions – dreams, for example – should be accorded importance, as should translations – one more form of interruption, between the text and the reader. For his part, Alexis Nouss sees translation as a form for modern times, implying as it does a logic based on combination rather than on exclusion: ‘both ... and’ rather than ‘either ... or’. Different strands become interwoven, without the need to choose, without the obligation of deciding for one and against another. This is the political and ethical dimension of translation, as an othering of the same, a deferring of identity through difference. Michael Cronin focuses on anxieties in translation involving the question of figurative language, anxieties which derive from the relation between eloquence and power, between language and conquest, and the appropriation of figurative language through translation. Translation is both needed and feared, as it permits expansion but also potentially undermines control. Gayatri Spivak interweaves a variety of situations of/in translation, connecting theory to practice, tying them in the end to her own translations of the
fictions of Mahasweta Devi. Finally, Harish Trivedi looks at the development of translation studies over the past thirty years, but more specifically at the question of the relation of the discipline to others, as it has taken part in a shift between disciplines. Analysing Cultural Translation and the resulting abusive omnipresence of translation, Trivedi argues that equating migrancy with translation leads only to a lack of specificity, and of credibility.
PART I

Translation studies in context
Translation and society

The emergence of a conceptual relationship

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Why did it take so long for sociologists to take translation as an object of study, and for translation studies to adopt a sociological eye? The history of disciplines illustrates that not only methods but also whole worldviews are created – or inherited – from other systems of thinking, defining what are legitimate objects of research. Sociology emerged within a certain geopolitical context and in a specific geographical location at a time when nation-state institutions conditioned the relation of the observer to the other. The contours of the definable object, whether domestic or foreign, prevented consideration of the intermediate zone, a region with blurred borders, thereby excluding translation from the list of acceptable objects.

Keywords: translation studies; disciplinary history; sociological eye; nation-state; method

We have grown accustomed to seeing contributions in specialised journals and publications focusing on a sociological treatment of translation, both as a complex process of cultural diffusion and transformation, and in the form of data, often in massive amounts, signalling the imbalance in cultural relations in, and between, national states. In retrospect, however, it should be self-evident that the question of ‘translation and society’ has not always been a topic on which research could be done; it has not always been possible to write on the links between the two concepts, on the role played by translations and translating in society, on the social dimensions of the practice, the interplay of the complex social forces shaping the politics of translation worldwide, or on the history of these interrelations. The specifically social worldview of life developed in the context of the human sciences has not always existed, and it was remarkably late in taking translation as an object of study. While it is true that elements making the articulation of the two concepts possible can be found in the discourses on translation that have
reached us since Cicero’s dicta on the subject in 45 BCE, it is important to realise that the formulation of a social identity for translation did not, and indeed could not, emerge until quite recently. Nor should it be assumed that the way the field is currently divided will endure, with ‘translation studies’ on the one hand, a specialised domain of social research where the relations between translation and society are increasingly being recognised, and the more traditional disciplines of the humanities and social sciences on the other, with individual projects focusing on translation, its status, its relationship to and its importance in society. In other words, the academic study of translations and of translators from a social perspective must itself be understood as a social object. What follows is an effort at such an understanding. Given the scale of these considerations, covering scholarly activity in and between several disciplines over roughly the last thirty years, exceptions to the overall map will be easy to find. The main interest of the exercise may lie in the internal dynamics it aims to lay bare rather than in any of its particular examples.

The belated emergence of a social worldview embracing translation

Translation is a practice of writing whose first recorded manifestations coincide more or less with the use of clay tablets to record lists of commodities more than five thousand years ago. However, it was only in the very last decade of the twentieth century that translation became an object per se for sociology or, more exactly, that it began to be identified as a social fact and a social practice (see, e.g. in Canada, Simon 1989; Brisset 1990; and for a synthetic proposal, Toury 1995). Earlier attempts to consider it as such, in the wake of Holmes’s call in 1972 at the International Congress of Applied Linguistics for the development of “socio-translation studies”, were resisted and at times were even presented in overly formal disguise, with the sociological component often left backstage, either for want of a proper conceptualization or due to some kind of disjunction between the case study observed, frequently of great relevance to the project, and the programme that was supposed to frame its interpretation. To take the full measure of that resistance, one should recall that outside translation studies proper, by that time, the sociology of literature was firmly established, dating back to the Marxist philosophers of the 1930s (see Williams 1977).

It is important to understand what exactly is meant by ‘society’ in the discussion of ‘translation and society’ that I am proposing here. Clearly, the discourses which have accompanied the practice of translation have always been fundamentally social in nature. Prefatory statements by translators, pronouncements by critics, and many of the recent histories of translation as well (for examples
of *florilegia*, see Lefevere 1992a; Schulte & Biguenet 1992; Robinson 1997b; case studies could be found in Delisle & Woodsworth 1995; in the “Traditions” section of Baker & Malmkjaer 1998, as well as, since then, in virtually every book on translation or translators focusing on a specific time period) – all of these texts contain anecdotes with a clear social content. Nevertheless, it is evident that this content has, for the most part, remained peripheral to something else which was considered of greater importance and which needed to be foregrounded: the quality of the translation (‘fidelity’ versus ‘infidelity’), the art or failings of the writer, the ‘poverty’ of translation when compared to ‘creative’ writing, etc., all observations that were limited in most cases to the particular text, worker or commission under discussion. Even in the 1980s, when the decisive theoretical step was taken to shift the angle of observation from the source text to the social environment of the translation, most major contributions to the field (including those by Toury) remained attached to a primarily formal, and only secondarily social, let alone sociological, worldview.

The abstraction of formal relations out of a practice that, up until that point, had been the preserve of applied linguists, literary and hermeneutic critics, or of the practitioners themselves, took time to emerge; it was familiar neither to the agents involved nor to those who studied their production. Less noted has been the fact that adopting a social worldview or, to use Everett Hughes’s felicitous expression, making use of the *sociological eye*, was even more ‘unnatural’. The lack of remove from the object under observation rendered it deceptively familiar, and it was not obviously possible to go beyond the observation of particular cases and arrive at general findings in connection with a world system which, while being constructed, needed to be viewed first and foremost as *social*, and not primarily as (poly)systemic or semiological. The importance of the question in terms of research as to ‘which comes first’, the construction or the quality of the order, and beyond that, the issue of its societal significance, cannot be overemphasized when it comes to assessing the relationship between translation and society. But even before answering such questions an explanation needs to be provided as to why scholars active in translation studies were so slow to see things with this sociological eye.

The most plausible explanation would seem to be that this belated development resulted from it being a process which was considered secondary to the establishment of an academic field of studies specifically dedicated to translation issues. As such, it was a delayed response, part of a broader epistemic displacement of attention that took place in the humanities, moving from a predominantly linguistic/semiotic outlook towards a broader, ‘contextualizing’ comprehension not only of translation but of all textual production. Symbolic of this realignment is the itinerary of Gideon Toury, from *In Search of a Theory of Translation* (1980).
to *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (1995). While in the latter work Toury does not reverse, let alone contradict, the principles and approach adopted in the first, there can be no doubt that his angle of vision has shifted towards a more ‘sociological’ outlook, a shift that is even more noticeable in more recent articles (see Toury 1997, 1998). Whereas the earlier book focused on the interplay of structures to the point that they at times seemed largely transhistorical, the later volume, through a number of case studies, some of which were revised from the earlier work, demonstrated the exceedingly sensitive configuration of normative forces at play in the social setting in which translational activity takes place. The research narrative present in the second volume more explicitly highlighted the idea that translations are textual artefacts whose functions are inscribed in the particular social culture that hosts them. Of course, Toury’s research is, and has always been, part of a larger programme devised and developed within the context of the influential Tel Aviv school, a programme which has clearly undergone a similar reorientation over the last twenty years. Witness a comparable evolution taking place in the works of Itamar Even-Zohar, as can be observed, for example, across the successive versions of his theory of “interference” (1978, 1990, 2005). It would be naïve, however, to limit the change observed to this particular environment. This reorientation by the Israeli scholars and their many disciples, epigones and followers, is in fact part of a more general trend in the human sciences: a turning away from formalism towards a more inclusive sociocultural paradigm. In this sense, it is fair to say that the recent increased interest in the social dimensions of translation on the part of scholars from the ranks of institutional translation studies (see, for example, Gambier, Hermans, Pym, Wolf) has not arisen strictly from within the field; it has bloomed in a space opened up by a more global retreat from the linguistic, text-exclusive paradigm.

It is not easy to trace the genealogy of this global shift, let alone to identify where it first began. One thing seems clear, however: it has affected most language-based disciplines over the past quarter-century or so, worldwide, though it would perhaps be more accurate to limit this remark to the Western world, on both sides of the Atlantic. Researchers active in the so-called periphery (that is, the “rest” of “the West”) did not need to migrate from formalism to the cultural paradigm, as they appeared on the scene fully equipped with the new paradigm. This, ironically, could also be revisited against the backdrop of a massive paradigmatic change in post World War II anthropology, from the earlier narratives of linear evolution to one of diffusion through contact (Bloch 2005). The migration from one paradigm to another affected the more traditional institutions of academia in North America and in Europe, though in different ways, whereas researchers outside the Western world, in and outside of academia, emerged immediately with a social conscience, so to speak, not because they constituted an ‘avant-garde’ or
were younger in age, but rather because their socio-biographical itinerary may have made them more aware of the interplay of social forces. In other words, over the longer term, the shift away from formalisms coincided more or less with other aspects of a lasting transformation variously called “poststructuralism”, the “end of theory”, or even the “decline (or crisis) in the human sciences” and, along with it, the emergence of the so-called ‘periphery’ (e.g. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989).

One of the institutional side effects of this global transformation is a division along geographical lines not so much between the West and the rest, but within the West itself. In some parts of the world, specifically in English-speaking countries, the simultaneous emergence of cultural studies, gender studies, and post-colonial studies has had the effect of eliminating formalist semiotic undertakings from the map of legitimate research and are well on the way of doing the same for formalist approaches developed within other scholarly practices. The work of (United States-based) Franco Moretti on *Graphs, Maps and Trees* (2003–2004) is interesting in this respect; despite the fact that they were first published in the progressive *New Left Review* in London, these formalistic proposals in search of new regularities in the “life” of the novel seem, so far, to have remained an isolated case. The sense is strong that, had that kind of literary criticism (now, most tellingly, called a “history”) been proposed three decades or so earlier, and coming as it did after the author’s highly original “Atlas” of the nineteenth-century European Novel (1997), it might have become the foundational stone for an entire school of thought. In the words of the new historicist Stephen Greenblatt (1988), distancing himself from all unifying views of the literary field, “there is no escape from contingency”. In Europe on the other hand, where structuralism was more firmly entrenched, the retreat from the formalist paradigm may have contributed to narrowing the gap between translation studies, history and sociology, thereby giving new life to the more established disciplines in the human sciences without – so far – putting their boundaries seriously into question.

Depending upon where they are active, translation scholars may be faced with two diverging strategies or sets of options. In North America they can continue to align themselves with the cultural studies movement. As Kuper (2000) has written, somewhat defensively, from within the bounds of his own field of anthropology, “Everyone is into culture now”. And indeed, despite their at times considerable differences, Arrojo, von Flotow, Godard, Robinson, Simon, St-Pierre, Tymoczko and Venuti, to mention only these, do share the same basic poststructural, culturalist paradigm. This approach has acquired momentum, reaching out to distinct scholarly traditions in territories such as India or China. In Europe, however, researchers who have come recently to the subject may be more inclined to work from within the more traditional disciplines in the human sciences in their efforts
towards the rejuvenation or the renewed ‘social-scientization’ of those disciplines. As a result, they have begun to open up their work to questions relating to translation: for linguistics, see Alleton and Lackner (1999); for philosophy, Moutaux and Bloch (2000); for sociology, Heilbron (1999); for history, where this has happened most conspicuously, see Roche (2001), Hamesse (2001), Calame (2002); and for cultural history, Espagne and Werner (1994). The situation in Britain in this respect is interesting to note. It has, so far at least, been leaning towards the North American model, although there still remains some internal resistance to this option. Despite the powerful neo-liberal forces currently at work in the academic community both in North America and in Europe (for a political treatment of these issues see the enlightening criticisms of Readings 1996; Aronowitz 2000; Charle & Roche 2002), it is not yet clear where these centripetal forces will lead.

Interestingly, the appropriation of translation by European scholars who are within the social sciences has been taking place without acknowledgement, or even awareness, of the contribution of translation scholars. A rare early attempt, among sociologists, was that of Heilbron (1999), in his effort to redefine “book translations as a cultural world system” from a strictly sociological perspective. He cited researchers in translation studies proper (Gentzler, Steiner, Kelly, Rener, Lefevere, Van Hoof, Ballard, Delisle and Woodsworth). His recognition of this work led to contacts being established in September 2001 in Paris with some members of the Tel Aviv School (Touri, Shavit), which may have been facilitated by the fact that, prior to writing her doctoral thesis in Paris with Pierre Bourdieu, Heilbron’s colleague and co-organiser of the working session, Sapiro, had been a student of a founding member of the Tel Aviv school, Itamar Even-Zohar. This seems to have been the first time that recognition from within the disciplines was accorded to a branch of studies dedicated to translation as a social practice (for confirmation that the work done in translation scholarship is still routinely ignored in other disciplines, even those which would appear to share most interest with translation studies, see e.g. Cronin 2000 and the case of anthropology).

Of the more general reasons for this invisibility – not so much of translation itself as of the translation scholar in European institutions – one is worth investigating further. It may be that as part of the proverbial provincialism of research in national institutions, the whole cultural-studies paradigm as it developed in North America, for a long time, was simply not considered acceptable to researchers trained in the European social-science tradition. France is a case in point. The French (non) reception, in the sense that their work remains untranslated more than thirty years after it was published in the United States, of authors such as Hayden White and Fredric Jameson, both of whom were instrumental in the development of the American ‘cultural turn’, would seem to justify such a view. Concurrently, the slow emergence of a receivable, ‘social-scientized’ format
A larger context: The national origins of the human sciences

The concept of society as understood in the West is a modern construction, dating back to Europe in the eighteenth century. The idea of a programme of studies based directly on that concept is even more recent, crystallizing slowly over a period of almost 150 years and developing into a legitimate area of knowledge – the future discipline of sociology – only at the end of the nineteenth century. The emergence of social studies, social science and social theory, and the related approaches and perspectives constituting the social worldview, led to a new mode of understanding, making it possible to view otherwise familiar things as objects which are primarily social, rather than individual, or supernatural. The process in which this emergence took place was one of both exclusion and consolidation. First, modes of thinking that had been internalized for a whole millennium and which were based on the dictates and strictures of the religious, specifically Christian, faith were rejected and new ones had to become part of the habits of new readers and writers. Secondly, as a configuration of new, finely attuned orders of rationality, social science set itself the mandate of providing better, positive responses to the increasing complexity of human affairs, in an environment experienced as more and more fragmented and sophisticated.

Of course, despite diverging goals, something of the old order survived in the new. Within the new techniques, some familiar ways of constructing arguments endured. More fundamentally, however, the same underlying aim – a total grasp of human affairs – continued to motivate the new scientific models, less triumphantly perhaps than what had previously been the case but as faithfully, as in the more enduring worldview of the period spanning the Carolingian and the Italian Renaissances. Certainly, there existed significant differences between the two principal models that would later lead to sociological investigation, that is, the French and the Scottish branches of what Heilbron (1990) calls “the predis-ciplinary history” of that type of inquiry, but for both models it can be claimed that continuity existed between the previous attempts to find all-encompassing explanations and solutions, and the scope of a sociological eye, whose capacity to absorb new objects into its field of vision seemed unlimited, as long as those objects could be related to any aspect of life in modern society.

Studying society in this sense – practising social science – has been with us for a relatively short time then, but long enough for some sociologists to start
talking about a history of their discipline (see for example Lepenies 1981). This social worldview crystallizing at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe not only led to the establishment of new fields, it also formed a dominant paradigm, spreading across the whole spectrum of human sciences to include biology (the former basis of physiological anthropology), criminology, psychology, linguistics, geography, history, ethnology, and political economy (Mucchielli 1998). In the wake of Durkheim’s new vision of society, every discipline underwent a dramatic reconfiguration. Indeed, in the twentieth century, virtually every human activity was subjected to the sociological eye. It became possible to study human activity with a view to establishing the constants of its relations to the larger scheme of things, but this time on a secular (or at least not so obviously religious) basis. This way of understanding human activity would have been inconceivable in earlier times.

The question raised earlier nevertheless remains: Why was translation not included among the legitimate sociological objects at an earlier stage, when (i) virtually every human activity, including the apparently most private acts (suicide, for example), became objects of inquiry for the new social worldview, and (ii), other existing human sciences, including the more prestigious discipline of history, were forced to redesign their programmes under Durkheim’s pervasive influence? It is not as if the practice of translation was in any way uncommon, or its importance ignored by either publishers or authors. Exchanges and crossborder contacts between economists, evolutionists, political theorists, philosophers, etc. had gone on continuously in Europe since the eighteenth century and the demise of Latin as a shared language of scientific codes, including medicine, in the twentieth century could only emphasize the need for reliable translations. More than a few of the new social scientists did their studies abroad. Translations of treatises dealing with social issues were common. Besides, the new ‘sociologists’ and their followers in the other social-scientized disciplines were quite proficient in foreign languages, not only in Latin or Greek but also in the languages of modern science – English, French and German – and should have realised that translation was a major component of social communication, at both the national and international levels, and, as such, could be included among the objects of interest for the new science. Or so it would seem to us today. For the real question is, to what extent did they, i.e. could they, really conceive of such a far-reaching proposition?

In the history of disciplines, as in the history of concepts and practices, anachronisms are not limited to questions of detail; they may affect the way in which an object is understood, the way it is constructed ‘by default’ so to speak, by successive generations. The newly emerging sociological eye may have retained something of the universalist ambition of the Church; it may have developed against the background of imperialist policies reaching territorially across the world; but
it was also terribly insular. Indeed, what was imagined and constructed at the
time by the best scholars of the nations of Europe amounted largely to specifi-
cally English, French, German, etc., sociologies, or social-scientized perspectives.
This was not because those involved would study only their national societies;
indeed, it is easy enough to identify important exceptions where such was not the
case: in general linguistics, for example (it was still the golden era of comparatist
philology), or in sociology proper (Weber), not to mention in history, where the
observer is almost by definition at a cultural remove from the object. Rather, the
cognitive confinement within which scholars operated was due to the fact that the
words and the rhetoric they used, the ways in which the new treatises and analy-
ses were elaborated, followed what were typically national (nationalistic) tradi-
tions of thought. This despite the fact that these traditions themselves borrowed
from others they were in contact with, with the notion of ‘borrowing’ itself the
subject of major studies (see Meillet 1906). The whole Durkheimian enterprise of
social-scientization was itself largely directed against the biologicist notion of ra-
cial determination and the self-closure of genetically-based nationalistic ‘genius’,
but, when it came to their own work, the new scholars’ agenda was to serve their
nation, in the interest of the particular national education system in which they
played a role, often in overt support of the politics favoured by their regimes.

The social worldview which was dominant in scholarly research was also
prevalent in national societies at the time. It is in this context that Croce (1917)
could write: “ogni vera storia è storia contemporanea” [All true history is contem-
poraneous history]. The Other was absolutely, decisively alien. Thus when C. A.
Alexandre, the French historian, translated the fifth book of Theodore Mommsen’s
monumental Römische Geschichte, he appended copious footnotes, practically on
every single page, systematically complementing or correcting Mommsen’s inter-
pretations, which he viewed as horribly biased, basing himself on a contemporary
reading of the conflict between France and Germany. The two Forewords to the
French publication of Mommsen’s Histoire romaine (dated June 1871 and May
1872) leave no doubt as to the feelings of both scholars, the author Mommsen and
his translator Alexandre. The latter describes the “violence” he had to do himself
while completing the task:

Pour achever ce travail à l’heure présente, il m’a fallu un tenace courage, et me
faire violence à moi-même. J’ai écrit les dernières pages, j’ai recueilli les derni-
ers éclaircissements joints au texte, au moment où l’Allemagne tout entière et de
longue main préparée, se ruait sur le territoire de la France!

Alexandre declares his total agreement with other French observers, including
those he characterises as “outrageously ‘germanissimes’” (that is, German, more
German than the Germans themselves), who blamed Mommsen for “certaines
tendances, certaines opinions sur les hommes et les choses de Rome, certains jugements prenant trop directement leur source dans la politique du temps présent, lui empruntant et ses passions, et ses expressions, et sa couleur. It is not only the political history of Rome, as it is reconstructed by Mommsen, but also its cultural policy and its literary history that Alexandre finds fault with in explicitly national-istic terms in the clarifications he provides in his footnotes. See for example chapter 12 of Book V, where the translator rushes to the defence of his nation against the author’s own patriotic stance; Mommsen had just compared some Roman dramatic conventions, which he judged vulgar, to what he perceived as standard practices on the French stage:

Selon la tradition allemande, M. Mommsen critique chez nous un état de choses qui n’est plus exact. La montre de notre auteur retarde [...] Je reconnais d’ailleurs que la farce absurde a envahi les scènes de second ordre: mais les Allemands et princes allemands ne sont-ils pas les premiers, et chez eux et chez nous, à courir en foule aux représentations de la Grande Duchesse? Et le compositeur de la musique n’est-il pas un Allemand ? Ce n’est pas le lieu d’en dire plus ici.

In this, Alexandre was following a long tradition of ideological control or State-induced reconstruction by translators of histories by foreign authors. A footnote in Roche (2001:99) leaves no doubt that this practice, and many other examples in the book attest to this, was commonplace in the Enlightenment period:

Le traducteur anonyme de l’Histoire géographique de la Nouvelle Ecosse (1749) se sent obligé de se justifier d’avoir mis en français un ouvrage à tendance gallophobe: “Dans tous les traits dont on pourrait être blessé, il ne faut pas perdre de vue que c’est un Anglais qui parle Français”. Il ajoute qu’il se dissocie des sentiments de son auteur à l’égard de la religion et de la nation française et qu’il a introduit dans sa version des notes qui “ramènent partout l’Original à la vérité.”

1. An opéra-bouffe, La Grande-duchesse de Gérolstein by Jacques Offenbach was created in Paris at the Théâtre des Variétés on April 12, 1867 during the Exposition universelle. It was an open satire of war and of military life. It attracted statesmen, diplomats and several members of royal families in Europe. To avoid censorship, the librettists, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic, chose to transfer the plot to an eighteenth century setting. Noteworthy among the characters were the “Général Boum” and “le soldat Fritz”.

2. The anonymous translator of A Geographical History of Nova Scotia (1749) feels obliged to justify having translated into French a work with gallophobic tendencies: “Wherever one might feel hurt by certain remarks it should be remembered that this is an Englishman who is speaking French”. He adds that he does not share the author’s opinions about religion and the French nation and that in his translation he has added notes which “everywhere bring the Original back to the truth”.

1.
2.
In the most part of the twentieth century as much as in all such cases the translator and the author may have been historians, but they were first and foremost contemporary scholars, mirror-figures writing in a time of conflict between their societies. Concomitantly, with the process of ‘social-scientization’ and the increasing dominance within the disciplines of the newly social worldview, the principles by which they functioned – ideological, argumentative or rhetorical – tapped into traditions that were an integral part of constructing and understanding their nations. The idea of an interpenetration of cultures, high or low, including their own understanding of foreign practices which they viewed as evidently social, completely evaded writers and readers alike.

This had momentous consequences for the general orientation of the new social sciences. Linguistics is a case in point. On the one hand, the same ‘social-scientization’ of the discipline took place as in the other sciences, with Bréal, Meillet and Gilliéron among the advocates of the new paradigm. In his obituary of Meillet in 1937, Mauss went so far as to refer to the holder of the Chair of Linguistics at the Collège de France as “un des maîtres de la sociologie”[one of the dominant figures in sociology]. The new linguists reacted to a then-prevalent ‘essentialist’ belief that individual languages were like living organisms, and as such following the laws of evolution. The break with this paradigm was decisive as it allowed them to document subdivisions within national dialects, such as ‘English’, ‘French’, and ‘German’, that had been – or were being – subjected to political ossification. The notion that such ‘local’ languages – technical, professional, class- or group-defined (and defining) languages – could become bona fide objects of study should have led to the inclusion of translation, a social fact, among the objects studied by linguists. After all, how did such group-languages become what they were if not through loan-words, a common operation of translation? But the sociological inflection of the new linguistic science was never able to break away from an accompanying conception coinciding with the prevailing nationalistic Zeitgeist: that individual languages, whether national, regional, professional, or even more local formations (synchronously considered) formed ‘closed systems’, to be described as their users experienced them, that is as tightly structured entities fully independent of, and functionally alien to, or ignorant of, other similar entities. This accompanying conception, which in the heyday of structuralism was referred to as Saussurean and was taken up by many functionalists, dominated in one form or another, until the current reconfiguration or social-cultural rescientification brought about new changes, this time as a result of the rejection of semiotic formalism by the humanities.

This is not the place to sketch a social history of the discipline of linguistics that has not yet been written (for an inspiring effort in that direction in the case of France, unfortunately left unpursued, see however Chevalier & Encrevé 1984).
Considering the number of countries involved and the diversity of their scholarly traditions it would be exceedingly complex to do so. Nor is my interpretation intended to downplay the importance, or dispute the validity, of the scientific programme carried out by mainstream linguists, following what Mucchielli calls Meillet’s ‘rallying’ to Durkheim. But it is important all the same to realise that for the greater part of the twentieth century tension persisted between two conflicting ideas: the notion that languages can be viewed as social facts whose history depends inherently on contact, loans, cultural exchanges – on “translation” – and that this defining feature must be fully incorporated into any theory of language, _versus_ the emergence of an orderly, systemic idea of language coinciding with the spread of nationalistic ideologies.

I would like to suggest that the opposition to admitting translation among the legitimate objects of mainstream linguistics as it emerged from the general process of social-scientization taking place at the end of the nineteenth century had to do with the persistence of that tension. The second proposition, that languages were experienced as closed systems by their users and therefore should be analysed as such, may have acted as a barrier as well, preventing the process of social-scientization, which had so radically transformed the method of doing fieldwork, from including an object whose manifestations were considered either inferior to the native’s productions (when performed by novices) or, which, in Martinet’s words (1953), were the products of “those linguistic virtuosos who, by dint of constant application, manage to keep entirely distinct their two (or multiple) linguistic instruments”. There was no place in this programme for the study of translations as specific linguistic products differing in socially accountable ways from those written directly in one’s native language. Against this background, the sometimes recognised dissonance between ‘the two Mounins’, the author of _Les Belles Infidèles_ (1955) and the theoretician of language, loses its mystery. Mounin as a linguist following Martinet’s prescriptions did not even include his former book in the references to his _Les Problèmes théoriques de la traduction_ (1963), despite the fact that part V of the latter – however summarily and awkwardly – was devoted to the cultural dimensions of translation.

This barrier is neither a thing of the past, nor is it particular to linguistics. The same phenomenon of nationalistically-induced scientific conceptions is being repeated to a large extent in North America. It is a truism, directly experienced by visiting scholars, that the sociological map – signalling the types of preferred research, the methods used, the subjects considered taboo – differs significantly in North America from, say, France, Germany or Italy. It is also possible to speak of an Anglo-American sociology (i.e. American and English-Canadian sociologies) quite distinct from the particular configuration of sociologies practised in Quebec, for example (on this see Brym 1989, and, for an early evaluation of this dif-
ference in relation to life-history sociologies, Simeoni & Diani 1995). To be sure, the kind of aggressiveness that characterised contacts between the Frenchman Alexandre and the German Mommsen in the 1870s gave way, in the Canadian case, to more benign attitudes of indifference – or mutual ignorance. My claim here is that this type of exclusionary thinking, built into the nation-based disciplines of Europe at the time of their social-scientization, and being perpetuated for similar reasons in North America (the construction of national traditions of scholarship and the maintenance of their distinctive character), prevented translation for well over a century from being admitted as a possible object of study by the disciplines. Indeed, the stakes, between Quebec and English Canada in the field of sociology, as between Germany and France in the practice of ancient or modern history some 125 years ago, suggest a blockage in the circulation of knowledge, a failure in cognitive translation. Letting in situations of observation ‘from the other side’ would have meant also inviting scholarly positionings which, although legitimate elsewhere, were considered with great suspicion at home. Yielding to that invitation might have forced observers to modify their native cultural stances regarding that elsewhere. The observer’s sense of identity was at risk.

Conclusion

It is clear, then, that in the past translation as a social fact or social practice was not, and could not have been, of interest to scholars otherwise concerned with social matters, and that, as the last example cited above suggests, little has changed in the present. As long as this state of affairs prevailed in Europe, the issue of translation and society could not even be formulated within the traditional disciplines. The situation in Europe has shown signs of change, with discussion centring first on the “Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” (November 1992) and the issue of translation in European institutions, along with the gradual admission of new member-states. In North America, the change seems to have come about when the cultural studies movement embraced translation (examples abound, not limited to translation studies: see Niranjana 1992; Clifford 1997; Simon & St-Pierre 2000; Seyhan 2001). The difficult reception given the propositions put forwards by Venuti (1998a), a scholar specialising in translation proper, shows, however, that the constraints of nationalism also play a role on the American side of the Atlantic. To this day, these propositions have attracted attention primarily in the more peripheral areas of North American research: either geographically and for very local reasons (in Quebec) or, in terms of status, in those disciplines of the humanities and social sciences considered minor. The evidence seems clear: for there to be discussion of the issue of translation and society a favourable climate
must exist in the disciplines as much as in society at large, since the former are a function of the society that hosts them.

In the end, it would seem that there is something about translation itself that must have been unsettling for the disciplines, particularly for the more established disciplines in the social sciences. Could it be related to the fact that translation – like languages more generally – is not an ordinary object, certainly not one that is easy to ‘objectify’? Where can one stand to turn it into an object and circumscribe its limits? Translation is also a cognitive ‘operator’, a mechanism which provides access to the social worldview in a double sense: firstly, as a necessary condition for the ordinary, day-to-day comprehension that we have of the social world around us, in our daily exchanges with others; and secondly, as a prerequisite for scholarly interpretations of the social world, including the way we build our arguments and make use of ‘method’. Our research narratives require constant translation. Failure in that regard brings the relationship, be it ordinary or scholarly, close to one of the two models of which examples were cited in this paper: the French-German interaction of the 1870s, or the Canadian model of mutual indifference.

Proper translation, as has been amply demonstrated in the restricted field of translation studies over the last twenty years or so, is never simply a replica. An appropriate dose of ‘friction’, in the sense of being neither too aggressive nor too ignorant of the other, is inevitable, giving rise to mutual misunderstandings as an ingenious solution to ordinary, yet potentially devastating, disagreements in social life (La Cecla 1997). This of course is an uncertain path. Disciplines whose working principles were firmly anchored in national (nationalistic) origins must have been wary of taking it. A degree of reflexivity and, above all, a capacity for relativising one’s findings are presupposed, which few of those involved were likely to have, certainly none during that particular period in the development of the human sciences, despite claims to the contrary. This may be an important clue as to why it took so long for the social sciences to open up to the issue of translation and society, and for translation studies to make use of a sociological eye.
Language and translation

Contesting conventions

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Translation scholars have, in recent decades, increasingly sought to distance their theories from the influence of structuralist linguistics. Yet, they have continued to rely on concepts such as source language and target language, which assume languages to be mutually exclusive, normalised entities. Little attention has thus been paid to varieties from mixed socio-cultural contexts which do not meet the criteria of linguistic norms. This article argues that the reliance on linguistic norms makes translation theory structuralist in orientation. By contrasting the language context of normalised languages with that of non-standard varieties, it sheds light on the challenges the latter pose to conventional translation theories, and proposes a view of translation as text transformation within language rather than between languages.

Keywords: languages; texts; conventional translation theories; non-standard language systems; translation between communities

It is not surprising that Steiner should write that “a study of translation is a study of language” (1975:47). From the early theories influenced explicitly by structuralist approaches (Catford, Vinay and Darbelnet) through to those based on the idea of dynamic/functional equivalence (de Waard and Nida, Nida and Taber) or the interpretive definition of meaning (Seleskovich and Lederer) and beyond, modern translation discourse in the West has been founded on the search for a postulated relationship (replacement, transfer, reproduction or re-expression of meaning) between autonomous languages: stable and relatively homogenous entities, with fixed frontiers. Notwithstanding, many recent scholars object to statements such as Steiner’s, arguing that the proper study of translation must be dissociated from that of language. They claim that the focus on language in early translation theory, typical of the work of many theorists such as Catford, privileged structural linguistic concerns (langue) rather than those related to function.
and usage (parole) (see Beaugrande 1994: 9). According to this view, subsequent research has clearly demonstrated that it is usage, not langue, that should matter in definitions of translation.

Yet, it can be argued that contrary to the stance adopted by later translation scholars, it is not only early twentieth-century theories that are heavily influenced by structuralist linguistics; later theories too, to the extent that they rely on notions such as source language and target language, unwittingly rest on structuralist premises. For, as Price observes, the creation of distinctions that are specifically lingual, attributable to the dichotomization characteristic of Western thinking, is essentially structuralist in orientation (2000: 24, 25).

**Translation theory and language**

Because recent attempts to remove translation from the grips of structuralism have been based on the view that positions such as Catford’s, which sees translation as involving the replacement of SL grammatical structures with comparable TL structures (1965: 27), should be discarded, the emphasis in translation studies has come to be placed on transfer of meaning between texts rather than between languages. Neubert and Shreve, for instance, argue that translation involves “text-induced-texts” (1992: 43) and insist that it is “within the framework of a science of text production and text comprehension that the translation process has to be studied” (1992: 43–44). These authors claim that their view is better able to account for the complexities of the translation process than are linguistics-based definitions. It must be noted, however, that the distinction between ‘source’ and ‘target’, whether between languages or texts, is not as clear-cut as this position would suggest. According to conventional conceptions of translation, a transfer of meaning between texts in translation is assumed to involve a transfer of meaning between ‘languages’, since distinguishing translation from paraphrasing, adaptation or rewriting, traditionally necessitates reference to source language text and target language text. The emphasis placed on text in translation theory does not, therefore, eliminate that placed on languages.

The reliance on the source language/target language dichotomy in translation studies is exemplified by Sheikh al-Shabab’s definition of translation. He writes:

‘Translation is the interpretation of linguistic/verbal text in a language different from its own. ‘Language’ is not used here in the sense of a dialect; nor is it used in a metaphorical sense to mean the language of music or dance; nor is it used in the sense of artificial language such as a computer language … ‘Language’ is used here in the ordinary everyday meaning of the word. Namely, it is the tongue –
verbal code – used by a human community, large or small, for instance English, Arabic, Aramaic, etc. (1996:8)

Not only does this conception view source and target texts as belonging to distinct and clearly defined entities, but it also opposes the tongue of a “human community, large or small” – ‘language’, to the undefined ‘dialect’, giving deference to languages which have been shaped by specific social processes of normalisation (e.g. English) or which have been accorded status as languages with the passage of time (e.g. Aramaic). By specifying the type of languages that may be involved in translation (English, Arabic, Aramaic), Sheikh al-Shabab points, unwittingly, to the deficiency inherent in conventional conceptions of translation: they are essentially concerned with texts written in what are considered to be stable and homogeneous entities. Definitions of this kind, which privilege dominant languages to the exclusion of what Venuti (1996:93–103) refers to as minority varieties or – relying on Lecercle (1990) – as ‘the remainder’, display what Price calls a baseless tendency “to perceive different linguistic realms as bounded” (2000:26).

Translation theory: Core concepts

Faithfulness and equivalence

The anchoring of translation within the framework of a specific kind of language has given rise to very problematic terms used in the definition of the practice. Good translations, for instance, have tended to be defined in terms of their ‘faithfulness’ and/or ‘equivalence’ to their source language texts. There is, however, no consensus on what these terms mean. Placing faithfulness within the framework of the capacity of one language to convey meanings expressed in another, Poisson argues that the notion relates to the correspondence between both formal (linguistic) and usage components in source and target languages. He stresses, however, that the notion is always relative, since different languages use different means of expression (1975:139). A similar view is found in Delisle et al. (1999), where faithfulness is defined as a property of translation which, depending on the translator’s intention, respects the presumed sense of the source text as much as possible and conforms to appropriate target language usages (140). Shuttleworth and Cowie acknowledge the vagueness of the concept of faithfulness but tentatively define it as a description of the extent to which a target text can be considered a fair representation of a source text “according to some criterion” (1997:57). The authors make the more important point, however, that there is a crucial link between conceptions of faithfulness and conceptions of equivalence,
since the latter have superseded the former as the pivotal concerns in translation studies. A number of other researchers in translation studies agree. Tack observes that from a historical and disciplinary point of view “focus on equivalence to define translation is probably the most common feature of translatology”, and that definitions of translation seem “to be based on the premise of an equivalence in the translational relation from Target Text to Source Text” (2000: 213). Likewise, Gorlée states:

it is generally claimed that original text and translated text are ideally placed in a one-to-one correspondence, meaning by this that they are to be considered as codifications of one piece of information, as logically and/or situationally interchangeable. (1994: 170)

Bassnett comes to a similar conclusion, though she cautions that the term has been often misused in translation studies (2002). Her caution is indicative of the fact that use of the term ‘equivalence’ in relation to translation, despite its prevalence, has become quite controversial. Wilss, for instance, while acknowledging the important role given to equivalence in translation studies, insists that it is definitionally problematic, since it is “characterised by relatively inoperative, difficult-to-harmonize concepts” (1982: 135). Furthermore, he observes, translation studies has not been able to make any definitive pronouncements on how a translator must proceed in order to arrive at “an adequate, qualitatively evaluable transfer result” (136). It is precisely because equivalence is so hard to define that scholars who see translation as the mediation of cultural differences have argued that the term should not be used in translation studies. In assessing the varying conceptions of equivalence used in translation studies, Snell-Hornby, for instance, contends that these are based on the faulty premise that there is symmetry between languages. She warns that since there are crucial differences between the terms used in any two languages, the assumption of symmetry between languages implicit in the notion is dangerous (1995: 16–17).

On the other hand, scholars such as Pym argue that equivalence-based definitions of translation, although problematic – since equivalence can be taken to mean “all things to all theorists” – are essentially correct (1992: 37). Koller, too, seeks to justify use of the term, though he points to the proliferation of views concerning its definition and use (1989: 100). In his quest to “specify the concept of equivalence more precisely”, he points out that while it postulates a relationship between a source language and a target language, it “as such does not say anything about the kind of relation[ship]” between them. For Koller, light must be shed on this relationship, and the conditions for treating one text as equivalent to another need to be clarified. For him, such conditions relate to aspects such as “content,
style, function, etc.” He concludes that equivalence requires that a quality (or qualities) in a source language text be preserved in the target language text.

In sum, then, faithfulness and equivalence in translation assume the existence of parallelisms between languages. Parallelism implies the possibility of similarity not only of functional or usage relationships between the terms in source language texts and those in target language texts but also, in some instances, between the concepts that these terms represent. The possibility of basing translation on similarities between functional and conceptual relationships in source and target languages arises from what Nida refers to as levels of linguistic and cultural ‘relatedness’ between languages. Relatedness may manifest itself in four situations: (1) between closely related languages and cultures (e.g. Hebrew and Arabic) (2) between unrelated languages with shared cultures (e.g. Swedish and Finnish) (3) between related languages but disparate cultures (e.g. English and Hindi) and (4) between languages that share neither linguistic nor cultural similarities (e.g. English and isiZulu). A common history and a common culture make it more likely that languages will share concepts and, thus, possess the terminology to express them. In such situations, Nida notes, “one should expect to encounter the least number of serious problems [of equivalence]”, though he cautions that languages that are too closely related may pose problems of superficial similarities leading to equivalents that are ‘false friends’ (1964:112).

Meaning and message

The postulated relationship between target and source, defined in terms of the similarity in the target to the function, usage and concepts referred to in the source involves two opposing dynamics: on the one hand, change, and on the other, constancy. In line with Haas’ argument (1976 [1968]), this assumes that translation relates to the distinct elements of source expression, target expression and meaning (86–87). While the text which gives rise to the translation operation is not the same as that which results from it, it is assumed that the underlying meaning or message communicated in the source is maintained in the target. In this conception, meaning, when expressed in a source language text, can be replaced by, transferred to, or (re)expressed in, a target language text because the target/receiving system either has a corresponding space that that meaning can occupy or has a different expression that may adequately convey the same meaning. In this way, translation consists of transmitting “un même contenu selon un code
different [the same message by means of a different code\(^1\)]” (Bénard & Horguelin 1979:17).

**Language and translation**

Sociolinguists caution that what we distinguish and refer to as (separate) languages and dialects are in fact interacting varieties which form continua transcending social, geographic and political boundaries. These varieties, with their lexical, morphological, phonological and syntactic mixtures, are the result of both horizontal and vertical systems of interpenetration. A horizontal system of interpenetration is one involving the mixing of two or more languages in such a way that the lines demarcating them as separate entities are blurred, as in the case of American-Mexican border ‘Spanglish’ and other such mixed varieties. Vertical systems of interpenetration take the form of dialectal layering, in which different synchronic varieties coexist in a hierarchy that may include standard forms and, progressively, less standard forms. One example of this kind of dialectal layering is the Jamaican language continuum, which consists of a number of varieties, ranging from standard (Jamaican/Caribbean) English on the one hand, to a variety distantly related to it. These varieties coexist and operate as a single, if diffuse, ‘system’ in which different varieties or a combination of varieties is used in different social or cultural situations. The existence of such interpenetrating linguistic systems and the fact that it is impossible “de trouver ... une homogénéité à l’intérieur de ce qu’il est convenu de considérer une seule et même langue” [to identify ... any kind of homogeneity within what, by convention, is considered a single language] (Pergnier 1993:248), should challenge translation scholars to be less reliant on notions such as target language and source language, understood as closed, homogenous systems.

For languages to constitute separate and autonomous entities, (relative) linguistic stability is required. This usually occurs if they remain insulated from one another, as happens in situations of geographic isolation, or are the products of normalisation and its accessory institutions, such as Academies and dictionaries, which guard against contamination and act to minimise or neutralise the ‘destabilising’ effects of foreign linguistic invasions. Baggioni describes normalisation as the selection of a social, regional or other dialect (or elements thereof) as the model on which educated speech is to be patterned. The reduction or elimination of differences between dialects (homogenisation) and the creation of a ‘neutral’

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1. All translations of quotes are mine.
variety results in a stabilised and grammatised – written and described – dialect, which is imposed in a given territory. This imposition, he claims, is what is known as standardisation (1994: 28).2

Historically, normalised language has served as the prerequisite for translation. In order to translate in the conventional sense, one needs source and target norms that can produce equivalence. In the West, the person best known for revealing the underlying link between translation and the linguistic norms was Martin Luther. Baggioni praises the translation of this ‘faiseur de langue’ ['language maker'] as “l’action primordiale d’un individu sur la détermination de la norme d’une langue commune” [the single most important contribution of an individual towards shaping the norm of a common language] (1997: 88). While Luther’s celebrated predecessor, Jerome – whose fifth-century Latin translation of the Greek Septuagint had been used for centuries in Hellenic-dominated Christendom – worked within the framework of an Empire at its peak, and whose language, Latin, dominated – at least officially – a vast territory, Luther operated within a context where that same Empire and its language were fragmenting, leading to the formation of vernaculars within networks of interrelated dialects. Confronted with the challenge of how to translate a text from a homogenous, standard language (Latin) into an unstable language (‘Germanic’) comprising several dialects, Luther opted for the model suggested by his linguistic heritage: that of normalisation. Resorting to the grammatical structures of Latin, Luther ’fixed’ a literary dialect of German, which served as the norm for translating the Bible (Baggioni 1997: 88). His translation achieved two things: first, it resulted in the creation of a normative linguistic entity in order to translate; at the same time, it was through translating that the standard language, German, came into being. Though these may be treated as separate elements, their consequences for the way in which translation is conceived are the same: translation depends on normalised language, which, if absent, it will attempt to create.

Harris suggests that normalised language, the product of nationalist movements such as that to which Luther’s project belonged, is the precursor of language in the sense referred to by traditional linguistics. For Harris, any echo of the notion of national language is problematic, given that it is based on the “central

2. According to John Earl Joseph, what is referred to as linguistic ‘standardisation’ is a process proper to the West, since it emerges as a creature of cultural institutions “which represent specific historical developments within Western civilization” (1987: 20). This is a view shared by others in the field, such as Roy Harris and Daniel Baggioni. The notion of a standard language, still according to Joseph, enters the linguistic discourse of other societies because of the influence of the Greco-Latin model on language across the rest of the world. In ancient literate Cultures such as China and India, Joseph notes, the notion of standard language did not exist as an analytical category.
fiction” that the people of one nation speak one language. The inevitable consequence of this view is the suppression of non-standard varieties, since anyone who speaks differently from the national standard is “simply not speaking the language correctly” (1981:46). This attempt to suppress non-standard speech, Harris argues, reflects “the political psychology of nationalism and an educational system devoted to standardising the linguistic behaviour of pupils” (9) typical of post-Renaissance Europe.

It is not only Luther’s translation project which reveals the link between translation and normalised language. European colonial contexts, characterised by Europeans’ attempts to impose their particular conception of language and language development on situations that differed vastly from those found in urbanising and nationalising Europe also demonstrate the important nexus between translation and normalised language. In the colonies, many primarily oral, polydiallecal languages were normalised and standardised on the Greco-Latin model. In many cases, this process was geared towards facilitating translation by a coloniser, normally a missionary. Harris describes such instances of normalisation as an attempt, in the name of linguistic science, “to impose a technically sophisticated but essentially Western concept of a language upon the descriptive analysis of all languages” (1980:30. Emphasis added.). In this way the description, analysis and translatability not only of European, but also non-European languages, were tied to European-styled normalisation and standardisation, pointing to the importance of these latter in determining translatability generally.

Non-standard languages and translation theory

Conventional Western conceptions of translation assume not only that the cultural and linguistic context of standardisation is universally reproducible, but also that the separation of ‘languages’ that it produces is the only framework within which a valid notion of translatability can be formulated. This view is reflected in Wright’s statement that translation, in the normal sense of the term, between Latin and Romance, only began in the twelfth century, since until that time Latin and Romance did not constitute two autonomous languages required for translation (1997:7). According to Wright’s perspective, the mutual exclusivity of languages, which makes communication difficult, is the basis for a conception of translation in the ‘normal’ sense of the term. The inevitable consequence of viewing translation as an operation on independent languages is that little attention is generally paid to mixed or hybrid languages. Yet, these languages may in fact provide the basis for rethinking the structuralist tendencies that translation studies has been seeking to discard.
Mixed or hybrid language contexts differ significantly from those which have given rise to conventional conceptions of translation. They generally lack the sharp boundaries typical of standardised languages, making it impossible for them to enter into the symmetrical language relationships that have come to characterise conventional definitions of translation. In many post-colonial societies, for instance, indigenous writers have been mixing imposed European standard languages with elements of local languages – many of which are not, or are only partially, standardised – to make them more amenable to conveying indigenous experiences. By so doing, their texts become “a combined version of other literary by-products resulting from an indigenous speech pattern, thinking patterns and world view [...] transliterated into the European language” (Ojo 1986:295). By passing their stories through the matrix of their own cultures (Ojo:294), these writers create texts whose content, as Mehrez notes, is the product of more than one culture, language and experience of the world (1992:122). This linguistic situation is the opposite of the homogenising process of standardisation. In such a context, there can be no meaningful notion of correspondence between a text from this hybridised ‘language’ and that from another language (121). Mehrez also points out that the linguistic fluidity intrinsic to such texts effectively effaces the traditional distinction between source and target languages, since a text written in this new ‘language’, with its hybridity resulting from the interpenetration of several linguistic varieties, no longer belongs to any language per se.

The view of languages as interacting and mixed rather than distinct and homogenous systems has very specific consequences for a conception of translation. If the language forms involved in a translation act are, in fact, interrelated, or themselves traversed by heterogeneity, then there can be no clear linguistic parallelism upon which to build notions of equivalence and faithfulness. Furthermore, in such a situation, the notion of transferring meaning from a source language to a target language becomes meaningless.

Treating the question of linguistic hybridisation/mixture within the context of conventional Western conceptions of translation, Derrida explains that it is impossible to transfer the internal heterogeneity of a mixed source language text into a target language. Commenting on Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and Borges’s tale of the (re)writing of Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, “Pierre Menard”, he points to the translation difficulties that arise as a result of the conception of language that underlies conventional conceptions of translation. Of Joyce’s phrase “And he war”, Derrida notes that even though “English is indisputably the dominant language in *Finnegans Wake* … the German word war influences the English word” (1988:99). Turning to “Pierre Menard”, he asks whether (conventional) translation can account for the text written in Spanish but strongly marked by French. He observes:
Translation can do everything except mark this linguistic difference inscribed in the language, this difference of language systems inscribed in a single tongue. At best, it can get everything across except this: the fact that there are, in one linguistic system, perhaps several languages or tongues (100).

Indeed, the hybrid text highlights the fact that utterances/speech can comprise an array of language varieties from different places.

The instability of mixed/hybridised languages represents another problematic area for conventional conceptions of translation. Generally, such languages are oral and display extraordinary fluidity, which results in polysemy and frequent meaning shifts. If mixed languages generally lack the sharp boundaries typical of standardised varieties, making it impossible for them to enter into the symmetrical language relationships that have come to characterise conventional definitions of translation, is it possible to conceive translation in a manner other than that offered by conventional scholarship? The answer is yes. However, this involves a willingness to accept “what we know to be the truth about language and language use in the contemporary world” (Price 2000: 24), that is that “different linguistic realms ... [are] intertwined and interstitched” (25).

Conclusion

To sum up the challenges posed by non-standard language systems, it may be argued that they present no interlingual frontiers to traverse and no equivalent spaces to occupy, forcing us to adopt new, more explicit conceptions of translation as text transformation within language, understood in a general sense to embrace not only those communicative practices historically developed in Paris or London, but also those shaped in the cane fields of Jamaica or the rice fields of the Carolinas. While conventional translation studies relies on notions such as source language and target language, which assume relationships of symmetry (and hence notions such as equivalence and faithfulness), an alternative view would privilege the transformation of a communicative act by one community (or an individual from that community) into a meaningful communicative act for another community (or an individual in that community). In this process, the focus is effectively shifted from knowledge of a ‘language’ to knowledge of the cultural, social and situational possibilities in communicative acts.

If translation relates to text, as has often been advanced in recent translation scholarship, that text needs not be linked to historically delimited closed entities called languages since, as Pym asserts, “there are no natural frontiers between languages” (1992: 25). The flexible transfers/transformation that occur in lan-
language (as opposed to *between* ‘languages’), may be a more important element in framing an adequate conception of translation. This reflects the insight offered by Pym that the kinds of translation “that take place between idiolects, sociolects and dialects are essentially no different from those between more radically distanced language systems” (25).

What translation scholars who speak of ‘text’ fail to recognise is that the inordinate amount of attention paid to the separateness of the systems in which texts exist is born of the structuralist construction of languages into hermetically sealed types. This suggests that removing translation from the strictures of structuralism requires more than insisting that the practice is an operation on text, not language. Put another way, translation scholars have to make the bold step of discarding the notions of source and target languages and view translation as a transformation of semantic content into unpredictably new, but sometimes old, forms *within* language. This conception would remove the ideological assumptions underlying questions such as language vs. dialect, standard vs. non-standard, which translation, by leaning so heavily on conventional notions of language, inadvertently maintains.
Translation studies, ethnography and the production of knowledge*

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Translation studies has recently opened up to the postcolonial, initiating an epistemological debate resembling that which marked anthropology some forty years ago. A number of studies have explored the analogy between translators and ethnographers as cultural interpreters and writers. This article continues the investigation by examining how the reflection by ethnographers on the production of knowledge can be useful to contemporary translation theorists.

The ethnographic perspective invites us to conceive translation as a production process relying on intermediaries operating in networks. The translated text, thus, no longer appears as the reflection of a society’s norms or of a translator’s subjectivity, but rather as the expression of the relations between the various intermediaries that have participated in its production.

**Keywords:** post-colonialism; ethics; translating agent; dialogism; networks

To enter into the postcolonial world is to see cultural relations at a global level, to understand the complexities of the histories and power relations which operate across continents. For translation studies and literary study in general, adopting a postcolonial frame means *enlarging the map* which has traditionally bound literary and cultural studies. [...] And so ‘we’ must understand our own place on this map. Where do ‘we’ belong, where are ‘we’ speaking from, and on the basis of what particular kinds of knowledge? (Simon & St-Pierre 2000: 13–14)

Translation studies emerged as a discipline at the same time as post-colonial studies, in the 1970s, with foundations firmly based in European linguistic and cul-

* The author would like to thank Jean-Sébastien Marcoux and Daniel Simeoni for their reading of and comments on earlier versions of this article, the last part of which refers to a research proposal on which they actively collaborated. She is also grateful to Paul St-Pierre, who translated the original text into English.
tural theories, at least according to Jacquemond (1992). In the opinion of certain researchers (Lewis 2002; Cronin 2003), even today it remains relatively closed to minority and hybrid languages. The first studies relating to translation in a post-colonial setting appeared barely some ten years ago, and it is only in the past ten years, with the work of – among others – Lawrence Venuti, Sherry Simon, Paul St-Pierre, Maria Tymoczko and Harish Trivedi, that this has become an area of research as such. Inasmuch as it puts into question traditional models based on notions of transfer and equivalence and requires researchers to “take a position” and examine the foundations of their own discourses and practices, this new area sets the scene for a questioning analogous to that which took place, in the 1950s and 1960s, in anthropology. Such a fundamental examination has not yet taken place since, until recently, theoreticians of translation have been involved in trying to gain legitimacy for their object of study and to create a new field of research. The question can thus be asked under what conditions and to what extent the reflection by anthropologists can help elucidate what is beginning to take place, today, in translation studies?

When culture is considered as a ‘text’ and texts are considered to contain cultural representations (see the ‘cultural turn’ [Bassnett 2002] in translation studies), then the connections between ethnography and translation studies become more evident, studies in one field gaining direct pertinence for the other. The analogies between the two have only increased over the past forty years. Extending the metaphor of Clifford Geertz, who ‘read’ culture as a text and defined the ethnographer as a ‘cultural translator’, certain anthropologists – such as Clifford and Marcus (see Clifford 1997; Clifford & Marcus 1986) – have followed in the footsteps of Walter Benjamin, the author of “The Task of the Translator”, while translation studies specialists have quite recently begun to use work by these anthropologists to explore the connections between interlingual translation and post-colonial literature, travel literature and ethnographic writing (Valero-Garcès 1995; Tymoczko 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Cronin 2000; Wolf 2000; Polezzi 2001). Although translation involves some form of ethnography, and ethnography some form of translation, there is at least one fundamental way in which the two practices are distinct: whether literary or pragmatic, translation has no claim to scientficity. This difference affects research, since, contrary to what is the case in anthropology, translation studies is a discipline in which theory and practice are not inseparable and have, in fact, for a long time been kept separated. Nevertheless, in 1984, Berman saw in this division separating theoreticians and practitioners one of the main hurdles to be overcome by translation studies. He thus proposed to define translation studies as a reflection on translation “à partir de l’expérience de la traduction; plus précisément à partir de sa nature même d’expérience” (1984: 300) [“on the basis of the experience of translation – more specifically on the basis of its very
nature as experience” (1992: 188)). His call was not heeded, however; at least not immediately. Translation studies specialists, whether adopting a historiographical, sociological or philosophical approach, have for the most part studied ‘sacred’ (literary, religious or scientific) texts, published and translated by others. Despite this, more and more researchers are emphasizing the need to bring theory and practice closer together. For Simeoni, the rehabilitation in translation studies of the point of view of the agent is required for such a rapprochement to take place:

short of taking the view of the translator in the act of translating as a solid reference point, any approach (and even more so, any theory) of translation or cultural transfer will run the risk of becoming estranged from its object; [...] The principled stance is one way of building into the field of translation studies a minimal condition for shared approaches to translation. (1995: 448)

This point of view is similar to that of Cronin, who favours a reflexive practice of translation: translation as reflexion, rather than reflection (Cronin 2003). The desire for reflexivity can also be found, in a different form, in research in translation studies relating to literary criticism. Thus in the past few years several studies have appeared which, through the (re)translation of literary works, examine inductively and reflexively the nature of the translation process (Levine 1991; Kadish & Massardier-Kenney 1994; Chapdelaine & Lane-Mercier 2001; Buzelin 2004). It is within such a framework, once theory and practice are interconnected, that the parallel between the figures of the ethnographer and the translation studies specialist (and not simply of the translator) becomes possible, that the reflection of the former can enrich that of the latter, at more than a merely metaphorical level. In this article, then, I will examine the second part of the question: what is the nature of this ‘enrichment’?

In the twentieth century, fieldwork came to play a key role in anthropology. As a result, when anthropologists began to question their own practices, they first examined their role in the field. For Mary Douglas, anthropology in the 1950s, or at least British social anthropology, was characterised by an interest in epistemology: “What was called ‘field methods’ was in fact learning to question the conditions of knowing” (Douglas 1995: 24). In fact, the 1950s and the 1960s saw the publication of articles and monographs examining the connection between ethnography and colonialism (Leiris 1950; Gough 1968; Leclerc 1972), the epistemological bases of the discipline (Leach 1961; Maquet 1964; Wolf 1964; Berreman 1968; Scholte 1971; Hymes 1999 [1972]), methods and human interactions in the field (Jongmans & Gutkind 1967; Nash & Wintrob 1972), and professional ethics (Jarvie 1969; Jorgensen 1971; Fabian 1971). Inspired by work in literary theory and philosophy, anthropologists of the next generation studied modes of representation and practices of ethnographic writing (Asad 1973; Clifford 1980;
Hélène Buzelin

Clifford & Marcus 1986; Said 1989; Pálsson 1993). Others, such as Bruno Latour, turned to processes of scientific and technical innovation, thereby extending beyond anthropology the reflection on the construction of knowledge. As opposed to anthropologists, specialists in translation studies work for the most part on written texts; as a result, the work in anthropology which resonates the most in translation studies today is that which looks at strategies of ethnographic writing, in particular the work of Talal Asad (1973, 1979) and of James Clifford (Clifford 1997; and Clifford & Marcus 1986). When considered from a reflexive perspective, however, the similarity between ethnographic practices and practices of translation is not limited to writing. Even if translators do not do fieldwork as such, they do carry out research, do documentation and consult sources. Inasmuch as the reflection of anthropologists departs from the literary and textual paradigm it makes it possible to consider the notion of ‘translating subject’ from a new point of view. As will become clear in this paper, the reflection of anthropologists invites the recognition and study of the collective and dialogical nature of this process. In doing so it reinforces conclusions arrived at by sociologists as to the necessity of studying this process from the inside, from the point of view of the agent (Simeoni 1995). But it also makes it possible to go even further, and to see in the confrontation of the points of view of the different agents involved an essential element of the process. Such a perspective can lead to a widening of the debate on ethics and to new avenues of research for descriptive translation studies.

Empowering translation (studies)

To understand how this reflection by anthropologists can enrich translation studies, it is necessary to recall the questions, observations and options formulated by translation studies specialists working in a post-colonial perspective. Douglas Robinson (1997a) contains a synthesis of this research, and so I will begin with his conclusions, while also taking into account work done since that time and published over the past five years. Generally speaking, research from a post-colonial perspective situates translation within a political context. The questions underpinning such work can be stated as follows: “Who is transforming what how? And also: if a current or still-dominant cultural transformation is harmful to our interests, how can we retranslate its terms so as to engineer a different transformation?” (Robinson 1997a:93).

Whereas, for the most part, the earlier texts analysed by Robinson – those by Rafael, Cheyfitz and Niranjana – looked at translation practices during the colonial era, those which have been published over the last ten years give increasing importance to contemporary practices. Analysing the flux of (literary) transla-
In recent years, Venuti (1998a), Heilbron (1999) and Cronin (2003) have
confirmed, among other things, the asymmetry of North-South exchanges noted
by Jacquemond (1992). One branch of research, represented by Samia Mehrez
in Robinson’s survey and which has developed still further, consists in studying
the texts of contemporary post-colonial writers. Thus, Sherry Simon (1999) and
Maria Tymoczko (1999b, 2000) have developed the parallel between the writing
practices of such writers and interlingual translation.1 These studies attempt less
to apply concepts from translation studies to such texts than to explore the ways
in which the texts, because of their hybrid nature, call into question the distinc-
tion between original and translation. Whether in India, the Caribbean, Ireland
or North Africa, the texts and contexts studied by these researchers are all char-
acterised by being sites marked by bilingualism, diglossia or multilingualism, by
being sites of linguistic friction and of translation. If the history of translation in
Europe is intimately connected to processes of linguistic normalisation and to the
development of nation states (Lewis 2002), then models developed within such a
framework are not readily applicable to the contexts studied by these researchers,
where translation is no longer an operation of transfer between two languages-
cultures, distinct from and foreign to each other, but rather seen as a process of
transformation (Lewis 2002), a practice of métissage (Nouss & Laplantine 1997)
and hybridity (Wolf 2000), a zone of tension (Simon 1996), an instrument in the
construction of collective identities. As a result, earlier tendencies to ‘demonize’
translation, noted by Robinson (1997a: 104–106), are lessening. The case studies
appearing in recent collections (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999; Simon & St-Pierre 2000)
tend rather to emphasize the creative and constructive potential of translation.
Insofar as they reinscribe their object in its (social, political, historical) context,
research on translation from a post-colonial perspective continues within the de-
scriptive paradigm foreseen by Holmes (1972) and developed by Toury (1980).
However, to the extent that they place particular emphasis on the role played by
translation in the struggle for power, demonstrating how translation can at times
be oppressive, liberating, constructive or damaging, they also modify the agenda
descriptive studies. More than a window (on a society, an era, a polysystem, a
culture), translation, from a post-colonial perspective, becomes an instrument.
The description and recognition of the power, dangers and limits of translation,
lead inevitably to a reflection bringing together both ethical and epistemological
considerations.

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1. The connection between post-colonial writing and translation has been explored by, among
In the next-to-final chapter of *Translation and Empire*, entitled “Resistance, Redirection and Retranslation”, Robinson lists the different ‘options’ envisaged by researchers adopting a post-colonial perspective, options which could help restore the balance of power: the literalism of Niranjana, the ‘mistranslations’ of Rafael, and the métissage of Mehrez. Of these, the second has had few followers, and the third valorizes the practice of the polyglot post-colonial writers who, refusing to choose only one language, practice métissage and write ‘between’ languages. Niranjana’s position has in common with the ethics of the foreignizing put forwards by Lawrence Venuti, the politics of translation of Gayatri Spivak, and the respect for the letter of Antoine Berman the complete rejection of the ideal of ‘communication,’ a rejection inherited from the philosophy of Walter Benjamin (1969). It is interesting to note that other than for Rafael, these options all refer to writing strategies and consist, more often than not, in translating literally, or at least idiosyncratically. The text is the end product, what remains of the translation process, that by which readers have access, in a partial and mediated way, to the original text and to a portion of the culture(s) in which it originates or which it claims as its origin. If only for that reason, modes of representation play a determining role in translation as well as in anthropology.² Although foreignizing, through the use of “minority elements” (Venuti 1996) from the ‘target’ culture, has the advantage of giving greater visibility to the transformation taking place through translation and of favouring heterogeneity in this culture, it also has certain drawbacks, which Robinson and others (including Venuti himself) have noted: such a strategy can be somewhat elitist; it is based on binary models which are of little use in theoretical paradigms of hybridity and métissage; a literal approach is not of necessity politically progressive (in certain cases ethnocentrism can be subversive, depending on the context in which translation takes place: who is translating, for whom, etc.); finally, and most importantly, such a strategy is obviously designed for and well-suited to literary texts, to ‘high’ literature in particular, yet these are only a very small fraction of the texts which are translated today.

While it questions the notions of transfer and equivalence, the post-colonial current of research in translation studies, most probably because it is quite recent, continues to reflect a literary bias. For Venuti, Spivak and Niranjana translation is a political instrument, but the type of ethics they propose relates primarily to representations, to ‘styles’ of writing, and thus to a great extent perpetuates the ‘cult’ of the text. According to Sela-Sheffy, this sacralization continues to dominate re-

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² ‘Traditional’ writing strategies in ethnography have also been analysed: see Asad (1979), Clifford (1980), Clifford and Marcus (1986), Sturge (1997). For a critique of the new strategies proposed by, amongst others, Clifford and Marcus, see Said (1989) and Mascia-Lees et al. (1989).
cent literary theory and, more specifically, discourses – theoretical or not – on translation. According to her the field of translation studies is divided not along lines opposing essentialist and non-essentialist approaches (a distinction no longer considered valid in the social sciences), but on the question of the text versus the process. She notes the priority accorded textual studies and calls for a reversal in the orientation of research:

expand[ing] the focus and interest of Translation Studies from the products (the translated texts) as such, to the interdependencies and exchange relations between products, persons (producers and consumers), institutions, and the translation market. (Sela-Sheffy 2000:348)

Such a reorientation is justified on ethical and theoretical grounds. As Michael Cronin notes: “[...] textual scrupulousness is only certain good. There must be an activist dimension to translation which involves an engagement with the cultural politics of society at national and international levels” (Cronin 2003:134). At the same time, considering translation as an instrument of power, a zone of tension and of métissage, and thus as a practice whose end result would to a large extent be unforeseeable has important theoretical consequences for descriptive studies, since it would seem to put into question the very possibility of defining ‘laws’ and of setting up predictive models. To both these questions – the ethical and the theoretical – anthropology provides, it seems to me, certain answers.

**Ethnography and the production of meaning**

Michael Cronin’s comments echo those of certain British and American anthropologists in the 1960s calling for a more ‘engaged’ anthropology (Davies 1999). In the United States, these protests were set off by a series of scandals (the Camelot project in 1964, and the Thailand controversy in 1970) relating to the use of anthropological research (financed) by the American army and used to legitimize armed intervention in third-world countries. The protests led to a debate about the responsibility of anthropologists and professional ethics. These controversies, however, were merely the most radical expression and continuation of a process of epistemological reflection which had begun at the end of the Second World
War. If the reasons for this 'revolution' are diverse and complex, the most important element was the process of decolonization:

The dissolution of empires entails the collapse of structures of knowledge. When an organization disintegrates, the forms of knowledge that have been called forth by the effort to organize collapse too. The process is sad for some, joyful for others. (Douglas 1995:16)

The dissolution of empires required that anthropology reinvent itself (Berreman 1999 [1972]), or at the very least rethink itself (Leach 1961).

The recognition of the way in which the imposition, disintegration and finally abolition of colonial regimes transformed so-called 'primitive' societies did not merely blacken the image of ethnography; its also undermined the principal dichotomy on which the discipline was based (the dichotomy between 'modern' and 'primitive'), the homologies derived from it (here/elsewhere, present/past), and the (objectifying) epistemological paradigm on which they were based. Given the extent of the changes affecting not only 'traditional' societies, but also those of their colonizers, the functionalist or structuralist approach, with its view of societies as homogenous and harmonious entities divorced from outside connections and influences, fixated in an idealized past, lost its heuristic value. Already in the 1950s certain anthropologists, including Edmund R. Leach, had criticised the "ethnocentric bias" of the functionalist anthropology of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, that anthropologists should not begin their arguments "with a lot of value loaded concepts which prejudge the whole issue" (Leach 1961:17). Several anthropologists, including Bastide, Balandier and Gluckman, began to take interest in the processes of transformation, and to see transformations and disruptions as essential to the ways in which cultures constitute themselves and thus to their understanding (see Laplantine 1987:137–144). In addition, social and political unrest, and the economic problems of the third world, made the idealization

3. In an article published in 1972 Nash and Wintrob mention four contributing factors: (1) closer ties between ethnographers and their informants, encouraged by a certain idealization of the 'field' based on the principle of immersion and the valorization of participation over observation; (2) democratization of the profession resulting in greater competition between researchers; (3) production of contradictory studies of the same context, raising doubts about the validity of the information collected and about the studies themselves; and (4) accession to independence by the colonies. It is clear from the ten pages of commentary following this article, as well as from other articles taking up the same question (Hymes 1999 [1972]; Scholte 1971), that not all anthropologists give equal weight to these four factors and that some put forwards still other reasons, such as competition with other disciplines, the influence of cognitive psychology, and the evolution from functionalist to semantic anthropology. Nevertheless, almost all the analyses consider the process of decolonization to constitute an important factor.
characterising structuralist theories all the more evident and questionable. Thus the new orientation was justified on both theoretical and practical grounds, leading researchers, if not to become involved, at the very least to take up questions which were pressing and pertinent for these societies. This orientation was also, to a large extent, the result of new compromises. The new-found independence of the societies in which anthropologists had traditionally carried out their fieldwork was also to have an effect on the way they did this. For the first time they had to submit their projects to governments for approval. In the field too, practices changed: “under post-colonial conditions the social and cultural anthropologist tended to be drawn into a social system of inquiry which included tribesmen with their own viewpoints, sensitivities, and sufficient power to affect the course of research or stop it altogether” (Nash & Wintrob 1972: 531). Researchers now had to consider the possibility that their work might be read by members of the communities they studied, and that their interpretations might be contested, at least in part. In such a context it became important to take into consideration – before, during and after work in the field – the points of view and interpretations of those people who, until then, had not been considered potential readers and critics, but only mere informants. These questions and new compromises explain, in part, why fieldwork led to rethinking the discipline, giving rise for the first time to more than mere anecdotal accounts. The consideration of institutional conditions (average length of stay in the field, the training – or lack of it – preceding fieldwork, linguistic competence) revealed the ambiguity of the notions of participation and involvement, the ambiguity of the position in which researchers found themselves, and above all their vulnerability as cultural interpreters and the limits of the undertaking in which they were involved. The ability to understand and interpret ‘others’, which until then had been taken for granted, was put into question.

The questioning of the opposition between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies and the political context in which this took place were to modify the way in which the object of study of anthropology was defined and apprehended. First of all, researchers were obliged to recognise their influence on the comprehension and construction of these cultures, to “turn the telescope the other way round [creating] observational reciprocity” (Douglas 1995: 24), to define themselves not only as partial observers but as actors. Thus, “the ethnographic enterprise is not a matter of what one person does in a situation but how two sides of an encounter arrive at a delicate workable definition of their meeting” (Crick 1982: 25). The image of researchers ‘collecting’ data was replaced by that of being ‘interlocutors’; dialogue between researchers and their informants became the fundamental principle on which research was based. Not only could researchers not claim complete understanding, but also their understanding – as limited and subjective
as it was – was only possible with the help of those who, by being a part of it, gave meaning to the social and cultural manifestations that the researchers were proposing to study. Fieldwork thus became meaningful and valuable due to the interaction between researchers and informants or collaborators (Fabian 1983). It became defined as a process based on exchange and reciprocity (Lundberg 1968), even of mutual exploitation (Hatfield 1975), of exchange during which the different parties involved – each with their own agenda – divulge certain information while keeping other information secret (Crick 1982: 26), constantly renegotiating and readjusting their positions. The rejection of the dichotomies on which functionalist anthropology was based, and the valorization of a dialectical anthropology, basing knowledge on the principles of exchange and confrontation, led to a ‘repatriation’ of anthropology back to western societies and to the emergence of a new figure, that of the ‘indigenous’ ethnographer.

When western anthropologists returned to their own societies, Bruno Latour reminds us, they at first studied what most resembled the “terrains qu’ils venaient de quitter: les arts et traditions populaires, la sorcellerie, les représentations symboliques, les campagnes, les marginaux de tous ordres, les ghettos” [the terrains they had just left behind: folk arts and traditions, witchcraft, symbolic representations, the countryside, all types of marginality, ghettos] (Latour & Woolgar 1996 [1988]: 16). Later, they looked at sources of power within society: science and technology. Latour’s sociology of networks and the research relating to it examine the process of scientific and technological innovation in the field, science in action (Latour 1989). According to Latour, modernity is based on two complementary practices: (1) the production/multiplication of hybrids or ‘quasi-objects’, and (2) a process of purification masking the production of such hybrids. The work of the researcher is to unmask this ‘purification’ and to study the process through which these quasi-objects are produced. Rejecting Cartesian dichotomies such as nature/culture, subject/object, cognitive/contextual, man/machine, which for a long time defined research objects and methods, Latour’s theory relies on two key concepts: network and translation. For Latour translation refers to a process of mediation, of ‘interpretation’ of objectives, expressed in the ‘languages’ of the different intermediaries engaged in a project/process of innovation – intermediaries who, at the beginning, do not necessarily have the same points of view or interests. It refers to the strategies which make it possible for objectives to change and evolve, ensuring the participation of the intermediaries and the continuation of the project. According to Latour,

L’erreur des modernes sur eux-mêmes est assez facile à comprendre une fois que l’on rétablit la symétrie et que l’on prend en compte à la fois le travail de purification et le travail de traduction. Ils ont confondu les produits et les procédés. (Latour 1997 [1991]: 156)

[The misconceptions people in the modern world have about themselves are quite easy to understand once symmetry is reestablished and both purification and translation are taken into consideration. They are confusing products and processes.]

Thus, on the basis of an ethnographic study, in situ, of the processes of innovation, Latour has demonstrated that “la science ne se produit pas de façon plus scientifique que la technique de manière technique, que l’organisation de manière organisée ou l’économie et manière économique” [science is not produced any more scientifically than techniques are produced technically, or organisation is produced in an organised way or the economy is produced economically] (Latour 1997 [1991]: 157). It seems reasonable, then, to put forwards the hypothesis that what is true for other products is also true for translation.

Who translates? The dialogic relationship between texts and agents

Toute saisie d’un objet par un sujet constitue un filtrage, c’est-à-dire une médiation par le sujet récepteur. Celui-ci plaque sur l’objet la grille de présupposés culturels, idéologiques, expérientiels, intellectuels qu’il s’est constituée au fil d’une existence et, à moins de se faire violence pour résister à la tentation de caser l’objet nouveau dans les structures du connu, à moins de faire table rase de ses pré-jugés, ce qui exige une véritable ascèse d’anthropologue, il finit par ne reconnaître que ce qu’il a appris au préalable à connaître. (Folkart 1991: 310)

[Every apprehension of an object by a subject is filtered; that is, mediated by the receiving subject. Subjects apply to the object a set of cultural, ideological, experiential and intellectual presuppositions developed over a lifetime and, unless they forcibly resist the temptation to frame new objects within familiar structures, unless they eliminate their prejudices and preconceptions, and to do so requires an almost anthropological asceticism, then they only recognise what they have learned to recognize.]

Whether with texts from their own culture or with foreign texts, translators apply their own structures and preconceptions and translate what they have been able to recognise, what they already know. They give us their interpretation, one interpretation among others ... unless they act as anthropologists. Years ago Nida and Mounin saw the advantages of an ethnographic approach. Nida considered it “the most fruitful approach to the semantic problems of translation” (Nida 1945: 207),
and some years later Mounin claimed that it was ethnographers who have established “les possibilités d’une vraie théorie et d’une vraie pratique scientifique de la traduction” [the possibility of a real theory and scientific practice of translation] (Mounin 1963:241). Their theories of translation were developed within frameworks whose postulates anthropologists put into question a long time ago: for both, the structuralist framework, and for Nida, the colonialist framework as well. Ethnographers no longer claim to be ‘collecting’ data; rather, they see their work as a process of construction based on the confrontation of different points of view. This exchange begins, concretely, in the field, and continues, more metaphorically, during the writing process. Some theoreticians also consider translation as a practice of dialogue and métissage (Berman 1984; Nouss & Laplantine 1997) or of hybridity (Wolf 2000), but in the area of translation studies this dialogue is somewhat different, referring only to the second part of the process, the activity of writing. The interpersonal exchange on which it was based (in ethnography, at least) is eliminated. The dialogue is no longer between people, but between readers and texts, or between texts alone. There are only representations, or, at best, a sole agent. No matter how fragmented the representation or the identity of the agent, the experience is no longer social in nature; it is personal. The influence of literary theory is evident here; while valorizing hybridity, literary theory maintains a romantic, and very individualistic, vision of the process of creation and of translation, considering translation as a practice of writing and of reading, but never as one involving research and production. By adopting Latour’s principle of symmetrical anthropology and examining not only products (texts) but also procedures (the process of production), then the dialogical nature of the enterprise can be recognised.

To begin with, the objects studied by translation studies specialists adopting a post-colonial perspective – the texts of post-colonial literature – are at times, quite often in fact, taken up in collective translation projects involving readers from different backgrounds, with different points of view. Whether or not such projects come about as a result of the linguistic and cultural complexity of the texts, they break with individualistic and binary models of translation, which proceed from the foreign to the domestic. Some of these collaborations are recognised, and the translations cosigned. This is the case, for example, of the translations by GERB (a research group in literary translation at the Université de Bordeaux, headed by Christine Raguet-Bouvart) of the stories by the Jamaican writer Olive Senior; of the translation of Texaco by Patrick Chamoiseau, by Rose-Myriam Rejouis and Val Vinokurov; or of the translations of Oriya literature undertaken by Paul St-Pierre in collaboration with Kamalakanta and Leelawati Mohapatra. Others have less official status, and the reader will notice in the paratext, in the preface or afterword, the names of some of the people who have contributed to the finished
product. Since collective projects, as well as prefaces and postscripts, often represent increased production costs for the publisher, the collective dimension of the translation process receives little recognition, is poorly documented and is not usually highly valorized. This collective dimension, whether official or not, is not, however, solely the domain of the translation of post-colonial literature, nor even of the translation of literature. It can be found in the few reflexive analyses available today, including those of translation projects which a priori were individual in nature.

These analyses (Levine 1991; Kadish & Massardier-Kenney 1994; Chapdelaine & Lane-Mercier 2001; Buzelin 2004) have revealed, among other things, the constitutive role played by the “conflict of subjectivities” (Lane-Mercier 2001), and the negotiations and tensions which occur during the process of translation. They thus confirm the extent to which norms are not purely objective and imposed from outside; rather, the formation of norms depends on a complex process, which, to be understood, must be apprehended from the point of view of the agent or, more exactly, of the agents, involved. In addition, insofar as they put into question, based on empirical evidence, the apparent linearity and individualistic nature of the translation process, these analyses point to the difficulty, to the impossibility even, of reifying this process. In doing so, they also confirm the uncertain, not to say unpredictable, nature of the process in question, noted by post-colonial specialists, revealing a methodological problem underlying contemporary sociological approaches in translation studies. Whether they adopt Bourdieu’s model of the field, a polysystemic or a sociocritical framework, these approaches all look at the translation process retrospectively. Their merit lies in the fact that they bring to light the multiple issues involved in literary translation, the complexity of the process, and the unpredictable way in which translations (of a text, or of a corpus of texts) are received. Nevertheless, based on an a posteriori reconstruction relating in most cases to published texts, these analyses tend, at the same time, to favour formal and contextual factors and lead to logical and functionalist explanations. They minimise other equally important aspects of the translation process, aspects which are essential for its understanding but which do not appear directly in the finished project or which disappear over time: negotiations between agents, unpredictable turns of events, and strategies of persuasion (or changes in strategies) which make it possible to deal with these changes and ensure and guide the participation (or departure) of these agents. Such studies are useful in providing information about the role of translation in a particular social and historical context, but, as Juliane House notes, they do not make it possible to fully understand “how and why a translation qua translation is as it is” (House 2001:245). The reflexive studies mentioned above also have serious limits. The process of translation is both realised and studied by univer-
sity academics, within an academic framework, and as such certain factors are not taken into consideration, factors which would be central to a real context, for a publishing house or a translation bureau. Among these are risk management, various constraints (legal, financial, temporal), and material and human resources (other than the translators) – factors which are likely to exacerbate the “conflict of subjectivities”. Conflicts, tensions, and negotiations, controversy even, but also complicity and trust, all are a part of the translation process, and this has often been confirmed anecdotally. According to Crick (1982), in anthropological fieldwork too, interpersonal relations – trust, complicity, but also tension and failure in the field – also provided material for anecdotes, until it was realised that they were a constitutive part of the process itself. Given the theoretical orientation and observations of post-colonial approaches, it seems necessary to go beyond the purely anecdotal level. In other words, once the collective dimension of the translation process has been recognised, not in the abstract sense of Brisset but in the most concrete one, it is necessary to study the interaction between the different intermediaries involved, including machines, and to study translation not merely from the point of view of the agent (Simeoni 1995), but of the agents, or, to use Latour’s terminology, of the actants.5

The notion that a translator works alone is a cliché. Not only do translators, as they always have, use other human and material resources (software, books, consultations with authors and informants, informal – often – readers/revisers, other translators to whom they subcontract work), but also the process of transfer is accompanied by a number of decisions which involve others and which continue once the work of the translator as such has been completed (revision of the manuscript or choice of a title, for example), decisions over which translators often have little or no control. The equation linking the translation process and the figure of the translator, already overly reductive and simplistic, is simply false in the context of globalization. As Cronin (2003) remarks, globalization and the intensification of economic exchanges have shortened delays for translation. The translation process and the process of production now tend to be one and the same. In such a situation the differentiation between the various stages of the process, and with it of the various functions of the people involved, is blurred. Their roles are redefined, and that in turn involves renegotiation, all of which takes place in the field. Whether they are interested in literary or in pragmatic translation, more and more specialists in translation studies are placing emphasis on the variety of functions translators today have to be able to fill. For Spivak, translators of “third-world” literatures not only have to fully master the source

5. As opposed to the concept of agent, that of actant includes both humans and machines.
and target languages, they must also be familiar enough with literary production in the source language to be able to look at it critically, have “a tough sense of the specific terrain of the original” (Spivak 1993:405), and be attentive to differences before looking for commonalities. As Sherry Simon says, these criteria are very demanding, perhaps too demanding, and idealistic, given the conditions under which professional translation takes place. They become still more demanding when applied to texts written not in one language, but in several. They can be met only with great difficulty when translation takes place from the foreign to the familiar, and when it is carried out by one individual. In a very different area, the translation of advertisements, Candace Séguinot (1995) talks about the necessity for translators to possess various skills relating to the use of new technologies, marketing, and legal questions; Daniel Simeoni (1998:31) notes “the sudden valuation of automated skills such as ‘product formatting’ in a profession that used to be mostly concerned with style”. According to Simeoni, the changes affecting the profession today “point to increasing demands on a cognitive faculty that is only marginally present in linguistic or even more generally language-based models, i.e. the adaptive faculty” (1998:31). In the same vein, Defeng Li (2000) mentions the necessity of developing students’ ability to work in groups.

In the context of such a redefinition of roles, aptitudes and tasks (and with translation schools redefining their curricula), the relation connecting the process of linguistic transfer, the subjectivity of the translator and the finished product is at the very least complex. Not only do translators not have a monopoly on translation, nor are they alone when they translate, but also their role does not confine itself to linguistic transfer. As a result, the finished product cannot be explained solely in terms which are either subjective (the translator) or objective and abstract (historical context, polysystem, ideology). Rather, it needs to be considered in the very process of fabrication, in the way in which the human, technological, financial, etc. resources are mobilized and interconnected. The acknowledgement, beyond the text itself, of the hybrid, productive and dialogical nature of the translation process can only lead to such a conclusion. The interest of the reflection which has taken place in anthropology, and in particular of that by Bruno Latour, is that it can provide a theoretical and methodological framework in which the empirical study of the processes involved in translation re-
 mains imaginable, within a paradigm of métissage and hybridity. Latour studies production processes in situ, examines them closely, and, as much as possible, accompanies projects which are underway. Adapted to the study of the translation process, this approach would make it possible to account for the “various hands” actively involved and produce data of a different sort from that to which translation studies specialists have had access until now. Such an approach would make it possible to examine the way in which the different intermediaries, beginning with the translator, interact with each other, negotiate their positions and objectives, the way in which they inscribe their participation and their effect on the form of the finished product. It would also make it possible to study the role of alliances, complicity and trust, but also of disagreements and conflicts in the realisation of translation projects. Lastly, it would make it possible, following Latour’s ontological claim, to recognise the ‘networking’ character of the translating agent. Such an approach would avoid the ‘individualising’ or ‘rationalising’ bias which traditional methods of analysis project on to the object of study, and would enrich descriptive research with empirical studies and, in the long run, further the reflection and attempts at reconceptualization already underway.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the ties between translation studies and ethnography from the point of view of the production of knowledge. After presenting the nature and implications of post-colonial approaches to translation studies, it turned to anthropology in an attempt to find answers to the question, at the heart of post-colonial theory, who translates? Even though ethnography and translation are different practices, the reflection of anthropologists on the production of knowledge brings to the fore elements which are also valid for interlingual translation but which have had relatively little effect on specialists in translation studies. This reflection, among other things, encourages us to think of translation as a dynamic process, as a collective – and therefore social – process, as a process involving the confrontation of different points of view. If such is the case the finished prod-

6. From an historical perspective, Simeoni (1998) quite correctly notes the necessity of having access to the trajectory of translators, and the difficulty this involves. The difficulty derives not only from the legendary invisibility of translators, but also from the fact that their texts (when they are still available) have even more than others been subject to modification, falsification, alteration “with little hope for the analyst to disentangle the various hands, minds and hearts responsible for the final product” (Simeoni 1998:32). The importance of these intermediaries, and the difficulty of defining, or even of apprehending, the “translating subject” are also mentioned by Robinson (2001).
uct, the translation-text, can no longer be considered the ‘simple’ reflection of the norms of a particular society or of a translator’s subjectivity, but must be seen, rather, as the end result of the relations connecting the different actors (including machines) taking part in the process. Considering translation in this way brings a new perspective to the debate on ethics and opens up new avenues of research for the descriptive paradigm. The two paragraphs which follow will briefly develop these two aspects.

As Gillian Lane-Mercier notes,

ce n’est qu’en donnant droit de cité à l’étranger du dedans qu’il est possible d’ouvrir une brèche à partir de laquelle une appréhension de l’étranger du dehors – aussi médiatisée soit-elle sur les plans culturel et institutionnel – peut être envisagée. (1998:84)

[it is only if the Other within ourselves is recognized that it is possible to create an opening through it is imaginable that the Other outside ourselves can be appre-hended, no matter how culturally or institutionally mediated such an apprehension might be.]

In this sense, the ethics of foreignizing proposed by Venuti is interesting. That having been said, however, and in addition to the fact that such an ethics is not appropriate for all texts and contexts, the question remains regarding the extent to which such a practice, consisting in “marking” difference and in introducing “minority constituents”, contributes to perpetuating the marginalization of such elements. From a post-colonial perspective, is not the challenge for translation rather to deal with such elements on their own terms and no longer see them as “minority elements”? More than a choice between one writing strategy or another, translation in a post-colonial context requires, above all – before substituting certain elements for others – that the “minority elements” of the original text become central to the process of interpretation, that the text be read, not solely but to a large extent, from their point of view. Such elements largely go unrecognised, and, insofar as languages are concerned, are often not standardised, as they are acquired rather than learned. As such, they encourage the elaboration of collective projects of translation and the reversal of the direction of exchange, giving control of the translation process to “the readers of the original”, for whom these “elements” are much more than “minority elements”. In short, insasmuch as it attempts to produce heterogeneity in the target culture, the foreignizing approach perpetuates the traditional paradigm of translation towards the familiar and, to a large extent, the cult of the text. The reflection of anthropologists (or at least of those referred to here) imported into translation studies, however, makes it possible to rethink ethics in less formal terms and to take into account the complete process, and thus the role, position and interaction of the agents likely to be involved. The question can be raised whether these interactions should not be studied prior to any at-
tempt to define an ethics of translation. Now the second point: what reflection in ethnography brings to translation studies on a theoretical level.

According to Michael Cronin, sociologists and anthropologists, including those with an interest in globalization, have shown little interest in linguistic and translational questions. As far as sociology is concerned, this lack of interest has already been noted by Daniel Simeoni (2002), who has pointed to its institutional and political underpinnings. Kate Sturge (1997, 1998) reproaches Clifford Geertz as well as James Clifford, the author of *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*, for giving little importance to interlingual translation. As for the works of Latour, they have so far had no effect on translation studies, including on the work of those specialists who adopt a sociological perspective. Generally, then, the work of anthropologists is discounted for taking translation in a purely metaphorical sense, for showing little or no interest in *interlingual* translation. The criticism is justified, but also somewhat surprising coming from specialists in translation studies adopting a post-structuralist approach and whose work also tends to extend the field of research beyond phenomena of linguistic transfer, breaking down the traditional distinction between interlingual, intralingual and intersemiotic translation. It is indeed regrettable that anthropologists have taken little interest in their own practices of translation (in the strict sense of the term) and they should be encouraged to take more, or others should do it for them, as Kate Sturge (1997) has done. In the end, however, the question can be asked whether it would not be in the interest of translation studies to “reappropriate” the concept of translation as defined by anthropologists such as Latour. Even though Latour has shown little interest in interlingual translation, his approach, based on theoretical positions identical to those being developed in translation studies, would make it possible to escape the epistemological division which still haunts the discipline. It would offer a solid methodological approach based on which the empirical study of the process of production, respecting a theoretical stance in favour of hybridity and métissage, would become possible and viable. Such a study remains to be done, and the modalities of how it could be realised are the subject of a forthcoming article.
Trafficking in words
Languages, missionaries and translators*

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This paper argues that there have been two major waves of translation and correspondingly two bodies of translation theorising that need our attention, based on formations that are here called fundamentalism and foundationism. The paper proposes a third take on the matter that identifies earlier efforts as prisoners of two variants of a missionary approach to the task. The work of Quine is seen as central to the rethinking enterprise required.

Keywords: Quine; theory; cognitive revolution; Esperanto; indeterminacy

When you translate, you are part of the traffic. You can visualise the traffic in vehicular terms – the two-wheelers, the bicycles that mysteriously fail to count as two-wheelers, the cars, the buses. This way of visualising transport carries over to translation. Specific kinds of translation traffic inherit particular traditions. These come with theories attached. At that level, translation theories are an important part of the landscape. When you want to work on communication, the roads are one of your channels, and translation is a road that raises questions we are only beginning to address. This is the kind of time when you want to pay attention to theory.

Much theorising is of course driven by a technical imagination. By technical I mean an imagination that recruits in the name of work efficiency. It makes every motorcyclist a member of a community of motorcyclists. Such mobilisation herds

* This text, which first appeared in The Little Magazine (vol. III, no. 3, 2002, pp. 28–36), reflects critical questions from participants, organisers, and fellow resource persons at the summer 2002 Sri Lanka Translation Studies Workshop (University of Peradeniya), where some versions of these ideas were tried out. If I name specifically Rajendra Singh and Thiru Kandiah, this is only to indicate the Indian, Canadian and Lankan elements in the mix by making two names dialogically salient, as all of us who took part in that magnificent experience will fully understand.
travel writing translators into a TWT tribe, for instance. The idea is that such a person needs to learn from other travel writing translators. Surely she does. But this enthusiasm is not enough. Fortunately, the wide range of the term Theory saves us from total captivity in this case; even if we believe, as we all should, in practice.

For Theory goes all the way from teachable techniques for handling your motorcycle, you see, right down to your approach to the road as a whole. There really is something general to be learnt, and therefore taught, if the public is to get over a pathology as broad spectrum as road rage. Philosophy – general theory – is just as practical as procedural models (particular theories) are. When the Trappist monk Thomas Merton first met the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, Merton seems to have said, “You can tell he is a master from the way he opens the door”. You make a proper door; I immediately see your particular grasp of carpentry as skill. You open a door properly, and you’ve just as directly, just as practically, shown me your general grasp of philosophy as theory.

Yes, there are different kinds of traffic, call them subtraffics. Correspondingly different trainers will initiate you into them. To keep the subtraffics going you need follow-up people like mechanics who will maintain and repair. But road transport, the traffic as a whole, is not training or mechanics or engineering. It isn’t even the kind of applied psychology that enables managers to manipulate the population into synergy.

You misunderstand my tone. I am not trying to get you off some power trip I see you as hooked onto. Like you, I too want the road to run smoothly. I will be as happy as you to see a clutter-free road full of happy travellers. If this is a power trip, we’re on it together. But I find that a truly powerful traffic is one where the traffic actually runs. Nothing gets in the way of such a flow. People achieve this only when all participants understand what they are doing; understand it so thoroughly that they don’t need to think or talk about it. Such understanding is still missing. The job facing us today is to prepare for it. Hence the need for theory. It will have to be an enabling theory, though. It needs to empower participants by improving their understanding. We don’t want a road management theory, making you a manipulator good at arranging participation patterns you desire. However well done, that job turns the public into a mass; not the same evil as a herd – see above – but an undesirable outcome nonetheless, in my book.

The tolerant, flowing, public road I dream of must begin its journey by tolerating the manipulative theories that are already in place. As I was saying, specific kinds of translation subtraffic inherit specific traditions and elicit theoretical styles corresponding to their practices. I find it convenient to call the two big traditions Fundamentalism and Foundationism.
I am about to unpack these terms in detail. But some of you may prefer to be quickly keyed into what all this is for. By Fundamentalism I mean the mindset coming out of the translation subtraffic that started in the remote past when civilisations were passing on their religious scriptures and other classical texts across language boundaries. Religion, art, culture are still immersed in the ways of that subtraffic. By Foundationism I mean the orientation associated with the Enlightenment and the techno-scientific translations it has sponsored. The basic parallel I am drawing is between the religious and cultural missionary enterprises that go back to classical antiquity and the scientific and techno-commercial ones that started only with European expansion. If my terms bother you, please silently substitute your preferences as you read.

At the same basic level, I need to explain at once, before this gets more complicated, what a translation theory tries to do. It doesn’t teach you how to translate the way a foreign language course teaches you the language from scratch. Only functioning translators can be trained in the image of a model of translation. The missionaries of a translation model or translation theory show you how to redo your first drafts along the lines they regard as perfect. I call them missionaries because they expect their theories to cover the entire planet. Do I end up counting as yet another missionary? That is, of course, for you to say.

Missionaries run schools

Fundamentalist translation activities all share the assumption that some valuable, highly charged set of texts is not to be missed. Translators must export these qualities to the ignorant outside world to save lives and souls. Religious translation in classical times obviously belongs here; so does Greek to Latin; so do the jobs Emperor Ashoka initiated. But the category also includes the less obvious Beatles singing “I want to hold your hand” in German, “Komm gib mir deine Hand”. Fundamentalism cherishes some great achievements in some sacred original language. Translators are exhorted to help the recipients in the lowly target languages to join the community of worshippers. This worship of origins and originals started out as religion. We moderns usually call it art.

The standard take says that science and technology are different. Perhaps I exaggerate when, contrary to mainstream beliefs, I see the Foundationist counterpoint to translational Fundamentalism as being on a similar missionary trip even though it cherishes science rather than religion or art. The basic mindset is very similar. Fundamentalists assume that they can win and that we have to stake all on their victory. Likewise, Foundationists assume that, through the efforts of a neutral everybody coming from a generalised everywhere, a coherent body of
valid knowledge already accumulating in the industrialised societies will grow into a universal scientific foundation for all human knowing and striving. When we fashion theories of linguistic meanings or practices of translation across the meaning networks we call languages, then, it is towards such a future foundation that valid efforts should be directed.

The kinds of translation subtraffic such theories envisage still dominate the road. The market for Fundamentalist and Foundationist missionary enterprises in translation is vibrantly alive. Missionaries enjoy running driving schools, a task they are good at. It would be insane to try to stop them. Quarrelling with them would turn us into missionaries of some other contending species. We shouldn't even try. In fact, we should help them to do what they have unique know-how for (or is it their savoir-faire that is unique, we wonder, to keep in touch with the ground realities of key word ambiguity that prevent a complete take-over by technique).

I thus find it useful to distinguish between general theory and particular theoretical models. The broad area of translation theory is responsible for the entirety of road traffic. The theoretical models of translation represent the two particular traditions of debate and training that I am calling Fundamentalism and Foundationism. Since every system proposes to conquer the world, the missionary element is inevitable. Do smile and put up with this teacherly weakness, please. At the same time, do keep identifying and outgrowing the pathologies of missionary translations. This is most efficiently done by pitting different kinds of missionaries against each other. To see how and why, take a closer look at the two major models.

Fundamentalist discourses have been replaying the eternal debate between literal and free translations. Already at the Greco-Roman interface, which tacitly assumed the slavery-based social background that some of us forget when we revisit their debates, Roman translators were asking whether they could express themselves in Latin of their own and yet remain faithful to the spirit of the Greek originals. They felt sure that the compulsion to copy source language details slavishly would, in the name of faithfulness, prevent them from keeping faith with their job.

In such talk, the political question of the relative dignity of the source language and target language communities has tended to interweave with the only recently politicised issue of beauty. With Literal recast as Faithful, and with Free translation recoded as Beautiful according to the target community’s aesthetic norms, the fundamentalist tradition, in the male humour register, once found it worth its while to keep saying, translations are like women: either beautiful or faithful, never both. In a climate of opinion where waves of backlash keep such
aphorisms or their equivalents circulating, many of us feel (understandably) com-
pelled to overreact to these pieces of the past that refuse to go away.

Overreaction is a trap, however. Serious, ex-shrill resistance will have to tar-
get the very idea that all writing must choose between being pretty and being purpose-driven. Such resistance will involve our learning to visualise today's arts and crafts as tomorrow's crafts and arts, putting intersubjective labour first and objectified beauty second. However, even such a future will have a place for beauty, perhaps as diversified sets of criteria for finished products that producers inter-subjectively converge on, defining their labour as worthwhile. The beauty debate therefore won't wither away, in translation studies or any other domain. It will stay interwoven with issues of cultural dignity for the source and target lan-
guage cultures and their political sites. In other words, Fundamentalist discourses will have something to talk about, way into the future! Fundamentalist mission-
aries, therefore, should be allowed to teach all this, and keep their flame burning.

Do I then not disbelieve what they are saying? You've got the terms wrong. Do you disbelieve in motorcycles or buses or taxis? Fundamentalist driving schools make one kind of contribution to the traffic. They keep us attentive to the shades of meaning in pieces of text. But there is more to the road than the subtraffic that cherishes shades of meaning. Even the perennial debate between literal and free translation changes colour when it is taken up by Foundationists.

In contrast to the Fundamentalist obsession with cherishing past glory em-
bedded in the original text and its source language, Foundationism worries about equipment. Starting with the translator's target language, they dream of equipping all languages with proper terminology and other resources. If they win, every speech community will some day face the glorious moment of universal scientisation cheerfully and unitedly. They must therefore maximise technologically and developmentally appropriate knowledge transmission. Art becomes a species of knowledge, in this view. You should then diversify your methods of translation, keeping different clients in mind in what must take the form of a centre-to-pe-
riphy development game.

To such a mindset, literal translation comes out as maximisation of attention to the knowledge profile of the original text's author/s and potential colleagues. Free translation represents the opposite pole that maximises broad-spectrum tar-
get language text usability for various end users. This debate becomes part of the retooling of the target language semantic and pragmatic systems.

Inevitably, Foundationists take over the old job of writing the technical ter-
minalogy sections of bilingual dictionaries and now the new job of handling dic-
tionary entries that match phraseology to phraseology, register to register, across languages. Such lexicography has the effect of speeding up language planning processes for the target languages. So far I have spoken only about humans. Foun-
dationism is the paradigm of choice when you move into the increasingly topical domains of machine translation and machine-aided human translation.

Missionaries of two kinds, Foundationist and Fundamentalist, run the standard driving schools that keep your translation traffic going. The interesting, perennial debate that has come out of Fundamentalism is the one about literalness and freedom. It stops looking that interesting, though, when the Foundationist framework picks it up. Foundationism plays the knowledge counterpoint to Fundamentalism's passion. Discussions in Foundationism polarise around the network of word meanings, lexical semantics, and issues of how language is used – speech act pragmatics. These poles organise what the knowledge is about. But the discursive tools in Foundationism give you no access to the deeper issues that become evident when you look at its practices, such as: When is knowledge knowledge? How can knowledges be unified? Which knowledges are easily accessible to which learners and why? How are knowledge and culture embedded in each other?

It is unfair to expect missionary enterprises to think through questions like this. Who will do it, then? Fortunately, out of the very heart of Foundationism comes the possibility of moving beyond the enterprise itself.

The last missionary

One of the Foundationists has found a way of looking at the problem that helps change the terms of the discussion. Profession, philosopher; name, Willard Van Orman Quine; major work, *Word and Object*, 1960. Forced into my road traffic metaphor, Quine says, in effect, the following: let us ask what it would mean for all drivers to have valid licences. The licence would say you know what is involved and can promise not to misjudge what your road-mates are about to do. Now, imagine a driving test where you negotiate the road and find that you are up against another driver coming at you who seems not to follow any rules you recognise. You have to go into the test unwarned about the chasm that separates you from him or her. It is your job to figure out what rules s/he is following. Quine shows that neither you nor anybody else can pass a test like this. It follows that no translator has a valid driver’s licence. Yes, people do translate, Quine admits. They pretend to give you real access to languages you don’t know. But it’s all a con job. Access can’t be legitimate if there are no known ways to figure out any rules in such a game.

This argument takes you further than you think, Quine shows. His point about translation is that no clear rules of translation can emerge from situations of what he calls radical translation. By this he means situations where speakers of two
languages encounter each other without any knowledgeable intermediary or any tradition of contact that would make it a soft landing. If you accept his point, then it follows that the theory of meaning, or semantics, cannot afford to say that the Bangla sentence ‘Raam maachh khaabe’ can have its meaning specified by translation equivalents like English ‘Ram will eat fish’ or Hindi-Urdu ‘Raam machhlii khaayegaa’. For you have just admitted that there is no such thing as a valid translation equivalent. This now forces you to admit that you can’t specify the meaning of ‘Raam maachh khaabe’ by resorting to ‘Raam machhlii khaayegaa’.

In other words, given the Indeterminacy of Translation, as Quine calls it, meaning itself stops being a valid concept. You can talk about meaning at a loose, informal level, the way people accept translations. But you are left without any rigorous right to specify it. Thus there just is no semantics. That people use language implies the existence of a pragmatics, a set of paths from words to objects and facts. But these paths are contingent, precarious, governed by idiosyncratic habits, subjective histories, and other negotiable material no rationality can systematise.

The final answer to the basic question of Foundationism is that the Foundation you hope for, the one the rules of your theoretical game make you hope for, will for reasons of principle never come to pass, Quine tells you.

He thus firmly believes that there never will be a foundation. But he is answering what he takes to be the only worthwhile question, that of whether a Foundation can be built. This makes him the last Foundationist missionary. Recall the village of Sartre’s childhood where everybody was a Catholic and thus ignored God, with the sole exception of the village atheist, who believed in Him so fervently as to see His absence everywhere. Likewise, Quine must be seen as the last theologian, the atheistic and therefore passionate believer in Foundationism as the only valid question, who claims to have found that the answer is No.

It pays to look carefully at this last of the Foundationist missionaries. He pulls off the feat of being the last Fundamentalist as well. How so? And how does this help us find our way out of the missionary enterprise itself? To cut to the chase, the answers to these questions will eventually tie in with the theme of transparent communication, which leaves the missionaries behind without being nasty to them.

Quine’s theory of translation and meaning is rooted in his earlier work on scientific discourse, which his 1960 book unpacks for ordinary language. Already in ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism,’ a paper in his 1953 book From a Logical Point of View, Quine had seriously questioned the traditional dichotomy between a scientific theory’s semantic core and pragmatic periphery. I need to revisit this to make the thread of reasoning clearer.

Traditional wisdom has it that the meanings of scientific terms lie at the core of the theory, forming its semantics. But the statements about matters of
fact made by some scientists and liable to be challenged by their critics and rival scientists belong to a peripheral zone of the theory, where the statements are checked against the world of facts and turn out to be true or false. The assumption has been that you sharply distinguish between the meanings and other conceptual properties of terms, at the core, and the truth or falsity of empirical statements, at this periphery. You can revise your theory at the empirical periphery if you got the facts wrong. It is an entirely different matter if you choose to revise the conceptual core of your theory. Conceptual revision and empirical revision can loosely inspire each other. But one does not force the other.

Quine attacked this whole picture, claiming that the boundary between the semantic or conceptual core and the pragmatic or empirical periphery of a scientific theory is far from clear. I’ll reconstruct his argument by using toy examples. Suppose you fix the meanings of Jupiter and Saturn at the conceptual core of the theory of astronomy. You state that the average distance between Jupiter and Saturn is $x$ kilometres, a statement in the peripheral zone where astronomical theory overlaps with the real world. Now, a new measurement intervenes, finding the distance to be $y$, not $x$. You revise your books empirically. But the conceptual core of your theory is unchanged. This is the kind of case that the tradition has seen as typical.

To see why Quine is unhappy with such an orthodoxy, just think about the words ‘water’ and ‘ice’, their meanings fixed at the semantic core of physics/chemistry, and the empirical statement that water freezes (under standard conditions) at zero degrees Celsius, located at the pragmatic periphery of the theory. Imagine finding that there was an impurity present in all the water we have known; call this impurity Zop. Now imagine a new technique for dezopping the water. It turns out dezopped water freezes not at zero but at ten degrees. But even dezopped water attains maximum density at four degrees. One important consequence is that only the impure ice we have been calling ice all along will float on water, whereas pure, dezopped ice will sink. Does this empirical discovery leave the meaning of the terms water and ice intact? Surely not. That ice is lighter than water is part of what we think of when we consider the meaning of ice. Thus, the discovery that only fake ice floats forces us to revise the conceptual core of the theory.

What Quine concluded from his examples (which roughly parallel these) was that an empirical statement never stands alone when it faces the world of facts. It stands or falls with the entire scientific language that makes the statement statable. Does the statement turn out to be seriously wrong? Then you’re in for various theoretical revisions. You may even end up revising bits of what you had thought was the semantic core. No hard and fast periphery/core barrier protects the core from periphery-induced revision. Don’t ask, is this statement conceptual
or empirical? It is a matter of degree: close to the periphery, more empirical; closer to the core, more conceptual.

That was a demonstration that the core is not independent. Neither is the periphery independent of the core. There are no theory-neutral facts that speak for themselves. A specialist offers to measure your Emotional Intelligence. The empirical statements she will make about you carry the baggage of her conceptual assumptions. These are relatively new; they betoken the period of women coming from Venus and men touching base with Mars. Observation statements are theory-laden, as Quine puts it. The dependency between the core and the periphery goes both ways.

After working out his idea that a scientific theory is like a language, Quine spends the rest of the 1950s studying structural linguistics. He finds he resonates completely with this doctrine of his times. His indeterminacy of translation proposal is a close cousin of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the conjecture that the structure of your language determines what kinds of thoughts you can think. This is the clue to what makes the last missionary of translation theory tick, and needs separate discussion.

The structuralist connection

Structural linguistics is the technical home ground of structuralism, a doctrine that says your society’s conventions tacitly trap you in a cagelike network (call it a cagework) of possibilities and impossibilities of meaningful action, including meaningful discourse. According to this doctrine, even when you think you are freely composing your meanings and implementing your plans, in fact the very stuff that your makings are made of is tightly regimented behind your back by the structure of social meaning in the society you belong to.

This powerful current of modern thought leads to relativism. If speaking, thinking, meanings, norms are all tied to a particular society and its language, it follows that cross-boundary comparisons are non-exercises. No conceptually usable and coherent universal ideas survive this line of thinking. You expect a free-for-all conflict between culture and culture, with each culture trying to impose itself on all others, as no neutral adjudication can ever work across cultural gaps.

A missionary enterprise of translation begins to look like the only way out of chaos. To put it in newspaper terms, you expect something like an America to emerge, and to try for an imperial hegemony that becomes the only salvation for an otherwise divided and opaque world disorder. Contrary to your bleeding heart sentimentality, this is not unfair. For there never were and never will be independent standards of fairness outside the confines of a particular culture. If
you want unimpeded communication to thrive, then, you may regret what you see. But in fact your logic leads you to wish for some hegemony to arise that will get rid of the opaque diversity. The way out of the unacceptable relativism is to let one of the cultures win. You then reinterpret history as having thrown up a series of candidates for the role of global champion, with America or some other victor taking over.

At one level, Quine seems to ally himself with structuralism and make its relativism completely inescapable. If I call him a useful last missionary, this is because the details of his work change this first reading. Structuralism of the disastrous kind I just outlined needs to make a sharp cleavage between the theoretical structure of a language, a formal enclosure whose sovereign internal affairs let nothing else in, and the practical use of this form. When language is used, so the structuralist story runs, the forms of its sound structure and its meaning structure are exposed to the air of the physical and social world. These substances don't obey the sovereign formal laws of any particular language, but are the common property of humankind and its habitat. Structuralism needs this sharp distinction between the substances of the world and the forms of the language to be able to tell its story properly. Notice that Quine doesn't let you keep such a distinction. Thus Quine ends up taking the sting out of relativism.

The heart of Quine's argument has to do with the core-periphery distinction being a matter of degree of how outside-ish or how inside-ish a particular item looks. There is no sharp boundary inside the language, for Quine, dividing a core of pure inside-ish stuff from a periphery that is entirely outside-ish. The inside-ish and the outside-ish react to each other and interdepend. This logic goes all the way to the edge itself where structuralists think a language-form meets an entirely distinct reality-substance.

I need to show you how this works, of course. Take a typewriter. You don't need to be a linguist to know that its details are a matter of physical substance, completely outside the purview of linguistic form. But even this lowly substance interacts with the language. It is a linguistic fact about written English that ‘e’ is the most frequent letter. Keyboard designers have therefore placed ‘e’ where its frequent use won’t hurt your fingers. In the other direction, rapid typing turns ‘th’ sequences into ‘ht’ producing ‘hte, hten’ and the like, which normal readers of English e-mail messages have had to learn to stop noticing as errors, thus changing the tolerance limits that define what counts as the ability to read English. The boundary is porous both ways, then. Only if you are an English typist rather than a Swahili typist is ‘e’ so very frequent for you. Even your fingers wear English expectations, an effect of linguistic form on typing substance. In the other direction, even adventitious facts, like the ease with which you mistype ‘th’ as ‘ht’, drift from Substance into the very Form of English.
Thus the Quine argument stretches all the way from the core-periphery boundary right inside a language out to the interface where the Form of language meets what structuralists call the Substance of speech and writing. The inside-ish is continuous with the outside-ish. The two depend on each other and can affect each other’s historical development.

When Quine was developing his point about mutual opacity between languages, he imagined a monoglot tribal and an anthropologist unfamiliar with that language trying to figure it out. Quine imagines a rabbit darting past them in the forest clearing, the tribal excitedly saying, “Gavagai!”, and the anthropologist taking it down and coming up with hypotheses, to be checked later, about what it might mean: (1) Rabbit. (2) Darting. (3) Darts past. (4) White. (5) Quick. (6) Rabbit visualised as unindividuated piece of massified substance of rabbitiness. (7) Rabbit viewed as unindividuated part of forestiness of forest. (8) Rabbit darts past. And so forth. Quine thinks the anthropologist may eventually follow procedures of narrowing down the range of possibilities. But he (Quine imagines a male) will never have a complete list of what needs to be eliminated, and will not even after twenty years be able to claim that he has got it right.

This Gavagai parable stresses relativism: a language reaches out with the full richness of its inside-ish Form, and colours the world for the tribal in a way that the outsider will never fully grasp. The logic here goes from the inside-ish to the outside-ish and makes the inside appear to win.

But even if you want to think of it as a game where somebody is supposed to win, the game plays in the other direction too. In the ancient Indian thinker Bhartrihari’s grammatical philosophy treatise *Vaakyapadiiya*, ‘On sentences and words’, we consider a baby just out of babbling and into early speech saying something semi-articulate for the Sanskrit word ‘*ambaa*’ or ‘mother’. Bhartrihari points out that listeners, starting with the mother, catch on without trouble. He invites us to see this roughly the way I did the ‘hten’ example earlier, as a deviation that competent listeners easily handle if they know their Sanskrit. The facts of Substance do sometimes undershoot targets set by Form. But this undershooting can be seen as falling within the elastic margin of error around the Form, or as changing the Form if you wish. Here it is the outside-ish that seems to win, making you wonder if victories are the right image for what is at work.

As long as Fundamentalism and Foundationism have to call the shots and run their translator training workshops in the missionary mode, it is inevitable that this structuralist game-playing will dominate the show. The stretching of Quine’s reasoning that I just did gives us some ideas about how to handle the structuralism without getting stymied by the relativism that seems to follow from an uncorrected structuralism.
Foundationism would like us to structure a language in terms of its knowledge base and practical edges around the knowledge. The Fundamentalist take on language emphasises the fact that some parts of the language are more valuable or interesting or significant than others. This is the differential that runs their stories about structure. Fortunately for us, the Form of language cannot close in on itself, for Fundamentalist Form competes with Foundationist Form. Each view of an inside sees the obsessions of the other view as a dumb and opaque outside. Literacy versus numeracy is a binary we certainly haven’t overcome. Even your ideas about what counts as transparent communication will be coloured by whether you are oriented to scientific numeracy or to cultural literacy. Both sides to this debate realise, though they often work hard not to admit this, that the appearance of victory is always internal to one of their frameworks.

For these reasons, which are ultimately Quinean, non-victory becomes definitive. Quine is the last Foundationist but manages to become the last Fundamentalist as well, for his logic closes both the gates that would have led to a final victory. Of course his actual writings alone do not make this directly apparent. When we follow his logic through, though, we come to see that his form-substance interaction precludes a true relativism, which would have involved the formal or the inside-ish winning a one-sided victory.

Readers unfamiliar with the ways of translation studies departments at universities and similar institutions need to be told that the unfolding of this logic yields known human consequences. Any typical set-up in translation studies puts a common roof over both the science types, who typically assemble machine-readable dictionaries and design software around them, and the culture types, who deconstruct and genealogise and culturally critique every text available. These two missionary enterprises serve different segments of the clientele. Neither can wish the other away. Even political considerations don’t choose between them. You can serve India’s national – even post-colonially envisaged – interests by building Foundationist, digital pathways to empower Indian languages and make them mutually translatable. Or you decide to extend the Fundamentalist reach of the latest critical tools of cultural empowerment to any subaltern group you wish, striving to reduce asymmetries. These kinds of progress are not mutually exclusive.

But they are both heavily dependent on structuralism in the study of language and texts. What is this structuralism? What makes me think I can find a viewpoint outside it that allows it to be looked at?
The cognitive revolution

To put the question differently, what forces, do I think, can forge a usable coalition? What worthwhile activity in translation studies can credibly go beyond the standoffs I have described? What logical basis will take us to a viable line of effort stretching beyond this or that flash in the pan?

I am hopeful that the cognitive revolution will deliver. In academia this means the rise of generative linguistics, cognitive psychology, and other components of the cognitive science package that has been emerging to understand just how a person cognitively takes in and responds to her world. Outside academia, I am proposing that this term be applied to the fact that in recent decades the boundary between heart-driven creative texts and head-driven discursive writing has become blurred. What kind of book is Amitav Ghosh’s novel, or fictionalised social analysis, *In an Antique Land*? What does Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* say about the kind of book it is? The cognitive revolution, in all its forms, directly works to serve human beings, works to articulate the rights of the individual defined procedurally in her real milieus and not hijacked procedurally by the state and other officialdoms.

Once the intelligentsia take the cognitive revolution on board, it will become possible to identify and overcome the structuralist legacy. That structuralism’s logic continues that of colonialism in obvious ways is a fact that has elicited commentary but no action even in verbally postcolonial circles. Like colonialism, structuralism pretended to be neutral but was based on writing rather than speech, including of course the standard gestures whereby the writing of the state tutors or otherwise co-opts its speaking citizens. An overcoming of this unsatisfactory basket of options (the usual nationalisms come from the imperial basket of bread and circuses as well) will have to be rooted in listening as this is relatively cooptation-proof.

Lend me your ears as I show you that this is so.

Generative grammar set out to portray not the society’s norm-basket but the individual’s creative knowing of her language. But its early work merely continued the structuralist conquest of verbal space, pushing the limit from words up to sentences. As long as early generative grammar stayed obsessed with deep structures and surface structures, it was possible for a phonemes-allophones structuralism to read deep and surface structure sentences as “sentencemes-allo-sentences”, and to assume that all cases reduce to the simplicity of a pair like “Masum looked up the phone number” optionally transformed by Particle Shift into “Masum looked the phone number up”. These two surface structures, derived from the same deep structure, were phonologically distinct expressions corresponding to the same semantic content. A grammar based on these postulates naturally seeks a single
kind of meaning at the edge where language meets a thinking that is taken as a
given. All this was merely the Foundationist fable writ large, and got co-opted by
structuralism. It didn’t matter in practice that generativists were verbally commit-
ted even then to the new job of representing the native speaker as an individual,
instead of structuralism’s old icon, the speech community as a reified source and
site of conventional unity.

Since the 1980s, though, generative grammar has actually been performing
as it had always wanted to. This is made possible by the transition from rules
to principles. Early generative linguists wrote particular language grammars em-
ploying rules like transformations. Post-1980 work rests on an adequately for-
malised grammar that uses universal principles. Sensitive to the ways of words, a
single UG can function appropriately in various languages without the principles
themselves needing to be reformulated in seventy-five different versions.

With this conceptual shift, structuralism can no longer co-opt the work of
genervativism. Technical systems must stop even hoping to view a sentence as pot-
tentially a massive, sprawling compound word of some sort and thus as society’s
property, allowing the opaque principles of Form to dominate the transparent
principles of Substance. It is now a matter of formal record that a sentence, consti-
tutively, is made up by the person speaking, assembling society’s words as she goes
along. It is possible to celebrate this shift from early or formalistic, code-bound
genervative work towards a substantivism that will keep the cognitive revolution’s
promises. For a detailed celebration, see the book I wrote with Alan Ford and
Rajendra Singh, After Etymology. If you take that book and turn it into a sermon
on translation, you get what I have been saying to you so far.

But it is not enough to make sure that the sentence belongs to the speaker.
Speech easily gets co-opted into writing. You’ve got to push things so that the
sentences belong to the communicators exchanging them in a dialogical partner-
ship. To make this stick, try associating your grammar with the pragmatics of a
conversation, focusing on the fact that comprehension precedes speech produc-
tion, that listening is always ahead of speaking. The move we need is to move from
a grammar of a language (viewed as a rigid Code which includes and excludes) to
a Transcode of a speaking and listening dyad. Technically, this can be presented
as an account of listening.

The advantage of such a move is that a listener is free to allow that the speaker
may have arrived at her sentence this way or that way. Thus, a listening Transcode
can allow for one of many kinds of formation processes imagined as responsible
for what has been produced. The various grammars thus become optional alter-
native ways to reach the outcome one is hearing.

When we make such a move from the grammars we have been writing to the
Transcode as an account of language as listening, it becomes possible to take the
ancient Indian thinker Bhartrihari completely on board, an enterprise we have already initiated in *After Etymology*. For his *sphota* theory of sentence meaning gives equal value for reasons of principle to various alternative accounts of how word *sphotas* add up to arrive at the sentence *sphota*. Generosity and openness are strictly written into the rigour of a Bhartriharian, substantivist account of sentential material, for which various formalist accounts from the producer’s imaginary viewpoints remain available – plurally available. We are thus able to keep the missionary driving schools going, along the formalist lines that come naturally to them. But we are also able to set up our quiet little roadside shack where we take refuge from too much driving at too efficient a level. This shack is also the road as a whole. Contemplating its flow, we become it. If we are able to stay away from the trap of becoming missionaries ourselves, this is because there can’t be missionaries of listening.

To return to the road of translation traffic and the missionary schools of driving that are vehicle-specific that we tolerate but cannot fully love, I am proposing that we invite drivers to become confident listeners to the traffic flow of the entire road. Neither schools nor any other institutions can produce such confidence in a mass production mode. But surely the inmates of schools, with their spontaneous resistance to what any school does to them, will begin to turn their ubiquitous cynicism into the positive energies of observation and empathy for users of other vehicles, and for pedestrians. Observing is something of a process between you and others who watch you watch them. It is dialogical. Only the dialogue can teach you more dialogue, and it has to happen on the road itself.

These moves turn you away from the old image of a language as a fixed, definable, teachable entity. An English, a Bangla, a Swahili are locked into perpetuating that image. They own real estate, they own property, even when they let something in as a borrowing from another language there is a clear distinction between host and guest. The image of a language is in fact unfriendly to communication in general and translation in particular. For a language is a walled city, an opaque establishment, which communication tries to open up.

For me, Esperanto has always provided the optimal image of an open community’s way of expressing its openness. It begins by abolishing the notion of linguistic real estate and by making guest and host symmetrical roles. If other languages are divided between identities of writership and speakership, Esperanto is dedicated to listening. It formalises the unviability today of the traditional structuralist idea of a Language as a Code for which serious linguistic sciences and arts can be sustainably fashioned. Given the umbrella notion of an Esperanto, it becomes possible to interpret every community as an open space, pushing the logic of the open society to the point where the open community becomes thinkable.
All this is, of course, in the service of understanding the patterns of who can give which current victims of asymmetric educational set-ups access to what desirable resources; theorising what is easy and difficult for whom; working for cultural change so that issues of cognitive ecological niches and recycling and the new currency of cognitive science become a normal part of our political self-consciousness. In a world where education is the arena where the important wars are being fought – wars over what is or isn’t going to be easy for people educated in which schools – these are not stratospheric academic luxuries. These are bits of vital news from the frontline that some soldiers fighting on your behalf may have forgotten to warn you about.

I may have got some of it wrong. But as a recent Nobel laureate has said somewhere, it is more important, in the social sciences, to learn how to be more or less right than how to be precisely wrong. This is the point that Bhartrihari makes, or the point that Quine misses, in the domain of linguistic understanding and translation. We need to make cross-boundary communicative successes, not failures, the paradigm cases our theories are based on.
Unsafe at any speed?
Some unfinished reflections on the ‘cultural turn’
in translation studies*

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Although translation has to do with texts and the languages which these texts have to follow the norms of, contemporary Translation Theory (TT) has, following the ‘cultural turn’, increasingly taken on questions that deal only with the institutional matrices the product of translation has its genesis in and finds its way into. This paper argues that in doing so, it has, unfortunately, peripheralized its own centre.

Keywords: translation theory; disciplinary autonomy; theory construction; applied linguistics

Translation Studies (TS) is, to use an American colloquialism, a new kid on the academic block, still somewhat uncertain of its place in the Academy. Precisely because its legitimacy as an academic discipline is still open to question, translation scholars have been trying harder and producing some good work, though some of it may actually not belong to TS.

Given the contemporary modularization of knowledge and the consequent professionalization, increasingly mimicking the natural and life sciences, some would argue that TS is perhaps the only field in the human and social sciences that seems NOT to focus on theoretical questions of its own. Whereas the now relatively old contemporary linguistic theory, at least in its North-American ava-

* I am grateful to Probal Dasgupta, Thiru Kandiah, Jayant Lele, Sundar Sarukkai, and Paul St-Pierre for reactivating my interest in translation and for several useful conversations regarding the nature of translation and Translation Theory. I am also grateful to Otto Ikome and Rene Tondji, encounters with whom made me see precisely how wide the gap between TT and the practice of translation is. The usual disclaimers apply – only I am, in other words, responsible for what is said here.
Rajendra Singh

...tar, established itself on the grounds of a maximalist insistence on its autonomy from other cognitive domains, Translation Theory (TT) seems to want to establish itself on grounds that can be said to be maximally non-autonomist, as the very title of Sarukkai (2002), for example, suggests.

Perhaps the point can be illustrated with a clearer case. Most Anglo-American universities have a department of Teaching English as a Second Language. As I argued in Singh 1999, it is understandably difficult or even impossible to see TESOL as an academic field rather than as a loose collection of academics inquiring about different sorts of things, though under one administrative umbrella provided for clearly politico-economic reasons. It is possible to construe language acquisition or second language learning as a field, but it is, I argued, impossible to construe TESOL or the learning or teaching of Arabic, French, German, or Swahili as a second language as a field of inquiry. The reason is very simple: there are no questions in these putative fields that can be answered without substantial appeals to already established domains of inquiry. Notice that I am not arguing against setting up departments of TESOL in universities, only against seeing TESOL as a field of inquiry. Such ventures create intermediate exploratory spaces that thrive on their intermediacy, ruling out depth almost by definition.

I must admit that I am not convinced by the argument, if that is what it is, that in an inter-local economy there is room for disciplines that have no autonomous questions of their own and that such disciplines are modes of steeping persons in particular sets of materials and activities that turn them into persons with certain sensitivities and responsivities. I agree that becoming such a person is a type of knowing, even if such a person cannot answer specific questions, but the Academy is IN PRINCIPLE not a place for the training of unsuspecting agents of the allegedly non-existent Anglophony or of post-modern civil servants but a place for asking serious questions that have not been asked in its established ‘cells of inquiry – the agents and civil servants cannot be stopped from coming to the Academy to train their minds but perhaps should not be allowed or encouraged to turn it into a branch-plant of their new administrative needs! Again the point is that depth becomes a victim of the framework such ventures construct for themselves.1

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1. The argument here, to borrow from Kandiah (personal communication), is NOT that such exploratory spaces cannot or should not be constructed but that too many of the scholars in the fields in question have NOT made sufficient effort to even lean on fields that could lend some explanatory depth to their theoretically unanchored explorations.
It is, in other words, still an empirical question about the legitimacy of disciplines, and it is still not clear to me why TESOL, rather than Language Teaching, can be the name of a discipline or why TS as it seems to be constituted at present is a legitimate discipline. The very charitable thought that particular practitioners of it may turn out to be more or less pointed, more or less effective exemplars of the ideal type, assuming, of course, that a worthwhile ideal type can be extracted from the way TS seems presently constituted, seems to me to lack rigour. This follows straightforwardly from the consensus view of the matter, according to which a discipline is just a tentative carving out of a hopefully permanent space from what is generally understood to be philosophy, set up to explore a set of putatively well-defined questions those proposing such a carving out hope to be able to provide answers to from well within the theory of what they say should be construed as a novel discipline. The crucial requirement in this view would seem to be that fields of inquiry constitute themselves on the basis of clearly defined metatheoretical principles which put their studies on a principled basis, allowing the achievement of the highest level of adequacy, explanatory adequacy. Although ‘once a discipline, always a discipline’ seems to be the rule in the Academy, it is in principle possible to define a discipline out of existence (cf. the fate of philology, particularly in North America, where Area Studies have met a similar fate).

I must underline the fact that the comparison between TS and TESOL is not intended to argue that they are completely analogous, because they clearly are not. Whereas the former can in my view be reconstituted to become a discipline, the latter is perhaps for ever doomed to remain only an instrument for, depending on one’s point of view, either dispensing English to those who need it or for helping English acquire new speakers, and, sometimes, for coming up with some data that fields such as linguistics and second language learning can profit from. Another way to characterise the difference would be to say that whereas TS seems not to be a discipline at present, it certainly can be one, while TESOL is seen as a discipline despite the fact that it really cannot be one. The difference is highlighted by the fact that one cannot even imagine an expression like “The theory of English language teaching”. Whereas the former seems to have put its centre on its periphery, the latter just never had a theoretical centre and is quite unlikely to have one in the future. At the moment, they both seem structured rather like doughnuts (the fact that the former looks more like a French curler rather than a plain North-American doughnut does not change anything).

Arguments on behalf of TS and TT provide a new window on the constant tension between the centrifugal and centripetal forces within the Academy. Even if the traditional autonomy of the sort my remarks above attempt to spell out turns out to be indefensible, the problem with TS, TT in particular, remains, because most, if not all, of the questions it now considers as its theoretical questions
seem to lie entirely outside of what translators do and what translation is. It is interesting to note that, as Baker’s (1992, reprinted 2001) excellent book makes clear, despite the cultural turn, most good books on the practice of translation have, apparently without a licence from TT, appropriated and enlarged Contrastive Linguistics in a big way. Even the talk about “localisation” (in the sense of “cross-cultural text adaptation” (cf. Pym 2004) and NOT in the restricted sense of software adaptation) is only a paraphrase of what linguists for a long time have referred to as “communicative competence”. They rely, as they must, very heavily indeed on linguistics, something TT claims to have dissociated itself from. It cannot really be otherwise, espousal of texts rather than languages notwithstanding. The problem, in other words, seems to be that whereas translation has to do with texts and the languages which these texts have to follow the norms of, TT has increasingly taken on questions that deal only with the institutional matrices the product of translation has its genesis in and finds its way into. It is one thing to quarrel with Catford and Nida – one should, and I would too – but quite another to ignore the heart of the matter. Although some theorising is still done about it, the focus has clearly shifted to applying theories from literary and cultural criticism to the socio-political origins of texts and the aims and fate of their real and possible translations, and, of course, to presenting those applications as TT, as an autonomous theory to boot. It is interesting to note that Venuti (2000) does not contain any recent contributions dealing with what I am calling the heart of the matter.

It is equally interesting to note that within linguistics, my own specialisation, what began as a window on human cognition has actually become a stumbling block to it, and perhaps my field would be justifiably swallowed by the emerging field of Cognitive Science. If and when that happens, the practitioners of my ‘science’ might realise that perhaps the Academy was a bit too generous in giving them as long a leash as it did (yes, dear Noam, the nature and architecture of beehives CAN be explained by physics and it is not necessary to endow these wonderful

2. In as much as “communicative competence” may already be a somewhat abridged version of Wittgenstein’s “form of life”, TT’s “localisation”, again in the relevant sense, may in fact not be much to write home about.

3. That this is not just an impression but an empirical fact is easy to show. The second number of the fifth volume of Translation Studies Abstracts (2002), for example, contains entries on only half a dozen studies, out of a total of 32 in the section called ‘Translation Theory’, that can be said to have taken up the heart of the matter. The five studies that get entries in the section called “Process oriented studies” don’t substantially change the picture.
little creatures with a genetically encoded bio-programme).\(^4\) It cannot, however, be subsumed by demography or by political-economy because these latter can handle only facts ABOUT languages and NOT facts OF language. It certainly cannot be subsumed by sociolinguistics, something I take up below. Minimally, in its fascination with post-modernism, TS seems to ignore the questions that could potentially constitute a site for its possible autonomy. The unlikelihood that TT can establish itself as the ultimate, over-arching unifying theory does not help matters either.

There are other similarities too, the most important being that just as there has been an unfortunate break in the relationship between the study of grammar and the study of other aspects of language, which resulted largely from a series of very powerful interventions made by some North American engineers, better left un-named, by deciding not to bother with questions it felt had created something of an impasse TT seems to have thrown its very own baby out with the bath-water. In linguistics, the blowing up of the traditional bridges with other aspects of the study of language – literature, anthropology, aesthetics, for example – was undertaken, these engineers said, to facilitate the building of new bridges, bridges that connect the study of language with the study of psychology, biology, and neurobiology. My own feeling about this is that it was indeed necessary to build these new bridges but that it wasn’t necessary to destroy the old ones. The same is true, in my view, of TT. Perhaps matters are worse, for the new ones in TS are a bit shakier than their counterparts in linguistics, or so it seems to a linguist. A theory only of contexts is no more a theory of translation than a theory only of texts is a theory of language.

What has happened, to continue with the metaphor of bridges, is simply that the new ones have been built IN PLACE OF the old ones. It is time in my view to rebuild the ones that have in the process been destroyed. And if we do undertake such a rebuilding of the old bridges that were there, then we will find that the study of translation and the study of language are so intimately related that they must in fact go together. Understandably frustrated with the break that occurred in the study of language half a century ago, TT dissociated itself, slowly, but very systematically, from its own heart, the study of language. TS, and TT in particular, seems to have decided to plug itself into a theoretical discourse of a slightly larger and radically different kind. Perhaps it is time to take a RE-TURN to the study of language and renew the connection between translation studies and the study of language.

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\(^4\) This partially immanent critique of contemporary formalist linguistics, particularly in its maximalist phase, should convince the reader that I am interested in rigour and depth and NOT in protecting disciplinary empires.
language for the benefit of both. I take the position that TT dissociates itself from linguistics at its own peril.

Let me first take a couple of examples from my own specialisation to be maximally fair. In my work in sociolinguistics, I have tried to argue, for example, that if one looks carefully at the work that is done under the rubric of sociolinguistics, at least on my side of the Atlantic, one finds two rather remarkable things: (1) sociolinguistics is normally done by people who seem not interested in language in the sense of the form of language, and (2) it is – again on my side of the Atlantic – done by people who seem generally ignorant of sociology, political science and economics (cf. Singh 1996a and 1996b for some detailed argumentation). The enterprise called sociolinguistics is, as a result, mainly made up of people who are interested neither in the form of language nor in social theory. As another example, let me take something called discourse analysis. Now discourse analysis in general shows the same lack of familiarity with language. I am still waiting for a demonstration that will show me that the discourse analysis of the discourse of colonial withdrawal from Hong Kong or the discourse of minority participation in Austria is not better done by a political scientist or an economist than it is by a linguist. To take an example from India, a region I can speak about with some authority, I have yet to see a discourse analysis performed by a linguist which will match Dasgupta’s (1970) analysis of the linguistic situation in India or Brass’s (1974) analysis of the linguistic situation in the Punjab. Interestingly, both Dasgupta and Brass happen to be political scientists. In fact there is sufficient evidence to show that if one looks at the analysis of facts of this kind by linguists, they seem generally much worse than those done by political scientists and economists. A case in point is King’s (1997) book on the politics of language in India under the leadership of Nehru. King is a professor of linguistics (at the University of Texas), but there is, as Lele (2000) shows, nothing in that book of his that would justify a linguist actually taking up such a task. He shows a remarkable lack of familiarity with the political economy of India and the history of what actually happened on that sub-continent. Being a linguist, he simply assumes that he is entitled to write about language politics. Again, the point is that language politics seems better analysed by political scientists. Almost any piece in Economic and Political Weekly that talks about the language politics of India, and these are standardly not written by linguists, provides much more insightful understanding of what has happened and is actually going on in the politics of language in India than anything that is done by any linguist. The point of this is not to be uncharitable to the work done by linguists but simply to underline the claim that simply being a linguist does not entitle one to talk about institutions of language or cultural products involving language. I realise these are harsh words, but I use them not because I intend to be
Unsafe at any speed?

harsh, but because I have been repeatedly saddened by looking at analyses of this kind – sociologically and economically naive at best, if not shallow.

Again, the point is NOT that linguists cannot or should not take up such matters but that should they decide to do so they must learn to make a distinction between politico-economic institutions that support speakers of this or that language and what actually happens to these languages when the support in question is augmented or withdrawn. Unless they learn to draw upon what is known about such matters from other fields in which they have been explored, their explorations are bound to remain somewhat superficial. Whereas a sociolinguist can certainly study with a sense of authority the changes Modern Hindi has gone through as a result of contact with Persian and English, she makes a mistake when she abridges the political and economic interventions made by a declining Moghul Empire or an ascending British Empire into a somewhat superficial sociolinguistic chapter on the replacement of one official language with another.

Similar questions arise in the context of TT, which seems to me to be replete with fairly analogous examples. Consider, for example, Behl’s (2002) commentary on and analysis of Emperor Akabar’s brilliant management strategy of setting up a Translation Office to attempt to bridge the gap between the Hindus and the Muslims of the India he is known to have unified in ways not seen on that subcontinent since Ashoka. Wonderful indeed, and certainly something we can all benefit from in an increasingly multi-ethnic world, but I must, I am afraid, ask again: “Is this the sort of thing TT should be about?”

Let me take a couple more examples: (1) the politics of what gets translated from where and (2) the functions, nourishing or otherwise, of translation. A lot has been written about both in TS, and is, apparently, seen as a contribution to TT. As for the former, I am afraid I AM entitled to ask the question if the fact that most translators from, let us say, Xanadu, translate FROM English is primarily a fact about translation or about political-economy (of cultural products) under present conditions. I would argue that it actually belongs to the politics and economics of cultural production in the post-capitalist stage we are at. If we treat this as a question of TT, we will have to allow the questions that arise from the patenting of margum margosa by American pharmaceuticals as questions of Theoretical Biology! I have no quarrel with the study of such phenomena – they constitute very valuable indices of what late capitalism is up to – but I regret I cannot place the answers in the baskets where some would like them placed. The problem is not that these questions are explored in what are seen as contributions to TT, but that these explorations generally do NOT draw upon what is available in other fields, thus missing the possibility of providing some depth, and that when that depth is added, these explorations may well appear to have been conducted in an artificially created autonomist space, ironic indeed. As for the latter, it should
be obvious that it is one thing to talk about uses and functions of translation but quite another to provide a principled and theoretical account of what is charmingly characterised as “looser forms of translation”. I wonder what sense it makes to set up a theory of physics that deals with the functions and uses of physics, wonderful as they are. Ordinary English would characterise such an activity as “journalism”.

Perhaps TS advocates are using THEIR maximalist strategies as bargaining chips in a turf-war, and would settle for much less, something they might legitimately call their own. It is interesting to note that Holmes, the chief cartographer of TS in the Anglo-American world, seems to forget that there is not only the sociology of knowledge but also sociology. In the meanwhile, we must evaluate the claims and counter-claims as best as we can. But perhaps scholars in TS can help us by applying the techniques of deconstruction they are happy to use to the very enterprise they are actively involved in constructing! The lack of articles on the politics of the establishment of TS by the followers of Derrida and other deconstructionists and post-modernists provides some empirical evidence for the admittedly uncharitable thought that anticipatory or preemptive deconstruction, or self-reflection as some traditions call it, is, apparently not a part of TS.5

Even a moment’s self-reflection should make it clear that even within an autonomist context, there are questions that would seem to be far more central than the ones that get routinely taken up. In doing what it does, TT ignores questions that it can examine with some sense of non-borrowed authority. Why do perfect bilinguals find it very difficult to translate from one of their languages to the other, for example? Or, why convergence seems, as was first suggested by the eminent Indian linguist B. Krishnamurti, to lead to better interlingual translatability? Or, to stick to the ground more familiar in contemporary TT, what is it that makes translation from first (target) to second (source) language tick in places like India (cf. Mukherjee 2002)?

The result of the focus on questions TT scholars seem interested in but are perhaps not particularly well-equipped to handle and the side-lining of questions they could and should in my view concentrate on creates, I am afraid, a situation that can only be described as sad. Imagine a school of medicine in which the

5. Not to say anything about the fact that TT seems willing to include talk about the semantics of ‘contract’ and setting up of translation-shops, as long as it is done with a Greek title, or about what Kandiah (personal communication) calls “the neo-neocolonial subversion of post-coloniality by post-structuralism and post-modernism”, something not that hard to see or document. Although I take the post-modernist critiques of post-Enlightenment abridgement of reason quite seriously, I find the lack of self-reflection in the relatively newly constructed TS sadden-
theoreticians teach courses on and write about the delivery of medicine in various parts of the world and project their activity as the theory of medicine and the non-theoreticians simply learn how to dispense drugs. I am afraid that is the sort of situation we have. I have nothing against finding the colour of science and the gender of theory, but I am not sure if either activity should be pursued in a thousand different places, each called “The Theory of...”. The fact that during the imperial period the periphery was asked to collect data against which the scientists in the centre could test their theories is an important fact, but it is a fact ABOUT science and not OF science, and most scholars treat it in what is called history of science. I am NOT defending science, which is mostly technology promoted as science, only the distinction ABOUT vs. OF. The hypothesis – notice that I don’t say ‘fact’ – that the earth goes around the sun is a hypothesis OF science, but the hypothesis, or, to be even more generous, the fact that South America supplied crucial data for the theory of physics during the early part of the twentieth century (cf. Pyenson and Singh) is a hypothesis/fact ABOUT technology/science. The fact that a certain percentage of engineers in Silicon Valley were trained in Indian Institutes of Technology is not to be accounted for in a putative Theory of Engineering.  

Engineering is an applied field. And so is TS. Once the allegedly autonomous questions and answers of TT are assigned their proper place, its true nature reveals itself clearly: it is applied linguistics par excellence. Lest I should be accused of invoking some mysterious definition of applied linguistics, let me make it clear that I use the term in the straightforward sense of a study of language mediated by practical concerns. I should also underline the fact that I do NOT use it in the sense in which advocates of this or that kind of linguistics use it. For them, it is the
application of their favourite kind of linguistics to this or that practical concern, most commonly language teaching.

It is necessary at this point to respond to textbook writers like Delisle (1988), who, with their very limited knowledge of linguistics, claim to present something that departs from a grounding in linguistics. Delisle finds linguistics too abstract— one wonders what sense it makes to say that physics is too abstract—and presents what he calls an interpretive approach to translation. He is, to use an expression post-modernists would like expunged from English, simply wrong, and on two counts. He is wrong because the kind of linguistics he must find too hard to understand is NOT the only kind of linguistics there is, and even if it were, the burden of making it accessible to those he hopes would buy his textbook would be inescapably upon him. He does not seem to realise that linguistics is simply a metalanguage in which one talks about language and that one cannot in fact talk about facts of language without employing a metalanguage. Now the metalanguage one chooses may be formalist, functionalist, or of some other type, but the idea that facts of language can be described or talked about exclusively in ordinary language is an illusion. Predictably even textbook writers like Delisle must and do rely on linguistics. And despite their theoretical stance, so do, as they must, social-anthropologists like Le Page.

It is indeed surprising to see an author who claims to “set forth an original method for training students to translate pragmatic texts” (emphasis mine) criticise Nida for dealing with “a specific type of translation” (1988: 40). No less surprising is his pedagogically relativized evaluation metric, which leads him to refer to Catford as “of little help”. One wonders what he would have to say about the theoretical papers of Pauli or Einstein! If the concrete realities of language, so dear to him, can be talked about in a way that he would consider NOT abstract he is obviously free to show us the way. But when we look at what he proposes, we find that it is hopeless indeed. It is one thing to point out that linguistics has very often restricted itself to the sentence but quite another to claim, as Delisle does, that linguists analyse sentences and translators analyse discourses (1988: 42). One wonders why not many translators or translation theorists are ever mentioned in Micro-Discourse Analysis (or Textology) or Macro-Discourse Analysis. From Dressler to Zimmermann is a long list, but one that does not contain the names of too many translators! Pace Delisle, Discourse Analysis, particularly of the micro-variety is very solidly a sub-field of linguistics, and has been for a very long time.

Better textbook writers know this, and use linguistics of all stripes to their full advantage. They actually go beyond acceptance. Consider the textbook on translation by Mona Baker (1992). It is interesting to note that most of the references at the end of it are to linguists, and she does not cite them because she has bones to pick with them. It is not only an excellent textbook for translators but also an
excellent introduction to linguistics; I would have no hesitation in using it to train those who plan to become linguists. The hands-on translation graduate-students who do not know the distinction between entailment and presupposition and are frightened even by linguists like Lyons should read Baker to get the distinction, for they cannot do without it. I am NOT arguing that teachers of translation should become linguists, but I AM arguing that the teachers of translation and TS scholars who argue against linguistics seem quite unfamiliar with what they are talking about. And I am certainly NOT defending linguistics as she is, any more than Bohm or Penrose is defending physics as she is. What I find vulgar is NOT thoughtful vulgarizations like Baker but the thoughtless theoretical postures of vulgarizers like Delisle. Not too many facts OF translation can be described or presented without using some meta-language furnished by some linguistics.

Consider the Table of Contents of Baker: Introduction and six chapters on Equivalence (word, above the word, grammatical, textual (2 chapters), and pragmatics). She draws on formal, functional, textual, and corpus linguistics and brings the fruits of these explorations to students who have to learn the art, science, and craft of translation. Her book also contains several insights, such as her remarkably clear and valuable definition of morphology as “the way in which the form of the word changes to indicate specific contrasts in the grammatical system” (1992:83), which even linguists could benefit from. And that is exactly the way it should be. Needless to add that despite contemporary TT’s dissatisfaction with equivalence and the contemporary translation-student’s apathy to and ignorance of linguistics, it is equivalence (or lack thereof) and linguistics all the way down (or up)!

Not to accept the connection I have just outlined is to endorse the total disconnect between the theory, practice, and teaching of translation that actually seems to exist. The TS complaint that contemporary linguistics is too abstract strikes me as too uninformed. Even if the linguistics that IS abstract were the only kind of linguistics there was, the complaint wouldn’t make any more sense than the complaint that physics is too abstract. In using the part of physics that one needs to use, one uses it without launching an attack on the abstractness of physics or of mathematics, its meta-language.

Contemporary TT seems to me not to be a theory of translation but an exploration that seems to assume that the various uses – literal and metaphorical – of the word ‘translation’; and of the techniques employed in what ordinary English normally refers to as translation, delimit an interesting domain of which one can construct a theory. Although there is no need to deny the joy such an exploration may bring or to reject the random insights it may be studded with, there IS reason to contest the interpretation of such an amorphous exploration as a domain of inquiry which one can construct a theory of. And it should be obvious that
deconstruction and unanchored construction do not amount to unification. It is perhaps a final irony that a maximalist enterprise devoted to non-autonomy ends up constructing something that seems maximally non-autonomist! In pleading that one of the new ways in which translation and TT need to be conceptualized is to revisit and renew the old ways in which they used to be seen, I hope that I have not taken undue liberties with the privilege accorded a guest-contributor.7

7. Discussions with Thiru Kandiah make me painfully aware of the fact that a refusal to listen to my plea may well be the unmarked response to the Hobsonian choice of capitulation I may appear to be offering TT. ‘Magar phir bhi’ [even then] as Firaq would have said, essentially because my intention is to simply invite scholars in TS not to give up on explanatory adequacy in their search for a space they want to allocate themselves.
PART II

Writing and translation
Translation and displacement
The life and works of Pierre Menard

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This article takes off from Borges’s fable of a recension of Don Quixote corresponding word for word to the original. The total imitation is also the most original recreation conceivable: the author of the new version must have utterly steeped himself in the original, yet his recension takes place in radically different conditions of being.

This extreme instance of translation suggests how translation itself is the most extreme of a phased range of redactions traced by a work in course of composition, transmission and reception. Every work thereby becomes the site of an ongoing intertextual process involving works before and after itself. This article uses translation as the symbol or epitome of this whole range of textual transactions.

Keywords: afterlife of texts; translation as reception; intertextuality; mediatory and creative translation

It was George Steiner (1975: 70–73) who first appropriated for translation theory that great allegory of textual creation, Borges’s short story “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote”.¹ Menard, we may recall, set out to compose Don Quixote anew: not to imitate it, nor – perish the thought! – simply to transcribe it, but to so form his experiential and creative faculties that his entirely original text, generated from his own mental being, would correspond with Cervantes’s, word for word. His work is both the ultimate exercise in tautology and the ultimate creative adventure. Nothing could be more derivative; nothing could be more original.

So suggestive is the story for theorists of translation that we need to be reminded that it was not written for their benefit. Neither Menard nor his narrator

¹ I have used the text in Jorge Luis Borges, Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings, trans. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby.
sees the second *Quixote* as a translation: rather as a profoundly original work, identical with Cervantes’s and yet radically different in purport. The issues that emerge from the fable are fundamental questions of reception, composition and intertextuality.

We write what we read. This is a necessary corollary of all reader-response theories. Today we readily think of the reader as activating and rounding off a textual process that the titular author has done no more than initiate. But that initiation is activated by the author’s own reception of earlier texts: he is a reader before he is a writer. The text that inaugurates a sequence of reception is itself the culmination of an earlier one. Thus a ‘dead’ author impregnates the reception not only of his own work but also of others further down the line. The reader might have power over the proximate text, but that rests on the fossil deposits of earlier reception by others. The bones from those older strata live and even rattle, for those who have ears to hear.

Moreover, we live what we read and may subsequently write. This doctrine is entirely compatible with killing off the author. Who can miss the Wildean life-follows-art strain in Barthes’s (1977a: 144) classic incitement to such homicide:

*Proust gave modern writing its epic. By a radical reversal, instead of putting his life into his novel, [...] he made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model; [...] Charlus does not imitate Montesquiou but [...] Montesquiou [...] is no more than a secondary fragment, derived from Charlus.*

Writing, says Barthes, liberates language into a free transpersonal space:

*For him [Mallarmé], for us too, it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...], to reach that point where only language acts, ‘performs’, and not ‘me’ [...]. (1977a: 143)*

* [...] For him [‘the modern scriptor’], [...] the hand, cut off from any voice, [...] traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself [...]. (1977a: 146)*

Within this space or ‘field’, the text changes its contours as it passes from writer to reader. The dissemination of the text is an endless series of *trans-lationes*, carryings across – trans-positions in more senses than one: an overall change of site or context, but also a reconstitution of the elements. Hence the text a reader reads is not the text that the author wrote, nor that read by any other reader.

Outwardly, of course, it is always one and the same text. It differs endlessly from itself by acquiring endlessly variable, endlessly unique ‘unwritten’ adjuncts, to borrow Wolfgang Iser’s term (1988:213). Interestingly, Borges’s narrator al-
ludes to Menard’s *Quixote* as his ‘invisible’ work. His meaning, of course, is that it cannot be visually distinguished from Cervantes’s. But in Iser’s sense, the second *Quixote*, though written by Menard, is at the same time the ‘unwritten’ creation of Cervantes. It extends the life of the earlier text in the most total and sustained way. In Walter Benjamin’s term (1969:71), it most fully vindicates the ‘afterlife’ of Cervantes’s work.

The ‘invisible’ activations of the text generated by outwardly passive readers culminate in Menard’s comprehensive response. The fact that Menard’s work coincides exactly with Cervantes’s does not indicate Menard’s intellectual passivity; rather, his hyperactive engagement with the earlier writer’s work. But because his creation, like that of passive readers, is ultimately ‘invisible’, it can typify and even epitomise the latter’s responses. With no outward change of state, a text thus enters on an indefinitely prolonged and varied extension of its being.

Needless to say, the ‘afterlife’ of the text also embraces highly visible formal reworkings and applications: the adaptation, the ‘imitation’ in the neoclassical sense, the cento, the allusion, and those Derridean phenomena, the ‘spectre’ and the ‘trace’. No such recasting can take place without an intimate engagement with the original. At the same time, recasting assumes a new shaping factor, an autonomous source of authorial energy. The originating text does not glide along securely in the fourth dimension while preserving its bearings in the other three. Instead, its elements are more deeply stirred through a visible translocation. The verbal medium and its frame are overtly modified or replaced.

Translation in the accustomed sense, out of one language into another, is the most radical of these displacements. Its function might be more clearly understood in the light of other, less extreme reworkings.

In this respect, Menard’s other *oeuvres* offer an illuminating guide (see *Labirynth*, 63–64). The reincarnated *Quixote* is by no means his only work. He has a ‘visible’ corpus of nineteen items, many of them published. Two are translations of actual Renaissance works, Roy Lopez de Segura’s treatise on chess and Quevedo’s *Aguja de navegar cultos*. Another is a ‘transposition’ of Valéry’s *Le Cimitière marin* into alexandrines. The language of the last presumably remains French; the ‘transposition’ is formal, metrical. It is of a piece with the paraphrases and formal reconstructions that have formed a recognised humanist exercise since the Renaissance.

The point of such an exercise is presumably to see how a work reacts (in the chemical sense) to a different formal environment. This obviously assumes an affinity or continuity between the two environments: to put it another way, the

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2. The term is used by implication. Menard’s other writings, in manuscript or print, are described contrastively as his ‘visible’ work.
recognition that one environment is basically compatible with the other, so that a work can operate in both. As Steiner points out (1975:70), more than one of Menard’s works explore questions of universal language and universal logic. Menard also composed “an examination of the essential metrical laws of French prose”, as well as “a reply to Luc Durtain, who had denied the existence of such laws”. There is nothing revolutionary in the notion of prose metrics, but it is significant that Menard should interest himself in such matters. It adds another angle to his exploration of the amphibious, cross-modal life of texts.

But what precisely is the status of ‘the text’ or ‘the work’ in such contexts? All notions of recasting, and still more of translation, are problematic in that they challenge the orthodoxy of total oneness of form and content. Can _Le Cimetièremarin_ remain that poem if rendered in alexandrines? What is the relation of the new version to the original? In what sense is it a recasting ‘of’ that work? Is it the merest nominalism to evoke the same title in alluding to visibly different texts?

Similarly, how can one translate a work without making of it a different work? And if different, does it constitute a translation of that work? Is ‘the work’ a transcendent entity that can assume various forms and vehicles without integrating with any, like a ‘skin’ of paint that can be transferred from one canvas to another?

Clearly, such a notion is inadmissible in any present-day aesthetic. Rather, we would hold, the translator’s challenge is to render in a new language material uniquely and organically integrated into another. We assume the uniqueness of linguistic structures and systems. And yet – or therefore – we translate.

Here lies the difference between the lambent literary afterlife of passive or ‘unwritten’ reception and that formalised in translation and recasting. In the former, endless variants and extensions are worked upon an outwardly unvarying text. In the latter, conversely, a basic formal disparity is employed to show up an essential integrity or continuity of being. The former admits the many while externally remaining one; the latter externally unfolds the many but presents them as aspects of the one.

That last sentence has a quasi-mystical ring about it – certainly a quasi-Platonic ring. It validates the unspeakable suggestion that some core or essence of the work – shall we say the ‘content’ – exists independently of its contingent language or ‘form’: in other words, that there is an ‘idea’ of the work distinct from its formal embodiment. At the very least, the different versions of the work are seen as springing from the same stock. To translate (or to read a translation) is to affirm one’s conviction that something can be ‘carried across’ languages: that a verbal message does not inhere only in the words.

By thus displacing the text from the solid ground whence it drew its being – namely, its language, and a verbal structure employing that language – translation
releases it in a spatial and temporal limbo. It thereby repeats the liberation of language itself through the process of composition, on which I have cited Barthes above. It is now free to acquire new value through new sites and associations. The reception of the original text may ramify as endlessly, but is limited by the unvarying verbal form and restricted lines of transmission: it is umbilically connected to its first conditions of being. A translation traverses a wider range of contexts and adaptive verbal strategies. It confronts the source-text with an alternative state of the latter’s being (and hence all other possible states). It thereby outlines something of the full latent scope of the work, envisions what it could be in other verbal or fictive incarnations.

Incarnations cut across space and time. Translation extends a work’s area of operation by accommodating fractures and slippages in the trajectory of its dissemination. A translation involves a radical shift of lingual context, with concomitant shift of social and epistemic mores. As compared to unilingual transmission, it thus also implies a more radical shift of mental if not physical site, and of cultural time-scale if not calendar-time.

All this is too obvious to elaborate, but it has interesting results. For instance, a translation (like all formal reworkings) can alter the usual time-sequence of reception. An independent ‘original’ work of later date than the source-text can obviously affect a translation later than both. In translating Homer, I might use a possibility of language I came across in last week’s magazine: or, arguably, bring out a possibility in Homer’s language that would otherwise have been unrealised. Thus T. S. Eliot can actually influence Shakespeare, as David Lodge’s drunken academic in Small World claimed. A simplistic, sequential chronology yields to intricate, hypertextual interaction between an indefinitely wide corpus of texts. Borges (1970:71) credits Menard with “a new technique [...] of the deliberate anachronism and the erroneous attribution”:

> This new technique, whose applications are infinite, prompts us to go through the Odyssey as if it were posterior to the Aeneid and the book Le jardin du Centaure of Madame Henri Bachelier as if it were by Madame Henri Bachelier. [...] To attribute the Imitatio Christi to Louis Ferdinand Céline or to James Joyce, is this not a sufficient renovation of its tenuous spiritual indications?

Bachelier writing Bachelier is a particularly intricate prospect: a novelty of textual synthesis where neither work nor author changes formal identity. In its insistence on textual reordering despite a total stasis of circumstance, and intertextual encounters within the formal confines of a single work, it goes well beyond Menard writing Cervantes.

Intertextuality implies deconstruction. It also implies critique. A translation draws out from within the work something other than itself, other than its pris-
tine and recognised being, other than what it ‘is’; yet something also within itself, something that it indeed is. It reconstitutes and relocates the original more radically and irrefutably than in any other form of ‘afterlife’; thus it most openly challenges the terms of the source-text’s being. Derrida’s ‘structure of the double mark’ is relevant here (Derrida 1981:4):

[...] in a binary opposition, [where] one of the terms retains its old name so as to destroy the opposition to which it no longer quite belongs, to which in any event it has never quite yielded [...]. This structure itself is worked in turn: the rule according to which every concept necessarily receives two similar marks – a repetition without identity – one mark inside and the other outside the deconstructed system, should give rise to a double reading and a double writing.

The ‘old term’, as Derrida calls it, is here represented by the source-text, with the translation as its deconstructive binary. Yet the translation upholds the source-text, vindicates the latter’s rationale by its own existence. It shows up the limits of the original vis-à-vis its extended boundaries, yet validates the extension in terms of the original. It makes concrete a part of the work’s total promise which would otherwise have remained unrecorded.

This function acquires a special dimension in the case of auto-translation. Beckett or Nabokov produces parallel creations in two languages, where each version extends the other’s operational field. Rabindranath Thakur’s (Tagore’s) free English versions of his own poems are a recognised commentary and self-critique of the celebrated Bengali versions. But the principle applies to all translation. There is no ‘mere’ translator: the translator is a reader and, like all readers, a visualiser and critic of the work he translates. Unlike other readers, however, he leaves a record of his reading in an externally embodied version of the work.

Yet as with any other reader, his understanding cannot be total. The perfect translation, like Pierre Menard’s Quixote, would be invisible. The translator’s brief, limited at start by the language he works in, is further determined by his uniquely conditioned response. The potential he extracts from the work may equally be seen as bestowed by him upon the work, borne upon a ‘correspondent breeze’ (Wordsworth, The Prelude, 1850 text, Book I, line 35) that activates the source-material.

The spatial metaphor I have used so far sees the textual potential realised in translation as inherent in the source-text from the point of composition. This image may need modifying, again in hypertextual terms. A hypertext – above all the ultimate hypertext of the Internet – is finite and complete at any given moment, yet it is continually being extended; but then again, the infinitely extended corpus remains, at any given point and thus at all points, finite.
So too, one can conceive of every new language, every new translation – like every new matrix for formal recasting of any sort – as adding to the original construct. The same may be postulated of every reader’s response. From this view, the original work as issuing from the author is credited with no more than a receptability that any subsequent reader/recaster/translator can tap with the resources he brings to the exercise. The bounds of the original, however broad and indefinable, are not infinite: they are merely indefinitely extensible.

There is more to this redefinition than a change of metaphor. What is at issue is the role of the translator. If we see the translation as inherent in the source-text, the primacy of the original work is not challenged: the basic line of transmission is single and unidirectional, whatever intertextual complexities it may absorb. The hierarchic relation of ‘original’ writer and translator remains intact.

If, on the other hand, we see the translation as adding to the source-text from an independent resource base, the translator is placed more on a par with the original author. He is seen as an independent centre or vortex of compositional energy. The chief inflow to the vortex might be from the source-text; but this is subsumed in an intricate play of forces, the conflation of texts, time-planes and authorial personalities.

Pierre Menard radically extends and reorients Don Quixote, even though he does not introduce a single new word. He thus makes the reader, too, relive Quixote in radically new terms. As Borges demonstrates through quotation and exegesis, three centuries of thought and history are brought to bear upon the (outwardly unchanged) text, mediated through Menard’s distinctive intellect and personality. He brings a ‘correspondent breeze’ to play upon Cervantes’s pristine material. That breeze, like the Wordsworthian imagination, can become “a tempest, a redundant energy / Vexing its own creation” (The Prelude, Book I, lines 35–38). In practice, its impact is never ‘invisible’ like Menard’s on the Quixote. It builds up its distinctive text on a new lingual base with specific modifications of the original.

These two approaches to translation, the conservative and the additive, may also be called the mediatory and the creative. The translator can view himself as purveying the source-writer’s work to those lacking the source-language; or he may declaredly overwrite the source-text and disavow its controlling presence.

No translation adheres entirely to one norm or the other: the two models provide the notional poles of a scale of conformity. Actual textual practice does not provide any reliable clue. Ezra Pound’s translations were made, by and large, with a goal of extreme fidelity in mind. He reports an almost Menard-like submergence in the pattern of life and thought implicit in the original work:
I have lived with these sonnets and ballads daily month in and month out, and
have been daily drawn deeper into them and daily into contemplation of things
that are not of an hour. (in Kenner 1953: 24–25)

Yet the outcome of this absorption is to induce formal experiment, creative ad-
ventures that redefine and extend the possibilities of the target language. Hugh
Kenner brings out the implications of the practice:

Ezra Pound never translates ‘into’ something already existing in English. The
Chinese or Greek or Provençal poem being by hypothesis something new, if it
justifies the translator’s or the reader’s time [...] something correspondingly new
must be made to happen in English verse [...]. A good translation seems like a
miracle because one who can read the original can, so to speak, see the poem
before the poet writes it, and marvel at the success of his wrestle to subdue his
own language to the vision; but Pound has always written as if to meet a test of
this kind, in a spirit of utter fidelity to his material, whether a document or an in-
tuition [By ‘poet’ and ‘poem’, Kenner seems to mean the translator and his work.].
(“Introduction”, Kenner 1953: 9, 10)

The ‘faithful’ and the ‘creative’ translation can be one and the same, if the intention
is merely to translate. But the urge to translate is inevitably combined with other
redactive agenda, producing a displacement beyond that of language. It cannot
disavow those other agenda insofar as language cannot disavow its social and
epistemic environment, nor its contingent specificities of form. There is no ‘mere’
translation: it always incorporates the total process of textual generation.

Formal translation cannot be equated with other processes of composition,
because of the very distinctive nature of its intertextual encounter: it prioritises
a single source-text and avows a basic though greatly variable attachment to it.
Nonetheless, this generative bias can highlight certain functions operating in the
creation of all texts. That is why the study of translation has to be central rather
than peripheral in any understanding of the textual process.

Menard’s Quixote is uniquely important in absorbing the source-text with
unrealisable fullness, so that total reliance turns into total originality. Only a hy-
pothetical model like this could illustrate the case: no actual work can encode
intertextuality in this way. Menard himself achieves no more than two chapters
and a fragment of a third: as he remarks in a letter to the narrator, it would not
be difficult to complete the work, only he would have to be immortal to carry it
out. Even a fictitious author cannot readily be endowed with this improbable state
of being. But Borges’s fable takes us a daring distance into the realm of mental
encounters where texts transform themselves.
Mark Twain vs. William-Little Hughes

The transformation of a great American novel*

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Mark Twain's famous novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was translated into French by William-Little Hughes in 1886. An analysis of Twain's work based on Jim's dialect, Black English, shows that the author was subverting the traditional view of the slave as submissive or unintelligent. In his novel Twain condemns white society of his time and proclaims the humanity of black people. Hughes's translation project, however, denies the black character's humanity, reinforcing racial prejudices and white domination. Whether through his speech, his actions, or the narrator's description, Jim is portrayed in Hughes's translation as a submissive and foolish servant. The aesthetic similarity of choices is maintained on a transformational level: additions and omissions are made with the same goal in mind.

**Keywords:** *Huckleberry Finn;* literary translation; Black English; translator's project; signifying mosaic

When Mark Twain published *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* more than a hundred years ago, who could have predicted that the story of a black man fleeing slavery, accompanied by a white boy, would become one of the greatest American novels? After it was first published, the book was criticised for its coarse language and vulgarity; today the book's use of the word 'nigger' is at the centre of controversy. This raises the question as to how to read the novel. Is it racist or not? Our answer to that question is unequivocal: *Huckleberry Finn* is not a racist work; on the contrary, it deconstructs racist ideas through irony and humour. What happens to this ideological standpoint when the novel is translated into another language? Surprisingly, there has been very little research on the translations.

* The author wishes to thank Paul St-Pierre for his reading of this text, his relevant comments and useful corrections, and his translations of the French quotations.
into French of *Huckleberry Finn*. The following article will focus on Twain’s novel and the first French translation, by William-Little Hughes, published in France in 1886, one year after the novel appeared in the United States. My analysis will focus mainly on Jim’s character, paying particular attention to Jim’s speech, a sociolect referred to here as Black English, and its transformation when the novel is translated into French.

Twain’s text, both in English and in French, is being read here as a *signifying mosaic* (Lavoie 2002). By signifying mosaic I am referring to a semiotic reading which attempts to reveal the motivations underlying diverse textual elements – dialogues, narration, description – and the coherence uniting them (all the pieces of the puzzle are put together to expose the signification of the author’s, or the translator’s, project). To put it differently, the text as a whole is being considered, and not just certain parts of it, with the consequence that Black English speech is not being analysed independently from the textual elements surrounding it since these elements contribute to its meaning and power. The objective is, on the one hand, to bring to the fore Mark Twain’s original literary project, and, on the other, to confront it with the translation project of the first French translator, William-Little Hughes. This concept of *translation project* is borrowed from Antoine Berman, who used it in his study on John Donne (1995: 76); it refers to the systematic nature of translation choices materialized in the text.

### What it means to speak black English

Irony is the literary device on which Mark Twain’s novel is based. It is well known that in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* almost everything has a double meaning – or is a *Twaining*, as the literary critic Victor Doyno has put it (1991: 102). Behind the expression of explicitly racist ideas, Twain actually criticises the society of the southern United States. Richard K. Barksdale, who published a study of the novel in the volume entitled *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, describes the novel in the following words: “Thus Twain’s novel, by motive and intention, is really an ironic appraisal of the American racial scene circa 1884” (1992: 54). Steven Mailloux, through a Bakhtinian reading of Twain’s work, arrived at the same conclusion:

> Difference is the essence of debate, and so it is no accident that the debates staged throughout *Huckleberry Finn* are almost always arguments over *differences* [...]. Dramatized arguments again and again break down all these differences or overturn their hierarchies. Wise men become fools, Frenchmen should talk like Americans, what is socially approved is morally reprehensible, the inferior slave
is superior to his master. Although whites don’t want to ‘mix’ with blacks, at least one black man proves ‘wholesomer’ than most whites. (1985: 124)

What is more, Twain was no fan of morality. For him, an author should not tell people what to do; a book should not be explicitly didactic. On the surface, his novel is a successful application of these rules. Beneath the surface, however, it expresses a very serious meaning: it denounces the white slaveholders of Twain’s time. This denunciation expresses itself through many elements, among which is the use of Black English. It will be argued, here, that black speech assumes a subversive function in the novel, both aesthetically and ideologically.

On the ideological level, Jim’s dialect serves to confront racist ideas propagated about black people at the end of the nineteenth century, most notably the idea that slaves were not human beings. Aesthetically, as well, Twain’s use of black speech goes against the dominant trends of his time, certain authors of the period using black speech to ridicule the character and to make the reader laugh. This was the case in the plantation novel tradition, represented by authors such as James Fenimore Cooper (The Spy, 1821), William Gilmore Simms (The Yemassee, 1835), John Pendleton Kennedy (Swallow Barn, 1832), Thomas Nelson Page (In Ole Virginia, “Marse Chan”, 1887), and Edgar Allan Poe (“The Gold Bug”, 1843). Black speech was used in these and other works to elicit a condescending attitude on the part of the reader towards the character using that speech. Twain, however, releases his character from these aesthetic limits. Jim is not portrayed as a buffoon, as a stupid or submissive man, as a big child, or as a character made ridiculous by his speech. Using different strategies, Twain undermines this literary model, constantly reaffirming the humanity of the black characters.

The characterisation of Jim is multidimensional; he has many positive attributes – he is intelligent, perceptive, serious, kind, and generous – all qualities which attest to his humanity. This characterisation is shown both through Jim’s dialogue and through his actions. Here, my analysis is based on Gillian Lane-Mercier’s studies of the use of dialogue in the novel. Lane-Mercier has shown that dialogues play an important role in the novel, that they advance the narration and description (1990: 56).

Represented as Black English, Jim’s speech signals his identity from the very outset. It is riddled with linguistic signs that reveal his social identity: phonetic signs, for example the replacement of the [th] sound by the letter [d]; morphological signs, such as the verbal phrase I knows instead of I know; and finally, purely visual signs, such as what is called eye dialect (Ross 1989:99), in which words are spelled differently but sound the same (as in was, spelled w-u-z).

It is also important to point out that Huck’s speech is not standard either. One of the most significant linguistic signs in his speech is also visual: the letter [c]
in the word *civilized* is replaced by the letter [s]. This reveals a great deal about Twain’s project. First of all, through this orthographic mistake, the author is attacking the bourgeoisie, which encouraged a standard use of language; secondly, he is directly attacking the so-called ‘civilized’ ways of a slaveholder society. Twain is implicitly asking how people who practice slavery can consider themselves civilized.

Jim’s speech contains many vernacular signs, but it is not ridiculed by a narrator using standard English. On the contrary, Huck’s speech also shows his social origins: he is a young poorly educated white boy.¹ This aesthetic choice represents a real innovation in Twain’s literary time; usually, Black English was contrasted with standard speech. Twain chooses to abolish this hierarchy. David Carkeet, who has studied the novel’s dialects, writes:

> For purposes of discussion, Huck’s dialect can be taken as the norm from which other dialects, to varying degrees, depart. [...] Since Clemens wrote the novel in Huck’s dialect, that dialect must have been uppermost in his mind. In a sense it is the “standard” dialect of the novel. (1991 [1979]: 113)

For his part, David R. Sewell notes that:

> From the perspective of Standard English, Huck’s speech is riddled with errors. But that perspective is impossible to maintain during a reading of *Huckleberry Finn*; since Huck is the narrator, his speech becomes normative for the duration of the novel. (1987: 85)

Black speech, as represented in the novel, is powerful: Jim argues cleverly with Huck Finn; he has authority over him; what he says can carry an emotional charge (see the example below of Huck and Jim’s discussion relating to the wisdom of Solomon). These are all attributes which serve to attest to the humanity of Jim. Twain subverts the racist idea which denies humanity to black people, and Jim’s character expresses his humanity precisely through that form of speech which would usually be used to ridicule and dehumanize him.

Other textual elements reinforce the indictment of slavery contained in the novel. Both the speech and the actions of Miss Watson are mocked; although she

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¹. Here are the first lines of the novel. Huck is speaking and his speech contains numerous syntactical and grammatical errors: “You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” but that ain’t no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied, one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly – Tom’s Aunt Polly, she is – and Mary, and the Widow Douglas, is all told about in that book – which is mostly a true book; with some stretchers, as I said before” (*Huckleberry Finn*: 7).
is a religious woman, she shows no sign of compassion and thinks of selling Jim to a slave trader who would separate him from his family. Huck’s father, pap Finn, is representative of poor racist whites and is also discredited through his speech and actions (he threatens to kill his own son). Finally, Huck, for his part, rejects his society, saying three times that he does not want to be *sivilized* by it. Again, Twain mocks white society by writing *sivilized* instead of the standard *civilized*.

Twain’s literary and ideological project can be summed up as having a double objective: to condemn white society of his time and to claim humanity for black people.

*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn through the eyes of William-Little Hughes*

The French translator ultimately had two choices: he could either re-express Twain’s views and opinions or erase the ideological stance contained in the novel. Before commenting on the translator’s choices, a few preliminary remarks are necessary. My reading of the translation by William-Little Hughes is based on the premise that every translation is, by its very nature, a transformation. This principle has been explained and demonstrated by many scholars in the field of translation studies, most notably Lawrence Venuti (1995), André Lefevere (1992b), and Antoine Berman (1985). The analysis of the translation which follows has been based more specifically on concepts defined by Barbara Folkart, who has shown that the differences between an original text and its translation provide access to the translator’s options:

[...] la traduction n’est jamais une transformation nulle. Elle ajoute toujours de la valeur, crée inévitablement des distorsions (bruit), des décalages ou des sollicitations (modulation) qui permettent de toucher du doigt à la ré-énonciation, de mesurer le décalage énonciatif qui se creuse entre la voix de l’instance de ré-énonciation et celle de l’instance d’énonciation, d’apprécier le dire du traducteur en flagrant délit de conflit avec celui de l’auteur. De ce conflit d’énonciations témoignent les indices de ré-énonciation dont est entaché tout système traductionnel [...]. (1991:127)

[...] a translation is always a transformation. It always adds value, inevitably creates distortions (noise), differences or solicitations (modulation) which make the re-enunciation visible, make it possible to measure the enunciative distance between the voice of the instance of re-enunciation and that of the enunciation, to apprehend the expression of the translator in open conflict with that of the author.
This conflict between enunciations becomes evident in the indices of re-enunciation marking every translational system (...)]

The main objective of my analysis has been to determine how the shifts which appear in the translation are interconnected, how small and sometimes almost invisible changes form a coherent pattern, and to what degree these changes are similar. The similarity and coherence of these shifts provide access to the translator’s project, since they are interconnected, forming a signifying mosaic. They are coherent and significant in the text. In other words, shifts do not take place by accident but are part of a larger strategy; in this case, a strategy which denied humanity to the black character, reinforcing racial prejudices and white domination.

The first French translation of the novel was by an Irishman by the name of William-Little Hughes, who had previously translated *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, a few works by Edgar Allan Poe, and the works of John Habberton. The analysis of Hughes’s translation shows that it is based on a project which is the absolute opposite of that of the original novel. The coherence of the translator’s project expresses itself in two different ways: on a transformational axis, and on an aesthetic axis. The transformational axis refers to two different types of changes – additions and omissions – and the aesthetic axis involves changes in the dialogues, the narration and the description.

In the dialogues, the most obvious and significant addition in the translation is the way Jim addresses Huck Finn. Many times in the French text he calls him *massa Huck*, while never once in the original does Jim address Huck Finn as *master Huck, mars Huck, Mister Huck, Misto Huck* or *Maussa Huck*; on the contrary, he calls him *chile* and *honey*. In the translation, then, Jim is relegated to a subordinate role. He becomes a submissive character and is portrayed as a servant, who calls his master *massa*. In the original text, however, he represented a father figure for Huck Finn, being both authoritative and kind.

In addition to the fact that Jim calls Huck *massa Huck* in the French version, he uses the formal form of address (the pronoun *vous*), whereas Huck uses the informal form *tu* to address Jim. It must be stated that the two forms of address, *vous* and *tu*, do not necessarily indicate dominant versus dominated types of relationships, but considering the global system of choices made by the translator, these forms of address are an explicit sign of social hierarchy. The same principle applies to the designation *massa Huck* used by Jim: such an expression is not necessarily used in mockery; its value depends on the other strategies that appear in the text. In Hughes’s translation, the forms of address and the expression *massa Huck* are similar to other choices which contribute to attributing to Jim a lower status and to ridiculing his character.
Hughes adds elements to the dialogue for the purpose of insisting on the portrayal of Jim as a servant. For example, when Jim tells Huck Finn that he escaped from Miss Watson’s home, Huck replies: *Jim... je ne me serais jamais attendu à ça de ta part* (*Les aventures de Huck Finn*: 9) [Jim, I would never have thought that you could do such a thing.] This line is not in the original text. And Jim replies: *Je n’aurais pas mieux demandé que de rester* (50) [I would have liked nothing better than to stay there]. Another line which is not to be found in the original novel. This dialogue invented by the translator serves to support slavery; implicitly, the translator is saying that when slaves are treated well, they do not want to free themselves.

Jim is submissive not only in his words in the French text; he is also submissive in his actions. On a narrative level, Jim acts in ways which show that he is in Huck’s service or even in that of other white characters. Thus, Hughes introduces a long passage at the beginning of the novel in which Jim carries a letter to Tom Sawyer on behalf of Huck Finn (*Les aventures de Huck Finn*: 5). This scene serves to show that Jim is being portrayed as a servant, as Huck’s servant. Moreover, the fact that it appears at the very beginning of the translation is also significant; the reader is promptly led to believe in the way Jim is characterised. In relation to such additions, passages in the original text which go against Jim’s new characterisation are omitted, giving the text in French greater coherence. Accordingly, when Huck and Jim are doing something together in the original novel – such as preparing the meals, or riding the raft – the French translator leaves out Huck, keeping only Jim, so that he alone cooks for the others, sews clothes, or hides the raft in the bushes.

Finally, in the French text, the description by the narrator (Huck) also contributes to portraying Jim as inferior: Jim is said to be superstitious (in the original version Jim uses superstition to get his way, whereas in the translated version it depicts him as naïve and irrational since Huck mocks his beliefs); Jim is also described as being stupid (he has to be told what to do, he forgets to do things) and lazy (he prefers to sleep rather than work, he would love to sit around and do nothing – see the example below), while Huck is presented as more logical and sensible (he, alone, analyses situations, gives his opinions, and makes decisions).

It is also worth noting that other characters are also changed in the translation to make them more coherent with the new message it carries. This is the case with Miss Watson, who changes from an old shrew in the original to become an understanding and generous old woman in the translated text. Huck becomes reasonable, but also domineering and condescending towards Jim, and, most importantly, Huck accepts to become civilized.

The example provided below will show many of the new attributes of Jim’s personality. The passage contains a dialogue between Huck and Jim. The charac-
ters begin to talk about kings, and what they do for a living, and end up talking about the story of Solomon. It is important to note that neither Huck nor Jim, in the English text, really know what they are talking about. They have heard of the story, but neither of them really knows what message it is trying to get across.

It should also be noticed that in the original Jim gets to talk about children, a topic which is important and familiar to him. Implicitly, he compares Solomon, who was about to cut the child in half, to slaveholders, who did not hesitate to separate family members from each other. In other words, he is telling his own story, since he himself has been separated from his wife and children.

In the French text, however, things are different. Jim is portrayed as lazy and stupid. Contrary to the original, Jim’s voice in the translation has no power; it fails to express his ideas on monarchy and, implicitly, on slavery. Huck, on the other hand, now understands the real meaning of Solomon’s story, so the gap between the two characters has become even greater. In the example, Jim also talks less than Huck, a change which is coherent with the rest of the translator’s choices. Finally, it is important to notice that in the translated text the choices which appear in the narration confirm those in the dialogues: in both parts of the text Jim is shown to lack intelligence.

In the first excerpt, Jim and Huck are talking about a king’s salary. Jim has just asked how much a king earns, to which Huck replies:

“Get?” I says; “why, they get a thousand dollars a month if they want it; they can have just as much as they want; everything belongs to them.”
“Ain’ dat gay? En what deygottodo, Huck?”
“They don’t do nothing! Why how you talk. They just set around.”
“No – is dat so?” [...] (Huckleberry Finn: 64)

This becomes in the French text:

– Combien il gagne? Rien du tout. Il prend ce qu’il veut — mille dollars par mois et même davantage, si cela ne lui suffit pas.
– Bah! il aurait de la peine à dépenser mille dollars par mois. Et qu’à-t-il à faire, massa Huck?
– En voilà une question! Est-ce que tu te figures qu’il est obligé de travailler?
– C’est un métier qui m’irait assez. [...] (Les aventures de Huck Finn: 88)

[– How much does he earn? Nothing. He takes what he wants — a thousand dollars a month, or more, if that’s not enough.
– Bah! He’d have a hard time spending a thousand dollars a month. And what does he have to do, massa Huck?
– What a question! Do you think he has to work?
– That’s a job I wouldn’t mind.]
Jim’s last remark, *C’est un métier qui m’irait assez*, meaning that a king’s job would be perfect for him, implies that he is lazy and hates to work. There was no such passage or implication in the original text. Finally, the expression *massa Huck* (Jim’s first line) is also added by the translator. The original text mentioned *Huck* only.

In the second part of the dialogue, Jim and Huck are now talking about Solomon, and Huck says:

“Well, but he [Solomon] was the wisest man, anyway; because the widow she told me so, her own self.”

“I doan k’yer what de widder say, he warn’t no wise man, nuther. He had some er de dad-fetches’ ways I ever see. Does you know ’bout dat chile dat he ‘uz gwyne to chop in two?”

“Yes, the widow told me all about it”. (*Huckleberry Finn*: 65)

In French, Huck makes the following remark:

– Mais non, mais non, Jim. Il n’y a jamais eu un roi plus sage; miss Watson me l’a dit.
– Elle peut dire ce qui lui plaira. Vous ne connaissez donc pas l’histoire du bébé qu’il voulait couper en deux?
– Si, je la connais, et elle prouve justement combien Salomon était sage. (*Les aventures de Huck Finn*: 89)

[– No, no, Jim. There never was a wiser king; Miss Watson told me that.
– She can say what she wants. Don’t you know the story of the baby he wanted to cut in half?
– Yes, I know it, and it shows how wise Solomon was.]

In Huck’s first line, *the widow* has been replaced by *miss Watson*. This change underlines the fact that the translator is giving Miss Watson a more positive role in his translation, making her nicer and more generous. Accordingly, it is somewhat natural that she should be given more space in the French text. Another and even more important addition has been made by the translator: Huck now says that the story proves how wise Solomon was, whereas in the original text he had only said that the widow had told him the story, without saying what the story meant. Jim, for his part, uses the formal form of address *vous*.

Finally, in the last part of this exchange about Solomon, Jim imagines what he would do with half a child. He says:

“[...] En what use is a half a chile? I would’n give a dern for a million un um.”

“But hang it, Jim, you’ve clean missed the point – blame it, you’ve missed it a thousand mile.”
“Who? Me? Go ’long. Doan’ talk to me ’bout yo’ pints. I reck’n I knows sense when I sees it; en dey ain’ no sense in sich doin’ as dat. De ’spute warn’t ’bout a half a chile, de ’spute was ’bout a whole chile; en de man dat think he kin settle a ’spute ’bout a whole chile wid a half a chile, doan’ know enough to come in out’n de rain. Doan’ talk to me ’bout Sollermun, Huck, I knows him by de back.”

“But I tell you you don’t get the point.”

“Blame de pint! I reck’n I knows what I knows. En mine you, de real pint is down furder – it’s down deeper. It lays in de way Sollermun was raised. You take a man dat’s got on’y one er two chillen; is dat man gwyne to be waseful o’ chillen? No, he ain’t; he can’t ’ford it. He know how to value’ em. But you take a man dat’s got ’bout five million chillen runnin’ roun’ de house, en it’s diffunt. He as soon chop a chile in two as a cat. Dey’s plenty mo’. A chile er two, mo’ er less, warn’t no consekens to Sollermun, dad fetch him!”

I never see such a nigger. If he got a notion in his head once, there warn’t no getting it out again. He was the most down on Solomon of any nigger I ever see. So I went to talking about other kings, and let Solomon slide. (Huckleberry Finn: 66)

In this passage, it is clear that Huck does not understand what is happening. He refers to Jim as nigger, while Jim does not fit the description at all. Rather than conforming to the image of the savage or contented slave, he is intelligent, perceptive, articulate and sensitive. Jim has actually won the debate. At three different occasions, he challenges the opinions of Huck and the widow (I doan k’yer what de widder say; Doan’ talk to me ’bout yo’ pints; Blame de pint!) thus contesting a certain code of conduct (one would expect a slave not to express his beliefs, and not to contradict the opinions of white people). Jim’s assertive position (I reck’n I knows sense when I sees it; I reck’n I knows what I knows) also manifests itself on the material level: he does not call Huck Finn honey or chile, but Huck; and does not refer to himself as Jim or ole Jim, but as I, thus showing his authority and confidence. Finally, he gets to tell Huck, even if only implicitly, that Solomon is a cruel man, who, by wanting to cut a child in two, is no different than slaveholders, who cut families in two by separating family members from each other.

In the French translation, Jim says (and note the formal form of address, vous, he uses when speaking to Huck):

– [...] Je vous demande un peu à quoi sert une moitié d’enfant? Je ne donnerais pas un liard d’un million d’enfants coupés en deux, ni vous non plus.
– Tu n’as rien compris à cette histoire, Jim.
In the last paragraph cited above, added in the French translation, the narrator Huck explains how he tried to get Jim to understand that Solomon had no intention of killing the child, that he just wanted to discover who was the real mother, but Huck could not succeed. Accordingly with such an addition, Jim says that he is no stupider than anybody else, meaning that he is, in fact, stupid, but no more so than other people. Finally, Jim’s long statement about rich people, family, children and slavery, has been omitted. The translator’s choices are, indeed, similar and coherent throughout the whole passage.

**Conclusion**

It appears then that, be it through his speech, his actions, or the description made by the narrator, Jim is portrayed in Hughes’s translation as a submissive and foolish servant, and this aesthetic similarity of choices is maintained on a transformational level: the additions and omissions are designed with the same goal in mind.

The French translation is based on a project, and its choices are of a similar nature throughout. It is this similarity which gives the reader access to the translation project, a project which is contrary to that of the original text. Instead of denouncing slavery, Hughes’s translation reinforces racist views and social discrimination.
My reading of the translation as transformation (Folkart) makes it possible to assemble the large and small shifts in the French text into a signifying mosaic, providing access to another text. It is this otherness of the text that I have tried to show, in order to understand the new meaning of the translation. Moreover, while discovering the translator’s project, this reading demonstrates that the translation contains a certain critique of the original (Berman), revealing, a contrario, as does a negative in photography, the structure and signification of the original novel. The transformations appearing in the translation act as a set of directions as to how to access the original text. Hughes’s options reveal textual particularities of the original which might otherwise not have been noticed. When, for example, the translator makes Jim say massa Huck, this very precisely underlines the fact that Jim does not refer to Huck in this way in the original version, which in turn leads the reader to ask why the translator (and the author) have made the decisions they have. All translations create changes and alter the original, and I believe that the main purpose of a translational analysis is to see how these shifts (no matter how small) are related to each other, and what new meaning they bring to the original text.
“A single brushstroke”
Writing through translation: Anne Carson

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Anne Carson is an internationally acclaimed poet and scholar of classical Greek. Her work is an illustration of the way in which a second language and tradition can nourish the writing process. Translation is principle and method in her work. In composing many of her poems, Carson flips back and forth between English and Classical Greek. But her aim is neither ethnographic nor philological: her work is a relentless confrontation of past and present, erudition and emotion, producing “dazzling hybrids”. To speak of such a work is to contribute to developing a vocabulary in translation studies that acknowledges the continuum of writing practices enabled by translation.

Keywords: interlingual writing; translation of poetry; creative interference; limits of translation; classical Greek

A Chinese proverb says: “Brush cannot write two characters with the same stroke.” Poet and Classical Greek scholar Anne Carson\(^1\) quotes this proverb only to disagree. A single brushstroke can indeed express two realities, she claims. One word can send us off in contrary directions. In *Men in the Off Hours* she gives as an example Aristotle’s theory of metaphor. He thinks that metaphors, like errors, seem to express two contrary ideas at the same time. The mind is at first puzzled by a disruption in meaning, at odds with itself. This interruption is a “valuable mental event”, because through it “unexpectedness emerges” (*Men*, 30–31). It is a short path from Chinese brushstrokes and Aristotle to Carson’s own work. Carson’s poetry brings together ideas and emotions in unusual ways. Translation is one of the brushstrokes she uses to bring together disparate realities, to gather them into the frame of a poem.

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1. The works by Anne Carson referred to here are the following:

Anne Carson has published, over the last fifteen years, numerous volumes of prize-winning poetry and essays: *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (1986); *Glass, Irony and God* (1992); *Plainwater: Essays and Poetry* (1995); *Economy of the Unlost* (1999); *Men in the Off Hours* (2000), *The Beauty of the Husband* (2001). She is the translator of *Electra* by Sophocles (2001) and a recent volume of translations of Sappho, *If Not, Winter* (2002). She has been called the most original of contemporary poets, and this reputation surely comes from the unusual ways through which she uses her knowledge as a scholar and a thinker to enrich the raw, often painful tales of love she tells. While the stories are embedded in the sensuous details of everyday life (especially the intensified observations of travel), her experiences resonate through additional frames of reference: historical figures, verse forms, writers with whom she enters into dialogue.

Anne Carson lives and teaches in Montreal. While she is not a native of Montreal and has classical Greek rather than French as her steady language partner, she is a quintessential Montreal writer. Her sensibility is translational. Her thought moves between forms and languages. And so her work is an illustration of the way in which translation can nourish the writing process, infusing the present with the emotions of another time. Translation is principle and method in her work. As a classical scholar, Carson flips back and forth between English and Classical Greek. But her aim as a translator is neither ethnographic nor philological: her goal is to rearrange and disturb the meeting of ancient and modern. Her work produces “dazzling hybrids” (Rae 2000), a relentless confrontation of past and present, narrative and exposition, erudition and emotion.

Carson explains Aristotle’s idea of metaphor as “valuable error” in a poem called “Essay on What I Think About Most” (*Men*, 31). That the essay is written as a poem is an indication of how Carson deploys her brushstrokes. The poem

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“Simonides and the Art of Negative Attention.” *Brick*, no. 65/66. 94–100. 2000b.

“Translation and Humanism”. Lecture, Liberal Arts College, Concordia University, November 29. 2000c.


has all the attributes of an essay (expository style, quotes and references) but as in every piece of Carson writing there is a surprising intrusion of the personal. The sudden switches in tone, the persistent alternation between registers, are Carson’s way of maintaining attention. Carson is suspicious of surfaces, of the ‘smoothness’ which sustains a stable world of meaning. She wants to create breaks in this surface, gaps that trip up the advancing mind. Translation is one of the means Carson uses to cause slowness. ‘Metaphorein,’ we remember, is one of the Greek words for translation.

Writing through translation: A brief note on vocabulary

A lot of unjustified criticism might have been spared translators over the years had we had a more precise and varied vocabulary to talk about the aims of translation. Translators are held to absolute standards. But each task of transmission has to set its own goals, find its place along a spectrum of possible intentions. We have not yet found a vocabulary to account for this range of choices, or what we might call degrees of translation. Except when we are talking about oral translation (which we call ‘interpretation’, as in ‘the conference interpreter’), the Western tradition has only one word to name all kinds of language transfer, as if translating a government job description or a nineteenth-century Native American poem were essentially the same task. Emphasis on this one term suggests that what matters about translation is exclusively the result – the conversion of one language into another, the existence of a replacement text. There is little concern for the motives or mental processes that lead to the result.

Other cultures and other eras have been more imaginative. In the Indian tradition, for example, translation is understood as a form of rewriting, and there are a number of terms used. The Romans, whose culture was essentially translated from Greek, also had a rich vocabulary. They distinguished between stricter and less literal translation, with terms like ‘vertō’, ‘converto’, ‘transverto’, ‘imitari’ (looser forms of translation) and ‘interpretor’ and ‘exprimere’ (closer translation), with later additions of ‘mutare’, ‘transfero’ and ‘translatare’ (Folena 1994:8–9). The medieval vocabulary was even more complex. It distinguished between the kinds of languages involved (translating from a noble to a vulgar language, or between vulgar languages – Don Quixote called this “translating among easy languages” (Folena 1994:13) and the kinds of texts involved (sacred, didactic, legal, historical or poetic). It was presumed that these different kinds of translation would not employ the same methods or seek the same ends. Paraphrasing and rewriting were permitted when vulgar languages were involved; literalness was called for when dealing with the ‘auctoritates’.
Our contemporary vocabulary (which was set in place in the early Renaissance) is impoverished and judgmental. Translations are literal or free, pragmatic or creative, faithful or treacherous. No wonder, then, that we are at a loss to account for looser forms of translation, where process takes over from equivalence. Where the translative impulse (the awareness of moving between two codes, two realities) becomes the motor for creative writing.

To say that there is overlap between translation and writing is not to suggest that the two terms be used interchangeably, but to explore the variety of practices which occur at this border – practices where translation tests its boundaries, overlapping with other categories of writing. “When is a translation no longer a translation but something else?” asks Umberto Eco (Eco 2001: 61). The words of the Other become a means – explicit or implicit – through which writing is generated. Language contact is put to creative use.

We might imagine a spectrum, indicating a range of interactions, where writing occurs ‘from’, ‘with’, ‘through’ and ‘over’ other texts. At the most minimal end of the spectrum, translation is apprenticeship or inspiration. Writers use translation to prepare themselves for their own work, or seek distraction or alternative voices in the work of writers they admire. One thinks of Proust translating Ruskin’s Stones of Venice, of George Eliot translating Strauss’s Life of Jesus, Marianne Moore translating Les Fables de Lafontaine. Translation contributes to the range of influences that shape the writing career. Certain academic traditions require the translation of a major work as part of the training: translation is the sign of an intellectual heritage, the basis for commentary and continuation, John Austin translating Frege, Gayatri Spivak translating Jacques Derrida.

At the other end of the spectrum, we find ‘interlingual writing’ which is informed by multilingualism (Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses, for instance, which abounds in bilingual puns, or Between by Christine Brooke-Rose, a novel written in various languages, or writing informed by ‘absent’ languages such as Nabokov’s novels or Beckett’s theatre). The overlap of languages is a distinguishing feature of post-colonial literature – writing with a double mode of address, impure language, drawn from the experiences of migration and cross-border migrancy. These include a repertoire of devices which include foreign words, periphrastic translations, bilingual puns, cultural references transposed. These cross-writing practices are becoming increasingly frequent in a culturally heterogeneous world. They draw attention to the instability of cultural borders and changing configurations of identity. Rather than acting exclusively as mediators, writer/translators create hybrid literary texts which are informed by a double culture. Their texts become a crossroads of sensibilities.

All across the spectrum, we find practices that express the translative impulse. A novelist like Gail Scott wants her English to be influenced by French and
she translates into English the formalist devices of her Francophone models. The poet Jacques Brault seeks out ways of blending his voice with that of others. His ‘nontranslations’ (*Poèmes des quatre côtés*), as well as the ‘renga’ he wrote with E. D. Blodgett (*Transfiguration*), are interlingual writings. These are forms of collaborative writing, which also cross languages. Erin Moure’s *Transelations*, her ‘versions’ of Fernando Pessoa, are also excessive forms of translation, through which the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa finds a new voice on the cusp of the new century, irreverent translations which are consciously bent towards invention. These are ludic exercises, similar in intent to parody or citation, where an original triggers off variations. Stranded between times and memories, these writers could be said to write translations which have no original, texts that fall somewhere between writing and translation, that use the gap between languages as a space of creativity.

The work of Anne Carson falls at this creative edge of the translational spectrum. She gives the fullest meaning to translation as an act of joining, drawing attention to the edge “between shadow and non shadow, seeking a point of insight that is to be found nowhere else” (“Chez L’Oxymoron”, 169). In making the past contemporary, in reconstituting a “body of fragments”, she leaves the points of juncture in evidence. So that other times and other languages run past each other, like “another day running under this one” (*Glass*, 8).

**A mutual undoing**

One of Carson’s favourite procedures is to double up a classical author with a modern partner – Thucydides with Virginia Woolf as thinkers of war, Stesichoros (born 650 BC) and Gertrude Stein, as iconoclastic users of adjectives, those “latches of being”, Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan. *Autobiography of Red* is a simultaneous telling of a Greek myth (the murder of Geryon by Herakles) and a modern tale of young love between a photographer and his boyhood lover, and their encounter later in life. These pairings startle us. But they are only one dimension of the kinds of thematic and generic collages which make up Carson’s work. Consider *Autobiography of Red*, with its extensive play of genres, including a preface, translated fragments, three appendices, a long romance in verse and a mock interview.

*Autobiography of Red*, like *Men in the Off Hours*, uses translation as a coupling device. Both volumes contain translations from classical authors, which are included as a separate section of the work. *Autobiography* offers Carson’s experimental translation of the *Geryoneis*. These fragments signal those parts of the story which Carson will develop in her own narrative coming later in the book.
In contrast to former versions, Carson’s version is stylistically more economical, eroticizing the border between mortality and immortality. Her translations are unconventional, “an act of composing elements from different epochs and speech genres, rather than an exercise in maintaining a uniform identity for the text across languages and periods” (Rae 2000:24).

Similarly, *Men in the Off Hours* “could be considered a meditation on translation – its potential for duplicating the kind of lyric experience readers have come to expect in poetry” (D’Agata 2000). The translations in the volume are from Catullus. Carson gives us the Latin titles of the poems, and translates these titles, in some cases quite literally,

inviting us to notice, figure out, or simply wonder where, to what extent, and why she has deviated from the original Latin [...] Another showcase of Carson’s utterly original experience of the world. [...] Here the scholar in Carson intends to advance the conversation about translation and appropriation and the contract of artistic license between critic and poet. Carson, the artist, on the other hand, is exploring the outer limits of lyric possibility. (D’Agata 2000)

These translations point to Carson’s compositional mode, the way in which she is continually bringing together bits of matter collected from the world. Observations, bits of anecdote, readings or musings, once transcribed, are drawn into Carson’s own poetic universe. Yet this is not simply a question of appropriation or of an omnivorous poetic appetite. Carson gives to translation the highest cognitive powers. Translation is “the process of thinking about thinking”, says Carson (2000c). The translator is

someone trying to get in between a body and its shadow. Translating [...] must line itself up with the solid body of the original text and at the same time with the shadow of that text where it falls across another language. Shadows fall and move. (Electra, 41)

Elsewhere Carson refers to translation as a “mutual undoing of each language into the other [...] You can’t capture, you can’t bring things across equally [...]” (Chen 2001:5).

Take for examples the screams of Electra in Sophocles’ play. According to Carson, the “bursts of sound expressing strong emotion (like OIMOI or O TALAINA or PHEU PHEU) furnished the translator with a very simple and intricable problem”. These words have generally been assumed to represent a “something formulaic body of ejaculatory utterance best rendered into English by some dead phrase like Alas! or Woe is me!” But Carson discovers that the screams contribute to her characterisation as “creatively as many other aspects of her diction. [...] Sophocles has invented for her a language of lament that is like listening to
an X-ray. Electra’s cries are just bones of sound”. ("Translator’s Foreword", 41–42) Electra has a private language of screams, an idiolect that is alien or unknown to other people. And so, in a translation marked by direct, unrhetorical speech, Carson leaves the screams in their original Greek, transliterating them for the English-language reader.

This decision is carefully justified in the foreword to the play, but it also connects with Carson’s previous writings about the female voice in Antiquity. Electra’s cries become another example of the way great female figures of ancient Greece, “make themselves objectionable by the way they use their voice”, like the “heart-chilling groan” of the Gorgon, the “highpitched and horrendous voices” of the Furies, the “deadly voice” of the Sirens, the babbling of Kassandra, the “fearsome hullabaloo” of Artemis, the “haunting garrulity” of the nymph Echo (“The Gender of Sound,” Glass, 120–121). Carson gives shape and weight to the screams. They stand out from the rest of the play, and allow us to hear how Electra is herself apart, outside the shared codes of communication. Her screams are a language both known and unknown, familiar and strange.

With

“What kind of withness is it?” Carson asks, in relation to John the Evangelist’s use of the Greek preposition in “The Word was with God.” The Greek preposition means “towards, upon, against, with, ready for, face to face, engaging, concerning, touching, in reply to, in respect of, compared with, according to, as accompaniment for” (“A Note on Method” in Economy, viii). The question serves to introduce The Economy of the Unlost. What kind of “withness” is she invoking by bringing together Simonides of Keos and Paul Celan? What do we gain, what do we lose, from such a yoking?

Economy is precisely the theme which Carson uses to explore the writing of Simonides and of Celan. Simonides is the first poet to have written for money, the inventor of epitaphs. Celan is a poet of extreme verbal economy, whose writing comes out of his experience of devastating personal and collective loss. Humans value economy, and yet we produce writing which has only the barest of links with the necessity of other kinds of production. What is the worth of words, asks Carson. And how do words count in the face of loss and death?

The prologue, entitled “False Sail”, is a good measure of the way in which Carson illustrates her theme. The image of the false sail is that of a message incorrectly sent, disastrously received. She finds this image in the work of both Celan and Simonides, Simonides recounting the original story of Theseus, Celan mentioning it in a poem called “Matière de Bretagne”. The story is as follows. Return-
ing from his adventure with the Minotaur, Theseus is to fly a separate white sail to notify his father of his success. But Theseus forgets to hoist this sail and, assuming that Theseus is dead, his father throws himself into the sea. Celan calls the sail “bloodsail”; Simonides calls the sail red. Both have a stake in the falsity of the false sail. Both build their poems around falsity and around negativity. “Negation links the mentalities of Simonides and Celan [... W]ords for ‘no’, ‘not’, ‘never’, ‘nowhere’, ‘nobody’, ‘nothing’ dominate their poems and create bottomless places for reading”.

There is no easy summary of this book, which moves from Simonides to Celan and back, along a tenuous chain of associations. Rather than prove the necessity of bringing these two figures into conversation, Carson creates points of contact which seem almost fortuitous. Yet each fragment of reading is grave, necessary. Of Simonides we learn that he was smart, that he was stingy, that he invented the epitaph, that he was concerned by brevity and wrote some of the most influential poetry of his civilization. Celan fits into another notion of economy. His poetry circulated in an economy of loss. He inhabits a language polluted by the Nazis and therefore “can make himself at home in his mother tongue only by a process of severe and parsimonious redaction” (Economy, 31).

Celan is a poet who “uses language as if he were always translating” (Economy, 28). Celan has an “outside” relationship with language, estranged from his native tongue (Romanian), linked in an essential way to “his other tongue, German” (Economy, 29). He is linked to his language and community in a relation of “intimate alienation”. Celan’s condition recalls Marx’s comparison between money and language. “Money and words are not the same”, says Marx. “Language does not run beside ideas the way prices run alongside commodities. Ideas do not exist separately from language.” Marx suggests that money is not like language but it is like translated language.

Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign (fremde) language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy. So the analogy lies not in language, but in the foreign quality or strangeness (Fremheit) of language. (Economy, 28)

The idea that money makes our existence strange is one that fits Carson’s idea of the valuable error. Marx wants to call into question the easy feeling of equivalence which capitalism has imposed between things and currency. He wants to provoke us into seeing how labour has been turned into a commodity, how the value of things has been distorted by capitalist imperatives. Prices do not reflect the essence of commodities; they only “run alongside” them. In order for something to be exchanged, it has to be translated out of its true nature and converted into the alien shape of currency. This alien shape reveals the fact that what has been
made to circulate no longer truly represents the nature of the thing itself. The strangeness of translation promotes a truer vision of the relation between language and ideas, between currency and its exchangeability. And so, Celan can say that among all the things that he has lost, “language” has been “unlost” (Quoted in Economy, 29).

“To keep attention from settling”, is, for Carson, the task of writing (Economy, viii). Partly for this reason, says Carson, she has chosen to speak of these two men at once.

They keep each other from settling. Moving and not settling, they are side by side in a conversation and yet no conversation takes place. Face to face, yet they do not know one another, did not live in the same era, never spoke the same language. With and against, aligned and adverse, each is placed like a surface on which the other may come into focus. (Economy, viii)

The essay replicates the chiasmatic logic of her own poetry, the interweaving of two registers, emotional and factual. What is the moral life of a user of money, what is the poetic life of consumption? Her writing enacts the logic of the oxymoron, the word which performs its meaning by bringing together two dissimilar things (“Chez l’Oxymoron”, 169).

Imagine the opposite

“Imagine the opposite” was a slogan strung in electric blue letters across the entrance of an art gallery in Munich some years ago. What could this mean, I wondered. The opposite of what? What the slogan challenged us to do was to define ‘this’, the reality of ‘here’, to see it as some sort of category for which we could imagine an opposite.

This is the kind of mental event that Anne Carson seeks out. Opposites are similar to negatives – and Carson is particularly drawn to negation, a quality of language she finds appealing, and which she finds common to both Simonides and Celan. Negation requires “collusion of the present and the absent on the screen of the imagination” (Carson 2000b:96). Most interestingly, Carson defines the negative vision as superior to, more complete than, the positive. Because the negative puts into play a double reality, one which is declared and then withdrawn, “it pos- its a fuller picture of reality than does a positive statement. And the person who speaks negatively can be said to command and display a more complete view of things than one who makes positive assertions” (Carson 2000b:96).

Negation has the added advantage of economy: “Two realities for the price of one” (Economy, 8). And so we can understand how Carson is also drawn to
another type of negative expression she calls “Crossouts”. “Crossouts sustain me now”, writes Anne Carson, in conclusion to *Men in the Off Hours*. She is grieving for her mother and reading the manuscripts of Virginia Woolf, where she can see the words and phrases that Woolf has crossed out. These crossed-out lines in Woolf’s manuscripts come to stand for death. “Crossouts are something you rarely see in published texts. They are like death: by a simple stroke – all is lost, yet still there. For death *although utterly unlike life* shares a skin with it. Death lines every moment of ordinary time” (*Men*, 166). “Certainly death gives most of us our elemental experience of absent presence” (Carson 2000b: 98).

“Absent presence”: this phrase describes much of Carson’s poetry, as it describes the work of the German writer W. G. Sebald, whose writing also uses exact vocabulary and careful detail to suggest another reality impinging on the objects and landscapes of today. Like Carson, Sebald writes in forms which are unclassifiable. For both, the line between languages is a fold among others, and translation activates something of its original meaning, the line between life and death. Susan Sontag reminds us that originally, in English, translation was “about the biggest difference of all: that between being alive and being dead” (Sontag 2000: 339). Anne Carson’s translative writing reminds us of this farthest border. There is in her work a persistent consciousness of intruding realities. We are directed to the place where the shadow’s edge joins the black of night, reminded always that surfaces have seams, an underlife.
Translation rights and the philosophy of translation

Remembering the debts of the original

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This paper deals with the question of translation rights. The status of translations under copyright law is based on a theoretical framework that is at the very least anachronistic in terms of a contemporary translation studies perspective, to which literary criticism, philosophy and post-colonial studies have all contributed. In order to explain the legal system’s epistemological delay in defining translation, this paper provides a brief account of the development of translation rights within the framework of international copyright law. It recalls, among others, the double heritage of literary criticism and philosophy in order to finally suggest an explanation, in an ethical sense, of translation rights as a claim for developing countries to translate the indebted original (the West).

Keywords: translation; philosophy; copyright; debt; colonization

Translation may be defined as the practice of communicating textual content from one language to another,¹ and law as the “discipline and profession concerned with the customs, practices, and rules of conduct of a community that are recognised as binding by the community” (Article ‘Law’, Encyclopaedia Britannica). Where do these two practices intersect? Is there a core element common to both? Even if the function of translation, in the achievement of its social and cultural objectives, is rather different from that of the law, close ties and common grounds link the

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¹ See, for example, Reiss (2000:160), where translation is defined as “a bilingual mediated process of communication, which ordinarily aims at the production of a TL [target language] text that is functionally equivalent to an SL text [source language][...].” Such quite traditional definitions of translation in terms of communication have been contested from as early on as Walter Benjamin’s “Des Aufgabe des Übersetzers” [The Task of the Translator], first published in 1923.
two disciplines: just as a translation results from an understanding of a source text (the original), from its reading, and thus from its interpretation, so too law involves the reading and interpretation of texts (see Kasirer 2001: 337–338). In both cases, first and foremost is the relation between an origin and its transformation, or transmission: law relates the normative text to its understanding and application, and translation relates the original text to its rewriting in another language, a rewriting which implies a double – cultural and spatiotemporal – displacement. Both are caught up in a “hermeneutic motion” (Steiner 1975).

Similarly to the case with the relationship between law and literature (see Posner 1988), which, among other issues, raises the question as to whether interpretation should attempt to determine the intention of the author, the comparison between law and translation revolves around what is usually characterised as the primacy of origin (the author, the legislator; the original text, the legislation) and the so called secondary nature of the texts following or deriving from it (commentary, critique, translation, interpretation or jurisprudence).

The interconnection between translation and law is more than merely disciplinary, however, reaching a level where each is a component of the other: in the legal aspect of translation, for example, and the question of translation rights. The practice of translation is governed by copyright law. Not only does translation take place within the framework of legal limitations (copyright), but – and this is the argument advanced here – translation, considered from the so-called ‘perspective of translation studies’, can be an occasion for law to reflect upon its foundations and function as an economic and political instrument. Thus, while translation rights need to be analysed from the angle both of law and of translation studies, we will present only an outline from the legal perspective and place the main focus on the examination of translation rights from the point of view of translation studies, informed by perspectives from the areas of philosophy and literary criticism. It is from this latter perspective that the most significant objections will arise.

This article is divided into six sections. In the first, we will give a brief historical account of the beginning and the evolution of translation rights within the framework of the Berne Convention, so as to clarify the position of copyright law regarding the relationship between translations and originals. Taking note of the way they are represented in law, the second and third sections will examine their institutionalized relationship from a ‘translatological’ (i.e. interdisciplinary) perspective and put it to the test of theories from both philosophy and literary criticism. On the basis of these results and with reference to an article by Lori

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2. Since Translation Studies is interdisciplinary in nature, my analysis will draw upon perspectives from philosophy, history, cultural studies, and post-colonial studies.
Chamberlain, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation”, the task will be to show how the metaphorization of the relation between translations and originals reflects the history of relations between the colonized and the colonizer, from the Renaissance to the present day. In the final two sections, we will conclude by discussing the concept of ‘debt’ as developed by Jacques Derrida, in order to stress the need to restore a more ethical relationship between the unbalanced poles of the world.

### Historical overview of translation rights

The laws of copyright govern the activity of translation in the same way as they do any artistic, literary or musical production. Interestingly enough, however, not only was translation included among the ‘artistic activities’ protected under international copyright law from the very outset – ‘copyright’ in France is expressed as ‘propriété littéraire et artistique’, but

> [...] it was the first right recognized in the Berne Convention, and was probably the most important factor which drew states into international copyright agreements in the late nineteenth century. It was ‘la question internationale par excellence’, as translation was really the only international means of reproduction in the case of books. (Ricketson 1987: 384)

The need for a multilateral system of copyright protection arose in the second half of the nineteenth century, as cultural exchange and publishing shifted to a wider international level. This shift was accompanied by a growing fear of piracy (Ricketson 1986: 12). As Drahos (1998) notes:

> Intellectual property owners faced a classic free-riding problem, or putting it in another way, some countries were the beneficiaries of positive externalities. Dealing with free-riding and positive externalities led states into the next phase of intellectual property protection: the international period.

One of the ways artistic works could be pirated was through unauthorised translations, to the extent that countries like France, a leader in the production of cultural artefacts, advocated the “complete assimilation of translation rights to other rights”3 – that is, reproduction rights – realising that such rights were “of the utmost importance to authors seeking protection for their works in countries with different languages” (Ricketson 1986: 21). At the time, European colonization was at its height, and there was the perception that a few European languages domi-

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nated throughout much of the world, making literary piracy more likely, thus explaining the push for an adequate enforceable international legal instrument. It is against this background that the Berne Convention came to be signed in 1886.4

More than seven decades later, the international configuration had changed dramatically. With decolonization, a number of new countries emerged as independent nations, with a new set of exigencies with regards the international copyright system (see Basalamah 2000). The main challenge to ‘developed’ countries was to integrate ‘developing’ countries into the Berne Union without lowering the minimum level of protection agreed upon at the birth of the Convention. A clash between the two points of view was inevitable. In 1967, the Stockholm Conference for the revision of the Berne Convention was the scene of conflicting interests between developing countries, for whom national literacy and training were priorities, and the developed nations, which contended that “the Protocol appeared to be a way of giving economic assistance […] at the expense of authors” (Ricketson 1987:124–125). Not surprisingly, the conference ended in failure. Interestingly, although translation had previously been assimilated to reproduction rights in terms of the duration of protection accorded, in the Stockholm Protocol (later known as the “Appendix of the Berne Convention: Special Provisions Regarding Developing Countries” [Paris 1971]) it was separated from other means of reproduction. While there were concessions offered on translation rights in the Appendix, these were limited by the Compulsory Licence for Translation (CLT). In order to translate and publish the copyrighted work, a translator or publisher in a developing country was required to obtain, against payment of a fee, a licence to do so. Such licences have proven administratively complicated to obtain and have been little used by developing countries over the last thirty years (Basalamah 2000:522–523).

Not only was the opportunity to take an ethical stand in favor of the developing world missed at that time, but also since then, within the framework of the recent World Trade Organization (WTO) system, taking such a stand has not been a priority. Following an initiative by the United States, the 1994 Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) has become the new legal context for the entire Berne Convention, except for article 6b relating to the moral rights of the author, which constitutes a major point of divergence with the Continental Author’s Rights system. This agreement is premised on almost exclusively economic criteria and represents a new generation of international treaties, from which attention to development is absent. As Ruth (1996) remarks: “Close examination of the TRIPs agreement reveals an overall disproportionate

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4. See Ricketson (1986) for a complete account of the “Birth of Berne Union.”
burden in the area of intellectual property protection in developing countries without any tangible development benefit.”

**Philosophical issues of copyright with regard to translation**

Another particularity of translations under copyright law is that they are not considered ‘original works’ but fall rather into the class of what are conventionally called ‘derivative works’. The rationale behind this legal categorization is that translations result from the transformation of a previous, already existing work. To translate means to submit an original text to a process of decoding and derive from it an equivalent in another language through a process of recoding (see Jakobson 2000). As such, translations are considered to be subordinate to original texts or ‘works of authorship’, without which they would not exist. This legal understanding of the secondary nature of translations is based on a narrow view of the process of translation, on the simple (simplistic) fact that translations come after the originals in time, and this understanding is extended to the very essence of translation: translation is secondary by definition, a pale copy, not even a simulacrum in the sense put forwards by Baudrillard, that is, a replacement for an original which no longer exists.

Although translations appear to be dependent on a source text, which is valued because of its anteriority, copyright law does nevertheless accord a certain degree of originality to translations and grants them protection to the extent that they contribute to the preexisting work. This is the case both in the United States Copyright law (17 U.S.C. §103 (b)) and under the Berne Convention (BC, art. 2(3) “Protected works”):

United States Copyright Law: “The copyright in a compilation or derivative work extends only to the material contributed by the author of such work, as distin-

5. “A ‘derivative work’ is a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. A work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications, which, as a whole, represent an original work of authorship, is a ‘derivative work.’” 17 U.S.C. §101 “Definitions” (United States Code, Title 17, Chapter 1, US Copyright law).

6. Under US Copyright law, translations are not listed among “original works” (17 U.S.C. §102 “Subject matter of Copyright”), whereas in the Berne Convention [1971, art. 2(3)] translations are listed among “protected works” art. 2(3).
guished from the preexisting material employed in the work, and does not imply any exclusive right in the preexisting material.”

Berne Convention: “Translations, adaptations, arrangements of music and other alterations of a literary or artistic work shall be protected as original works without prejudice to the copyright in the original work.”

From this it is clear that, under copyright law, the works underlying translations cannot simply be ignored once the translations have been carried out. Not only are the author’s rights protected within a portion of the translation, since the translator’s rights do not extend to the totality of the translation, but the so-called original work is considered still to be present, like a palimpsest, almost literally underneath a layer of the translation’s foreign language. As Derrida (1996) would put it re-reading Hamlet, the specter of the ‘father’ (the author) is always there, although undecidedly present or absent. Rather more present than absent, copyright law would say. Why is it, however, that translation, which is recognised under international copyright law as a right separate from that of other forms of reproduction, is still considered a means of copying, despite its doubly transformative function? On the one hand, the language (the form) of the work changes, and, on the other, the work passes from one set of culturally-influenced potential interpretations or readings to another, thereby adding a supplementary dimension to the original. The resulting translation necessarily escapes the original’s interpretative determinations. Since it involves a change of form, can translation be considered a derivative work, given “that [a work of] authorship consists of original expression, and hence that legal protection is given only to forms, not ideas”? (Venuti 1998a: 50) In other words, how can the original remain present within the translation, when the change in language constitutes a major change in form, and it is the form alone – the expression – which is protected under copyright?

This discrepancy is still supported by copyright law and used to justify the derivative nature of translations and thus their dependence on original texts. Opposing such a view of the relations between translations and ‘originals’, Derrida, commenting on Walter Benjamin’s concept of ‘survival’, notes (Derrida 1988: 121):

[...] the structure of an original is survival, what he calls ‘Überleben’. A text is an original insofar as it is a thing, not to be confused with an organic or physical body, but a thing, let us say, of the mind, meant to survive the death of the author or the signatory, and to be above or beyond the physical corpus of the text, and so on.

An original text is intimately bound to its context of origin, whereas a translation is but one possible reiteration in another context, emphasizing its différence with the original and offering it survival, a new life, a new identity. Thus, with the
survival of the original a new text is born – the translation, with its own context and its own meanings. As opposed to copyright law, Benjamin’s philosophy of language and Derrida’s commentary free the translation from dependence on the original, but without separating the two. In fact, Benjamin “maintains a strict original/translation opposition”, consequently repeating “’the foundation of the law’ […]”, which supplies the very possibility of ‘actual’ copyright law” (Derrida quoted in Davis 2001:44). For Derrida, this opposition leads to a reconsideration of their power differentials and marks a tendency towards a new equilibrium.

Benjamin’s concept of ‘survival’ as explained by Derrida is critical to our reflection here as it suggests a reciprocal dependence – and not subordination – between the original and its translation(s). The former does not “[produce] its receiver or its translators, but […] requires, mandates, demands or commands them in establishing the law” (Derrida 1985:181). The original is in a position of ‘debt’ to the translator, who extends its life and value:

And if the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself. From the origin of the original to be translated there is fall and exile. The translator must redeem (erlösen), absolve, resolve, in trying to absolve himself of his own debt, which is at bottom the same […]. (Derrida 1985:188)

The relationship between the two is thus reversed, or rather reconsidered and restabilised, so that the translation is in a position neither of submission to nor of ‘autonomy’ from (see Venuti 1998a:59) the original, but preserves only what is minimally necessary for their interdependence. The translation also makes a valuable donation to the original, so that the latter becomes as much indebted to the former as the former is to the latter, although it is only this latter indebtedness which is recognized under copyright law. With regard to this new understanding, is a translation an original, or, as Venuti would put it (1995:9), is it at one and the same time an original and not an original? Is it ‘original’ because the original text is still perceptible through the lines of the translation, or is it ‘original’ because its contribution to the survival of the original text is such that the latter is indebted to the translation? Do they thus exist, in a relationship not of filiation, but of dialogue and interaction, which characterise relations between texts in general?

7. “[…] translation in a third dimension, where each is both a donor and a receiver – a dual trajectory […]” (Vieira 1999:97).
The progressive perspective of literary criticism

According to modern literary theory, once a text has been read or interpreted – even at an early stage, soon after it has been written – it no longer belongs to its author. The work escapes its genitor and becomes the ephemeral property of the minds that have received it through the intricate constructions of their historicity. Or, as Roland Barthes (1977a:145) puts it: “The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own book [...]” Ironically, the book comes into being when the act of writing ends; the work is born at “the death of the author”. Distinguishing in great detail between ‘text’ and ‘work’, Barthes speaks about “the estrangement of the Author”, writing (1977b:161) that “[a]s for the Text, it reads without the inscription of the Father” (1977b:161), that is, of the author. Thus, the autonomy of the text and the freedom of its reading is declared, giving birth to the reader. As Barthes notes (1977a:148):

Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal [...] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.

Two ideas are worth noting here. The first is the importance accorded the reader. In addition to Barthes and the Tel Quel group in France, emphasis has been placed on the reader by a recent development in hermeneutics in Germany called ‘Reception Esthetics’ or ‘Reception Theory’. After the Romantics’ interest in the author and New Criticism’s exclusive concern with the text, the time was ripe for the reader. Introducing Wolfgang Iser’s theory as formulated in The Act of Reading (1978) and The Implied Reader (1974), Terry Eagleton notes (1983:74) that without the reader “[...] there would be no literary texts at all. Literary texts do not exist on bookshelves: they are processes of signification materialized only in the practice of reading” (emphasis added). This is a way of saying that the construction of what we consider to be the literary work is carried out beyond the author’s reach. Eagleton continues (1983:77):

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8. We will frequently refer in this section to well-known works by Roland Barthes and other contemporary figures in literary criticism. We are introducing them from an interdisciplinary perspective, to shed new light on the problematic nature of translations as legal objects and as symbols of how traditional legal and political institutions in the West relate to the Other.
The process of reading, for reception theory, is always a dynamic one, a complex movement and unfolding through time. The literary work itself exists merely as what the Polish theorist Roman Ingarden calls a set of ‘schemata’ or general directions, which the reader must actualize.

Hence, according to the terminology of this theory, the reader contributes actively to the ‘materialization’ of the text, to its creation so to speak.

The second idea we would like to draw from the passage by Roland Barthes quoted above is the concept of *intertext* (“multiple writings [...] entering into mutual relations of dialogue”). Elsewhere Barthes writes: “Every text is an intertext; other texts are present within it, at various levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the former culture, as well as those of the surrounding culture; every text is a new web of past quotations” (Barthes 1973b. My translation). Literary originality does not exist, nor can there ever be a ‘first’ work of literature. The romantic image of the genius creating an unprecedented work of authorship *ex nihilo* is no longer valid: every literary text is made up of others, is ‘intertextual’. Furthermore, Barthes emphasizes the fact that the multiplicity and the dialogue between cultures and writings is located within the reader, rather than within the author. This confirms once again that the paternity of the text is to be found on the side of reading, in what Eagleton has called (1983: 141), in relation to Barthes’s *Plaisir du texte*, “reading-as-writing”.

Similarly to what has been developed in the field of literary theory, we would like to suggest that a translation – although ‘derived’, so to speak, from a previous work – does not contain its original between its lines. Rather, by virtue of the transformation, transfiguration even, of the original’s form, it becomes just another text, an independent work pertaining only to itself. We would like to put forwards the idea that a translation does not exist simultaneously with its would-be ‘transcendental signified’, to use Derrida’s terminology (Derrida 1972) – the original text –, but ultimately is freed from this metaphysical shadow by the very fact of the interpretative displacement it carries out, the ‘materialization’ or ‘reading-as-writing’ that it brings about. Walter Benjamin stressed this at the beginning of his famous essay “The Task of the Translator”, where he wrote that a “translation is a mode”, a form. If that is what translation is about, then the transformation of the identical into an Other shows this operation to be formal in nature, resorting to what allows the otherness, the difference, that is the trans-formation, the crossing-over from the self to the other, that is to say the translation as an autonomous entity.

One of the main arguments of George Berkeley, the British philosopher of idealism – that “the existence of a sensible object cannot be separated from its being perceived because it is impossible to conceive of a sensible object which is
not perceived” (Foster & Robinson 1988: 3) – while challenging common sense, is of some inspiration to our own. If literary texts (on the shelves) do not exist when they are not being read, then they do not exist in the great web of the ‘hypertextuality’ of human languages, to use Gérard Genette’s term (1982: 7–19), in the wide “reconciliation of languages” – the ‘pure language’ (die reine Sprache) – as Benjamin writes, when they are not being translated. In other words, we would like to risk the proposition that the input of a translation in the era of globalization goes as far as providing existence and promising “growth” to the original work.

Now that we have presented the historical and philosophical roots of the contentious relationship between translation and law, let us turn to modes of conceptualizing translation, where its tense relationship with the original is reflected at the economic and political level between nations. The question we are asking is what it means to conceptualize translation sometimes as a servile outgrowth that passively receives its substance from a paternal origin and at other times as an aggressive conquest in the maternal womb of the “original”.

Translation as process versus the status of translation

In an often cited article, “Gender and the Metaphoricsof Translation,” Lori Chamberlain presents an account of the different representations, found in literature and in the theory of translation, where a gendered metaphor based on the master/slave, action/state opposition is used to depict the relationship between the author and the translator, the original and the translation, the translator and the text or the mother tongue. Making her feminist commitment clear, Chamberlain writes: “[...] what must be subverted is the process by which translation complies with gender constructs” (Chamberlain 2000: 327). She points to a network of representations underlying the gender metaphor, where the translation is sometimes seen as the object of sexual aggression and sometimes as the agent of political conquest (“colonization”) (328).

The structure of the relationship between the original and the translation as presented by Chamberlain is of two sorts. On the one hand, whenever translation appears as a process, of ‘incorporation’ or ‘appropriation’, it plays a ‘masculine’ role and is connotated negatively. When, however, the translation and the original are considered as products, within the framework of social, legal and political hierarchies, the former is given a role traditionally designated as ‘female’ (thus the values of ‘fidelity’ and ‘chastity’) while the role of the latter becomes ‘male’ (values of ‘paternity’ and ‘authority’), and these roles are given legitimacy by being presented as natural and usual states of being (319). What is striking in Chamberlain’s demonstration is the inversion of polarities and gender attributions when trans-
lation is perceived from different perspectives: as a process, translation is a virile and aggressive activity that assumes a front line position because it has initiated the move towards the original as its prey; as a product, translation is a secondary and derivative result of what society (principally, the law) has recognised as its absolute primary source, that is the original.

In fact, this latter representation of translation is clearly reflected in the field of legal translation, and pertinently criticised from within, especially by comparative law scholars, who maintain that the positivist orientation in legal translation undermines the value of the translator, and consequently his work, since translations are considered to be transparent and reverential towards the source text:

The positivist instinct, when transposed to legal translation, supports the view of the translator as something of a non-actor for law, whose task is limited to transcribing a legal text from one language to another without participating in the production of new ideas. The translator is often depicted, if at all, as a faceless player in the transmission of legal ideas and his or her work is not understood to be a communicative act distinct from that of the author of the source legal text.

(Kasirer 2001:332–333)

Thus, the status of translation as we have seen it in the copyright law corresponds precisely to the way the activity of translation is depicted in the realm of legal interpretation: ‘derivative’, because of the ontological position of the legislature with regard to its interpretation (translation), and ‘secondary’, because, for a traditional jurist, it is fundamentally considered as instrumental, servile.

Referring to the attempt by Serge Gavronsky (1977) to free translation from its derivative status so that it could attain the more self-affirmative status of creativity, Chamberlain deplores “the binary terms” (320) sketched out above, where translation can take the initiative only if it is coded as negative and violent.9 Inspired by the hermeneutical model of George Steiner, Gavronsky’s “cannibalistic” model, although aiming, according to Chamberlain, “to free the translator/translation from the signs of cultural secondariness” (320), simply reverses the binary opposition. Thus, contrary to what has usually been the case, henceforth, according to Gavronsky “[...] the original has been captured, raped and incest performed. Here, once again, the son is father of the man. The original is mutilated beyond recognition; the slave-master dialectic reversed” (quoted in Chamberlain:320).

What, however, is the basis for such a reversal? Why does this opposition between translation as process and the translation as product exist? How can translation go from being ‘masculine’ to being ‘feminine’, simply by a change of perspective? What are the historical sources for the representations of the rela-

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9. For translation as a form of violence, see Dingwaney and Maier (1995).
relationship between translations and originals? Is there a political dimension to this seemingly purely theoretical debate?

Lessons from the inversion of the relationship

Notwithstanding the binary nature of the opposition between the two representations of the relationship between the translation and the original, it is still a revealing pattern from our historical heritage. From research on post-colonialism it is clear that the contrasting characterisations of translation are consistent with the historical context in which they have been used and that close ties exist between them. As Bassnett and Trivedi note (1999:2),

 [...] translation does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum [...] It is not an innocent, transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems.

Similarly, according to Niranjana (1992:2), translation “ [...] as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism.” Thus, not only is the representation of translation as a process rooted in the context of its emergence as a tool of domination, but its legal status, a mirror-image of the first, has been shaped at the same source as well. Translation as a ‘manipulative work’ (a process) of power over signs represents the position of the colonizer, whereas translation as a ‘derivative work’ (its legal status) “ [...] is the representation of the colonized, who need to be produced in such a manner as to justify colonial domination [...]” (Niranjana 1992:2). The instrument of representation is at the same time what is represented:

The notion of the colony as a copy or translation of the great European Original inevitably involves a value judgment that ranks the translation in a lesser position in the literary hierarchy. (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999:4)

This contradictory depiction of translation does not, surprisingly enough, differ greatly from that of its counterpart, the original. The high status accorded original texts is relatable to the construction of European identity, throughout the Renaissance, as national boundaries were beginning to be drawn; such status is not, however, accorded texts when they are produced by the colonized. Colonial translations treat originals produced in the colonies as acquired property, and their originality as fundamentally different from that of European works. The colonized original, although it occupies the same position in terms of the translation process as the European original, cannot pretend to the same high-ranking posi-
tion; whereas an ‘original’ produced in the colonizing nations is considered “de facto superior” (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999: 2), an ‘original’ from the colonies is at best ‘different’ and perhaps even ‘alien’. As Bassnett and Trivedi note (2): “It is also significant that the invention of the idea of the original coincides with the period of early colonial expansion, when Europe began to reach outside its own boundaries for territory to appropriate.” Thus, it is clear that the relationship between the original and the translation is in fact modeled on that between colonizers and colonized. Translations became the property of originals (of authors) almost at the same time that the colonies became the property of the colonizers. Bassnett and Trivedi once again (3): “[...] it is, of course, now recognised that colonialism and translation went hand in hand.”

This brings us to question the legitimacy of international copyright law, since it is clear that it has put into place a system whose development is closely related to that of Western civilization. The inversion between translation as a process and the status of translation is now admitted in law, despite it clearly involving a double standard, and this reveals the capacity of hegemonic parties to benefit from the fixation of the flow of time where it is to their advantage, as is stated at the highest levels in international intellectual property forums: there cannot be any retroactive effect for the recuperation of the rights attached to works stolen from colonized countries during colonization.¹⁰ Should, however, the status of translation – now globalized – remain the heritage of a painful past and therefore become henceforth the foundation of what is understood as the symbol of the communication between the world’s cultures, while at the same time translation is the privileged means of their hybridisation?

The debt of colonization as the debt of translation

Clearly, the previous section points to the heart of the injustice which had been perpetuated, not only geographically, but, more pertinently, on the philosophical level as well. In a metaphorization of Europe’s cartography and cultural identity, Jacques Derrida, in his L’Autre Cap (The Other Heading), reminds us that Europe has for a long time considered itself “a spiritual heading”, “a universal idea of its own memory”, imagining itself as the most complete expression of world civilization or of human culture more generally. He writes (1992a: 49):

Europe takes itself to be a promontory, an advance – the avant-garde of geography and history. It advances and promotes itself as an advance, and it will have never ceased to make advances on the other: to induce, seduce, produce, and conduce, to spread out, to cultivate, to love or to violate, to colonize, and to colonize itself.

Quoting from an official document produced by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding what it calls “The Cultural Construction of Europe”, Derrida draws attention to certain words and expressions, placing them in italics: “There is no political ambition that is not preceded by a conquest of spirit(s): it is the task of culture to impose a feeling of unity, of European solidarity” (1992a:51). This conquest is naturally accompanied by the paradoxical value of universality inscribed onto the body of a single culture facing the rest of the world:

Whether it takes a national form or not, a refined, hospitable, or aggressively xenophobic form or not, the self-affirmation of an identity always claims to be responding to the call or the assignation of the universal. There is no exception to this law. No cultural identity presents itself as the opaque body of an untranslatable idiom, but always, on the contrary, as the irreplaceable inscription of the universal in the singular, the unique testimony of the human essence and to what is proper to man. (Derrida 1992a:72–73)

The pattern being described is clearly similar to that seen in the previous section: the primacy of the original, here the West, in its delusion concerning the universality of its in fact singular vocation, is a construction of the European imagination. Unless it opens itself up to a more interdependent relationship with its translations, its identity will continue to suffer from what Carlos Fuentes has called the ‘sickness’ of originality, “[...] the sickness of a modernity that is always aspiring to see itself as something new” (Quoted in Bassnett & Trivedi 1999: 3). Originality, if it exists, is a ‘dangerous purity’, the illusion of the absolute being made available to mankind. Translation, by contrast, is diffused into what is characteristic of human beings: the diversity of languages and cultures. Life is in fact a permanent unfolding, translation into an Other, a move out of one’s self towards others. This idea finds expression in the work of Octavio Paz (1992:154), who writes:

On the one hand, the world is presented to us as a collection of similarities; on the other, as a growing heap of texts, each slightly different from the one that came before it: translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation – first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase.
The ubiquity of translation in all aspects of our reality makes it problematic, contradictory even, to relegate it to a secondary position, as is presently the case under copyright law in particular and in social and literary traditions in general.

The preoccupation that motivates our advocacy of the cause of translation is tied to what would be beneficial for the collectivity: the call here is definitely ethical. In order to have a more accurate perception of others, rather than exclude them, requires change and exchange with their perspective. Derrida writes:

[...] it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of a difference of Europe, but of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what is not, toward the other heading or the heading of the other, indeed – and this is perhaps something else altogether – toward the other of the heading, which would be the beyond of this modern tradition, another border structure, another shore. (1992a: 29)

This leads us to the observation that the politics of the relationship between the original and the translation are in fact marked by the historical responsibility borne by Europe, as its cultural institutions (including law) are rooted in the Western philosophical heritage. The philosophy of the Enlightenment clearly demonstrates this, especially with regards to law. As Derrida puts it, referring to Kant’s Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht (1784):

[...] Greco-Roman Europe, western – continental I would dare say – philosophy and history, play a driving, capital, exemplary role, as if nature, in its rational disguise, had charged Europe with this special mission: not only to found history as such, and first of all as science, but also to found a rational (not fictional) philosophical history and to “one day give laws to” all the other continents. (1997: 26–27. My translation)

Noting his reservations about the Kantian concept of ‘cosmopolis’, Derrida points out that there are no determinations of Western philosophy that confine it to the dialectics of the self and the other, because “[n]ot only are there other ways to philosophy, but philosophy, if it exists, is the other way.” And he adds that what can be said about philosophy “[...] can be said as well, and for the same reasons, about law and democracy” (1997: 33). The ‘other way’ is the perspective of the ‘other heading’, from where the ‘debt’ (which Derrida has emphasized in relation to Benjamin’s “Task of the Translator”) is no longer that which is actually borne by developing countries (the colonies), but that which should be sustained by the developed countries (the colonizers) themselves. While the colonized were freely appropriated and translated in the past, they are now paying, if not begging, for translation and reproduction rights. If the debt should be paid to benefit those
whom translation represents (the colonized), not to benefit the original, then the latter should ‘erase’ the debt that it is imposing on translation “in the name of reaffirmation” (Derrida 1997: 50. My translation), in remembrance of its own debt.

Conclusion

We have tried in this article to reflect on different aspects of the relationship between law and translation, giving particular consideration to translation rights from the beginning of the Berne Convention in the late nineteenth century, and showing how, through the light shed by other disciplines such as philosophy and literary criticism, the secondary position of translation from the standpoint of copyright law is not definitive, even unjustly attributed, particularly when considered within the perspective of the history of colonization and the inversion of values it has seemingly favored. Translation as a process, bridging the gaps between cultures, has turned into a derivative legal status for translation, where the differences seem to deepen and the wounds of the past are not yet ready to heal.

Although the law is known to be a valuable instrument for compensating victims of torts, it is puzzling that – willfully or not – it has been deprived of any memory of the debt Europe has contracted towards a great portion of the world. As copyright law in its present state ponders over the possibilities it can offer Indigenous Peoples to ensure their rights in their ‘traditional knowledge’ (see Lewinski 2003), no voice has been raised among experts and scholars in favour of a mechanism to compensate countries and peoples for the artefacts, traditional knowledge and works of art appropriated during colonization, and later. Even if the law does not seem to have a sense of debt, our hope is that by this modest contribution in relation to ethical copyright and translation rights we will re-mind the ‘original’, and what it metaphorizes, of its duties, so as to make the world a fairer place.
Seeds of discontent
Re-creation and the bounds of ownership

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This article examines how current debates on intellectual property, and in particular concern for the maintenance of the biological commons, might extend to examples of literary reaction. If, as Rajasthani writer Vijay Dan Detha urges, the responsibility of a writer is to nurture the ‘seed’ of a story, how might we consider the implications of this metaphor – of multiple originals and copies, germination, growth – in the light of current TRIPS debates? How might we productively explore the paradox of copyright residing in the living person of an author when a text has been multiply created?

Keywords: copyright; authorship; intellectual property; Vijay Dan Detha

Individuals must be offered adequate protection for their work in ideas or else they won’t have sufficient incentive to continue coming up with those Mickey Mouse cartoons and Viagra pills and Windows 2000 versions that modern civilization relies on to function smoothly. At least, this is more or less the argument proponents of the 1994 WTO/GATT sponsored Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) make, in much the same way that booksellers in eighteenth century England argued that without the right to regulate copies of their output, authors would no longer create works of original genius by venturing out to discover new (intellectual) territory. Given the tropes of discovery and piracy associated with intellectual property rights, it should come as no surprise that the concept we are heir to today was developed in Europe during the time of its great colonial expansion. And like other colonial-era inheritances, its rhetoric claiming to promote the greater common good invites more than the ordinary amount of scepticism. For it is not clear in the case of intellectual property what is understood by the term ‘common good’ and therefore how its rights and interests might best be protected.
Vanderbilt law professor Jerome H. Reichman wrote hopefully in a 1998 issue of *Journal of International Economic Law* devoted to TRIPS, this 1994 agreement “should give rise to a worldwide balance between legal incentives to create and the rights of second comers to compete [...]” (1998:587). Adding, “Most developing countries stand to gain from a more pro-competitive balance of public and private interests than currently prevails [...]” (588). Others in the same volume, like the former U.K. Law Lord Sydney Templeman – author of a seminal opinion on rights regarding trademarks – charges testily that “the term ‘intellectual property’ is a pernicious fiction” that “acts to disguise the creation and enforcement of monopolies which are contrary to the public interest” (1998:603). Indian activist Vandana Shiva and her colleagues at the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology sound a similar note of alarm (Shiva et al. 1997: 3): “The ‘enclosure’ of biodiversity and biodiversity related knowledge through patents and intellectual property rights (IPRs) is the final step in a series of enclosures of the commons that began with the rise of colonialism.” They charge:

[... the diversion of the biological resources to global markets undermines the livelihoods of the two-thirds of India [...] and threatens the biodiversity base which they have protected because their survival depends on it. (v)

While the life-and-death, re-creative metaphors used to talk about rights to property – both tangible and intangible, unique and reproducible – may seem as old as Adam, I would argue that the limits and conceptual bases of such tropes signal a new understanding of the value of ‘reproductions.’ This paper will draw out the analogy between the creative endeavours of farming and writing, including the task of translating most particularly, in order to point to the ways ‘value’ in the economic sense subsumes legal and ethical concerns surrounding this agreement. My contention is that the legal distinction between individual versus communal ownership obscures more important questions that need to be addressed concerning the economic and ethical value of creations which are, by their nature, produced in the plural.

I would like to begin by citing Rosemary Coombes’s beguilingly basic observation in *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Properties: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law* that

texts protected by intellectual property laws *signify*: they are cultural forms that assume local meanings in the lifeworlds of those who incorporate them into their daily lives. Circulating widely in contemporary public spheres, they provide sym-
bolic resources for the construction of identity and community, subaltern appropriation, parodic interventions, and counterhegemonic narratives. (1998:7)

The dilemma she describes in her opening chapter may be familiar: you might laugh at the image on a t-shirt or dance along to a song, but when you are asked to name the inventor and therefore intellectual property owner of a Black Bart [Simpson] t-shirt (Coombes 1998: 10) or to describe the difference between “sampling” a track of “Ham Aapke Hai Kaun” versus pressing the record button on your tape player at home, you would be hard-pressed to delineate with any certainty the legal distinctions between these various forms of appropriation. And appropriation is for most of us a daily necessity. At what point are we engaging in ‘piracy’? We are reminded, regardless of our views on simulacra, that the law – here, in the singular – forces us to distinguish the false copy from the real. “The mass-reproduced, media-circulated cultural form accrues social meaning in a multiplicity of sites,” Coombes argues, “[...] but legally, the meaning of a text is produced exclusively at a mythic point of origin” (8). The results, as she describes it, are far from life-affirming and creative:

The law freezes the play of signification by legitimating authorship, deeming meaning to be value properly redounding to those who “own” the signature or proper name, without regard to the contributions or interests of those others in whose lives it figures. This enables and legitimates practices of cultural authority that attempt to freeze the play of difference (and différences) in the public sphere. (8)

Deborah Halbert expresses similar concerns in Intellectual Property in the Information Age: The Politics of Expanding Ownership Rights. Writing not on subversive t-shirts and hip-hop artists, but on “the ever-expanding web of knowledge” in general and computer hackers in particular, Halbert argues,

Our current framework of intellectual property, while being enormously beneficial to the large information brokers of our time, is detrimental to the free exchange of information as well as to the ability of a world citizenry to participate in its own future. (Halbert 1999: ix)

She joins Templeman and Coombes in pointing to the pernicious fiction that posits a mythic point of origin as the rhetorical trope most advantageous to corporate interests, even while claiming to protect the individual: “[...] this notion of the individual author who is in control of his or her creative work,” she writes, “successfully conceals the larger political and economic implications of the intel-

1. My great appreciation to Rachel Sturman for sharing this particular reference, as well as many of the ideas in this paper.
lectual property system where major owners such as Microsoft can own as well as control information systems and the information itself” (ix–x). I would offer that the very fact that translated work, like the code writing projects on SourceForge for example, can be considered a form of shared or ongoing production, issues a challenge to the myth of singular originality. For legally the intellectual property of a literary text is owned by both the original author and the translator. (The translator cast in the dubious and institutionally duplicitous position of both author of a second original and at the same time copyist of the first original.) How then are we meant to understand the terms offered when one Intellectual Property reproduced counts as both one and two? In short, I am asking how a contemporary, critical approach to translation studies might participate in the global-minded conversations taking place today to redefine the ways creativity is accounted for – legally, economically, ethically.

For the purposes of this paper, I would like to read the term ‘creativity’ in a most literal (and possibly retrograde) sense, in pursuit of an analogy I heard in my early years of translating that likened the art of storytelling to the sowing of seeds. That year I journeyed within Rajasthan from sophisticated, direct-dial Jaipur to telephoneless Borunda, the Rajasthani village where Vijay Dan Detha lived, in order to interview him about the relationship of oral to written traditions, and to ask his permission to publish a story I had translated. This was the era before satellite television in India and internet connections in general. The village had no phone lines, intermittent electricity, and only the state-sponsored television station, but was home to a printing press and a folklore institute Detha had helped establish, which published his fourteen volumes of oral-based stories in Rajasthani, the local language. It was the two volumes of Hindi translations done by Kailash Kabir, however, that had established Detha’s literary reputation outside of Rajasthan, and thus earned him national awards for his work. He seemed eager to have a translator in English achieve the same degree of success, but seemed equally skeptical that such an accomplishment might be possible. During the course of the interview, he cautioned cryptically: Every story contains a seed which it is your responsibility to honour. At the time, I was not sure if he meant to be offering an intimate view into his own writing process or a gentle critique of the translation I had done. After all, close-to-the-soil as it was, the metaphor did not distinguish the oral storytellers who told the story from the writers who wrote their versions of it – be we categorized as ‘translators’ or ‘authors’. (A theoretical sleight-of-hand that was

2. And, speaking of collaborations, I wish to thank computer programmer Paul Hoffman for pointing to the site SourceForge.net to demonstrate the mutuality of our interests.

3. Interview with Vijay Dan Detha, Borunda, India, 4 March 1989.
as convenient for him, as for me. Not to mention telling.) Since, like so many soft-focus biological metaphors of yesteryear, it pretended that the bounty of this seed was potentially infinite, that there were no such things as vicious property disputes, drought, or blight that might threaten future proliferation. And while it hinted at possible problems with the wrong kinds of production, it refrained from naming particular measures that might be taken to guard against any dishonour to said seed. The encounter forced me to ask then as I ask now, another version of the question asked above: Who is meant to take responsibility for a story in translation? Who owns it – in the legal, as well as ethical, sense?

Let’s take an example: if I write a story I have read in Rajasthan called “Adamkhor”, and publish it under the name “The Cannibal”, we would naturally expect Detha’s name to appear as the author and mine as the translator. And, according to the usual practice, Detha and I would divide the fees paid by the publisher 50-50. But what is natural about this? What does it mean to be half an author, or to split an intangible in half? Jagaram Singh, for example, could make the claim that this piece of intellectual property in Rajasthan does not belong exclusively to Detha since Singh was the one who originally told Detha the story. And likewise, the person from whom Singh first heard the story could claim original and therefore exclusive ownership. And so on, in a seemingly never-ending line that begins to gnaw away at the tidy, stable premise that such creative work can be claimed by a single person. Is this another version of the folklore versus literature dilemma?4

Not entirely: part of the conceptual problem, Mark Rose explains in Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright, is that today there exists a gap between copyright – which “depends on drawing lines between works, on saying where one text ends and another begins” – and literary thinking – which emphasizes the ways in which “texts permeate and enable one another” and so cannot abide “the notion of distinct boundaries between texts” (Rose 1993: 3). Rose regards copyright – which he calls a “practice of securing marketable rights in texts that are created as commodities” – as a specifically modern institution, the creature of the printing press, the individualization of authorship in the late Middles Ages and early Renaissance, and the development of the advanced marketplace society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (3)

Foucault expresses a similar sentiment in his well-known essay “What is an Author?”, slipping into yesteryear rhetoric as he describes:

4. For a discussion of the folklore question in relation to translation studies, and Vijay Dan Detha’s stories in particular, see Merrill (2002).
Foucault uses the essay to pose a direct challenge to the modern institution of the author, and yet the terms he uses to describe this idyllic, pre-modern way – when texts were “accepted, circulated, and valorized” – reveal that their value can only be expressed now through capitalist paradigms of property. In these terms, an anonymous or communal entity would have as much trouble justifying ownership of a story in this century as it would asserting its rights to land titles in eighteenth-century Europe. How did literary work come to be equated with physical property?

Rose’s monograph, *Authors and Owners*, details the history of legal decisions in England which applied Lockean notions of property – usually tangibles like “farms, factories and furnishings” – to intangibles like book production. This shift in thinking required, as Rose puts it, “the abstraction of the concept of literary property from the physical book and then the presentation of this new, immaterial property as no less fixed and certain than any other kind of property” (1993: 7). It is appropriate to recall Lydia Liu’s argument that international law “does not translate between equivalents” but “creates tropes of equivalence in the middle zone of translation [...]” (1999: 136–137). Her essay which I draw from, “Legislating the Universal: The Circulation of International Law in the Nineteenth Century”, queries the ways natural law and the law of nations (as “international law”, in the singular) were translated from English into Chinese, a process she describes as “negotiating a ground of commensurability between Chinese and Christian values [...]” in a historical context with a “relative absence of hypothetical equivalence between English and Chinese” (152, 148). As one example she highlights a moment of “makeshift translatability” when the phrase “human rights” came to render not just a term in Chinese (shiren ziran zhi quan) but introduced an entirely new concept of international law. My contention is that rendering a concept such as book production with the term “property” relies on its own “makeshift translatability”, figured here as taking place not between traditionally recognised language domains but among citizens struggling to negotiate some ground of commensurability in a historical context with a relative absence of equivalence, albeit within national borders.5

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5. Here I rely implicitly on George Steiner’s observation in *After Babel* that every act of communication is an act of translation (1975: 45). Also of relevance is James Boyd White’s basic premise in *Justice as Translation: An Essay in Cultural and Legal Criticism* that “the very activity of translation brings us [...] to face that which is particular or unique to the language and its context” and therefore to see its implicit ways of forming an ethical community (1990: xvii, xvi).
In eighteenth century England, for instance, litigators issued a mandate to guard against an activity they equated with 'piracy', and thus began proposing that literary works be the equivalent of immaterial estates, with the author recognised as the rightful and original owner of such property. In 1709 writers like Joseph Addison and Daniel Defoe worked to establish the ground for such tropes by writing imploringly and publicly in favor of copyright legislation, Defoe claiming grandly that an author’s “Work is his Property, and he cannot be divested of that Property at the Will and Pleasure of any Man” (Review 3 December 1709, cited in Rose 1993:37), while Addison complained that

> All mechanick artizans are allowed to reap the Fruit of their Invention without Invasion; but he that has separated himself from the rest of Mankind, and studied the Wonders of the Creation [...] and has an Ambition to communicate the Effect of half of his Life spent in such noble Enquiries, has no Property in what he is willing to produce, but is exposed to Robbery and Want [...]. (Tatler 101, 1 Dec. 1709, cited in Rose 1993:37)

And while it is as true then as it is now that the ‘authors’ in question had something to gain from legislation protecting the right to control the sale of copies of one’s work, it should be emphasized that the booksellers had a greater stake in these claims. “Significantly,” Rose notes wryly, “the parties in these cases were all booksellers, not authors [...]” (5).

The booksellers’ legal argument hinged on the notion that property is recognised when an individual by his labor cultivates the fruits of the earth from land that was in a common state of nature and thereby makes it his own, as much as he owns his person. Such cultivation is considered the original act of translation – a form of appropriation authorised by law. That this law of translating property authorised itself through translation leads to an oxymoron I wish to draw our attention to: one may ‘translate’ property in the sense of taking ownership of it, and one may ‘translate’ a certain text, but in the second sense of the word the intangible original would still belong to the ‘author’ so it is not a translation in the legal sense. Detha’s premise – that storytelling, authoring and translating are equivalent – asks us to acknowledge the incommensurability between translating land and translating a story, an incommensurability that I would argue has been there all along. The booksellers in the eighteenth century insisted that the two types of property were in fact commensurate, invoking in their defence the language John Locke set forth in 1690 in the second book of Two Treatises of Government:

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, yet every Man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left
it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*. (Book II, Chapter V, Section 25)

These were the lines Addison and Defoe attempted to repeat so that they, as individual authors, could claim their natural rights to the fruits of their invention. This claim was not based on air, the booksellers were insisting, but in a man like Addison, a man like Defoe, who each enjoyed property first and foremost in his person.

Rose notes that the gap between “a traditional conception of society as a community bound by ties of fidelity and service” and “the emergent ideology of possessive individualism” began to open up in the earlier part of the seventeenth century, before Locke ever wrote his *Treatise* (1993 [1691]: 15). Locke’s – “He that, in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled, and sowed any part of [the earth], thereby annexed to it something that was his *property*...” (Book II, Chapter V, Section 32) – high-handed language of divine destiny merely supplied thereasoning the booksellers needed. Nevertheless, Lyman Ray Patterson makes clear in *Copyright in Historical Perspective* that legislation drafted in the eighteenth century with the stated purpose of protecting the individual and exclusive rights of an author to protect him from literary (read: intellectual) piracy, were “less a boon to authors than to publishers”, for, he writes, it made “copyright monopolistic in a way that [it] had never been” (Patterson 1968: 151). In short, the figure of the author became a convenient legal fiction behind which monopolistic publishing interests made forceful claim to intangible property in the singular for control over the sale of tangible property in the plural.

Nowhere did this successful bit of chicanery better betray its hidden purposes than in legislation proposed to extend copyright beyond the death of the author (calling to mind, of course, Barthes’s essay of that name). Templeman writes (1998: 603–604):

The Copyright Act of 1709 gave an author the exclusive right of printing his work for a term of 14 years and, if he survived, for a further 14 years. By the Copyright Act of 1814 copyright was extended to 28 years or life, whichever would be the shorter. In 1842 [...] Mr. Serjeant Telford was instrumental in obtaining an extension of copyright to the life of the author and seven years after his death [...]. By the Copyright Act of 1911 the term of copyright protection was increased to the life of the author plus 50 years. By Regulations made in 1995 [...] the protection was further increased to life plus 70 years.

While the life and livelihood of the author was the justification for granting booksellers a right to copy, soon the reproductions took on a life of their own. Templeman concludes emphatically (603–604):
All the increases of patent and copyright protection were obtained by powerful lobbies persuading individual governments to take action and then persuading all others to ‘harmonise’ their legislation, thus obtaining worldwide monopolies. There appears to be no public interest justification for the increases in copyright protection; the extensions were not necessary to encourage authors.

The list of dates he offers draws a succinct history of successful copyright legislation in England. Nevertheless, Patterson’s and Rose’s books show that in the past four centuries in that country there were many more unsuccessful attempts to enact similar legislation, blocked when citizens expressed concern for the public good. Indeed, Carla Hesse points out that in France the institution of the modern author was “unstable from its very beginnings”: “the author as a legal instrument for the regulation of knowledge was created by the absolutist monarchy in 1777, not by the liberal bourgeois democracy inaugurated in 1789” and so, galled by the privileges this private individual as absolute bourgeois enjoyed, Revolutionaries did their best to “dethrone” the author, recasting him instead as a servant for the public good. (Hesse 1990: 130) Her article, “Enlightenment Epistemology and the Laws of Authorship in Revolutionary France, 1777–1793”, traces an ongoing dispute between author Denis Diderot (hired by the chief officer of the Paris Publishers’ and Printers’ Guild), who in 1763 asked publicly, “What form of wealth could belong to a man, if not a work of the mind [...]?” (cited in Hesse 1990: 133) and the marquis de Condorcet, who, in 1776, in Fragment sur la liberté de la presse, attacked the notion of authorial claims and privileges in a pamphlet that (more or less) declared (in Hesse’s words: 116):

Unlike a piece of land, an idea can be discovered, inhabited, and used by an infinite number of people at the same time. Ideas are not the creation of individual minds, be it through revelation, appropriation, or cognition. Rather, they inhere in nature, and hence are equally and simultaneously accessible through the senses to all.

Directly refuting Foucault, Hesse describes

the emergence not of one modern position on the nature of the author and his relation to the text (i.e. the property-bearing individual) but rather of a modern tension between Diderot’s conception of the author as the original creator and hence inviolable proprietor of this works and Condorcet’s depiction of the ideal author as the passive midwife to the disclosure of objective knowledge. (1990: 117)

Legally Diderot’s side – with some help from their English bookseller friends – may seem to have triumphed, but I would assert that culturally Condorcet’s ide-
als persist, that the tension she describes remains. Even in seventeenth century England, a similar debate had started. John Locke himself took great exception to booksellers’ efforts to secure unlimited rights over dead authors’ work and agitated to block such licensing agreements. In 1693 he wrote in a memorandum to a friend, “That any person or company should have patents for the sole printing of ancient authors is very unreasonable and injurious to learning [...]” (Correspondence 366 [dated 2 January 1683] Memorandum 208–209, cited in Rose 1993: 33). He hotly calls such propositions “absurd and ridiculous”. That instead, in the intervening years, such authorial rights would appear natural, shows how successful such individualistic rhetoric was in establishing itself as consensus, or (ironically) as: common sense.

Locke’s Two Treatises of Government, for one, states very clearly that “As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property”, and yet three paragraphs later more or less defends the rights of those working land in common – provided they have committed themselves to a recognisable social compact:

It is true, in land that is common in England, or any other country, where there is plenty of people under government, who have money and commerce, no one can enclose or appropriate any part, without the consent of his fellow-commoners: Because this is left common by compact, i.e. by the law of the land, which is not to be violated. (Book II, Chapter V, Section 35:290)

Leaving aside the alarming connotations with the word “violated”, how are we to make sense of Locke’s contradictory admonitions regarding commons and enclosures? In The Poetics of Imperialism Eric Cheyfitz points out that many of the rhetorical moves in Locke’s treatise evidence a certain “[n]ostalgia for a mythic past of common land, and anxiety over the increasing privatization of commons” which “both conflict with and conceal the English project of converting this new land into the alienable places that property constitutes” (Cheyfitz 1991: 44). The very rhetorical ground Locke tried to build his argument on was itself unstable. E.P. Thompson points out similarly in his weighty Customs in Common (1991: 164):

### Footnotes

6. In “The Philosophy of Intellectual Property” Justin Hughes distinguishes between the emphasis in Anglo-Saxon law on Lockean ideas of “property” and the Continental regard for “personality” in the Hegelian sense. This distinction helps us understand the particular tenor of the concerns Foucault and Barthes express in their articles on the author.

7. While Locke did propose limiting the properties of current authors, Rose points out that Locke’s primary interest was with ancient, long-dead authors. Rose conjectures that this may have something to do with Locke’s interest in publishing an edition of Aesop’s fables, which was blocked by the stationers.
A global ecological history might be written, one central episode of which turned upon the mis-match between English and alien notions of property in land and the imperialist essays in translation. Even within the main island of Britain, successive emigrations and clearances from the Scottish Highlands were testimony to the decisions of a law which afforded no shelter to a population evicted from lands which they had supposed to be communally owned, from time out of mind, by their clans. But the law could take no cognisance of such a communal personality. Nor could its categories match the communal usages of hunter-gatherer people. Locke had ruminated, in his chapter on property, on “the wild Indian [...] who knows no enclosure, and is still a tenant in common.” This Indian served as a paradigm for an original state before property became individuated and secure [...]

Thompson elsewhere suggests that the very existence of the commons in England “prompted questions about the origin of property and about historical title to land”, questions Locke tried to answer by proposing that the origin of property inhere in the mixing of labor – as man’s only original property – with the common (1991:159). In the English imagination land in common was seen as negative community, Thompson explains, since “it belonged to nobody and was open to any taker” (160). It is little surprise that those living in the New World, where land was held, as Cheyfitz terms it, “not as property to be alienated, but in common to be used” were seen as touchingly backwards, nobodies, cannibals, noble savages, Calibans all, for they reminded the Europeans of a past they wished they could leave behind and yet also wished to return to (Cheyfitz 1991:43).

Locke’s reasoning could not prove why the land belonged to the master of the estate and not to his servant, or even his horse, as Thompson points out. G. A. Cohen’s essay “Marx and Locke on Land and Labour” in Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality enumerates internal inconsistencies in Locke’s “value argument”, which insists labor is responsible for almost all of what the land yields. Cohen argues, in brief, that even if we were to agree that a piece of property’s value (Cohen here specifies use-value) is virtually non-existent without labor, “the landowner would not thereby be justified in taking all of the land’s fruit,” he writes, “on the supposition that he or relevantly connected predecessors had performed all the labour on it” because land which is potentially so fertile would still have tremendous value (1995:188). Nor would the landowner be justified in claiming his rights as “the improving cultivator” because

the argument justifies private property only as long as appropriation generates an expanding common for the privately unendowed to forage on, and it therefore
fails to justify actual private property in the real and fully appropriated world. (189–190)\textsuperscript{9}

Nevertheless, starting with Locke the argument has been made that if property were not fully appropriated, it was not working for the public good, and so needed an owner who himself was – in Locke’s phrase – “proprietor of his own person” and therefore could bring the same cultivation to the unruly territory. Farmers or peasants might do the grueling work of tilling and sowing, but this did not entitle them to ownership of the land they had worked, for legally it was the figurative act of subduing the land that counted, and this could only be done by someone who himself had distinguished himself from the common.

The distinguishing mark of ownership relied on cultivation in a more intangible sense. “[T]he very mark of property,” Cheyfitz explains, “is the enclosure: the defining, or bounding, of a place that signals the perceived settling, or cultivation, of that place […]” and so “it is this figure of enclosure that marks the frontier between the savage and the civilized” (Cheyfitz 1991:55). A landowner was someone in the rhetorical position to translate property. And thus far, it seems, of all the various collectives and group ventures in this world over the past few centuries, only multinational corporations seem to have figured out how to band effectively behind a “communal personality” – to use Thompson’s phrase – recognised by law. Without such a legal fiction it was impossible to claim ownership. Thus it becomes clear why a writer like Detha who artfully reproduces stories otherwise attributed to ‘anonymous’ or ‘folk’ would be under some pressure to assume the mantle of ‘author’. What is the alternative? To be another nobody in a long line of nobodies?

The alternative offered by Shiva and her collaborators is to embrace the mantle of nobody, to render land titles a form of property theft, and in so doing accuse the accuser of piracy himself:

IPRs are the equivalent of the letters patent that the colonisers have used since 1492, when Colombus set precedence in treating the license to conquer non-European peoples as a natural right of European men […]. Charters and patents issued to merchant adventurers were authorizations to “discover, find, search out and view such remote heathen and barbarous lands, countries and territories not actually possessed of any Christian prince or people.” (Djel 1990:90) The colonisers’ freedom was built on the slavery and subjugation of the people with original rights to the land. This violent takeover was rendered ‘natural’ by defining the colonised people into nature, thus denying them their humanity and freedom.

\textsuperscript{9} He also advises on pages 166–167 that Marxists delink their labor argument from such flawed thinking.
Locke’s treatise on property\textsuperscript{10} effectively legitimised this same process of theft and robbery during the enclosure movement in Europe [...]. Because property obtained through privatisation of commons is equated with freedom, those commoners laying claim to it are perceived to be depriving the owners of capital of freedom. Thus, peasants and tribals who demand the return of their rights and access to resources are regarded as thieves and saboteurs. (Shiva et al. 1997: 10)

Her polemic relies on the same divisions made between European and non-European peoples that she finds so objectionable, and by invoking phrases such as “original rights” risks ineffectively challenging the basis on which these legitimizations are made. And yet, the work done by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE) and Navdanya, the National Biodiversity Conservation Movement she helped found, have been anything but ineffective.

The RFSTE has documented the shift from indigenous varieties of seed to high-yield varieties (‘miracle seeds’) introduced during the Green Revolution to recent genetically modified varieties, noting in particular the growth of the private seed industry in the 1980s, and the effects of these shifts on the independent farmer. The organisation has provided data to counter the claims made by the government in collusion with the World Bank and the multinational seed corporations that the liberalization of agriculture encourages ‘efficiency’ and thus benefits the ‘public good.’ (Shiva et al. 2000: 113, 119) The RFSTE and Navdanya joined forces in 2000 to establish a “Bija Panchayat” (Seed Tribunal) that drew testimonies from farmers across India and around the world to show that these ‘miracle seeds’ are instead what they call ‘seeds of distress’ and even more provocatively ‘seeds of suicide.’ They charge

The evidence showed on the one hand the growth of corporate monopoly in the seed sector and on the other hand farmers’ increasing dependency on these monopolies, which leads them to choose death as the only possible way out. (Shiva et al. 2000: 113)

Farmers plunge into a vicious cycle of debt, forced to buy seed as well as pesticides from the private sector at very high rates with every round of cultivation, rather than collecting seed and organic fertilisers from past yields as they had done previously; and when the yield is not as high as predicted, they are unable to command the promised prices for their crop, nor repay the high-interest-rate loans they took out when they needed money for seed and fertiliser at planting time, and so sink deeper into cumulative debt. “That the independent farmer is struggling to survive against immeasurably difficult odds is borne out by the number of

\textsuperscript{10} Shiva cites John Locke, \textit{Two Treatises of Government}, ed. Peter Laslett.
suicides by farmers,” Shiva and her collaborators write: “over 2000 known deaths have occurred in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh alone” (Shiva et al. 2000: 113).

In this and other works they link the survival of the indigenous seed with the survival of indigenous farmers, and the practice of indigenous farming more generally, in much the same way that eighteenth century authors were linked with ideals of creativity. The paradigm invites the same yesteryear rhetoric we saw in Foucault, but also in Locke. For instance, in a monograph decrying *The Violence of the Green Revolution* Shiva writes (1992:63):

> For 10,000 years, farmers and peasants had produced their own seeds, on their own land, selecting the best seeds, storing them, replanting them, and letting nature take its course in the renewal and enrichment of life. With the Green Revolution, peasants were no longer to be custodians of the common genetic heritage through the storage and preservation of grain. The ‘miracle-seeds’ of the Green Revolution transformed this common genetic heritage into private property, protected by patents and intellectual property rights. Peasants as plant breeding specialists gave way to scientists of multinational seed companies and international research institutions [...]. Plant breeding strategies of maintaining and enriching genetic diversity and self-renewability of crops were substituted by new breeding strategies of uniformity and non-renewability, aimed primarily at increasing transnational profits and First World control over genetic resources of the Third World. The Green Revolution changed the 10,000-year evolutionary history of crops by changing the fundamental nature and meaning of ‘seeds’.

Her observations force us to consider an underlying irony at work in these discussion of the bounds of intellectual property: in 1989 when Detha spoke so hal lowedly of a story needing to be honored like a seed, the actual seeds being sown in the land outside the institute where we sat talking were being threatened with extinction. The literal meaning of his metaphor for creativity could no longer apply. In the intervening years since that first interview, telephone lines have come to Borunda, as well as cable television; electricity is more reliable. And the international laws of intellectual property have succeeded in encouraging a kind of technological inventiveness which has rendered the seeds being planted outside the folklore institute non-renewable – a much more obvious instance of “the law freeze[ing] the play of signification by legitimating authorship” that Coombes referred to earlier. I submit that this fixing of the cycles of reproduction has implications for more than the “bij” movement in India, and certainly more than the translation projects Detha and I are engaged in.

The question asked earlier becomes more urgent: Is there an alternative to the legal fiction of a singular author in talking of ownership? And here I remind you
that the term “ownership” cuts several ways at once. A seed company may profit each time a farmer buys their product, but they equally are meant to be held accountable when that product proves defective. (Regrettably but not surprisingly, taking responsibility for the property one has sold is not an aspect of “ownership” the seed companies seem as interested in.) How does one – or two, or more – then “own” a story, in all the ways that term obtains? “Adamkhor” tells the story of an ornery priest in a village in the desert of India who received a boon that he would get everything he wished for but that everyone around him would receive double. He so begrudges others’ happiness he has one of his eyes and one of his ears put out so that the others around him will become deaf and blind. One by one his neighbours fall into wells, until there is only the priest left. The story ends with the ironic claim, “No one was happier than he!” Jagaram Singh’s Rajasthani oral version, from what I understand, told a local, everyday moral tale of greed. Detha’s Rajasthani written version then relied on that moral perspective to offer a critique of consumer culture, one attentive to local concerns and yet conscious of national and even global issues. Part of Detha’s authority to make such pronouncements about everyday life in this globalized world relied on the collective knowledge of all the storytellers before him (including Jagaram Singh) and part derived from the status he claimed as author, a cultivated individual worthy of speaking for the collective. Kabir’s Hindi version, like my English version, divided the financial reward for the publication 50–50, and split the legal credit for the story between author and translator, but in the moral landscape of the story, we maintain the fiction that it is the figure of the author, Detha, who animates this story. Thus, when I translate the title as “‘The Cannibal’, a term that, as Cheyfitz points out, was one of the “diverse arsenal of rhetorical weapons [Europeans] used to distinguish what they conceive[d] of as their “civilized” selves from certain “savage” others [...]” (1991:42), I am relying on the assumption that the term will be read as Detha’s intervention to appropriate a term that draws a line separating civility from savagery. In this reading, Detha must be the cultivated owner of the story in order for the judgment on the never-ending desire of consumer culture to be seen as savage. But at the same time, without my recreation, the story would not exist for the English reader. As Cohen points out, the value of the property inheres not only in the labor put into the land to cultivate it, nor in the land itself as fertile object. There is a much more complex procedure taking place.

Akhil Gupta argues in Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India that present-day farmers in India, who are forced by circumstance to combine ‘Green Revolution’ fertiliser with a traditional, Ayurvedic understanding of its heating effects on the land, are negotiating situations “in which contradictory logics and incommensurable discourses are intermingled with one another” and so have much to teach us about the ways that we might “concep-
tualize impure, hybrid, incommensurable modes of thinking and being without filtering them of their messiness” (Gupta 1998: 5, 6). He sees Intellectual Property Rights as the site of important contestation:

From a North American perspective, a discussion of the finer points of TRIPS appears hopelessly specialized, if not esoteric [...]. For many poor people living in different parts of the globe, however, the effects of international governance are visceral and often calamitous [...]. Peasant groups in India are aware that global accords signal important shifts in the territorial basis of nationalism and are struggling to articulate what this postcolonial space represents for peasant organization and resistance. (292)

And while he agrees with many of Shiva’s critiques of TRIPS and their effect on the everyday life of the farmers and peasants he interviewed, he urges for a more complicated articulation of that critique, one which does not lead “to the inescapable conclusion that environmental problems, like world wars, can best be understood in terms of conflict between coalitions of nation-states” (1998:293). Like many cultural theorists today focusing on issues of globalization, Gupta argues that extant understandings of the relationship between the local and the global, the micro and the macro, the West and the rest, need to be drastically rethought in order to comprehend some of the most important changes happening in the world today. (293)


> The total rejection of modernity by Shiva [...] and most post-developmentalists represents a lament against this globalization of the capitalist mode of production and indicates their desire to hold on to the local narratives in some imagined authentic form.11

The ‘local’ becomes not so much a geographical space as a temporal location, one defined in opposition to the modern.12 “This kind of assertion of difference,” Nanda observes (367), “is not very incompatible with the cultural logic of global capitalism, which can easily sell any such cultural difference as ethnic or global chic or cannibalize it in order to better market commodities.” Fixing the ‘local’ as essentialized commodity is but one way of freezing the play of difference in the public sphere (to use Coombes’ phrase.) Our task as scholars engaged in critical

11. I would like to thank Jayati Lal for sharing this reference with me.

12. Gupta points out astutely in Postcolonial Developments, “[...] while ‘the traditional’ is defined as the lack of modernity, ‘the indigenous’ is defined by what modernity lacks. It is defined not be excess but by the failure of modernity” (1998: 80).
translation studies is to theorise the makeshift ownership translation practice already engages in ways that makes productive (and possibly reproductive) use of the tensions inherent in concepts of intellectual property.
PART III

Contexts of translation
Translation and social praxis in ancient and medieval India

(With special reference to Orissa)

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This paper attempts a “sociology of translation” focused on India, and more specifically on the Indian state of Orissa. The analysis of translational practices during ancient and medieval times provides a key to the asymmetrical power relations between social classes, languages, regions, religions, as well as between the sacred and secular domains, during that period. Drawing on the critical perspectives of translation studies, but also critiquing them from the point of view of an as yet not fully developed India-centric translation studies project, it seeks to develop a model for the latter by providing a narrative of the intricate relations between culture, power and economy during the ancient and medieval period in India and in Orissa.

Keywords: India-centric translation studies; non-translation; asymmetrical power relations; translation as subversion

In recent times the field of translation studies has seen several fascinating intellectual undertakings. Translation has, for example, been perceived as an ideological enterprise and studied as a potential site for raising issues relating to practices of power and knowledge within a community or culture (Niranjana 1992). Translation studies draws on a combination of “work in linguistics, literary studies, cultural history, philosophy, and anthropology” (Bassnett 2002: xi); it is not merely an exploration of the process through which texts are transferred from one culture to another, but uses the study of translation as an indication of the history of ideas in a particular culture. Despite the claims by Bassnett that translation studies is losing its overly European focus, however, it continues to be Western in its theoretical orientation. Several recent studies have attempted to analyse various colonial and post-colonial translatory practices, but they largely employ theoretical models developed in Western discourses, probably due to a paucity of indig-
enous theoretical models. This could, perhaps, seem quite natural, since most of the studies have been undertaken keeping colonial translational practices in view. Nevertheless, it is problematic to impose derivative theoretical frameworks upon linguistic transactions and the circulation of knowledge and power in India, especially in ancient and medieval India. It would be more fruitful to develop a narrative of such practices and to examine if a general pattern can be derived in our search for a theory. The present paper is a step in that direction.

Translation in Sanskrit aesthetics

Before attempting to develop such a narrative, however, it is fruitful to meditate upon theoretical formulations regarding translational transaction in India. India has always been a multilingual society and linguistic transactions across several languages have been standard practice. In such a situation it would be normal for theoretical guidelines for translational practices and a narrative of praxis to exist, but, strangely enough, such is not the case; there has been no systematic study of translation in ancient India, in the sense the word is understood in the West. In the Western tradition the dominant view of translation has tended to include a perception of the violation of the integrity of natural languages in any process of linguistic transfer. Such acts of linguistic transfer were not viewed with suspicion or antipathy in India, however. Translation was therefore, a legitimate part of creative writing and of literary discourse, and it was not accorded separate ontological status. Though Sanskrit aestheticians and literary theoreticians constructed elaborate theoretical frameworks for other literary and linguistic practices, a theory of translation was unknown until the eighth century CE. In the ninth century, Anandabardhana, in Dvānityaloka, refers briefly to sambāda, or dialogue, which is the closest an Indian text on poetics comes to the related concept of translation, and which can be roughly rendered as ‘influence studies’. Citing an unknown source, Anandabardhana opines that there are three types of verisimilitude or sambāda: the similarity we find between an object and its reflection, between an object and its portrait, and verisimilitude. Translation would be verisimilitude in another language, but Anandabardhana did not develop either the ideas of verisimilitude or of reflection in relation to transactions between languages.

Another Sanskrit rhetorician, Rajasekharā, briefly touches upon the notion of harana, or appropriation, which is closer to the Western notion of translation as betrayal or plagiarism. Rajasekharā was a champion of the Prakrit language; in his Kavyamimamsa he deals at length with harana, with its classification and propriety. In the final analysis, however, he attributes the source of poetic production to the poet’s ability, or craftsmanship. The various categories of harana – such as
kavya harana, sabda harana and artha harana – are subsumed into a new synthesis in the poetic act of a poet-genius. In such a scheme of things the excellence of the translated text is in effect a triumph of authorship and creative ability or originality. It is worth noting here that among Sanskrit aestheticians and literary theorists Rajasekhara was the most competent to either attempt actual translation or develop a theory on the subject: he was multilingual (he claimed mastery over several tongues); unlike other Sanskrit scholars he did not denigrate other tongues; and he used all the languages in his own creative writings. He believed that felicity of poetic expression in relation to a particular theme or emotion could be achieved in a specific language. Thus, what would be suitable in Prakrit might not be in Sanskrit; different subjects required different languages to be expressed adequately. This opinion relating to a certain kind of untranslatability challenges the basic assumption of translation activity – that meaning and felicity of expression, or at least some part of them, are transferable to other languages – and perhaps explains why, although he was the most competent among Sanskrit scholars for the task, Rajasekhara did not develop a theory of translation.

Subsequent theoreticians of Sanskrit poetics like Kuntaka and Bhoja went against the dominant notion of the text as a finished product. They conceived the text as a process and were, like Anandabardhana and Rajasekhara, sensitive to the multilingual episteme of the times (sometimes citing Prakrit texts). In Bakrokti Jivitam, Kuntaka deals elaborately with the role of imagination in the creative process. But as De remarks, “Kuntaka started well on his journey of discovery, but stood half-way, enmeshed and uncertain” (1981:44). Even Bhoja, who according to Warder is the most comprehensive critic “in the synthesis of the study of language of literature with that of the aesthetic experience” (1978:37), is silent with regards exchange between languages. Despite defining twelve aspects that serve as a bridge between ordinary language and the expression of rasa (aesthetic rapture) in literature, Bhoja does not consider the problem of expression and interpretation when more than one language is involved.

In addition to the silence of the major theoreticians, the terminology used to designate translation activity in India is symptomatic of the subsidiary importance accorded it. For example, the term anubada, which designates translation in Sanskrit, means the reiteration of what is already known. In a hierarchy of exegesis, the anuvadya (subject), according to the Mimamska school of philosophy, is that which “discloses to the listener what any utterance is about, and is not always indispensable” (Raja 1977:185). In other words, the activity of anubada is involved in a peripheral aspect of exegesis. The real exegetical work aims at deriving the nirysa, or essence, of the poetic act. Since literary criticism and aesthetic theory in India closely followed grammar, concepts like anubada and anuvadya traditionally remained marginal categories in the discourse.
The lack of a theoretical framework has not meant, however, that there has been a lack of translation activity in India. Rather, the praxis growing out of a material need seems to have compensated for the lack of theory. This phenomenon itself could be symptomatic of the distribution of power and knowledge in ancient and medieval Indian society. As the subsequent delineation of praxis will show, translation activity in India constituted an epistemic challenge to the elitist consolidation of knowledge and power, which had traditionally been where most theoretical formulations were expressed. A contextual rather than a normative analysis of translation activity is what is thus called for if we are to achieve a precise understanding of this gap between theory and praxis.

Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit

Sanskrit – both Vedic and classical – was the dominant language in ancient India until the sixth century BCE. The Aryans, who claimed this language as their own, were the ruling race during that time, and it is quite possible that the ruling elite followed a politics of exclusion, resulting in the virtual obliteration of other languages from written discourse, including written history. It is quite legitimate to speculate that India has always been a multilingual society and that even when Sanskrit was the dominant language various others were at different stages of development. The fact that they could be claimed by new religious and caste hegemonies, as they assumed ascendancy, is proof of their developed status (see infra).

That Sanskrit maintained its dominance through a politics of exclusion becomes clear when we analyse the phenomenon of Panini’s grammar in the fifth century BCE. While other caste and religious identities were clamouring for attention by adopting other languages, Panini proceeded to codify Sanskrit grammar in his Astadhyayi, where he divided all languages into two types: chhandas and bhasa. Etymologically bhasa should have been used to refer to all types of language, but for Panini it meant only classical Sanskrit. Consciously or unconsciously, an attempt was being made to deny ontological status to other languages. According to Deshpande:

While literally the term bhasa stands for ‘language’; in fact, it actually refers to the upper class language, in relation to which other forms of Indo-Aryan and non-Aryan languages were viewed as being substandard, as those peoples themselves were placed lower in the social hierarchy. (1993: 2)

Probably due to such exclusionary politics, Sanskrit was the language through which discourse was controlled and the ideological justification of the world and
of society was provided. It was also the language of the elite and of statecraft. Various forms of interdiction restricted free access to Sanskrit, not to mention to its mastery. The Vedas, Vedangas, Smrritis, Darshanas, Samhitas and Kavyas written in Sanskrit were meant to have the function of ratifying the worldview of the ruling class and of the Brahmin clergy. The Brahmins used their knowledge of Sanskrit as an irreducible form of power, and translation was not encouraged since it would have diluted the role the texts could have played as a part of such an officially-sponsored ideology.

This dominance of Sanskrit, in the realms of both the sacred and the secular, created a situation in which interaction with other languages was impossible. Translation from the debabhasha of Sanskrit into the languages of common people in medieval India is a case in point. Such activity was not allowed in order to protect the hold of the Brahminical class on power and knowledge. Brahmins had monopolised knowledge and had used the power accruing from it in different spheres of socio-political activity with varying degrees of intensity. Translations would have meant access to this knowledge, and this in turn might have lessened the hegemony of this ruling elite.

In addition, translations challenged the metaphysical notion of authorship, by situating texts materially. The Brahmin class had retained its monopoly on the ancient Indian cosmology encoded in Sanskrit texts like the Vedas, Vedangas, etc., by claiming that these were ‘revealed’ texts and that translation into any common tongue would result in their pollution. Attempts at translation of debabhasha texts in medieval India countered this divine origin theory of texthood by placing texts in a more public domain and by problematizing the notion of authorship. Mediation between languages ultimately meant a shift in social equations, because such transfers dealt a deathblow to the linkage of language to knowledge. Texts came to be seen as ‘produced’ rather than as ‘created’.

In the sixth century BCE atheistic schools of thought such as Jainism and Buddhism came into prominence in India, in a revolt against Brahminism and Vedic ritualism. Buddhism and Jainism militated against the hegemony of Brahminism, and of Sanskrit, in part through their choice of languages, with Buddhism adopting Pali as the language of its scriptures and Jainism Prakrit. The emergence of Pali and Prakrit into dominant positions coincided with the ascendancy of Kshayarshi chiefains in the power hierarchy, and it is relevant to remember that both Buddha and Mahavira, the founders of Buddhism and Jainism respectively, were the sons of such chiefains.

While preaching his new religion Buddha tried to popularize the local language of the area to which he belonged. Subsequently, Ashoka, the most powerful proponent of Buddhism, also continued the patronization of Pali, by engraving
rock-edicts and encouraging religious preaching in that language. K. R. Norman has dealt extensively with this phenomenon:

I would suggest that the idea of language developing from Magadhi is a clear indication of the state of affairs in North India during the time of the Mauryan empire in the fourth and third centuries BC and I think that the idea of language development expressed in the Buddhist and Jain texts must have been arising during, and very probably because of, that empire. During the Mauryan period, Magadhi, the language of Ashoka’s capital Pataliputra, was the administrative language of North India, and it, or a modified form of it, was inscribed all over India to make Ashoka’s decrees known to his subjects. I would therefore suggest that Magadhi *sabbasattanam mulabhasa* [the language of all beings] was a (fairly) correct statement as far as North India was concerned in the fourth and third centuries BC and it was natural that a statement which Ashoka might have made about his administrative language should be adopted by the Buddhist missionaries when they went to Ceylon. A similar use for missionary purposes would doubtless account for the Jain adoption of the same phrase. (1980:67)

In a manner of speaking, the languages which were elevated to the status of a state language were in a similar position to that which Sanskrit had had previously. They too adopted the exclusionary politics of not recognising the relevance of other languages, especially for purposes of exchange and interaction. Pali and Prakrit did not encourage any translational transaction with Sanskrit during the early phase, from the fifth century BCE to the first century CE, since this would have meant an implicit acceptance of Brahmin dominance. Several texts in Pali and Prakrit, such as the *Tripitaka*, the *Dhammapada* and the *Nikayas*, were spawned by Buddhism and Jainism and created a parallel ideological structure driving for a new hegemony. Thus, in the initial phase, none of the three languages – Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit – accepted or adopted translation as a mode of interaction.

The situation can thus be summed up as follows. In the case of Sanskrit: (a) whatever was of perennial value was considered to have already been revealed; (b) revelation had taken place in the *debabhasa*, that is to say Sanskrit; (c) subsequent texts, including creative literature, owed allegiance to these foundational texts in Sanskrit. Unlike Sanskrit, however, Pali and Prakrit were never claimed to be languages of divine origin, but both were used as instruments for asserting the race, religion and caste identity of specific groups and their push for hegemony. Thus while society remained more or less multilingual, with many individuals having access to several languages at the same time, the positive dimension of a healthy exchange among the languages was not envisaged.
Changing roles for languages

Pali and Prakrit lost some of their glory after the decline of the influence of Buddhist king Ashoka and Jaina king Kharavela, around the second century BCE. Once the ruling dynasties which patronized these languages lost their hold over power, there was a corresponding decline in the appeal these languages possessed. The political crisis unleashed by the decline of these empires was compounded by foreign invasions, by Sakas, Hunas and other nomadic tribes. There was a return to a stability of sorts only after the establishment of the Gupta empire in north India. This led to a resurgence in classical Sanskrit scholarship, as the Gupta kings patronized Brahminism as the state religion.

Another phenomenon also contributed to the waning popularity of Pali and Prakrit: their use as scriptural languages. While the languages of the common people had a natural growth, these languages, due to their status as languages of religion, had a stratified existence. From the first century BCE to the eighth century CE there thus existed a complex linguistic scenario in which languages underwent a phase of secularization, accepting and appropriating each other and adopting translation as a means for survival. At around the same time the religions which used these languages as scriptural and missionary vehicles became mired in sectarian conflicts. The Mahayani Buddhists and the Swetambar Jainas, the conservative sects within Buddhism and Jainism respectively, demonstrated the same class characteristics as had the elite Brahmin class of earlier times. Like the Brahmans, the Mahayanis and the Swetambaris sought to monopolise power and knowledge and maintain an elite status in both secular and religious domains of the society. While adopting the class characteristics of the Brahmans of ancient India, they also sought to adopt the language of Sanskrit, against whose hegemony they had initially rebelled.

Sanskrit also gained wider acceptance among Buddhists, due to a number of other factors. First, Sanskrit gradually became distanced from its caste and religious connections. It became the vehicle for philosophical systems (Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, etc.) and various scientific and technical discourses (medicine, astronomy, dramaturgy, political economy, grammar, and the like). During this period, as well, Brahmans used Sanskrit to compose panegyrics on the newly ascendant Kshyatriya chieftains. Buhler goes so far as to assert that the entire Sanskrit ornate poetry tradition evolved out of such panegyrics (Buhler 1973). In addition, Brahmin scholars shed some of their insistence on maintaining an elitist status and their reservations about other languages. The increasingly secular character of the language made it more acceptable to communities other than the Brahmans. For example, in the dramas of Kalidasa, the character of Bidusaka (clown) uses Prakrit and Bibhasas in his dialogues, though he is a Brahmin by
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Caste, while his companion, the king, a Kshyatriya by caste, uses Sanskrit. Sanskrit aesthetician Bharata, in his *Natyasastra*, a treatise on dramaturgy, expresses approval of the use of several tongues in a single play. Bana, the famous writer of the *Harsha Charita* and the *Kadambari*, praises Prakrit authors as his literary models. In the introductory remarks to *Harsha Charita* he lauds the efforts of Satavahana, the author of *Gaha Sattasayi*, Prabara Sena, the author of *Setubandha*, and Gunadhya, the compiler of the *Brihat Katha*. The amount of respect of this Sanskrit scholar for a Prakrit writer can be gauged from the following couplet relating to Gunadhya:

> To whom is not the *Brihat Katha* a marvel like Harā’s sportive exertions of power – by both of which love is kindled, and glory done to Gouri? My tongue seems checked and drawn within my mouth by Adhyaraja’s even when they are only remembered as abiding in my heart, and so it does not attain to a poet’s success? (Trans. Cowell and Thouras. Cited in Serebryakov 1972:221)

Gradually, then, a situation was being created in which the politics of exclusion in the linguistic domain was on the wane; there was greater acceptance and recognition of the multilingual nature of Indian society. At the very least, the separate ontological status of the different languages was recognised, as was their legitimacy. As a result, the discourses oppositional to Brahminism, such as Buddhism and Jainism, adopted Sanskrit for their scriptures towards the first century BCE, and, probably due to the sectarian conflict within Buddhism, some Mahayanists accepted Sanskrit as the language of the intellect and of wisdom. The Sanskrit dramatist Asvaghosha, a Buddhist by faith, was an early example of this. Jainism also followed suit, accepting Sanskrit as a vehicle for its scriptural ideas.

A new development took place with the decline of the scriptural status of Prakrit, but its survival in a subordinate role and greater participation in secular discourse. Philosophical treatises, ornate literature, lyric poetry and narrative prose were written in Prakrit. The functional gap between Sanskrit and Prakrit was thereby lessened, making the language more acceptable to the scholarly elite. Many Sanskrit rhetoricians – Anandabardhana, Hemachandra and Rajasekhara, for example – cited Prakrit texts as models of literary excellence, and grammars of Prakrit were codified in Sanskrit. A true basis for fruitful exchange between these languages in the future was created during this time, and further interaction between the languages took place with the retelling of Sanskrit texts in Prakrit. Thus, during the fourth century CE, Bimal Suri composed his *Paumachariya*, a Jain version of Valmiki’s epic the *Ramayana*. Suri’s text was a subversion of the Brahminical worldview enshrined in the earlier text. In Suri’s Jaina Purana the story of Rama, Ravana and Hanuman is retold according to the Jaina worldview. In the *Paumachariya*, Ravana is not a monster, nor Hanuman a monkey – they are
vidyadharas, semi-divine personages. More than one hundred years later Sanghadas and Dharmadas wrote the *Vasudevakindi*, a free rendering of the Sanskrit *Haribansha* in Prakrit. While writing this text the poets incorporated many legends, folktales and short stories in oral circulation, retaining the original narrative line of the *Haribansha*. Subsequent Sanskrit writers were at times influenced by these efforts and adopted these texts as models for their own creative endeavours. Alternatively, many regional language writers were inspired to transmute, subvert, and retell other Sanskrit texts.

The period also witnessed another process contributing to translational transactions later on, that is the production and popularization of the *Puranas*. Most of the *Puranas* were written during this period to cater to the cultural needs of society. The ideology informing those cultural needs has been aptly summed up thus:

> [...] the *Puranas* performed the delicate task of operating simultaneously at several levels, widening their scope to accommodate local elements as much as possible and involve as many people as permissible without compromising their principal objectives of establishing the Brahminical social order; in the process even running the risk of appearing to be self-contradictory, without losing their essential unity. (Chakrabarty 2001 (1996): 64)

This attempt to widen the reach of Puranic ideology was what appealed to the Jainas most. Later on, the Jainas used the translation/transcreation of the *Puranas* as a way of reaching a wider audience.

Before the Jainas entered the field of translation, however, the Buddhists had already embarked upon this project in the fifth century CE. Describing the contribution of the Buddhists to the actual process of translation, Winternitz comments as follows (1981–1985, vol. II: 218):

> Indian Pandits went thence to Tibet and China, learned Tibetan and Chinese, and translated Sanskrit works into these languages. Chinese pilgrims like Hsuan-Tsang learnt Sanskrit at Nalanda, and translated Buddhists texts into Chinese. Some of the Sanskrit works which were produced there, and the originals of which are lost, would not be known to us, but for the Tibetan and Chinese texts. The finds of manuscripts in Central Asia include fragments not only of Sanskrit texts, but also of translations of Indian works in Central Asiatic languages.

The zeal for proselytization could be said to be at the root of the development of this process. It is true that Jainism maintained a distance and a separate identity from Brahminical Hinduism, but the Jainas were less virulently oppositional and less aggressively proselytizing than were the Buddhists, who had the expansion of their influence at the uppermost of their agenda. With the ascendancy of the
Gupta empire in the fourth century CE and the resurgence of Sanskrit scholarship, the Buddhists felt threatened within India. Moreover, they had established universities to which they needed to attract students. With the renewed increase in Sanskrit scholarship, the use of Prakrit as a lingua franca in the universities might have seemed unglamorous and less rewarding. Thus, on the one hand Buddhists tried to expand their base outside India while on the other they started translating Pali texts into Sanskrit to make them more accessible in the universities and more in keeping with the temper of the times. In the process, they fashioned a synthetic language which can be termed ‘mixed Sanskrit’. In addition to translating Pali texts they retranslated Sanskrit texts into Chinese and Tibetan. A truly multilingual translation practice began with these Buddhist scholars. The close connection of proselytization, academia and translation, whose echo we find in the efforts of Christian missionaries, was established at this time by the Buddhists.

If the real credit for translation as it is understood today goes to the Buddhists, the credit for transcreation can be attributed to the Jainas. It was mentioned earlier that Jainas were not aggressively proselytizing and felt less threatened during the resurgent Brahmin ascendancy. Once the political climate became more chaotic after the decline of the Guptas, however, the Jainas increased their influence among the intermediary castes on Indian territory, especially in the western part. Since Sanskrit was the domain of higher castes like the Brahmins and Kshyatriyas, the Jainas started adapting their religious scriptures into a more easily accessible standardised literary language called Apabhransa. Writers using this language contributed greatly to the practice of translation. This shall be discussed in greater detail below.

Thus, with the existence of three major cognate languages – Sanskrit, Prakrit and Apabhransa – and their mutual interaction it can be said that a truly multilingual situation had evolved in India towards the eighth century CE. However, the relationship between the Aryan languages of north India was not based on equality. Sanskrit continued to dominate as the language of power while other languages, rightly or wrongly, were identified as the languages of the common people. Rajasekhara’s statement in Kavyaminamsa (Chapter III) designating Sanskrit as the mouth, Prakrit as the arms, Apabhransa as the thighs, Paisachi as the feet and mixed Sanskrit as the chest of the Kavyapurusha is a clear indication of the existence of a hierarchical relationship. Ironically, Rajasekhara was one of the major champions of Prakrit and an accomplished practitioner. It must be pointed out here, that except for Buddhists of certain denominations, other groups did not challenge this hierarchical relationship in any serious way. The asymmetrical relationship that existed in medieval India between the source language and the target language could have been the reason for the lack of theorisation and intel-
lectual legitimation of a practice which was gradually becoming more and more widespread to cater to social needs.

Linguistic pluralism and the rise of translation

The dominant position of Sanskrit gradually waned after the ninth century CE. The socio-political reasons for this were the following. First, there was the absence of a strong central political power in western and northern India. Traditionally, strong imperial seats of power led by higher caste rulers had been the patrons of classical Sanskrit scholarship. With their decline, many small principalities in the northern and western parts of India shared power. To safeguard their political and economic interests they compromised with various business communities and trading classes, among which the Jainas had a greater sphere of influence. Once the trading classes became the major financiers of the smaller principalities, the Jain worldview became as important as that of the Brahmins, and the languages the Jainas patronized gained wider circulation. Apart from Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa, the period coincided with the rise of a more diluted version of Apabhraṃśa, namely Abahatta. A corrupt form of Sanskrit, it had wide use among the common people and its status was almost that of a lingua franca across the upper half of the Indian peninsula. Sukumar Sen is of the view that Abahatta is the parent language of most of the modern Indo-Aryan languages, such as Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, etc. (Sen 1992: 329).

Once literate people had access to languages like Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhraṃśa and Abahatta, in various stages of development and use, conditions became far more conducive to translational practice. Prakrit, Apabhraṃśa and Abahatta texts were translated into Sanskrit, and sometimes texts were also produced using multiple languages, such as Somprabha’s *Kumarapala-Pratibodha*, in 1195 CE.

Moreover, the period also saw the germination of many regional languages in the North. Several tongues, which until then had had a purely colloquial status, became literary languages. Amidst all these changes in the linguistic scenario, there was also a change in the status of Prakrit among Sanskrit rhetoricians. The texts of the major writers in Prakrit began to be taken seriously by Sanskrit scholars. As stated earlier, the texts of Gunadhya and Hala were lauded by eminent writers and rhetoricians like Banabhatta and Anandabardhana. Gunadhya’s *Brihat Katha*, written originally in Paisachi Prakrit, was translated into Sanskrit by Buddhāswami in the tenth century. This translation was more or less a faithful translation of the original text. Due to the popularity of the text other Sanskrit scholars, Kshemendra and Somadeva, also translated it in the eleventh century. Interestingly, Somadeva for the first time used the term ‘translation’ to designate
the nature of his work. Thus, the translation of the *Brihat Katha* occupies a privileged position in the history of translation in India. Another collection of very popular stories – the *Panchatantra* – was also often translated. The Jaina trading classes were very familiar with various versions of this text. The Arabs who came in contact with these trading classes also gained access to the texts, and so the *Panchatantra* was translated into Arabic and old Persian (Pahlavi) at this time.

As the linguistic space grew more liberal, and languages became more tolerant of each other, the activity of retelling and subverting the Sanskrit *Puranas*, begun in the fourth century, became more widespread. It was mentioned earlier that the *Puranas* were meant to further Brahminical ideology among the common masses. The retold and subsersive *Puranas* served a similar role for the Jainas during this period. The Buddhists also translated the Betala stories from Pali to Sanskrit. In the eleventh century Buddhist monk Dipankar Srijnana, known as Afisa, translated these stories with a sequel into Tibetan; he also translated a number of Buddhist philosophical texts into Tibetan.

It must be mentioned here, however, that despite such a liberal atmosphere of transaction among languages, certain Brahminical philosophical texts – such as the *Vedas, Vedangas* and *Upanishads* – were not translated into any other tongue. Nor were works in the ornate poetry tradition, including those of famous poets like Kalidasa, rendered into other languages. This was probably due to the fact that the people who had access to the philosophical texts still believed in Brahminical hegemony and the preeminence of the Sanskrit language. The practitioners of Prakrit ornate poetry chose to compose their own Kavyas rather than translate those written originally in Sanskrit. Thus, high Sanskrit culture remained largely unaffected by translational practice for a long time. Theorisation, which would have been a part of such so-called high culture, was not felt to be needed, since sacred philosophical texts and canonical Kavyas remained out of the translational orbit. The lack of theory building in translation in India can be attributed to this phenomenon.

**South India**

Up to this point the focus has mainly been on the dynamics between Indo-Aryan languages in north India. The narrative has been developed taking into account translational transactions between Sanskrit and other more or less cognate middle Indo-Aryan languages, such as the various forms of Prakrit, Pali, Apabhraṃsa and Abhāhatta. A different relationship existed in south India, however, between Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages. The Vindhyā mountains did not, of course, close off the South into a self-contained cultural unit, and there was regular cul-
tural interaction between the South and the North throughout history. Northern religious and social movements regularly affected the society and polity of southern India, but the social upheavals in the South were less turbulent than those in the North. The South remained more stable than the chaotic North, which was ravaged by both internal and external forces. Religious, cultural and political changes took place in the South slowly and gradually, brought about not by marauding forces but by trade and missionary activity. Thus, the various Dravidian linguistic-cultural phenomena had a more stable trajectory of growth. The relationship between northern and southern languages reflected this. Sanskrit and Prakrit, especially Maharastri Prakrit, were well nurtured in the south, but the indigenous Dravidian languages maintained their unique identity and steady growth and largely resisted, unlike in the North, the domination-subordination syndrome.

To a great extent it was possible to maintain the unique identity of Dravidian languages because of the language policy adopted by southern states under different dynasties. Southern empires such as the Chola, Pandya, Kakatiya, Satavahana, Rashtrakuta, Ganga and Chalukya, despite their heterogeneity, followed a broad pattern in which the language of the Nadu (province), or local language, maintained a healthy coexistence with the language of power or statecraft (which would change along with a change in the seat of power). The central power had a healthy respect for regional peasant consolidations and their languages. Unlike in the North, these consolidations wielded substantial power. Burton Stein qualifies the state formation within which this form of power sharing took place as a “segmentary state”. Thus even when Sanskrit was the state language, no opposition existed to the growth of local languages. Moreover, since the southern languages were not cognate languages of Sanskrit, large-scale mutual appropriation was not possible. Whatever transactions took place, they were indirect, such as the sharing of formal aspects, the borrowing of terms and ideas, etc. A detailed analysis of that process is necessary here to better understand the translational situation in the South. The analysis of the process has to be separate for each major southern language because their reaction to Sanskrit and their process of growth was different. It should also be noted that Malayalam, one of the major south Indian languages, has been omitted here because it had not developed sufficiently during the period under consideration.

Tamil
Of all south Indian languages, Tamil was the most conservative with regard to its relationship with other languages, especially Sanskrit. Tamil’s reaction to Sanskrit can be characterised as undiluted resistance. Although it was the most dominant and developed language, with a long tradition of written literature beginning in
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the third century BCE, major translations date only from the sixteenth century CE. Of course Kamban had translated the Ramayana in the eleventh century into Tamil, but credit for this should also go to his association with the Kakatiya kingdom of modern Andhra Pradesh. It is a moot question whether Kamban would have been inspired to undertake the task if he had not been influenced by the linguistic scenario prevailing with regards Telugu. The reasons for Tamil’s adversarial relationship with Sanskrit were many. First, Tamil could boast of a long lineage comparable to that of Sanskrit, with its own indigenous grammar. Second, the scriptures of the local religions were in this language. Moreover, as the realm of influence of the Jainas and the Buddhists spread in the South, they contributed to the process of desanskritisation, encouraging the consolidation of Tamil. The Jainas even went to the extent of disowning Ardha Magadhi, their traditional language, attempting to write their scriptures in Tamil. The earliest Tamil epic, Cilappatikaram, was composed by Ilanko Atikal, a Jaina convert, in the second century CE, and by the time Bhakti cults spread within those areas, they used Tamil as a vehicle rather than Sanskrit. Thus the first Tamil translation from Sanskrit, Gunadhya’s Brihat Katha, reveals a peculiar process. Brihat Katha was initially translated into Sanskrit by Jaina King Durbinita, in the sixth century CE. This Jainised text was later rendered into Tamil by Konkuvelir, in the eighth century. The translation had a new title, Perunkati, and all aspects of the Brahminical worldview were eliminated. Thus, while Sanskrit was acceptable, the Brahminical order associated with it was anathema. While retaining its purity and rigour, Tamil surreptitiously appropriated Sanskrit terminologies, concepts and iconic figures. Towards the twelfth century a less adversarial relationship developed, due to writers like Umapati, who were adept in both languages. Poets such as Soibattar translated the Bhagabad Gita in the thirteenth century, giving it a new title, Paramartha Dharisanam. Literary history does not record any notable translations other than these stray examples until the sixteenth century, despite the strength and reach of Tamil. There is another important dimension to the Tamil translation scene which should also be mentioned here. Whereas the philosophical texts of Brahminism and the tradition of ornate poetry in Sanskrit were rarely translated into cognate languages, such as Prakrit, as more and more translations into Tamil took place it was mainly the philosophical texts – the Gita, Vedas, Vedangas and Upanishads – which were translated.

Kannada

Kannada did not adopt the extreme position of Tamil resistance. Its position has been aptly summed up as follows by T. R. S. Sharma (2000: 31):
Kannada displayed neither fear nor self-consciousness while dealing with Sanskrit or assimilating freely the linguistic and lexical materials from it. In short, Kannada did not have to confront Sanskrit the way Tamil did [...]. In relation to Kannada, Sanskrit therefore enjoyed a privileged position, though the hegemony of Sanskrit was already shaken by the use of Pali and Prakrit and the Vedic religion had given rise to counter movements in Buddhism and Jainism. As Kannada writing received concepts, myths and ideology from the Vedic and Jain religions, the Jain elements being predominant, Sanskrit and Prakrit both had a direct hand in shaping the language and its literature.

Since Kannada had simultaneous interaction with both Sanskrit and Prakrit, the language did not become overly Sanskritised; since the Jaina influence was predominant, the language did not manifest a Brahminical worldview. Instead of a culture marked by hierarchy, Kannada culture and literature were characterised by collaboration. In Asaga’s *Karnataka Kumara Sambhaba* (853 CE) there is a demonstration of this process. This text attests to the multilingual allegiance of the author, his close reading of Kalidasa’s Sanskrit text, a general scholarly erudition and mastery of form, as well as adaptation in a manner suitable to local taste. Moreover, the worldview is coloured with a Jaina flavour. Gunabarma I’s *Haribansam* (900 CE) is a similar translation/adaptation with a synthetic worldview and is important also because of its innovations on the level of form, using both prose and poetry in the adaptation of a poem.

The translation of the entire period bears the influence of Jaina religion. The greatest Kannada poet, Pampa (942 CE), while writing his epic *Vikramarjunavijayam*, was in fact retelling the *Mahabharata* from a Jaina point of view, despite being an erudite Sanskrit and Prakrit scholar. His rendering of Jinasena’s *Adi Puranam*, which takes as its subject the first Jaina Tirthankara Adinatha, shows his skill at both faithful translation and transcreation. Similarly Baddaradhane was a Kannada rendering of *Panchatantra* by an unknown translator from a Jaina perspective. Throughout this period then, various translational practices (creative translation, adaptation and literal translation) continued in Kannada. Jaina religious ideology and a healthy respect between Sanskrit and Kannada were behind this strong translational tradition. This is evident in Janna’s *Yashodhara Charite* (thirteenth century) adapted from Sanskrit.

**Telugu**

Telugu was the closest of the southern languages to Sanskrit in terms of orientation and worldview. The dynasties that ruled the areas where Telugu was used were somewhat closer to Brahminical ideology and had no hesitation in patronizing Sanskrit. The socio-political situation in this region was conducive to fruitful interaction between languages, and to translational practice. In the eleventh cen-
tury CE the great poet Nannaya undertook the translation of the *Mahabharata*. However, his patron, Hindu King Rajaraja, specifically asked him not to follow the Kannada model of Jainisation. Thus, quite early in Telugu, the modern form of literal translation was used. Nannaya completed the translation of only two and a half books of the Sanskrit epic. Like the Kannada translators, however, he took certain liberties with the form, using both prose and poetry. This more or less set the tone for subsequent translations into Telugu. Tikanna (thirteenth century) and Yerrana (fourteenth century), who translated the remaining fifteen books and half a book respectively, closely followed the example of their predecessor. This sharing of a translation enterprise across several centuries was unique in Telugu literature. Apart from these writer-translators several others undertook the translation of texts with a predominantly Brahmin ideology, keeping the worldview intact but tinkering occasionally with the form.

Unlike what was the case with Prakrit, some literary texts were translated into Telugu. Notable examples of such translations were: Nanna Chodudu’s twelfth century *Kumar Sambhabam*, which did not follow Kalidasa’s text closely, Mullaghatika Ketana’s *Dasakumaracharitramu* (thirteenth century), Machana’s rendering of Rajasekhara’s play *Viddhasalabhanjika* into *Kathakavya Keyurabahu Charitramu*, Ketana’s *Kamalanalla Matyudu*, the Telugu rendering of the Sanskrit prose-fiction *Kadambari*, and Srinatha’s *Gatha Saptasayi* (thirteenth century). In addition to literary and religious texts, several technical texts were also rendered into Telugu. Puvuluri Mallana’s *Ganitamu* is a translation of a Prakrit treatise on mathematics; it, along with Ketana’s *Vijnaneswareyamu* and a translation of Rudrada’s *Nitishara* by an unknown translator in the twelfth century, are examples of translations of technical texts.

With some exceptions, such as Adharvana’s *Bharatamu* (twelfth century), a Jaina version of the *Mahabharata*, translation into Telugu was dominated by Brahminical ideology. The most positive aspect about translation into Telugu was that translators took up a variety of texts. In matters of ornate poetry and basic philosophical texts in Sanskrit, however, translation into Telugu remained as conservative as into Prakrit. Such texts were probably still considered to be untranslatable, despite the fact that Telugu was the most advanced of the South Indian languages.

In the South, then, through Brahminisation, Sanskrit became the language of the elite and of religion. The aryанизation of the South led to the development of complex social and political practices, as arriving Brahmins, with their language and texts, came into direct confrontation with the indigenous Tamil language, with its lore created by emergent castes. However, as Sanskrit and Tamil were both already highly developed, neither could eliminate the other, and the confronta-
tion between the two gave rise to a synthetic culture (Deshpande 1993). While Sanskrit forged a pan-Indian intellectual identity, the second language emerged and functioned as the language of the state and of the political elite. Unlike in the North, where language was linked to caste and to religious texts, in the South the importance enjoyed by a language had more to do with its relation to the State. The concepts of the sovereign and of the province were connected to the structure of the language (Kulke 1995). During the Chola Empire, which lasted for one thousand years (the most dominant period being from 849 to 1279 CE), the local chieftains patronized the local vernaculars – Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, etc. – although Sanskrit remained the language of sovereign power. The importance accorded to local languages in the South explains the healthier growth of Dravidian literatures as compared to the modern Indian literatures of Indo-Aryan groups in the North. The concept of Nadu, or province, in the South Indian states is expressive of this aspiration for provincial identity based on political and military hegemony (Kulke 1995). This points to the simple fact that the question of language in the South was tied to that of regional autonomy; both Sanskrit and regional languages were used in literary texts and in the canonical texts of religion. This model also played an important role in moulding the literary culture in Orissa, a region which had close political and cultural contact with the South from the eleventh century onwards. In what follows we propose to map out the translation scene in medieval Orissa.

Orissa

As was the case elsewhere, language in medieval Orissa was a defining index of the complex relationship between cultural production and the political economy. In ancient Orissa, the Dravidian and Austric inhabitants likely used various local languages (Kui, Kuvi, Kisan, Malto, etc.) for day-to-day interaction, but the language for which the earliest evidence of use exists, in the Ashokan edicts, is Pali. Subsequent rock-edicts from Kharavela’s time, first century BCE, were in Prakrit. It is worth remembering that Pali and Ardhamagadhi Prakrit were the scriptural languages of Buddhism and Jainism respectively. Although no recorded evidence exists to provide a precise dating, it might be safe to conjecture that Sanskrit came to Orissa with its Aryanisation before Ashoka’s invasion in the third century BCE (see Pattanayak 1956). After the rule of the Somavanshis, the major part of modern Orissa came under the imperial Gangas, whose language policy was similar to that prevalent in south India. Several rock-edicts of that period make use of three languages: Sanskrit, the language of the sovereign; the language of the province; and, finally, the language of the people and of popular culture. As Telugu was the mother tongue of the Gangas, it became the language of the state. In addi-
tion, however, use was made of the common language of the people of Orissa for administrative purposes. It was during this period that the Oriya script came into existence. Nevertheless, and despite the script having been stabilised during their rule, the Gangas encouraged and patronized Sanskrit for the written texts of scripture and literature, with the result that Sanskrit literature flourished while not a single text of importance was written or translated into Oriya. Thus, paradoxically, the first stage of translation activity in medieval Orissa was one where translation was conspicuous by its absence.

The Gangas were replaced by Suryavanshi King Kapilendra Dev, an Oriya by birth and by language. By that time the Oriya chieftains were already in search of a respectable place in the royal power structure. Kapilendra Dev used language as a tool to bind people together and to consolidate power, and this resulted in the breakdown of Sanskrit domination. It was only once this had happened that the rural elite tried to appropriate and subvert the Sanskrit texts. This was the second phase of revolt. It was not by chance that the early attempts at appropriation and subversion were by non-Brahmins such as Sarala Das (c. 1420–1480) and Balaram Das (c. 1470–1550). Their acts of translation and rewriting, their use of the language of the people to disseminate scripture, can be seen as efforts to destroy Brahmin and Sanskrit hegemony in an attempt to take a dominant position in the ideological struggle. Sarala Das’s translations were in fact re-writings of the structure, values and worldview of Sanskrit texts like the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Chandi Purana, to the point of at times even taking liberties with the themes of the texts. Translation had to all intents and purposes become a search for identity. Like the texts in the south Indian languages, these were revolts against the Sanskrit originals. Sarala Das’s earliest writing, Bichitra Ramayana (Mishra 1980), is an expression of this. His Ramayana begins with the banishment of Sita, and, whereas in Valmiki’s Ramayana Rama banished Sita after being informed that a washerman and his wife were discussing Sita’s lack of chastity, in Sarala’s Purana the story was transformed and given a new significance. The washerman and his wife were replaced by a milkman and a milkmaid, and the adulterous milkmaid was discovered by her husband. Far from being apologetic, she retorts that her husband should take a cue from Rama, who does not mind his wife Sita’s flirtations with Ravana. Through the construction of the character of the milkmaid the Brahminic notion of chastity and male domination is challenged.

Another demonstration of the close and complex relationship between power, language and translation was the translation of Sarala Das’s Oriya text into Telugu. Though there was much more literature in Telugu than in Oriya at the time, no Telugu text had been translated into Oriya. Not only was Sarala Das’s Bichitra Ramayana translated into Telugu in the sixteenth century, but five more translations of the text into the same language were to follow. The most plausible
explanation for this is that it happened as a result of Oriya King Kapilendra Dev's having extended his empire into Telugu-speaking lands. Sarala Das's translations of Sanskrit texts into Oriya not only signified the emergence of a new rural elite within the power structure; they also had far-reaching consequences for Oriya language and literature, establishing the institution of authorship indirectly and consolidating Oriya as a written language. Sarala Das's selection of texts for translation and the process of recreation of those texts through a modification in characterisation and worldview became the model for later writers like Balaram Das.

Balaram Das is known as the author of the *Jagamohan Ramayana*, a free translation of Valmiki's epic. While Sarala Das trivializes and subverts the ethical norms and worldview of the priestly order, Balaram Das contests, but also at times accepts, this worldview. In the *Jagamohan Ramayana* he creates a parallel ideological structure by alternating between breaking with the original text, closely following it and at other times inventing new narratives. The main significance of this text is that it initiated the process of translation as we know it today in Oriya. This was the third phase of the translation process.

It should be noted here that up to this time in India and the history of Orissa only the *Puranas*, which mainly consisted in the articulation of ethical norms, had been taken up for translation. Theological and philosophical texts had been left untouched. When Sarala Das rewrote the *Mahabharata* he dropped the portion of “Bhisma Parva” known as the *Srimad Bhagabat Gita*, a theological and philosophical treatise. Balaram Das took up the translation of this text. His *Gita* is both a translation of the Sanskrit text and a commentary on it. Like Sarala Das, Balaram Das states that his work is not a translation, but a revelation: Lord Jagannath revealed the text to him and he merely transcribed it. Such a strategic disavowal of agency could be symptomatic of the social restrictions that accompanied access to and appropriation of sacred texts, which were under the control of the priestly class. His subsequent humiliation and oppression by Brahmins (Das 1951) demonstrates this; his assuming the marginal function of a medium for the transcription of the sacred revelation thus did not prevent his persecution at the hands of the Brahmin clergy. In his later *Batabakasha* he elaborately records the oppression he had to undergo because of his attempt to read the Sanskrit texts. Balaram Das's negotiation with his subaltern status had far-reaching implications. Not only did it show that it was possible for autonomy between castes to exist, in particular with the increasing ascendancy of non-Brahmin castes such as the Karans, Khandayats and Gopalas, but it also established Oriya as a language in which theological and philosophical texts could be articulated. Moreover, his interpretation laid the groundwork for the translation process proper. Be-
fore Balaram Das no one had dared to attempt a direct verbatim translation of a Sanskrit religious text into Oriya.

In the fourth stage of the translation process caste divisions became more fluid and the language-allegiance of different castes underwent a massive change. In Jagannath Das’s translation of the *Bhagabata* this process reached its culmination. *Srimad Bhagabata* is both an ethical and a philosophical treatise; it is the prime theological text of the Vaishnavites. Jagannath Das, who was a member of a lower denomination of Brahmins, translated the *Bhagabata* with the help of Sridhara’s Sanskrit commentary on the text. Before Jagannath Das (c. 1490–1550) all Oriya texts had been based on the linguistic structures of Magadhi Prakrit, whereas Jagannath Das Sanskritized the structure of the Oriya language to make it conducive to the articulation of philosophical texts. The Prakrit strain of Sarala Das’s and Balaram Das’s Oriya language had probably been less-well equipped for such a task. Once Jagannath Das had Sanskritized Oriya, it gained acceptance throughout Orissa, communicating beyond sub-regional dialect affiliations. This process contributed to the creation of a standard Oriya language. At the same time, and unlike the case in South India, the spread of Vaishnavism in Orissa blunted the sharpness of caste distinctions. After the sixteenth century standardised Oriya became the language of all sections of the population, including of the sovereigns and the priests. Although Sanskrit was still used in the court and religious establishments, Oriya had a powerful presence in the sphere of creative writing and administrative transactions. Such a scenario was responsible for the subsequent translation into Oriya of Sanskrit texts such as Jayadeva’s *Geeta Gobinda*, by Dharanidhar, in the later half of the sixteenth century.

A four-fold division of translational practices and usages in medieval Orissa can thus be identified. During the first phase, access to original Sanskrit texts was denied non-Brahmins. In the second, non-Brahmins revolted against Brahmin hegemony by subverting texts written in Sanskrit. Translation activity was an expression of the desire on the part of hitherto excluded social groups to appropriate a cultural space, which had previously been denied them. In the third phase, the subalternity of translation was expressed through a paradoxical process, which involved the appropriation and acceptance of Sanskrit texts. Translation made it possible to express high philosophical speculations in the vernacular languages, thereby both conspiring against and colluding with hegemonic Sanskrit. In the final phase, the language of the emerging castes, representing a parallel worldview and power structure, began to be modelled on the language of the hegemonic caste, with the same universalist aspiration.
The scene of translation in medieval Orissa was thus as complex as the social matrix from which it arose. In many ways translation contributed to the formation of the Oriya language and of Oriya identity, but this process of standardisation also involved a progressive alienation from dialectal roots. These problems are most evident in the creation of a canon of Oriya literature which systematically excluded folk diction. The fourth phase of translational practice, epitomized by Jagannath Das, was particularly symptomatic. In fact it became a model for subsequent translators and creative writers. Translation activity was to take a radically new turn in the nineteenth century with the rise of an urban elite, schooled in English. This new development, in the sphere of translation in Orissa, deserves a separate analysis.

Conclusion

Translations, more than the so-called ‘original’ creative works, are governed by social and political compulsions. Creative art might owe its origin to purely aesthetic reasons (the aesthetic principles may, however, be indirectly linked to social praxis), but the need for translation is more ideological than aesthetic. While designating translation as an ideological enterprise we are using the term ‘ideology’ to signify the relation in which the realm of culture stands to that of political economy. This relationship is asymmetrical and can tend to either mystify culture’s relation to material practice or to lay it bare. To designate translation as an ideological enterprise is, therefore, to suggest that translations, more than ‘original’ creative works, give us a sense of our inescapable imbrication in the social and political forces of our times. Here, however, the emphasis has been placed on the potentially demystifying role of competing ideologies involved in the translational practices under review. The act of translation is a powerful demonstration of the relationship between culture and political economy principally in two respects: (1) in its role as a mediator between languages, and (2) in its subversion of the notions of ‘authorship’, ‘originality’, and ‘creation’, thereby redrawning the boundary between the private and public nature of cultural sites. In other words, translation, in denying the private privacy and in denying the owner sole ownership, enables us to see the private and the public domains not in monolithic terms, but as a process, as part of a dialectic. 

1. The authors would like to thank Paul St-Pierre for his editorial suggestions.
From regional into pan-Indian
Towards a heterographic praxis for postcolonial translation*

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The discipline of translation studies in India is largely confined to and appropriated by Departments of English. Alongside this, a huge publishing industry has taken up the translation of regional language texts into English, raising the question of the viability of the translation’s reaching an ‘Indian audience’. The negotiating contours and the inferences of this paper are derived from my experience of translating the Malayalam novel *Vyasanum Vighneswaranum [Vyasa and Vighneswara]* by Anand, into English. The paper proposes a process of translation termed *heterographic* to achieve linguistic decentralisation in multilingual nations like India as well as to retrieve a more heterogeneous perception of Indian societies. *Heterographic* translation implies translation of the same text into a number of Indian languages simultaneously.

**Keywords:** postcolonial translation; heterographic translation; linguistic and cultural hegemony; metropolitan language; *bhasha*-subalternity

At a ‘Roundtable on Translation, while replying to a question raised by Patrick Mahony, Jacques Derrida noted: “Babel equals Confusion. This is the paradigm of the situation in which there is a multiplicity of languages and in which translation is both necessary and impossible” (Derrida 1988: 103). Although Derrida was referring to the necessity and impossibility of translating proper names, his remark seems equally applicable to the labyrinthine scenario of postcolonial translation in India.

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the national seminar “The Banyan and the Oak: Translation and Cultural Representation”, organised by the British Council, Chennai, in 1998.
This study examines the theoretical and ideological implications of the activity of translation in the postcolonial Indian situation, in which the English language is accorded a certain ‘power’. While I am reconciled to translation into English in view of ‘practical’ considerations, it is clear that translation in only one direction, towards English, may not be justified, if the same text is not simultaneously translated into other bhāsas (modern Indian languages). Such an enterprise, which I term ‘heterographic’, could constitute an ideological praxis for postcolonial translation. In her paper “The Banyan and the Oak: Translation and Mutuality”, also presented at the national seminar in Chennai in 1998, Saumitra Chakravarthy observes that the purpose of translation is to establish cultural egalitarianism; that is, to make knowledge available to the masses and not just to the literary elite. If that is indeed the purpose of translation, then one must wonder how far this function is served in the postcolonial Indian translation scene.

I will not discuss here the technicalities of interlingual translation nor theorise on the basis of my translation of the Malayalam novel Vhyasanum Vighneswaranum; rather, I will attempt to stimulate debate on the multidimensional theoretical ambivalence involved therein. For the benefit of addressing the postcolonial bilingual translator,1 it is perhaps necessary to begin with an analysis of the convolutions of our particular linguistic situation.

Language in India

Bilingualism has long been a characteristic of the postcolonial translation scene in India, even though the Indian social situation is characterised in fact by multilingualism. Harish Trivedi (1996:48) observes that one of the aspects of the cultural-national project of postcolonial translation in India is translation from Indian languages into the languages of the world, but mainly into English (emphasis added). An examination of the large number of translated texts brought out by publishers like Katha, Macmillan, or even Kendra Sahitya Akademi confirms this. This situation is fraught with linguistic and cultural hegemonic tension and reveals a continuing colonial hangover for Indian society in general, and for many authors and translators, for whom English belongs to a superior realm, in particular. An important aspect of this linguistic hegemony can be located in the background of many of those doing the translations. In most cases, translators of bhāsha texts have the source languages as their first language; rarely are transla-

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1. By ‘postcolonial bilingual translator’ I mean translators who translate mostly from a bhāsha into English, in the postcolonial scenario. The fact that the target language is English is significant for the analysis carried out here.
tions from bhshas done by metropolitan Indians who have English as their first language or who have attended English-medium institutions throughout their education. Indeed, in such a metropolitan context the bhshas are conceived as languages belonging to the uneducated, and hence inappropriate to modernity. It could therefore be argued that translation in India aspires for an ‘upward’ flow, that is from the bhshas into English. When English texts are translated into the bhshas, this is in most cases done by translators whose first language is the target language, not English, since those who have English as their first language rarely bother with bhshas. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why there are so few bhsha translations of English texts as compared to the enormous industry of English translations of bhsha texts. In addition, English today is regarded as the lingua franca of the people of India. This is not to deny the fact that other languages in the past – Sanskrit and Persian – have played a hegemonic role; however, unlike English, these languages were never considered the ‘linguistic representatives’ of the people; that is, neither was used as a vehicle to represent regional cultural or political spaces. Nor was their hegemony initiated by a central political power which could decide affairs for the whole of the present Indian region. Rather, the authority of each kingdom could decide things for itself. This is not, however, to deny the local politics of the hegemony of the ruler’s language and the demands of the time. Nevertheless, unlike during the colonial and postcolonial era, there was perhaps no language-based construction of a class that could occupy centres of power. The attempt here is not to demonize the British or the postcolonial nation-state, nor to claim an apolitical, innocent state for the kingdoms before colonialism; rather, I wish to portray the postcolonial situation and the predicament which accompanies it.

An argument along these lines means facing the fact that the political unification of India had the effect of creating a centralised system and led to the contemporary postcolonial crisis, to the political and social predicament which resulted from having to consider all citizens as belonging to a single nation and hence needing to speak to all simultaneously. In the context of India, it seems possible to do this only through English, a colonial legacy accessible only to a minority of the country’s population. It is this predicament which produces the entity called the postcolonial translator working through English. Translation into English from a bhsha for an Indian audience is thus an attempt to converse with the nation at large. In the limitation of its reach lies its irony.

As part of this linguistic predicament, English translators of bhsha texts attempt to address or reach out to the nation as a whole. It is here that they are faced with an abysmal Hobson’s choice, on account of political centralisation and the multilingualism it generates. One can easily identify an anxiety about unity in these endeavours. Moreover, since English is understood by no more than four per
cent of the Indian population, the majority is left beyond the reach of the text, and this has the effect of nullifying the desire for nationwide interaction. Postcolonial translators thus contribute to the dangerous equation of ‘language’ with ‘nation’, perpetuating the conceptual folly of equating English with India and of relegating the solid presence of multilingualism to the background. It is on this question that subaltern studies would have immense scope for addressing the politics of translation, since the ‘nation’ here turns out to be an English-educated metropolitan construct. The act of the bilingual translator, which has rightly been called by Sujit Mukherjee an act of ‘cross bearing’,\(^2\) privileges the English-educated metropolitan middle class. The image of the cross bears great political significance here: it is not merely a burden; it also raises questions about who represents whom. According to Christian faiths, Christ bore the cross for mankind, representing the whole of humanity by performing penance for its sins. Similarly, postcolonial translators translating into English, in collaboration with the English-speaking community, bear the burden of representing the nation as a whole, a burden only made more difficult by the anxiety about national unity.

Engl****ish today is not just a powerful language in India; it is the language of power as well. Any project of centralisation requires unity. In fact, the very concept of ‘centre’ – whether political, cultural, or economic – in Derridean terms (see Derrida 1978:279) implies a unified structure under the control of a central point which simultaneously opens up and limits the play of its elements within the circumference of that structure. When a language operates in this manner, it attains a powerful status. The medium of communication within the circumference of the nation is largely determined by its politico-economic power, thereby making the language an agent of power. When educated middle class translators who wield this power negotiate “[...] the vexed territory of colonial modernity, one pauses to think, too, of the subject(s) denied any voice, of the processes of exclusion and silencing that are systematic with those of liberal-bourgeois empowerment” (Harris 1998). And, it can be added, in postcolonial modernity as well. It is here that my own activity of translation (Vyasa and Vighneswara) could be subjected to critical scrutiny. However, the predicament of having to imagine a single, united nation-space as well as of possessing a footing in only two languages, one of which is English, forces me to carry out this activity even while realising that I am playing into the hands of power blocks. For translators like me,

\(^2\) In Translation as Discovery, Sujit Mukherjee comments, “[...] the Indian Translator is involved in transferring an Indian (native) text through a non-Indian language such as English (alien) into the Indian culture (native), whereas Ingalls or Miller is transferring an Indian text (alien) through his native language into his native culture. Lal or Ezekiel or Ramanujan has thus an extra cross to bear” (1994:82).
in search of a footing in the field, there is no other possibility but to be part of this ongoing cultural process.

Writing in a third language

Every translation is rewriting, Mahasweta Sengupta (1998) argues, and “rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and society”. Sujit Mukherjee too makes a similar observation when he refers to the notion of ‘new writing’ in Translation as Discovery, hinging on the possibility of a ‘third language’. The notion of the ‘third language’ is definitely a laudable turn as far as translation studies in general is concerned; it reinstates the idea of ‘rewriting’, making us view a translation as an ‘original’. Apart from this, there is also a political question that this notion should generate: what is the nature of this so-called ‘third language’? In other words, is there a deliberate attempt to ‘rewrite’ the language itself while constructing this third language? Let me go into this a little further. In the ‘Introduction’ to Kanthapura, Raja Rao hints at an alternative style of English that Indian writers in English could adopt. But what is the nature of the English used in translations of Indian texts into English? Are we able to deliberately subvert so-called Standard English in our translations? Are we able to speak as Jamaicans do or to transform English as Black Americans have? It is only when postcolonial translators are able to remake English in a way such that it speaks beyond the boundaries of domination that our English translations can rightly be said to occupy the realm of a ‘third language’ which is theoretically and politically correct. In other words, as the language of translation we need a subverted English. The Englishes used in translations would not necessarily have the same patterns, but this diversity could, on the one hand, put into question any notion of a uniform, monolithic style of English for Indian translators, and, on the other, make possible a questioning of Standard English too. To quote bell hooks, “There, in that location, we make English do what we want it to do. We take the oppressor's language and turn it against itself. We make our words a counterhegemonic speech, liberating ourselves in language” (1996:301). Yet, we cannot be complacent in spite of hooks’s statement, for the situation we are analysing is multilingual in nature. The kind of liberation that hooks talks about is itself problematic, for it is limited to the English-educated urban middle class alone: the ‘ourselves’ hooks refers to do not include bhasha-subalterns, even though a politically justifiable ‘third language’ may be constructed in postcolonial multilingual societies.
Indian literature in translation

An examination of the curriculum of some of the modern English departments in India reveals the presence of courses titled ‘Indian Literature in Translation’, reminding us of the already-mentioned ‘third language’. In such courses, texts in English translation alone are dealt with, pointing to a serious anomaly: the complacency and audacity with which translations into English are considered the only possible translated literature. In order to critique the idea of Indian Literature in Translation, one has to first interrogate the idea of Indian Literature itself.

The Indian subcontinent, with its culturally and linguistically diverse communities and races, can only produce literatures (note the plural suffix). Moreover, any translation of a text into any language should be termed a translation. Hence, it is high time that instead of referring to ‘Indian Literature in Translation’ the expression ‘Indian Literatures in English Translation’ was used. A critique of a course such as Indian Literature in Translation would be very similar to that addressed to ‘Commonwealth Literature’. Examining the term, Helen Tiffin holds that “[...] inquiries into the methodology of Commonwealth Literary history are altogether rare while histories of individual Commonwealth Literatures, more often than not, bypass theoretical comments or considerations” (2000:53–54). The issue of ‘individual histories’ is pivotal to Tiffin here. Furthermore, it should be noted that the question of difference raised by postcolonialism is opposed to the notion of commonality of experience, on which Commonwealth literature is based. Similarly, as a student of Comparative Literature, fed on the principles of Cultural Relativism, I find it problematic to overlook cultural pluralism in the process of systematically homogenizing texts rooted in diverse cultural ambiances, by presenting them under the monolithic rubric of ‘Indian Literature in Translation’. Doing so reduces the diversity of the texts, fitting them into one cultural mould represented by the term ‘Indian Literature’ (note the absence of the plural suffix). There can be no doubt that this kind of a homogenously viewed ‘third language’ – that is, English – belongs in fact to the English-educated middle class of our metropolises, and, what is more, that issues of the politics of translation – such as ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘by whom’ texts are translated into English – are seldom addressed in these courses, with the result that these works remain outside the realm of discourse. However, it must be noted that the inclusion of courses such as ‘Indian Literature in Translation’ in the Departments of English is a result of the extent to which postcolonial theory and cultural studies have penetrated the discipline. Despite this, the fact remains that these departments seem to be situated at the initial stages of the thinking about postcolonialism, as evidenced in the presentation of The Postcolonial Studies Reader, which identifies postcolonial literature as the literature written in English (emphasis added) from the once colo-
nised countries, as though literatures in other languages from these regions are yet to become postcolonial! What I am arguing is that even in the case of the already mentioned courses, a text seems to enter the discursive terrain of translation only if it appears in the garb of English! Modern English Departments in the postcolonial world need to free themselves of this Tiffinian hangover and concern themselves with the following urgent question: how far have they been able to adopt the theories and practices of Comparative Literature, especially while dealing with translations?

The notion of Indian Literature in Translation would seem to suggest the possibility of a homogenous cultural narrative. My contention is that a collection of translated texts from heterogeneous cultures cannot suddenly produce a unified narrative of cultural patterns. The dream is as elusive as the notion of a Standard Indian English or the Kendra Sahitya Akademi’s idea of an Indian Literature. Such valorization of a ‘third language’ obliterates the cultural differences of the texts as they were imaginatively constructed originally. The theoretical parameters used in the analysis of Indian Writing in English are often adopted to examine these texts too. In other words, the ‘regional self’ of the textual space is fallaciously transmuted into a ‘national self’ in these classrooms. As Barbara Godard observes, “Translation aids in the development of [...] a consciousness of ‘national’ identity in its enunciative function constituting the translator as the speaking subject within the discourse of an emerging literature” (1997: 180). But analysing English translations of bhasha texts in a homogenous manner is to deny ourselves much of our own locational experiences.

Translating into English and into Hindi

In the process of translating a bhasha text into English, two negative activities are juxtaposed. First, the translator participates in the hegemony of literature written in English; second, s/he seeks to empower the text (by reaching out to a larger audience) through English. The former pursuit is clearly negative, unlike the latter, which seemingly is positive. But careful scrutiny reveals that both are in effect the same. The notion of empowerment functions and operates at a different level here. By aiming at the empowerment of particular texts through English, there is

3. The presentation of The Post-Colonial Studies Reader states that “one of the most exciting features of English literatures today is the explosion of post-colonial literatures, those literatures written in English in formerly colonised societies” (Ashcroft et al. 1995: i. Emphasis added).

4. In the Introduction to the History of Indian Literature published by Kendra Sahitya Akademi, Sisir Kumar Das observes that Indian Literature is one, though written in many languages.
the implication that only literature written in English enjoys the position of literature, or that power comes to literature only through English. Translation involves a dialogue between cultures and languages, a dialogue which takes place often in varying realms – of demand, profit, interpretation and so on. However, the translation scene in India is often driven by a dialogue shaped by the supremacy, recognition and hegemony of English, and this constitutes the driving force behind the activity. It then follows that the socio-political and economic act of translation reflects the tense power relationships between the bhashas and English. As Harish Trivedi rightly points out, “The English language has thus become the clearing house for various Indian literature(s) of India [...]” (1996: 52. Parenthesis added).

Moreover, in this translation activity, there is also the politics of the audience – the international audience – which both the translator and the author have in mind. This is evident from the otherwise unnecessary footnotes and additions one finds in translations. Nor is translation an activity involving only a source language text and a translator. There are also other agencies of power in operation – the author, the editor, and the publishers, to name only a few. This means that the end product is not the result of the conjugal affair between the translator and the source language text, but that other agencies of power also possess a share in the fathering and mothering of the target language text, not as mere benefactors but as active participants in the process. Translation studies has yet to adequately address these agencies in their role and function as power structures constantly ‘limiting and opening up’ the play of the freedom of translatorial endeavours.

Now that I have problematised the translation scene in India, it is absolutely natural and appropriate that the following question should be asked: Why should one translate a bhasha text into English for an Indian audience? One could argue that this takes place for practical reasons. Acculturation, hybridity, multiculturalism and globalization, all of which mean more or less the same thing and all of which have been the products of the diffusion and dissemination of Western ideologies and knowledge, compel Indian translators to perform this activity of self-deception.5 The translators can only continue to do this, but it merely reveals the cultural predicament of a society caught in a tangled web – of a colonial past and a neocolonial present! The postcolonial linguistic predicament of Indian society begets translators who act as interpreters between the West and their own society by asserting the unifying power of the English language. There is no easy way out

5. What is being hinted at here is the hegemonic aspect of hybridity and multiculturalism, which are central to the process of globalisation, as it does not operate equally among all classes of people. The hybridity that globalisation has created is mostly limited to the urban middle-class, which reaps its benefits and finds a viable, justifiable explanation of its identity in the terms mentioned.
of this predicament. Nor is this analysis being provided with a view to putting an end to translation activity in India. It is rather meant to create awareness of our situation, our attitudes and activity. We cannot simply do away with it, because the perennial questions would still remain: How else could we all speak to one another? How can Kashmiris, Keralites and Bengalis or Oriyas or Tamils converse among themselves? Are such conversations possible only through English? This is the predicament the multilingual nature of our society has created, and I feel it justifies the activity of the translator.

At this point, a natural alternative that could be suggested is the possibility of Hindi functioning as a link language with a national dimension – a seemingly more indigenous approach! Hindi, the national language of India, has long constituted a bone of contention for many in the country, particularly, and in spite of state-sponsored patronage, for those in the southern part of India. In fact, nowhere else is the issue of the ‘national’ and the ‘regional’ so clearly and vehemently defined as in this case of linguistic jingoism. Hindi is still looked upon as a manifestation of North Indian hegemony, and it is incorrect, politically, to officially designate one of the Indian languages as the national language, merely because of its majoritarian acceptance, going against notions of linguistic ‘secularism’ or linguistic heterogeneity. It then follows that the nation-state belongs to the majority in linguistic terms as well. Further, it creates hierarchies among the languages of India, accompanied by the attendant extra benefits and recognition that would follow in the direction of those who speak Hindi. Moreover, the belief that a majority speaks Hindi itself turns out to be baseless, as there are innumerable varieties of the language, which cannot be considered simply as mere dialects. Furthermore, in states where Hindi is not the primary language, its hold is limited to the urban middle class alone. Therefore, to say that it is the language spoken by the majority is to fall into the same baseless folly of majoritarian politics, determined by and in the interests of the urban middle class.

Further, the choice of Hindi as the appropriate language of translation in India has serious political implications as far as the construction of identities is concerned. Constructing identities along linguistic lines demonstrates that linguistic identity has come into existence in accordance with religious identities, showing the relation between religion and language in a multi-religious society. It also reveals the cultural politics of the linguistic domain in a specific nationalist context. In a seminal work titled *Hindi Nationalism*, Alok Rai states that originally the language of the common people of the Gangetic plain was a common language given names such as Hindustani, Urdu, or Hindi (2001:15), formed by a variety of cultures and societies which could not have been differentiated as Hindi or Hindustani (103). Rai enquires into the reasons for the separation of this language into Hindi and Urdu today. His study attempts to expose how the power of cul-
tecture works to create a culture of power under nationalism. It was the Sanskritised Hindi that was installed as the official language of the new nation-state.

The necessity for a new language was created by a nationalist desire to express in a distinct manner the grandeur of the Hindu upper caste middleclass. At the same time, Urdu, a regional variety of the same language, was othered as Islamic. Thus, Hindi was made the national language at the cost of a public field of secularism. What is important to note here is that the linguistic restructurings under nationalism create conflicting identities, and thereby contesting subjectivities, within the nation-state. In the Indian context, the discourses of Hindi and Urdu produced distinct subjectivities of the Hindu and the Muslim respectively. This brief discussion of the role of Hindi in Indian nationalism suggests that, in the nationalist context, languages themselves are not natural and given. Hence literary production in a particular language itself brings with it the burden (the history) of nationalist discourses. No one particular Indian language can be identified as the saviour in the postcolonial linguistic crisis in which India finds itself, and any such attempt to do so at the level of the political superstructure needs to be met with strong resistance from the translatorial mode of production-base. Stretching the tenets of Marxist criticism, we may understand the relation between the bhashas and Hindi. The former occupy a ‘linguistic proliterate’ realm, and translators in these languages can try and resist the latter’s hegemony by carrying out translations into other Indian languages on a larger scale.

Heterographic translation

For the empowerment of bhasha texts an alternative methodology, which would be politically and theoretically justifiable, is required. My deliberation here has, in fact, been an attempt to move towards a possible praxis for postcolonial translation. I would propose that a possible solution to this predicament and to the hegemony of English would be translation activity on a large scale, with the translation of the same text into as many Indian languages as possible. This could become possible only by liberating ourselves from the metropolitan notions of a unified cultural space. Moreover, the proliferation of the text into many languages would simultaneously affirm the plurality of the Indian nation-state. I propose to call this enterprise ‘heterographic translation’, as opposed to ‘homographic’ translation, which centralises and hegemonises one particular language, thereby relegating the subaltern to the sidelines of the discursive terrain of the nation’s intellectual enterprise.

This ‘rupture’ (to use Derrida’s terminology) in the thinking about postcolonial translations could definitely be made possible by invoking the Foucauld-
ian critique of the power/knowledge nexus. The problematic of ‘pouvoir-savoir’, a fundamental theme in Foucault’s historical studies of the genealogy of the human sciences, is useful for the analysis of the ‘empowerment of bhasha texts’. Bhasha texts can be viewed as ‘minor knowledges’ (to use Foucault’s terminology), which attain the status of discourses and then disciplines through translation into English. At the national or even international level, these texts then represent what constitutes the body of literature in the respective bhashas, thereby subjugating the rest of the ‘local knowledges’, those left untranslated. The hegemonic operation here is the truth-value accorded anything appearing in English. The promotion of heterographic translations is perhaps one way to achieve a linguistic decentralisation in multilingual nations like India. Heterographic translations alone can carry a text to a larger reading public without confining it to a limited circle of upper middle class society. This of course would require an immense amount of organisation and coordination, which could initially be carried out by government-funded cultural organisations like the Sahitya Akademi, or by voluntary organisations.

Conclusion

Translation can no longer be viewed as a purely linguistic performance; rather, it involves the undermining of the boundaries of knowledge societies that are held captive by cultural and linguistic ‘lines of control’. Through the act of translation, the text which, as an original, confined a system of knowledge – cultural, political, and social – to a particular language, breaks through the boundary and establishes a negotiation with other knowledge systems beyond. Yet, its curious characteristic lies in the absence of the total replacement of the source language culture by the target language culture; it is more of a negotiation between the two in the process of which the translated text retains and assimilates source language and target language cultures. It is only in such a fluid ambience that the product of the act of translation enters the realm of discourse, resisting both essentialism and appropriation, negotiating the ‘impossibility’ and ‘necessity’ of translation. The heterographic translation process can also interrogate the idea of the ‘original’, which has already been substantially dealt with in debates current in translation studies. In such an ambience of plurality, texts may be translations of translations, thereby attaining an existence of their own, not as a collective entity but as individual texts that negotiate individual cultural paradigms as in a state of fluidity. That is, their existence need not lie in any unity (as translations of the same text). Instead, divorced from a ‘hangover of the original’, each translation could be viewed as an original text negotiating the patterns of the respective language.
In such a situation of the individuality of the translated text, questions of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ translation would cease to exist, and the text could then be subjected to questions about its effectiveness as a text in the respective language alone. As Derrida remarks, if a translation has the force of an event, it becomes an ‘original’ (1988: 148). Furthermore, Paul St-Pierre finds an important practical solution in ‘indirect translations’ – “Such indirect translations involving a third language [...] constitute a practical solution to the impossibility of finding competent translators for certain language combinations” (1997: 137). True, such translators may not find a place in the ‘Platonic Republic’ for representing ‘removed reality’, but for a postmodernist critique they would help interrogate the very idea of the ‘real’ for the benefit of a plurality of realities constructed by the narratives of cultural patterns. This is because a Platonic obsession with reality would invariably assume the existence of an original by limiting the freedom that could be accorded the translator. However, a postmodern critique would be in a position to accept the text as it provides a construction of an alternative reality/original.

Thus the postcolonial Indian translation scene has a mission to fulfil in order to retrieve a more heterogeneous perception of Indian societies, in addition to performing the task of crossing linguistic boundaries. Even as a bhasha text is translated into English, a coordinating body could ensure the simultaneous diffusion of the same text into other languages as well. Then, perhaps, the activity of translation itself would occupy a realm reserved not only for the privileged elite. That way, a one-way (mad, prolific) translation activity of bhasha texts into English, which fails to reach a wide audience in various languages, could be transformed into an act that reaches out to larger, multilingual audiences.
Revealing the “soul of which nation?”

Translated literature as cultural diplomacy

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Cultural diplomacy is a term currently much in use as both powerful countries such as the United States and “B” countries such as Canada and Germany mobilise the export of cultural products for the purposes of bolstering image and “soft power”, and influencing trade. This article studies the current situation, and examines the role assigned to translated literature in such an export agenda. Using findings from a research project on Canadian literature in German translation, and referring to postcolonial and neocolonial theory, it proposes that the process and its outcome depends as much if not more on the participation and choices of the receiving culture.

Keywords: literary translation; soft diplomacy; nation branding; exporting literature in translation

The import/export of literatures,1 or of literary products, as a component of foreign affairs policy is the underlying basis of this article. It thus deals with a rather discreet aspect of the type of government policy that usually funds more flamboyant and visible activities such as chairs in literature at foreign universities, journeys abroad of large orchestras or ballet companies, art exhibitions, academic exchanges and other events related to culture.2 I will focus on Canada, but take examples from other parts of the world as well, especially in regard to current theories behind recent North American attempts to incorporate culture in diplo-

1. Most of the work on Canada in this paper derives from a study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and entitled The Institutions and Influences of Cultural Transfer. Canadian Literature in German Translation 2001–2005.

2. Canada’s last Governor-General initiated several such large events when she organised state visits to Germany (2001) and Russia (2003) taking with her a large number of invited Canadian “culture workers”. See Flotow and Oeding (2005).
macy. The connections between the production of literary translations, the export of literature in translation as a cultural product, and so-called cultural diplomacy, have not been studied extensively, although literary histories do sometimes take account of the effects of translations as literary imports – the reception and translation of Shakespeare in early nineteenth century Germany is one example. More recently, both post-colonial and neo-colonialist approaches to translation have explored this area of translation effects, and I will briefly address some of the concerns raised. First though, I would like to visit the former East Berlin, and one of my first clear experiences of seeing literature in translation being deliberately implemented for diplomatic effect, in other words, deployed as a political tool.

It was the summer of 1989, and hundreds of East Berliners, and East Germans generally, were leaving the country via the so-called Grüne Grenze – the green border through Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Various oppositional groups were publishing their anti-government journals and magazines, unaware that the whole system was on the brink of a collapse that would bring with it the end of the Cold War. One group with literary interests, whose members were not allowed to publish via official literary channels, were producing samizdat publications that featured not only their own eccentric materials, and original works of art, but also many translations, mainly of texts from North America. Often they translated poets, people like Charles Bukowski – who presented themselves as renegades, oppositionals, or deliberate outsiders in their own cultures. The translation processes were unconventional – with someone producing an interlinear translation – word for word – often with the help of outdated dictionaries, and a local poet rewriting this text as an East German artefact. In fact, the translation quality did not really matter. What mattered was the fact that these works appeared, and that they appeared clandestinely in handsome, handmade books, produced in limited editions, circulated to sympathizers, as proof of and witness to the oppositional forces at work. In this case, just a whiff of the difference produced by another literature that did not correspond with what the official writers were allowed to produce was highly political – and enough. Literature in translation was an instrument of political resistance.

At about the same time, and still focused on East Germany, I came across another piece of translation with an obvious political purpose, also from East Berlin. This was the translation of Christa Wolf’s Der Geteilte Himmel (1961), translated

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3. An early North American form of cultural or public diplomacy was developed by the CIA and affiliates after World War II for the purposes of combatting left-wing and Communist tendencies of European intellectuals and promoting American brands of ‘free’ democratic culture. These activities, along with their enormous funding, often referred to as ‘psychological warfare’ have been extensively documented and described by Frances Stonor Saunders.
into English as The Divided Heaven (1965), the first book by East Germany’s now most renowned woman writer, still alive today and still producing similarly ambiguous work. The translation into English had been done and published in East Berlin in order to export this new young talent to the West, but what this new young talent wrote in German, and what the censors tolerated, because she was a new young talent, the translator and the Seven Seas publishing house had to change. Presumably for the very purposes behind the translation.

The original uses the present tense to tell the story of a young woman who is convinced that socialism is the new and the right way to run a society, yet who wavers constantly in this conviction as she is torn in different directions by various forces: her intellectual boyfriend who defects to the West, the hard physical labour required of her in a train yard and her inability to carry it out, the friendly and thoughtful comrades at work, her difficult living situation in post-war Berlin, etc. She tells her story with all its uncertainties and ambiguities in the first person, and readers experience her as genuinely confused and conflicted, until these conflicts are resolved – by the construction of the Berlin Wall – and an accident in the train yard.

The English translation, which came out after the Wall was built, changes the text substantially: the girl’s story is told in the third person, and in the past – her immediate anxiety and discomfort are thereby removed, and she hardly wavers in her socialist course. Her self-questioning is tempered, and she progresses happily towards ever-improving (Realsozialismus) socialism. While this translation is still the only existing English version of the book, I doubt it was a successful instrument in convincing readers of the benefits of East German socialism and the Berlin Wall – or of Christa Wolf’s considerable talents as a writer. The book was hardly reviewed in English, contrary to later books she wrote, such as Cassandra or Medea. It remains, however, a good example of how translation was implemented in the interests of what has now come to be called “cultural policy”, official policy that involves the export of culture, paid for by governments in order to garner interest, sympathy, and support abroad.

Cultural policy I

Very recent developments in literary translation and cultural policy have been rung in by a noteworthy event: the introduction of the Global Cultural Initiative by First Lady Laura Bush on Monday, September 25, 2006 at a White House

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ceremony in Washington, an initiative to enhance and expand the United States’s
cultural diplomacy. The first programme implemented under this initiative is a
series of international literary exchanges, a programme that will, according to
Michael Jay Friedman, a File Staff writer for the U.S. Department of State, “spon-
sor translations and publications, thus affording Americans and readers in other
nations access to the best of each other’s literature.” Other, later, initiatives are
to include film and filmmaker exchanges, and performing arts management and
training, especially for the handicapped.

This announcement – with its focus on literature and translation – is a very
new development in the cultural policy of the United States and more broadly, of
North America, and it is of great interest, not only to those who work on literary
and translation studies at the university level and have always seen translation
as a way to gain access to other literatures, but also to those who are translators
of literature and have never managed to get a book into an American publishing
house. Things may change now!

But what is the reason for this sudden focus on translating literature?
The answer is the current, severely compromised, image of the United States,
largely, but not only, encapsulated in the September 11, 2001 attacks and their af-
termath. This image problem has been analysed by numerous pundits but is most
succinctly presented in a text that doubtless underlies this initiative, submitted
to the U.S. Department of State in September 2005. It identifies a malaise that is
rooted in the United States’s cultural, literary, philosophical, and spiritual isola-
tion from other peoples of the world. Entitled Cultural Diplomacy. The Linchpin
of Public Diplomacy (the text can be accessed at www.publicdiplomacy.org/55.
htm). It asserts that in the face of world opinion about certain United States for-
egn policy decisions and their effects – the document specifies the unmitigated
support of Israel against Palestine, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the
prison scandals of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo – literature (and culture, more
generally) must be mobilized as one of the most important forces with which to
repair the world’s view of the United States. Specifically, the document claims that
literature reveals the “enduring truth of the American experience – that we are
a people capable not only of espousing, enacting, and spreading our noblest values
but also of self-correction” (22). The text sees the “first flowering of American
literature” – the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau’s Walden,
the stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter, Her-
man Melville’s Moby Dick and Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass – as presenting ex-
amples of these American qualities, coming as they did just before the American
Civil War. And it cites the poetry of Emily Dickinson for bearing eloquent witness
to the carnage of this war, yet also “sustaining millions of people the world over”
(22) ever since. For the writers of this document, (high) literary culture and its
dissemination abroad is one important way to come to terms with the “latest fall from grace” and continue a “tradition upon which to build a permanent structure of cultural diplomacy” (22). With an eye to internal diplomacy, to the way the document might be read within the State Department to which it was submitted, they write somewhat hedgingly:

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

Recognising that United States publishers publish comparatively few translations (only three percent of all books published in a year), they remark that therefore “we (Americans) are not privy to the conversations – literary, philosophical, political and spiritual – taking place in much of the world” (12). This gap in knowledge and experience is not only cumulative, but also isolationist, and an important factor leading to dangerously short-sighted international policies.

This is the thinking behind the recent founding of several “centres for cultural diplomacy” in the United States as well as the decision to implement the Global Cultural Initiative, an initiative that may, if it is properly funded and maintained, do work similar to that of Voice of America during the Cold War, or of agencies such as the Alliance française, the British Council or the Goethe Institut. All of these European agencies recognised the “soft” power of culture decades ago (Flotow & Oeding 2004) – with the French assigning an “utilité publique” to their organisation and strongly financing it since the late nineteenth century, the Germans establishing their Institut to counter the damage done in twelve years of Nazi dictatorship, and the British setting up the British Council in the 1930s to spread “British values” in the face of rising fascism in Europe, but also, and very significantly, in order to improve trade. Indeed, as early as 1933, the British Board of Trade and the Board of Education collaborated in the Council, seeking to expand and solidly anchor British influence – in culture and commerce.

Cultural policy II

Trade is an important aspect of the cultural policy of many nations at the moment. While the United States’s initiative and the examples from East Berlin are largely ideological and concerned with “soft” propaganda and image, the use of culture to improve trading opportunities has become widespread in many of the so-called “B” countries (Anholt 2003). Canada is one of these, and its cultural policy is
clearly, if not exclusively, motivated by trade. A recent Canadian Foreign Minis-
ter set up an International Cultural Relations programme, to be co-implemented
by yet another government programme – Trade Routes, a $500 million invest-
ment in Canadian arts and culture designed to meld culture and trade. The official
text for Trade Routes reads (available at www.pch.gz.ca/progs/ac-ca/progs/rc-tr/
index_e.cfm):

Trade Routes supports the Government of Canada’s trade agenda to enhance
prosperity and job growth in the knowledge-based sectors of the new economy.
Through Trade Routes the Department of Canadian Heritage ensures that Cana-
da’s arts and cultural entrepreneurs and organizations have access to the full range
of the Team Canada Inc. network of government trade programs and services in
order to expand export capacity and market development opportunities.

It is hard to tell from this excerpt, and from much of the rest of the text, whether
this programme is supposed to support cultural production at home, or use Ca-
nadian cultural products to enhance trade abroad, or simply help Canadian cul-
ture workers in exporting their work. Whatever might be the case, the point is
that trade and culture are being explicitly linked, in government documents and
in government strategies. Again a document commissioned by Canada’s Depart-
ment of Trade and Foreign Affairs underlies the policy. Compiled by John Ralston
Saul, it strongly recommends the use and export of Canadian cultural products as
one of the most important methods in making Canada known in the world and
thus enhancing trade. Saul asserts that

Canada’s profile abroad is, for the most part, its culture. That is our image. That
is what Canada becomes in people’s imaginations around the world […]. Not
being a player in international communications today implies disappearing from
this planet. It isn’t simply a lost cultural and financial opportunity. It’s a major
problem for foreign policy. […] Both political and trade initiatives are dependent
upon that image. (Saul 1994)

Saul argues that the translation of literature is an integral part of this process; in-
deed, he deems the translation of literature the primary vehicle of export for Ca-
nadian culture. A further result of this document was a change in 1995 in Govern-
ment of Canada foreign policy, which henceforth had as its third main objective
“the projection of Canadian values and culture abroad” (Canada in the World
1995).

While such policy is called “cultural policy” by diplomats and those seeking
to maintain good relations with culture workers (i.e. writers, theatre people, com-
posers, artists), a less considerate or more cynical term used by marketers is “na-
tion branding”. Branding, which once referred to the ownership mark burnt onto
the flank of grazing cattle in the North American West, is now a buzzword in marketing, and refers to any activity that supports a company’s desire to clearly define its products and/or services. In the era of cultural diplomacy, the use of the term has shifted from products such as Coca-Cola, or services such as those offered by McDonalds, to the cultural exports of individual countries, and their reputations. Peter van Ham summarises this approach as “giving products and services an emotional dimension with which people can identify” (2001:2). While it may be difficult for those working in literary and cultural fields to imagine the emotional dimensions of Coca-Cola or of a McDonalds hamburger, it is a fact that marketers try to achieve such an impact by *telling stories*, i.e. engaging their clients through narratives closely related to literature and culture. This is also where literature comes in, at least the kind of literature that tells stories.

From the mid-1990s on, new marketing strategies for products (and more recently, nations) has moved away from disseminating the same standardised glossy images throughout the world. Instead of selling products in the same way to every culture, marketers have turned to narrative, to finely-tuned story-telling, carefully adapted for individual cultures, for specific audiences, with specific cultural backgrounds and beliefs, stories that may only tangentially relate to the product. What counts is the *story*, and a key factor is the need to constantly provide updates of the old stories, to re-focus the narratives towards new, often younger, or specialised, audiences/consumers. One example comes from the marketing techniques for alcohol (Heilemann 1997), where British marketers have tried to dislodge ingrained perceptions that gin is a drink for fusty old colonels and make their product attractive for young audiences, in an attempt to get them while they are young.

Such strategies, applied to nations, follow the postmodern trend towards “style over substance” (Van Ham 2001:2), as countries “continually present and re-present their past cultural achievements alongside their modern equivalents in ways that are fresh, relevant and appealing to younger audiences” (Anholt 2002:6). The idea is that this will not only encourage continual production and the renewal of culture (which can enhance the sale of products) but that it will also lead a country to resist the temptation to rest on its laurels and live in the past. Anholt sees successful branding as imperative for developing countries, which need to draw attention to themselves and become competitive, insisting that “having a bad reputation or *none at all* is a serious handicap for a state seeking to remain competitive in the international arena” [my emphasis] (2003:2). While conservative thinkers may be unsettled by such developments, they are actually positive, “since state branding will gradually supplant nationalism” (Van Ham 2001:3), and sales due to successful branding will allow developing and “B” countries to compete globally. As another commentator has put it, if a Canadian businessman in Japan
can share a few words about Margaret Atwood with his Japanese counterpart, the two men are that much closer to closing a deal.5

Whatever the outcome of such ideas and practices, current branding seeks to attract attention and pays attention to the image, reputation and attitude a country may present. These factors affect the perception that other states, and consumers in general, will develop of a particular place, and in turn will affect the sales of goods and services. To resort to cultural diplomacy, then, is to participate in the contemporary shift to influence in geopolitics and power via image-making (or image-repairing, as in the case of the United States today).

**Issues around post-colonialism and neo-colonialism**

Cultural policy thus consists of at least two basic strands: the export of culture for ideological purposes, and the export of culture for trade initiatives through image development and management. They are connected and overlapping – but while the first generally includes translated literature and sometimes addresses its importance, the second (the marketing approach) avoids the topic of translation. Indeed, though nation branders know the value of storytelling (i.e. a certain type of literature), they try to tell their stories in pictures, thereby avoiding the “nightmare of translation” (Heilemann 1997). They may have a point, as many post-colonial studies of translation have shown.

In a recent book on translation and post-colonialism, Changing the Terms. Translating in the Postcolonial Era (Simon & St-Pierre 2000), Sherry Simon begins her introduction with an anecdote about the literary texts available in the ancestral home of the Indian writer, Amitav Ghosh, when he was a child. These were works of European literature, all translated into Bengali, a collection of books that could be found in much the same form in all corners of the (then) British Empire. They represented, on the one hand, the family’s access to the European world of letters, and, on the other, they were the physical representation of a certain canon of recognised works, “identifying middle-class tastes in genteel settings” (2000:9). In Simon’s words, as texts that came from outside Indian culture, they served “the imperialist, Orientalizing cause” (10).

Much of what has been called post-colonial theory in recent years, and applied to the translation of literature, takes a dim view of translation. People argue that translation has appropriated (i.e. stolen) indigenous materials for the thoughtless pleasure of the colonial power (a prime example is Fitzgerald’s version of *The

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5. Evan Potter in conversation.
Rubayyat by Omar Khayyam; another is Helene Cixous’ “abuse” of Clarice Lispector for her particular version of feminism (Arroyo 1999). Translation has been accused of deliberate misrepresentation for the purposes of marketing, a story Tejaswini Niranjana traces in all its cynicism in her 1992 book Siting Translation. It has been seen as imposing colonial texts as the norm, to the exclusion, denigration and stereotypification or Orientalization of local culture. This has been traced in Indian work on the subaltern and rejected in anti-colonial movements such as négritude, by writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who refuse to write in the colonial language, as well as in much theoretical work by and since Edward Said. In this scenario, then, translation and translators have often (but not only) been seen as the henchmen of colonial and neo-colonial powers, and their work has been described as strongly affected, even ruled, by the power differential in place between the cultures in question.

While this work on the colonialisit aspects of translation has been vital in understanding the deliberate, and sometimes accidental, instrumentalization of translation at different times, it has also had a very positive effect for translation, which is to cause translated literature to be recognised as an integral part of a bigger picture that includes “the economic and political fields through which ideas are circulated and received” (Simon 2000:17). Literature in translation, in other words, has been found to rarely circulate innocently or by chance. It is circulated – by certain powers, at certain times, for specific purposes. In the case I am concerned with, the reasons are diplomatic and mercantile, much as they have always been. While some, such as the spate of post-colonial theorists, will choose to see and record the damage done, others will describe the way ideas inevitably circulate, texts move, translation transfers materials between cultures in many different, fluid, serial, and often uncontrollable ways.

The American citizens who produced the document behind the very recent American Global Cultural Initiative certainly do not see the translation of literature as a nefarious form of neo-colonialism; they simply say that “culture matters” and that “cultural diplomacy reveals the soul of a nation”. For them, cultural diplomacy via the translation of literature is a strategy that can restore the view that America is a beacon of hope rather than a “dangerous force to be countered”, while at the same time serving to broaden the horizons of the reading public of the United States.

Is this a deliberately innocent stance? Is it naïve? Is it misleading? Especially given the considerable work of scholars working in the area of post-colonialism? To what extent does neo-colonialism play into this scenario? And does literary translation indeed run the risk of participating in the “continued control […] of native elites compliant with neocolonial powers” as one writer describes neo-colonialism (Yew). These are difficult and recurrent questions, and there are doubtless
as many answers as there are perspectives. To look at just one possible response, related to Eastern Europe (since that is where my East Berlin examples started), recent scholarship on the translation trends in post-Cold War East Central Europe certainly shows that translation of Western European and North American books – in the humanities and social sciences as well as fiction, biography, self-help, etc. – into the various languages of the former East Bloc experienced an enormous upswing after 1989, financed by various Western organisations such as the Soros Foundation, the Vienna Institute for Human Sciences, the Central European University in Budapest, and the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Mihalache 2006). Mihalache, who focuses on Romania, does not, however, see only deliberate and deleterious influence-peddling or Western “cultural colonialism” in these activities; she views them as well as “nourishing the cognitive activities” of a society in transformation (117). She considers the situation from the perspective of the translating culture that chooses its texts, and writes

La “production traductive” dans la Roumanie postcommuniste pourrait être vue comme une oscillation entre transmettre la signification d’une manière rationnelle (envisager Other-as-reason […] et traduire la “normalité” occidentale) ou relier cette signification à une expérience préverbale (approcher Other-as-mystery). Un ethos qui projette la traduction comme étant constamment “contrôlée” par des représentations de la société traduisante. Mais aussi, une traduction solidement ancrée dans et explicable par un recours à l’histoire des croyances de la société traduisante. (123)

[The “production of translations” in post-Communist Romania can be seen as oscillating between the rational transmission of meaning (seeing the Other-as-reason and translating the “normality” of the West) and the linking of this meaning with a preverbal experience (seeing the Other-as-mystery). An ethos that views translation as constantly “controlled” by the representations of the translating culture. But also, a translation that is solidly anchored in and can be explained through recourse to the history of beliefs of the translating culture.

(My translation)]

In other words, the translating culture is as much, if not more, involved in the selection of the foreign materials it wishes to have circulated and read as any neocolonialist force providing the funds to make this possible. Further, Mihalache notes that in this post-communist context, the waves of translation from the West have triggered responses from local writers and intellectuals as counterbalances that are “fonctionnels dans la création d’un mécanisme de défense et dans la promotion d’un idéal nationaliste, anti-occidental” (124) [that function to create a defence mechanism and promote a nationalist, anti-Western ideal], thus forcing local publishing houses to revise their programmes and lists. Indeed, a third dis-
course develops from what others might proscribe as neo-colonial translation, which may be seen as “a repressed desire to resolve a social conflict on the imaginary level of translation” (Chesterman 1997: 238, cited by Mihalache) and which, in this case, recommends a “critical though positive distancing from the West” (My translation).

While Mihalache’s work represents a tempered view of what might well be seen as a strong example of current neo-colonialist translation, it is interesting for its focus not only on those (Western) forces behind the translations, but also on the reception and effect of the translations from the West. These are not only oppressive, repressive, “abusive” materials imposed on a helpless readership; on the contrary, they trigger responses from that readership, and in turn have an effect on local publishing policies. There is movement, discussion, disagreement and innovation as a result. Neo-colonialism or “cultural colonialism” does not simply blanket a helpless target culture; it also triggers responses, shakes things up, and stimulates a third discourse.

This, I believe, is also what the American authors of the paper Cultural Diplomacy. The Linchpin in Political Diplomacy have in mind, when they couch their ideas in terms of “dissemination”, “widening of horizons” and even the revelation of “a nation’s soul”. They say little about aggressively exporting values and culture, but keep their purpose very general. For them, the translation of literature is a useful and desirable form of exchange, the fruits of which – the dissemination of information and ideas, the inculcation of nuanced views of foreign cultures, increased empathy and understanding, the recognition of our common humanity – will be on display for a long time. (12)

Literary translation as Canada’s cultural diplomacy: Policy or possibility?

Canadian cultural diplomacy, where the translation of literary work has been touted as the primary vehicle of cultural diplomacy since the mid-1990s, has been irregularly financed by the Canada Council for the Arts, a federal agency, and by

6. A different response to the American paper comes from Nalina Taneja, writing for People’s Democracy, the weekly organ of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). In a text entitled “US Cultural Policy as Imperialist Foreign Policy” she labels cultural diplomacy as laid out in the Linchpin text as an initiative “through which the US intends to highjack debates on and influence the discourses on religion, identity, sports, and other concerns of everyday life, in the interests of imperialism.” At http://pd.cpim.org/2006/0820/08202006_nalini.htm (accessed October 16, 2006).
the Department of Foreign Affairs since the 1970s. Yet Canadian literature has been translated into German for over one hundred years. I have been concerned with only the last thirty – since Canada’s centenary, and formulated four questions: how are texts selected for translation and for translation funding, and is this selection steered by the Canadian government (as a branding strategy, for example); how do German publishers make their decisions on what to publish and sell; how do the translations themselves deal with the details of Canadian culture, politics, history, and environment – all the specificities that set a text in Canada; and lastly, how are these translations received. What do reviewers make of these materials from such a different place? The results of this project are due to be published in *Translating Canada* (Flotow & Nischik 2007).

The study shows that the vagaries of public taste, publishing contracts, government funding, literary prizes, and local (target) culture conditions are so complex that control of this process by the government of the exporting country, in this case Canada, is highly unlikely. Equally unlikely is the imposition of a particular literary item or fashion. In the case of two “B” nations like Canada and Germany, where the power differentials that are so telling for postcolonial and neo-colonial theory are far less obvious, it appears that it is the importing culture that makes the decisions in regard to selection. Canadian officials at federal and provincial funding offices and at embassies and consulates merely aid in promotion, financing travel, and defraying the costs of translation.

On the other hand, the history of the German translation of Canadian work seems to show that a joint effort between German publishers and modest Canadian funding has begun to bring some of the mild results that the American committee projects: some dissemination of ideas and information, some nuanced views on Canada, and perhaps increased empathy and understanding. There are, however, three quite telling moments in the last thirty years of the Canadian-German connection that also show how important the interests of the importing culture are in determining the kinds of materials it will translate. The issues raised in post-colonial or neo-colonial theory seem almost irrelevant here.

One of these moments is the “wilderness-ization” of Canada, especially in translated children’s books, which seem to focus on bad weather, backwoods and bears, and feature only real men braving the elements in the wilderness. The images of Canada promulgated by such books have not changed much over the past 100 years, and the books keep getting re-printed, with Canada remaining the stronghold of the tough male. Only the interpretation changes with the times, with the country moving

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7. It is noteworthy that this “joint effort” has only caused Canadian work to be imported to Germany. No German works are imported to Canada.
from an adventure playground for male protagonists in the 1920s, to a “survival of the fittest” arena for the Aryan heroes during the Nazi regime, to an escape haven for post-war Germans, and finally to a place of spiritual healing and self-discovery that today qualifies as an ecological paradise. (Seifert 2007)

It is interesting that Canada’s cultural policy has had little or no effect on these images; they are disseminated to meet German tastes and fashions. Further, such fashions have occulted other children’s books, those set in urban spaces or featuring female protagonists, for example, thus hampering the development of Canada’s new image or brand as “youthful, diverse, creative, modern.”

In adult writing, literary translation practices and effects have been less obviously homogeneous. In fact, no coherent and sustained translation of adult work began until the 1980s, with women writers then quickly coming to the fore. Much of this translation derived from the success of one person – Margaret Atwood – who became Canada’s bright young talent about 10 years after Christa Wolf had emerged in East Germany. In her case, Canadian government policy played a considerable role – supporting her with writing grants, allowing her to travel widely to promote her books, and financing all the translations. Her success in Germany carried over to many other Canadian women writers of the time: Alice Munro, Margaret Laurence, Barbara Gowdy, Bonnie Burnard, Mavis Gallant, Elizabeth Hay, and others, whose work was translated and marketed in Germany after Atwood. Again, this was only partly due to Canada’s cultural policy; it had as much to do with international feminism and German feminism, and readers’ needs that had been created and now had to be met – through the series of “women’s writing” that virtually every German publisher set up. The German literary landscape itself, where feminist books or women’s writing were in a different space, often seen as aggressive crude, shrill, and programmatic, or too introspective, was also an important aspect. Indeed, reviewers constantly return to the judgment that Canadian women were writing texts that addressed women’s lives and interests, but that refrained from polemics, and best of all, told good stories. In other words, a gap in the local production of women’s writing – at a time when such material was fashionable – was filled by importing Canadian books. Not much Canadian government policy was directly involved.

Finally, in the 1990s, Canadian writing of a different sort became useful in Germany; this was multicultural writing, the work produced by so-called “international bastards” (Flotow 2004) who had been born somewhere else, ended up in Canada, and usually continued writing about that other place: Michael Ondaatje (from Ceylon), Alberto Manguel (from Argentina), Rohinton Mistry (from India) are examples. They became interesting for Germany as examples of “multikulti” possibilities, at a time when Germany after unification in 1991
was experiencing terrible difficulties integrating foreigners into the society. The stories these Canadian writers told, writers who were foreigners (often members of “visible minorities”) but also Canadians, were seen to serve as examples of an even more multicultural but much less conflicted situation. Again and again, German reviewers point to their colourful personal backgrounds, focusing more on them than on their literary works, and again, allowing translations to fill a gap in the local literary landscape.

Conclusion

To conclude, it seems that, perhaps unconsciously, the forte of Canadian writing in Germany has been its storytelling: the women writers tell good stories, the children’s books tell stories about bears and snow, the multicultural writers tell stories about their home countries. This is narrative; and this is what Germany imported. Much like the marketers who sell their nation or their products by telling stories, Canada managed to export stories, leaving experimental writing and poetry well out of the picture. It seems that in the current world of the international exchange of culture, whether directed by policy or by market options, or simply made possible by occasional government funding instruments, stories travel, stories sell, stories are what people want to read. And while these stories will always have a different edge in translation, and their importance will depend largely on the importing culture, they may be an effect of cultural policy, or they may not. They may indeed “reveal the nation’s soul” or they may simply supplement the soul of the importing culture.
Language as sharp as a knife
Translation in ecological context*

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From 1999 to 2001, the Canadian poet Robert Bringhurst published three volumes of translations from classical Haida, the indigenous language of the Queen Charlotte Islands off the northern British Columbia coast. His work touched off a fierce debate over the relationship of a translator to the culture from which he draws his material. Exploring the underlying linguistic ecology reveals relations of material and discursive power that are implicated in the impending loss of Haida as a spoken language, and may be unavoidable for any English translation. As a contrasting example, literary translation into Esperanto may position the translator in a more sustainable ecological context.

**Keywords**: Haida, oral literature, linguistic ecology, Gemeinschaft, Esperanto

*Ll gidaagang wansuuga.*
*Kkuxu gyaaat gutgu lla giistingdas.*
*Ll xhitiiit ttsinhghwaanggwang qawdi
llanagaay diitsi qahlaagang wansuuga.*

*There was a child of good family, they say,*
*He wore two marten-skin blankets.*
*When he was of age to go bird-hunting*
*He went inland, uphill from the village, they say.*

* An oral version of this paper was presented at a conference on The Translator as Cultural Mediator, held at the University of Hartford, October 20–21, 2006. I am grateful to the organis- ers for their permission to include a written version in this volume.
This is the voice of Ghandl, blind poet of Qaysun and Xayna, speaking to ethnographer John Swanton in November 1900.\textsuperscript{1} Preserved in manuscript for almost a century, these words were sent out into the world again in 1999 by Robert Bringhurst, a Canadian poet, friend, and protégé of the great Haida sculptor Bill Reid, following twelve years of hunting down and poring over whatever he could find of the original Haida transcripts.

In *A Story As Sharp As a Knife* (Bringhurst 1999) and its two successor volumes, *Nine Visits to the Mythworld* (Ghandl 2000) and *Being in Being* (Skaay 2002), Bringhurst not only offered a set of translations from classical Haida; he also sought to turn conventional thinking about indigenous mythtelling on its head. Myth lives in and through the performance of individual oral artists, he asserted. Appreciating the skill of a mythteller requires the same kind of patience and attention to detail as the appreciation of music or painting. Indeed, to put it still more strongly:

> Native American oral literature in general, and Haida oral literature in particular, seem to me far closer in spirit and in form to European painting and to European music than to European literature. [...] In my attempts to set the best Haida poets in a global context, I have found Bach and Titian and Velázquez more immediately helpful than Racine. (1999:15)

What Bringhurst discovered in the Swanton manuscripts were stories in which repeating themes and motifs were assembled in complex structures of ideas by the mythteller, each individual bringing a distinctive style of thought and language to the task. Because Swanton endeavoured to record each story exactly as it was told in Haida, the originality and artistry of each voice can still be discerned. This is unfortunately not the case for many other mythtellers recorded by linguistics and anthropologists in the early decades of the twentieth century, since the latter were often content to get down the general outline or paraphrase of a story in English. The underlying assumption was that the shared features of myths are more important than the idiosyncrasies of particular retellings. Bringhurst’s view is precisely the opposite:

> I venture to think that if we practised comparative mythology in honest terms – working with full original texts instead of summaries in translation – we would

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\textsuperscript{1} John Swanton (1873–1958), an ethnographer with the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, spent the year from September 1900 to September 1901 collecting Haida stories in the communities of Skidegate, Masset, and Hydaburg (in Alaska). His method was to work with a younger Haida speaker who would listen to the stories and repeat them word-for-word at a slower pace so that Swanton could write them down. Those texts, comprising about 250 narratives and songs, constitute the entire preserved body of classical Haida literature.
find that the whole system of comparison disintegrates unless the human element
is fully factored in. We cannot compare two myths in the abstract. All we can
ever compare are embodiments, versions, performances of myths. If these per-
formances are summaries, we are certain to learn more about the summarizer’s
mind than we do about the people and the cultures who provide him the material
he condenses and reworks. (1999:410)

Thus Bringhurst’s project: to demonstrate that mythtellers such as Ghandl, and
his older colleague Skaay,² are as deserving of recognition as the great names of
European literature and art. Above all, he wants to show that their works – and, by
implication, those of several dozen other mythtellers recorded in the original in
various American languages – will repay the effort of understanding, translating,
and interpreting them, even at this belated juncture, eighty years or more since
the texts were first set down.

By and large, Bringhurst’s work was received enthusiastically by literary crit-
ics, translators, and authors; somewhat grudgingly and critically by linguists; and
with no small degree of hostility by the Haida. I do not know whether this came
as a surprise to him or not. His own affiliation clearly lies with the community of
poets, although he takes issue with European assumptions about poetry as elo-
quently as he criticises the preoccupations of linguists. Since poets are used to
being ignored by most of the population, he may have expected his work to go
unnoticed by the Haida, or to be treated with indifference. But this was not the
case. While there is little written Haida commentary on Bringhurst’s work, a two-
hour documentary (Bartoszewski 2001) aired by the Canadian national broad-
caster CBC Radio in June 2001 gave voice to some of the conflicting opinions
about his work from Haida elders and artists, including descendants of the people
who worked with Swanton during his remarkable year on the islands. Five years
later, mention of Bringhurst’s name in the communities is still likely to elicit a
strong reaction.

At one level, of course, the issues at stake here are familiar ones of voice and
appropriation. Bringhurst has lived all his life in Vancouver, far from the tradi-
tional territory of the Haida and the locales in which his translations are set. He
has no particular interest in the contemporary language, nor has he learned Haida
in the context of any relationship with fluent Haida speakers or an existing Haida

² Swanton worked with several informants in each of the communities. Bringhurst’s choice to
focus on only two, both from Skidegate, was motivated by the unequalled mastery of ideas and
language he found in the texts dictated by the mythtellers Skaay (John Sky, c. 1827 – c. 1905)
and Ghandl (Walter McGregor, c. 1851 – c. 1920). Each has a distinctive style and repertoire,
with Skaay’s long, intricate, and subtle narratives displaying a particularly remarkable intellec-
tual power.
community. For Bringhurst, Haida is literary language like Classical Greek, offering similar kinds of challenges and rewards. If a community of ancient Athenians had survived to the present day, enduring all kinds of dislocation and dispossession in the process, they too might feel irked at the notion that their classical texts were at the mercy of any scholar who happened upon them. So much can readily be understood.

But it seems to me that there is a deeper ecology of language that underlies the Haida’s reception of Bringhurst’s work – one which casts a revealing light on the role of translation in a globalized world.

Prelude to an ecological theme

Bringhurst himself is not shy about using ecological imagery to evoke the significance of listening to and translating myths. The following passage is from the Preface to A Story As Sharp As a Knife (1999), which introduces some of the key themes of his work on Haida:

Every language and its literature – written or oral – is also a world, linked to other worlds, of which the speakers of the language are often unaware. Every language and its literature form an intellectual bioregion, an ecosystem of ideas and perceptions, a watershed of thought. The several hundred oral literatures indigenous to North America – though constantly remade in the mouths of oral poets and new to every listener who comes from somewhere else – are parts of the old-growth forest of the human mind. (1999: 17)

And here he is again, much later in the same work:

You can no more record all the stories in a mythology than you can write down all the sentences in a language. A mythology is not a fixed body of stories; it is an open set. It is a narrative ecology: a watershed, a forest, a community of stories that are born and die and breed with one another and with stories from outside. (1999: 288)

Bringhurst wishes to celebrate Haida myth and Haida mythtellers, and so he expends much effort in bringing vividly alive the world in which they were produced. Being a realist, he also makes it clear just how much had been lost by the time Swanton arrived. Successive waves of epidemics had reduced a population of at least 10,000 to perhaps no more than 700 people, a traumatized band of survivors collected together in two villages where the missionaries held sway. Bringhurst likens the situation to a concentration camp – not to imply a deliberately planned slaughter, but to evoke the radical dislocation experienced by its inmates.
Yet there were still hearers for the stories: elderly and middle-aged and young. Left to itself, the culture would have pulled itself together, drawn on its ancient roots of creativity, and regenerated a new-growth forest on the remains of the old.

But the culture was not left to itself. In 1900, the potlatch had already been outlawed for 15 years. The housepoles at Skidegate and Masset, bearing family crests and the remains of the dead, had been pulled down; new ones would not be carved for three quarters of a century. Large traditional houses, where twenty people or more would sleep, eat, and talk together, had been replaced by European-style houses which could accommodate perhaps a third of that number. Within a few years, the system of residential schools would ensure that many children would spend their formative years away from parents and grandparents, usually in settings where the speaking of any language other than English incurred punishment. It was the beginning of the Silent Years.

It is a curious fact that nowhere in his extensive commentary on his translations does Bringhurst acknowledge that there may be no living Haida person capable of reading and appreciating the texts in their original form. Haida is still spoken, it is true; but when Bringhurst refers to “the speech of a later age” and affirms that “the Haida language continues to change” (1999:421), he is being unwontedly coy. Haida is a language on life-support. Perhaps a dozen fluent speakers, nearly all of them elderly, remain of each of the two principal dialect groups, northern (Masset) Haida and southern (Skidegate) Haida. Very few can read and write the language comfortably. No venues are left for elaborate use of the language, such as might preserve the more complex syntactical and narrative structures that characterise Swanton’s myths. The living culture that sustained the magnificent, complex web of ideas and words in the minds of Skaay and Ghandl has trickled away. And this of course is the situation for nearly every North American indigenous language. The mythtellers’ words, preserved a century ago, are like dinosaur fossils more than they are like tree rings.

For three or four generations now, the daily life of most Haida people has been conducted in English. Where written literature is concerned, they are part of English-speaking North America. And so, to really understand the significance of

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3. The richly carved housepoles of the northwest coast were mistaken for totems by the European explorers, and are still frequently referred to by that term. But their role in Haida society was more akin to European heraldry than European religion. By displaying the ancestry of a particular family, each pole implicitly stated the case for that family’s status and role within the community (MacDonald 1983). Part of that ancestry was located in mythtime, imparting a degree of transcendent meaning to the simplest acts of family life. The destruction of the housepoles and the banning of potlatches, the feasts through which families and individuals gained social status, eliminated key organising elements of Haida cultural life and undoubtedly contributed to the language’s decline.
Brighurst’s work for the Haida, we must look more closely at literary production and consumption in these two very different linguistic ecologies – the vanished world of the mythtellers, and contemporary Haida society.

Translating Gemeinschaft

I have already alluded to the pains which Brighurst takes to set his myths in their social context. In fact, he does this brilliantly. In his treatment, the mythtellers emerge as accomplished jazz artists of the spoken word, combining an enormous repertoire of mythic elements with a personal style and an acute awareness of audience and occasion. He also provides extensive notes on the physical and biological environment of Haida Gwaii, elucidating background knowledge that would have been taken for granted by both tellers and hearers. Finally, he provides some explicit guides to the intricate structure of the performances recorded by Swanton. If one invests the necessary time, involving frequent rereadings and cross-checking, one can certainly acquire a relatively deep and nuanced appreciation for the oral literature he offers in translation.

Yet as Brighurst himself acknowledges, all translation is approximate. And this is true in a different degree, as he also recognises, for translation from an oral literature to a written one:

In a self-sustaining oral culture, faith, hope, and even charity are invested very differently than in cultures that are learning or have learned the use of writing. A shift from oral to written culture affects the functioning of memory, the understanding of truth, and the place of voice and language in the working of the world. It affects not just the meaning of words but the meaning of language itself. It affects the meaning of meaning. (1999:193)

Brighurst would surely agree, then, that his English translation “means” something significantly different from the spoken Haida original. Or maybe it would be better to say, economically, that it means differently. The way it works upon the imagination is different, even when the translator has succeeded in capturing a good part of the original semantic content. The source of the difference I want to focus on here is not the grammatical or lexical particularities of English, but what I can only term its ecology: the dynamic system of utterances and relationships that constitute it as a real object in the world.

English belongs to a class of languages often denoted as “modern”, but which I would prefer – at least in the present context – to call “metropolitan”. These languages have developed through a long historical process of colonization, in the sense that greater and greater swathes of territory, together with the economic
and social systems located on them, have come to be co-ordered through a single more or less standardised linguistic medium. The essence of a metropolitan language is that the vast majority of linguistic devices available to any user are also widely used in genres and discourses which are beyond the influence of that user, or even any group of people directly known to them. It is the linguistic equivalent of a commodified and standardised economic system, and indeed the two are closely tied to one another (cf. Calvet 1999a and 1999b; Illich 1981 and 1983).

But of course languages do not start out this way. In a territory that has not yet come under metropolitan rule, the influence of distant places and ways of doing things is only a minor chord amidst the constant re-creation of language through community life. That is why dialectal and linguistic diversity is so great in places where people do not travel or communicate very frequently across community lines. But what is often missed in this description is the emotionally and perceptually vivid quality of meaning when it is based on shared direct experience. The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) described this kind of community in the late nineteenth century using the word *Gemeinschaft*, which has since become a standard term in English to describe social groups based on bonds of kinship, place, and shared meaning. Language devices in a Gemeinschaft are produced and reproduced in a tight cycle of imagination and interpretation. The hearer is never far absent from the topic of speech, even when that topic is located in myth-time or in distant historical time. And this makes available endless possibilities for self-reference and sly personal allusion that metropolitan languages are denied.

Most translation takes place between metropolitan languages. As all students and consumers of translation know, this can be endlessly challenging, fascinating, and rewarding. It does not, however, involve a fundamental change in linguistic ecology. Writers and readers in both source and target language have adjusted to the constraints and freedoms offered by distance and standardisation. But the situation is different when one translates from a Gemeinschaft language to a metropolitan language, and then offers it back to the members of the Gemeinschaft. Now a set of ideas and relationships that had one kind of life in the community have been given another kind of life altogether. This is not something that translators have any choice in, assuming they are looking for any kind of audience at all: it is as integral to being a translator into English as it is to being a poet or essayist in English.

Translators are motivated, above all, by a sense of enrichment, both personal and cultural. By means of their traffic across language borders, they seek to enlarge the bounds of their own imaginations and those of their linguistic compatriots. And I think there is no doubt whatever that Bringhurst’s work has resulted in the cultural and intellectual enrichment of himself and his readers in the Eng-
lish-speaking world. Our literary canon now includes a few of the Haida master mythtellers, and we are the better for it.

But has Bringhurst’s work enriched the Haida? There I think the verdict is more equivocal, perhaps in direct proportion to the ways in which it has been received. Participation in metropolitan culture is only part of the Haida reality. Living in small island communities as they do, intertwined by multiple webs of familial and clan relationship, they are the heirs of a Gemeinschaft culture also. And this work that is now given back to them, neatly arranged on the printed page, is not a Gemeinschaft cultural artefact, but only its distant echo. For us, the metropolitanans, echoes and distance are what we are used to. But to the Gemeinschaft imagination, they sound like a death knell.

Can things be otherwise?

Bringhurst acknowledges the help of many people in the book that introduces his Haida work (1999), but only one Haida individual is raised to the status of a Gemeinschaft relationship — his friend and mentor Bill Reid, to whom the first volume is dedicated. And Reid was raised far from Haida Gwaii, the son of an Anglo father, only slowly coming to reclaim his matrilineal inheritance. Although he chose to have his ashes scattered on the site of his ancestral village Ttanuu, Reid experienced great difficulty in relating to contemporary Haida culture, as numerous passages in his writings suggest (Reid 2001). For him, as for Bringhurst, it was the classical culture that called forth his allegiance. And so it is certainly true that the distance that a Haida reader might hear in the text corresponds in fact to the geographical and emotional distance of the translator from that person’s communal culture.

But had Bringhurst lived on Haida Gwaii — had he even been Haida — could the outcomes be any different? Translation into English is translation into English, no matter who does it. Perhaps, in such circumstances, like a canoe caught in an eddy and unable to go either forwards or backwards, one could not be a translator, or at least not a literary translator. In the broadcast debate over Bringhurst’s work

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4. William (Bill) Reid (1920–1998), an accomplished jeweler and sculptor who spent his early career as a radio announcer in Toronto, played a central role in the revival of classical Haida carving from the 1960s to the 1990s. Although best known for massive sculptural works such as The Raven and the First Men (at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia) and The Black Canoe (at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC), Reid also helped to revive the carving of housepoles, canoes, and the black stone known as argillite, basing his work on careful study of Haida masterworks housed in various museums.
mentioned earlier (Bartoszewki 2001), Haida artist Christian White argued in its favour, suggesting that the Haida had had the same opportunities to reclaim their literary heritage, but had let them pass. Yet reclaiming a visual tradition, such as carving, is very different from reclaiming a linguistic tradition. The medium for the former, be it wood or stone, is timeless; the play of line and form is timeless; each artwork has an integrity and autonomy that can be experienced directly, even to a degree by the untrained eye. But language depends for its power on layers of meaning and association that are imparted, as George Steiner observed, “by time and native ground” (1975: 401), and not simply given in the artwork itself. The meanings and associations that English has for the Haida are bound up with the complex history of contact, colonization, and resistance; they are distant indeed from the palette and purposes of the mythtellers.

But not all language ecologies present identical dilemmas. Consider, for example, the case of Chinook Jargon, a trading language of the northwest coast, spoken by over 100,000 people in its heyday (Holton 2004). Although the Jargon was used in a restricted range of situations, like all languages it offered distinctive aesthetic and cultural possibilities that would have developed in response to the will of its speakers; for a brief period in colonial history, it was considered for the role of a common British Columbian language. Let us imagine, for a moment, what that might offer to a Haida translator, seeking to make the works of his or her culture accessible to a wider audience.

As a regional language, mediating contact among numerous and diverse communities, the Jargon would require the translator to wrestle with issues of what is common and what is particular among those cultures, modifying and enriching the language itself in the process. In much the same way as Haida was used to express and negotiate the worldview of particular families or communities within an encompassing Haida universe, the Jargon might be used to negotiate the place of particular nations or language communities within a broader British Columbian horizon of meaning. Because the history of the language would be different, involving a greater proportion of dialogue to domination, its ecology would be different as well. On a scale stretching from Gemeinschaft, at one extreme, to a wholly metropolitan language at the other, the Jargon would occupy an intermediate position, relatively unconstrained by metropolitan rules and regimes, but not so tightly bound to individual communities. As such, it could offer a more hospitable medium for translation from the Gemeinschaft cultures of British Columbia than metropolitan English. Indeed, no one would be more at home in it than the community translators themselves.

The case of Chinook Jargon is purely hypothetical, since the language vanished from use as English consolidated its grip on the government, economy, and education systems of British Columbia. But the preceding thought experiment
illustrates the dependence of language ecology on history, politics, geography, and culture. If, for Chinook Jargon, we substitute Esperanto (Janton 1993; Tonkin 1997), we discover some intriguing parallels. Most approaches to communicating across language barriers are resource-intensive, meaning that large and wealthy cultures are better placed to take advantage of them (Fettes 2003a and 2003b): the preponderance of translation into metropolitan languages is one example. By minimizing the investment of time and energy needed to acquire fluency, maximizing the range of effective communicative strategies, and establishing an intercultural horizon of significance, Esperanto offers a linguistic medium that, like Chinook Jargon, is more hospitable to visitors and travelers (Dasgupta 1987). One might say that the cultural ecologies of the two languages are similar, though not identical. It would therefore be of interest to explore in greater depth the relationship of Esperanto translators to the source cultures from which they draw their texts, and particularly to the Gemeinschaft cultures of indigenous peoples around the world.5

What this brief comparison illustrates is the fact that every act of translation is itself inextricably part of a larger cultural system. Through the choices they make, at every level from the lexical to the linguo-political, translators contribute both to maintaining and to changing the ecologies of the language communities of which they are a part. The dramatic example of Haida may help to clarify the choice by some translators to work primarily in languages that are distant from the metropolitan end of the scale. In translation into (and from) a language such as Esperanto, or from (and into) a language such as Haida, the “meaning of meaning”, in Brighurst’s phrase, shifts in subtle ways, opening up new possibilities (and, of course, imposing new restrictions) for the unfolding of the translator’s art. Aesthetically, ethically, and pragmatically, these non-metropolitan linguistic ecologies are surely worthy of attention, of inquiry, and of celebration.

Indeed, it should not escape our attention that such eco-cultural systems, to which translators contribute more than they perhaps recognise, have profound effects on people’s lives. As we all know, small language communities around the world are facing a loss similar to that experienced by the Haida (Abley 2003; Nettle & Romaine 2000), with devastating psychological and cultural consequences. These processes are in turn connected to the unfolding bio-ecological crisis, both locally and globally (Maffi 2001). Yet local language revitalization efforts, like lo-

5. Several notable studies of translation exist in Esperanto, including Waringhien (1989) and Auld (1978), both of these being written by accomplished poets. Unfortunately there is no English-language treatment of similar depth, and these authors are primarily concerned with metropolitan languages from various parts of the world. A guide to the relevant literature can be found in Janton (1993).
cal conservation efforts, are unlikely to take root in the absence of a broader ecological shift. Bringhurst's work may help to heighten our awareness of what is being lost; but the foregoing analysis also points to the need for translators, along with many other cultural actors and cultural brokers, to invest “faith, hope, and even charity” for new purposes and in new ways.
PART IV

Culture(s) in translation
Literally ambiguous

Issues of ambiguity and identity in the French translations of *Lazarillo de Tormes*

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Through the study of a few passages dealing with the issue of identity, this article presents a critique of the French translations of the sixteenth-century anonymous Spanish picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*, in order to propose a model of analysis of syntactic ambiguities that can allow for multiple and often contradictory interpretations. This model begins by questioning some key notions at the heart of Antoine Berman’s *critique of translations*, suggesting that it is useful to take into account Paul Julian Smith’s critical reading of the concept of unity in the writings of “serious” twentieth-century critics of the *Lazarillo* and Michael Riffaterre’s analysis of the trope known as syllepsis.

**Keywords:** politics of identity; ambiguity; intertextuality; syllepsis

One of the most interesting aspects of Antoine Berman’s critical approach to translation in *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne* is most certainly that it envisages translation criticism as taking place within a framework which includes not only all the aspects of a given translation but also the other works by the author of the original, works about the author, works relating to the author’s era, etc. Berman calls these *other* works ‘collateral texts’.¹ However, even as Berman recognises the importance of analysing translations in light of such collateral texts, too great a place is accorded components that depend exclusively on the notion of the author of the source text, components that are difficult to theorise and thus hardly applicable in practice, unless one resorts to a biographical type of analysis. This is a serious methodological problem – all the more so when, as is the case here, the translation is of an *anonymous* text. Our text is *La Vida*

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¹. Berman uses the word *translation* in French (instead of the usual *traduction*) to refer to the sum of the translation(s) proper plus the ‘collateral texts’.
de Lazarillo de Tormes, a Spanish work whose anonymity still constitutes today, four and a half centuries after its publication, one of the most intriguing puzzles in world literature. Indeed, the anonymous nature of the text is one of the main reasons there is continuing interest in the Lazarillo, leading to constantly renewed interpretations, which have increased exponentially over the past twenty years.

Our purpose is not to add yet one more brick to the interpretive structure surrounding what, after Cervantes’ Don Quixote, is the most analysed text in all of Spanish literature. Rather, we intend to look at the five translations of the Lazarillo into French which appeared between 1561 and 1968, and the collateral texts relating to it. Since our point of departure is the principles put forward by Berman, translation as used here consists in what can be termed the Lazarillo’s ‘translatability’, that which ensures, as Walter Benjamin would have put it, the survival of the source text. Corresponding to this notion of virtual ‘translatability’ is an ever-increasing preoccupation on the part of scholars of the Lazarillo with the opacity of the text, with the mystification of the reader through what some scholars have called the ambiguity, others the uncertainty, others still the indeterminacy, of the Lazarillo, terms that have all been used to refer to the linguistic and stylistic particularities that are present in the story of the narrator-protagonist and that make reading and comprehension difficult. Is it this last factor, related to the un-graspable nature of a text which supports so many different interpretations, which could explain the large number of retranslations of the text over the centuries? This is one of the central questions we will deal with in this article.

The flow of translation (in the sense of Berman as discussed above) in relation to this text has been almost overwhelming, in terms both of actual translations and of critical interpretations, and is impressive as much for its duration as for the number of critical editions, books, collective works, journal articles, conference proceedings, that appear year after year without a truly dominant critical or interpretive approach having emerged. We would like to argue that this tidal flow can be attributed to the translatability of the Lazarillo. In all likelihood, this is a text which owes its survival to the different readings and interpretations continuing

to this day rather than to its hermetic qualities, a text whose numerous retranslations are less the result of inherent textual difficulties than of its own translatable and interpretive possibilities.

Translation criticism which limits itself to the analysis of what can be considered the intrinsic qualities of the source text would inevitably attempt to gauge the extent to which the translation or translations under scrutiny distance themselves from what Berman calls the textual *centre of gravity*. It would want to show the extent to which these central qualities are transformed. Such an approach would require (as in Berman) that it be possible to arrive at a ‘correct’ interpretation of the source text; indeed, this would constitute a preliminary condition to the critical work of comparing the translation(s) to the original. Even texts considered to be polysemic are subject to this condition, and the critics of the *Lazarillo* have given a great deal of importance to its *ambiguity*, a generic term referring to the critics’ difficulty in determining the correct interpretation of certain passages of the text. It is perhaps because of the impossibility of being certain as to how to interpret what the narrator-protagonist Lázaro means that critics of the *Lazarillo* have chosen to give themselves the task of reconstructing the text’s “artistic and literary unity” (to borrow the terms of an article by F. Courtney Tarr, which the critic Paul Julian Smith sees as “the foundation of all serious criticism” on the *Lazarillo*). In the textual passages where there is ambiguity, ‘serious’, ‘pictorialist’ or ‘humanist’ critics see an obstacle, but an obstacle that does not undermine the will to reconstruct what they feel is the intrinsic unity of the work. In Smith’s words (1988:89):

Any reading of the *Lazarillo* will suggest two areas of uncertainty or possible disagreement. The first is formal: what is the significance (if any) of the evident disproportion between the length of the first three *tratados* and the brevity of the remainder, between the leisurely detail of the first half and the extreme compression of the second? The second is epistemological: what value (if any) can we attribute to the disjunction between the predicament of the character and the protestations of the narrator? How can we know what is happening at any particular point? [...] The two questions become one in the work of modern critics who seek to uncover both artistic and psychological continuity beneath what they take to be a merely ‘superficial’ fragmentation of the aesthetic and conceptual registers of the text.

Very much preoccupied with the necessity to make sense, the more traditionalist critics of the *Lazarillo* maintain that this is a superficial problem which can easily be resolved by linking, in the name of artistic unity, the two “areas of disagreement”, transcending both. This is why, writes Smith: "For pictorialist critics unity
is perhaps the highest good, and its innate prestige is rarely subject to question” (1988:89).

Even more noteworthy than the refusal to recognize the genuinely problematic nature of the uncertainty generated by any reading of the *Lazarillo*, is the assurance with which critics appeal to the notion of authorship. On this subject, Smith writes: “Formal inconsistency is [...] resolved to a seamless, ‘aesthetic’ integrity, hermetically sealed from social practice and remorselessly policed by authorial intention” (1988:90). The unity sought through the resolution of the “formal and stylistic inconsistencies” that run through the *Lazarillo* ends up in fact being a critical construct, where every syntactic anomaly has its own *raison d’être*: the author, according to the critic, wanted things to be as they are.

The question of the ‘intrinsic ambiguity’ of the text can, in turn, be linked to the question of subjectivity and, more precisely, to the fact that in the *Lazarillo* subjectivity is being expressed for one of the first times in literature, an expression which is itself linked to the emergence of the novel as genre.

The question of subjectivity in the *Lazarillo* is of major importance, due to the willingness on the part of critics to separate it out from the ambiguities that run through the story, as if these were irrelevant to the conceptualization of subjectivity in the work. From this point of view, Smith’s brief study of subjectivity in the *Lazarillo* is interesting, in that it raises the question of the representation, through writing, of the way in which subjectivity is developed. Smith shows that the subjectivity of the narrator-protagonist is achieved through the identity of certain “daily objects”:

[I]f Lazarillo as character achieves a certain measure of identity it is through the projection on and misrecognition of self in objects which he encounters and desires. His often-noted concern for clothes is a case in point. But this primal division is not merely represented in the narrative as the varied and often contradictory experience of a fictional protagonist; it is also reproduced by the narration in the inconsistent texture of its representative process. (Smith 1988:94)

Even more interesting are Smith’s remarks concerning the codes of representation and ostentation expressed by way of the writing process:

3. This particular aspect has been the object of an interesting study by Giancarlo Maiorino (see Maiorino 1996).

4. Michel de Certeau (1984) speaks of a scriptural economy to describe the social space born with the Renaissance, at which time discourse becomes a produced good. The term ‘economy’ refers to the emergence of the concept of progress associated with the passage from orality to writing. The foregrounding of the writing process in the *Lazarillo* perfectly exemplifies this transition.
[T]he position (or positions) from which the author writes is curiously mobile and contingent, and the reader is confronted with a plurality of mutually exclusive codes of representation, a patchwork of heterogeneous fragments. The _Lazarillo_ is, in Maurice Molho’s word, a _cento_, a linguistic scrapbook. [...] But I would suggest that it also reveals the ‘under-side’ of subjectivity and of fiction: in its ignorance of the consistency we associate with ‘classical’ realism, it lays bare the devices of both identity and narration, the ‘seams’ of the psychological and literary garment which are conventionally repressed. (Smith 1988:95)

With relation to the expression of subjectivity, Berman’s method turns the author’s style into a question of necessity and precision, of essence and justness, notions obviously opposed to, among other things, excess and supplement. Translation criticism, as advocated by Berman, makes little concession to anything vaguely resembling imprecision or indetermination, and one can wonder if Berman’s method can even allow for such aspects.

Terms associated with imprecision and indetermination are often, from the critic’s point of view, difficult to analyse, if only because they cannot be considered to correspond to the will or intention of the author. The same cannot, however, be said of polysemy, which is seen as prefiguring the intention of the author.

One of the problems that the critique of the translations of the _Lazarillo_ poses, because the text is anonymous, is the impossibility of ‘naming’ this formal inconsistency. Do the ambiguities and ambivalences derive from the author’s will (hence a ‘wilfully’ polysemic text), or are they rather cases of imprecision and superfluity, whether desired or not? And even if this last hypothesis is the case, must it be taken into account? Should it in any way modify the critic’s appraisal of the text?

Historically, the question of the formal inconsistency of the _Lazarillo_ has been linked to the multiple interpretations to which this text continues to give rise. Consequently, it is to be presumed that the translation cannot remove itself from this debate.

**Ambiguity, intertextuality and syllepsis**

If a text escapes consensus, or gives rise to multiple interpretations, it is often tempting to talk in terms of polysemy, although it is not at all certain that the absence of consensus or the plurality of interpretations stems from polysemy proper. This is what we would like to show here in relation to translation criticism. Of some use to our argument is the clear distinction between the notions of polysemy and ambiguity made by Michael Riffaterre more than twenty years ago:
Ambiguity is not the polysemy most words display as dictionary entries but results from the context’s blocking of the reader’s choice among competing meanings, as when, to use an example from Derrida, a French context hinders the reader from deciding whether *plus de* means “lack” (no more) or “excess” (more than). In this case, the undecidability is due entirely to the fact that the reader is playing a score, the syntax, that will not let him choose. (Riffaterre 1980:628)

Ambiguity results from the difficulty readers (translators, in our case) face regarding a choice to be made between different possible contextual meanings, not because of the polysemy of a word or expression, but because of a syntactic structure that does not allow them to choose a particular contextual meaning without abandoning others. The reader or the critic is not forced to favour this or that interpretation, as opposed to the translator, who *must* choose even though, as Riffaterre puts it, “the syntax […] will not let him choose”. This is perhaps the fundamental distinction to be made between the translation of a polysemic term and of an ambiguous syntactic structure. Polysemy almost always results from a reading that allows the different meanings of a dictionary entry (the meanings are often linked to one another through metonymy) to coexist simultaneously, whereas ambiguity arises more from the difficulty the reader encounters when forced to choose between one contextual meaning and another. Riffaterre makes an explicit distinction between the two notions when he undertakes a revision of the notion of intertextuality, a revision made necessary according to him by the confusion between this notion and that of intertext:

> We must be careful to avoid the confusion between intertextuality and intertext that spoils most of the studies newly born of the current craze for intertextuality. The intertext proper is the corpus of texts the reader may legitimately connect with the one before his eyes, that is, the texts brought to mind by what he is reading. [...] The ability to connect or collocate texts does not, however, result from superficial similarities of wording or topic; two or more literary passages are collocable and comparable as text and intertext only if they are variants of the same structure. Intertextual connection takes place when the reader’s attention is triggered [...] by intratextual anomalies – obscurewordings, phrasings that the context alone will not suffice to explain – in short, ungrammaticalities within the idiolectic norm [...] which are traces left by the absent intertext, signs of an incompleteness to be completed elsewhere. These, in turn, are enough to set in train an intertextual reading, even if the intertext is not yet known or has been lost with the tradition it reflected. (Riffaterre 1980:626–627)

The notions of ambiguity (“phrasings that the context alone will not suffice to explain”) and of ungrammaticality or anomaly are thus linked through intratextuality. Ambiguity differs from polysemy in that the latter does not originate in
uncertainty, is not opposed to what Riffaterre calls the “idiolectic norm”, is not “to be completed elsewhere”.

Riffaterre’s study constitutes a genuine attempt to propose a serious analysis of intertextuality, going beyond notions of allusion, parody, citation, etc. This analysis is all the more interesting since it locates the basis for intertextuality in intratextual anomalies or ambiguities. In the case of the Lazarillo, the established critical practices of drawing parallels between the anonymous text and the Erasmus-like discourses of certain Renaissance works, of identifying motifs from the folklore of the Middle Ages or from oral traditions, or of considering the text as a parody of novels of chivalry (such as the Amadís de Gaula), remain pertinent. They are still relevant to our understanding of the Lazarillo (consider the brilliant work of Marcel Bataillon, for example, or, more recently, of Augustín Redondo on the relation between the Lazarillo and folklore), but it is important as well to analyse the linguistic or stylistic anomalies of the text, which have contributed to the multiplication of interpretations over the past century. Such analysis would, following Riffaterre, integrate its intertextual dimension.

The text of the Lazarillo illustrates Riffaterre’s distinction between the ‘significance’ of words and their ‘meaning’. Riffaterre formulates this distinction in order to point to what constitutes the semiotic productivity of the figure of speech called ‘syllepsis’. Given the sylleptic nature of the Lazarillo, a study of this figure of speech is required to help us better understand not so much the importance of the notion of meaning but that of significance for translation.

Significance, as opposed to meaning, is to be understood as a link of interdependence between two or more variants of the same structure. An intertextual reading – essentially an exercise in comparison – is possible and must be carried out even if, as has already been shown, the intertext has not been identified. The intertextual connection is made when the reader of the text comes upon an anomaly that will become grammatical only once the intertext has been completed. Riffaterre calls this form of incomplete or non actualized intertextuality presupposition, that is, “[a] significance where words signify by presupposing an intertext either potential in language or already actualized in literature” (Riffaterre 1980:627). As far as the Lazarillo is concerned, anomalies are usually associated with the second type of presupposition – an intertext already actualized

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5. This is precisely the point made by Claudio Guillén (1988:66–70).

6. Riffaterre (1980:626–627) thus explains the difference between the two terms: “I shall speak of meaning when words signify through their one-to-one relationship with nonverbal referents, that is, their reference to what we know or believe we know as reality. I shall speak of significance when these same words signify through their relationship with structural invariants [...]”
in literature. The other form of presupposition, however, through which words reach their significance only through realising the potential of language itself, has never been examined through an intertextual reading of the Lazarillo. Riffaterre’s presupposition in fact presupposes that there exists an intertext (of one of the two types discussed) and that the literariness of a text is the result of the words being organised not only syntactically (the meaning of words) but also according to presuppositions (the significance of words). According to Riffaterre, incomplete or non actualized intertextuality can be of three types:

So far as I can make out, there are three types of intertextuality: first, the complementary type (every sign has a reverse and an obverse); the reader is forced to interpret the text as the negative, in the photographic sense, of its intertext); second, the mediated type (where the reference of text to intertext is effected through the intercession of a third text functioning as the interpretant that mediates between sign and object [...]); and third, the intratextual type (where the intertext is partly encoded within the text and conflicts with it because of stylistic or semantic incompatibilities). (Riffaterre 1980:627)

Moreover, the fortuitous relation originating from an intertextual connection depending on the cultural knowledge of the reader or critic (identifying allusions or influences) should be distinguished from the necessary relation stemming from a presupposition in Riffaterre’s sense (that is, a type of connection requiring no other aptitude than linguistic competence). Riffaterre maintains that it is important not to confuse intertextuality (“a set of restrictions upon the reader’s freedom, as a guide for him in his interpreting”) with ambiguity (“the kind of obscurity that prevents the reader from quite discerning which of a word’s pertinent meanings are equally acceptable in context” (Riffaterre 1980:628). His analysis of ambiguity is being carried out in light of the Derridean concept of ‘undecidability’. Riffaterre notes: “Undecidability has become a central feature in Derrida’s analyses of literariness, and it is also the main underpinning of his creative writing. Better still, his own critical discourse has put undecidability to use [...]” (1980:628). The analysis of literariness that results from undecidability is often expressed in Derrida as syllepsis:

7. As far the Lazarillo is concerned, the only true ‘intertextual reading’ to this day is to be found in Gómez-Moriana (1980).

8. It would be difficult not to consider such a distinction relevant for translation, a practice for which it is impossible to presuppose the reader’s ability to recognise allusions within a text, especially if the latter is many centuries old. Furthermore, even if translators have all the literary and cultural facts necessary to understand all the allusions within a text, it is not certain they will choose to reproduce these allusions (for example, they could choose to make them explicit or to adapt them) for readers who might be incapable of noticing them.
[...] a pun or, as Derrida prefers to call it, a ‘syllepsis’, the trope that consists in understanding the same word in two different ways at the same time, one meaning being literal or primary, the other figurative. The second meaning is not just different from and incompatible with the first: it is tied to the first as its polar opposite or the way the reverse of a coin is bound to its obverse [...] (Riffaterre 1980:629)

Finally, it is important to mention that different forms of syllepsis correspond to the three types of intertextuality already mentioned – complementary, mediated and intratextual:

With the complementary type, the syllepsis itself suffices to presuppose the intertext and by itself conveys the significance. With the mediated type, the syllepsis refers to the textual interpretant. With the intratextual type, the syllepsis symbolizes the compatibility, at the significance level, between a text and an intertext incompatible at the level of meaning. (Riffaterre 1980:629)

There have been numerous useful stylistic analyses of the Lazarillo, but all attempt to draw up a more or less extensive list of the tropes used by the author to stylize the discourse of his narrator-protagonist. We would like to suggest that the stylistics of the anonymous author should be unindividualized, in order to determine which internal resources of the language itself come into play in the Lazarillo. It would then be possible to determine the extent to which the translation plays the language games of the Lazarillo. ‘Language game,’ ‘wordplay’ and ‘pun’, these are the terms to be used in speaking of syllepsis. As Riffaterre writes: “It is simply a pun”. Thus it is easy to understand why syllepsis, a simple play on words, is of utmost interest for translation, and for the critical study of the translated forms of the stylistic variations of a text.

**Ambiguity and/of identity in the French translations of the Lazarillo**

At the beginning of the first chapter of the Lazarillo,9 there is a passage where the narrator-protagonist states of his father, a miller accused of having robbed the people who had come to use his mill:

Mi padre que Dios perdone tenía cargo de proveer una molienda de una hazaña [...] en la cual fue molinero más de quince años. [...] [S]iendo yo niño de ocho años, achacaron a mi padre ciertas sangrías mal hechas en los costales de los que

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allí a moler venían. Por lo cual fue preso y confesó y no negó y padeció persecución por justicia. Espero en Dios que está en la gloria, pues el Evangelio los llama bienaventurados. En este tiempo se hizo cierta armada contra Moros, entre los cuales fue mi padre que a la sazón estaba desterrado por el desastre ya dicho, con cargo de acemilero de un caballero que allá fue, y con su señor como leal criado feneció su vida. (p. 3–4)

The literal meaning of the short passage highlighted above in italics is that the narrator-protagonist’s father is one of the Moors against whom a war was waged. The unacceptability of this literal reading, which co-textually links the Christian Gospel (“el Evangelio”) and the heretic Moors, produces ambiguity, and instead of clearing up the ambiguity, the narrator goes on to talk about the adventures of his mother with a slave, whose name, Zaïd, reinforces the isotopy of ‘arabness’. The ambiguity – whether Lázaro’s father is a Moor, or, in accordance with contextual logic, a Christian – is not diminished in any way. Instead of making clear the ethnic origin of the narrator-protagonist (a very sensitive question at the time of the Counter-Reform and the Spanish Inquisition), the text forces the translator to choose between whether Lázaro’s father’s participated in a war against the infidels (the only acceptable interpretation in the social and historical context of the time) or against the Christians (which is what the text literally says).

Is this simply an awkward syntactic structure? Is it simply a case of a peculiar stylistic usage (this is the point of view of most critics)? Would it be an exaggeration to consider Lázaro a Moor and the “cierta armada contra Moros” a war waged against himself and his own kind? Having to answer this question directly, the French translations speak with one voice:

Saugrain (1561): Mon père (auquel Dieu pardonne) avait charge de voiturer la mouture à un moulin [...] [É]tant en l’âge seulement de huit ans, mon père fut accusé d’avoir mal versé en sa charge, et taillé quelques veines aux sacs de ceux qui venaient là à moudre. Pour lequel cas étant mis en prison, et endurant la question entre les mains de justice, confessa finalement le tout sans nier aucune chose du fait. Dont je crois qu’il soit en Paradis, eu égard que l’Évangile dit telles gens être bienheureux. L’on fit en ces temps-là une armée contre les Turcs : à laquelle mon père (qui pour la défortune avant déduite était banni du pays) alla pour muletier d’un gentilhomme de l’armée : au service duquel, comme loyal serviteur, finit ses jours. (p. 4–5)

Bonfons (1616): Mon père à qui Dieu fasse pardon avait la charge de pourvoir de mouture un certain moulin [...] [É]tant âgé de huit ans, l’on accusa mon père d’avoir malicieusement fait quelques saignées aux sacs de ceux qui y venaient moudre; pour raison de quoi étant pris, il ne nia mais confessa le fait, dont il en souffrit persécution par justice, et jespère en Dieu qu’il est au Paradis, vu que
l’Évangile dit bienheureux ceux qui endurent. Au même temps on *leva certaine armée contre les maures, avec laquelle mon père* (qui pour le désastre susdit, était banni du pays) *s’achemina*, avec charge de muletier de l’un des Cavaliers d’icelle ; où comme fidèle serviteur, il finit sa vie avec son maître. (p. 11–13)

Viardot (1842): [M]on père, que Dieu lui fasse miséricorde! était chargé de pourvoir un moulin [...] dans lequel il fut meunier plus de quinze ans. [...] J’avais à peine atteint l’âge de huit ans que l’on accusa mon père de certaines saignées malicieuses faites aux sacs de ses pratiques. Il fut arrêté, mis à la question, n’eut pas la force de nier, et souffrit persécution pour la justice, ce qui me fait espérer qu’il est aujourd’hui dans la gloire de Dieu, puisque l’évangile l’appelle “bienheureux”. Dans ce temps-là, *on arma une flotte contre les Mores, et mon père*, qui était banni pour le malheur que je viens de raconter, *suivit en Afrique un chevalier dont il menait le bagage, et, en fidèle serviteur, y mourut avec son maître*. (p. 423)

Morel-Fatio (1886): Mon père (que Dieu absolve) avait chargé de pourvoir la mouture d’un moulin [...] où il fut meunier plus de quinze ans. [...] Après – j’avais alors huit ans – on accusa mon père de certaines saignées mal faites aux sacs de ceux qui venaient moudre au moulin. Il fut pris, questionné, ne nia point et souffrit persécution “à cause de la justice”. J’espère qu’il est dans la gloire, car l’Évangile nomme ceux qui ainsi souffrent bienheureux. En ce temps *on leva une armée contre les Mores, où mon père*, pour lors banni en raison dudit désastre, *alla comme muletier d’un gentilhomme, et là-bas, aux côtés de son maître, comme loyal serviteur, finit ses jours*. (p. 5–6)

Molho (1968): [M]on père, à qui Dieu pardonne, avait chargé de pourvoir la mouture d’un moulin [...] où il fut meunier plus de quinze ans. [...] [Q]uand jeus huit ans, mon père fut accusé d’avoir mal taillé quelques veines aux sacs de ceux qui venaient moudre, pour lequel cas fut mis en prison, confessa et ne nia point, et souffrit persécution pour justice. J’espère en Dieu qu’il est en gloire, car il est dit dans l’Évangile que ceux-là sont bienheureux. *L’on fit en ce temps-là une armée contre les Mores. Mon père, banni du pays pour l’infortune devant dite, y alla comme muletier d’un gentilhomme qui partit là-bas, au service duquel, en loyal serviteur, finit ses jours*. (Molho adds, in a note, that this was one of two expeditions mounted by the Spanish in an attempt to establish themselves on Jerba, in the gulf of Gabes, in 1510 and 1520. Both ended in disaster.) (p. 5)

In Saugrains’ and Bonfons’ versions there seems to be no doubt; if one relies solely on the syntax; it seems clear that the first two translations reject any idea that the father could be counted among the Moors against whom “se hizo cierta armada”, the first by writing “mon père alla à l’armée contre les Turcs comme muletier” [my father went with the army against the Turks as a mule-driver], and the second by stating “mon père s’achemina avec l’armée contre les maures” [my father rode with the army against the Moors]. Viardot’s version has the father travel to
Africa ("suivit en Afrique" [followed to Africa]) with “une flotte contre les Mores” [a flotilla against the Moors]; as for Morel-Fatio’s and Molho’s translations, they do not specify the place where Lázaro’s father “alla comme muletier” [went as a mule-driver], but they do note “où mon père alla” [where my father went] and “mon père y alla” [my father went there] respectively, although there is no precise antecedent for either “où” [where] or “y” [there]. Thus over the four centuries of French translations of the Lazarillo (1561–1968) the approach taken to this peculiar syntactic turn has remained fundamentally the same. It is interesting to note that none of the five translations includes the possibility that fue refers to the third person singular of the verb ser (to be) in the preterit tense (he was); without exception, they all interpret fue as referring to the third person singular of the verb ir (to go) (he went).¹⁰ No translator has chosen to reproduce the original syntactical order. By having the passage “fue mi padre” depend co-textually on the passage “con cargo de acemilero” (“avec charge de muletier” [as a mule-driver]), with the result that the expression can only mean “mon père alla” [my father went]), our five translators have chosen to bring together elements which are syntactically distant from one another in the original, instead of having the passages “entre los cuales” (“among which”) and “fue mi padre” (meaning either ‘my father was’ or ‘my father went’) follow one another syntactically, as they do in the original. Thus, the story says one thing but also its “polar opposite” (to use Riffaterre’s terms): the father is Moorish and he is not. Critics have not until now offered an explanation which could provide an answer (most do not consider there to be a problem) other than to say that this is an example of discontinuity (actually, an anacoluthon) in the narrator’s discourse. Even the very few critics of the Lazarillo who have drawn attention to the literal meaning of the “entre los cuales fue mi padre” passage have always done so while invoking the social and historical context in order to emphasize the ironic features of the passage, that is, by pointing out that a fair number of millers were in fact of Moorish origin.

Critics and translators of the Lazarillo all prefer the same interpretation, one which, ultimately, leads to the rejection of a literal interpretation of the passage. In order to avoid this literal interpretation, however, weight has to be given an intertext which would validate, so to speak, the opposite interpretation, that Lázaro’s father is a Christian and an infidel. This traditional interpretation has always been defended, especially in the translations, because of what is stated in the second part of the sentence: “[...] con cargo de acemilero de un caballero que allá fue, y con su señor como leal criado feneció su vida,” that is, Lázaro’s father went to war

¹⁰. As they also do in the case of fue in the expression “de un caballero que allá fue” in the same passage; here, however, fue, because of the immediate presence of the adverb of place allá, can only refer to the verb ir.
with his master, whom he served as a mule-driver, and there (*allâ* – ‘where the Moors live’) he ended his days as a loyal servant of his master. Critics have consistently identified the war referred to here as one of the two Spanish expeditions Molho speaks of in his note on the passage, this despite the fact that the narrator-protagonist does not in fact specify, saying “una *cierta* armada [a certain war] contra Moros.”

There is no particular reason to believe that Molho is wrong. What is important, however, is that critics have established this link between what the text says and historical facts on the grounds that when Lázaro’s mother is about to leave her son with his first master (the Blindman), she tells the latter that her son “era hijo de un buen hombre. El cual por ensalzar la fe, había muerto en la de los Gelves [...]” (p. 6). This is rendered in the following ways in French (passages in italics):

- **Saugrain:** [Elle] le pria me faire bon traitement, pource que j’étais fils de bon père, *lequel pour augmenter la foi de Jésus-Christ fut tué* [who was killed attempting to increase the faith in Jesus Christ] en la bataille des Gelves. (p. 7)

- **Bonfons:** [... ma mère]; Qui me recommandant à lui, lui dit que j’étais fils d’un homme de bien, *lequel pour exalter la foi, avait été tué* [who was killed glorifying the faith] en la bataille des Gelves. (p. 21)

- **Viardot:** Celle-ci me recommanda de son mieux, disant que j’étais fils d’un homme qui avait été se faire tuer *en la bataille des Gelves pour la défense de la foi* [defending the faith]. (p. 424)

- **Morel-Fatio:** Elle me recommanda à lui et lui dit que j’étais fils d’un homme de bien, *qui, pour exalter la foi, était mort* [who, glorifying the faith, died] en la journée des Gerbes (p. 11)

- **Molho:** [...] ma mère, laquelle me recommanda à lui et lui dit que j’étais le fils d’un homme de bien *qui, pour exalter la foi, était mort* [who, glorifying the faith, died] en la bataille des Gelves. (In a note Molho adds that the battle referred to was the Jerba expedition.) (p. 7)

Despite seeming simple and straightforward, this passage contains a number of ambiguities. These, however, have gone unacknowledged, and constantly the same interpretation has been put forward (see the translations above), which leads us to believe that critics have in fact interpreted this passage based on inferences drawn from the interpretation given the passage already discussed. Here, nothing is really dealt with explicitly: ‘opposite’ meanings can be given the word *buen* in the expression “buen hombre” – a ‘good man’ but also, if taken figuratively, a ‘cuckold’ – and the phrase “por ensalzar la fe” does not specify which faith. What is more, critics never raise the point that Lázaro’s mother would most probably
not have known for certain that her husband was deceased, since it was highly unlikely, at the time of the Inquisition, that the authorities would have gone to the trouble of informing the wife of someone who had been “banished from the country” that he had died at war. In fact, the passage “como leal criado, feneció su vida” [as a loyal servant, ended his life] at the end of the passage previously analysed leads one to believe that the father died there, and, more to the point, that he ended his days there, perhaps after a good number of years. The choice of “fenecer su vida” in relation to “morir” in no way enables us to posit, with certainty, how the father died. The interpretation that he died in battle is a pure inference on the part of critics.

There is therefore every reason to doubt the truthfulness of the mother’s words, or, more precisely, her words as reported to the reader by the narrator-protagonist. Nothing of a textual nature enables one to conclude that Lázaro’s father went to war against the Moors in the name of Christianity and that he died in combat. The text does say that, but at the same time it says exactly the opposite. That is why it is necessary that the second passage (where the mother of young Lázaro leaves her son in the care of the Blindman) be analysed in relation to the first, in order to determine if certain elements are examples of intratextual syllepsis.

We have already said that in the passage “había muerto por ensalzar la fe” nothing indicates for certain which faith is being referred to; what is more, even if it were certain that the faith is the Christian faith, it would still not be possible to choose between two interpretations, concerning the father’s beliefs: one, where it would be understood that the father (a Christian, or a Moor converted to Christianity) died for his faith, and a second, according to which Lázaro’s father, a Moor, would have died in order to exalt the faith of others, the Christians.

By linking (semiotically) the passages where the formulas “una cierta armada contra moros”, “entre los cuales fue mi padre” and “el cual por ensalzar la fe había muerto” occur it becomes clear that the indeterminacy (as in Riffaterre’s use of the Derridean term) of the second passage is a consequence of the indeterminacy of the first. Thus, the unknown or incomplete intertext (see Riffaterre) for the first passage may well be the overinterpretation of the second. Where the necessary existence of an intratextual link becomes more convincing, perhaps, is in the incapacity of the translations of the second passage to establish this link. The unique interpretation provided for the second passage, in all the translations, despite the passage’s ambiguity, can only be explained through reference to the unambiguous interpretation of the first. What a syleptic reading of the translations forces one to acknowledge in the end is that the usual interpretative criteria (textual coherence, contextual analysis, etc.) are insufficient when light needs to be shed on ambiguous passages.
Translation terminable, interminable

Freud and Schleiermacher

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Psychoanalysis deals not just in unravelling words and their referents but also in delineating the links between images and the words used to represent them. Like translation in Schleiermacher’s sense, Freud’s version of psychoanalysis implies a transfer of meanings whose referents are not limited to fixed, immutable objects. In both, meaning is utterly intricate – so much so that no single element can be separated from the whole without implicating, in the process, entire networks, which specify its intent and value. Interjecting questions of relevance or pertinence in these processes always involves the risk of cutting off the kind of dialogue – from author to translator, from patient to analyst – without which neither translation nor analysis can survive.

Keywords: Freud; Schleiermacher; psychoanalysis; dialogue; Talmud

Walking with my father

It was shortly after my family moved from Casablanca to a predominantly Anglophone quarter of Montreal in the late 1950s. I was enrolled in a public elementary school. I did not speak enough English to get on but I had very soon made quick friends with another Francophone, also an immigrant, but less recent, and therefore somewhat more competent in English. One day, in the schoolyard, some of our classmates approached us and told him something which I could not understand but which appeared to me to be some sort of narration. My friend responded very directly and in what appeared to me to be the spontaneous retort of a native speaker. He said: “So what?” and this response seemed, at least to my mind, to at once placate and provoke some mild admiration from the others. I had no idea at the time what the expression meant; I could not even have guessed its spelling. But I was impressed by the rapidity of the response as well as by the reaction it obtained: my friend appeared to have slipped identities, to have, with
these magic words, become integrated into the group and have evolved several stages ahead of me in that process. It all seemed so natural in fact that for fear of seeming ridiculously out of place I never asked my friend what had been said or what “so what” meant. Yet I was endlessly intrigued by the exchange, and by the expression I had found so decisive. At the same time, I knew I could not lose face and ask my friend. I could ask my father, whose seemingly flawless knowledge of several languages could always be relied on. And there were occasions enough to do so on any of the long walks we took together.

But, when asked, his response was disappointingly short. When, despite my uncertainty as to their form, I managed to reproduce the sound of those words as I remembered them, my father said curtly, in French: “C’est un mot mal-élevé” [It's a dirty or improper word].

The expression my father used was then and remains a locus of ambiguity: ‘mal-élevé’ was an expression very commonly used by parents at the time as a kind of signal to children that their behaviour or language was inappropriate and that, if such behaviour did not cease at once, sanctions would soon follow. A boy or girl would also be referred to as ‘mal-élevé(e)’ to simply mean ‘bad boy’ or ‘bad girl’. But the terms of the expression were easily separable – even by a child – to yield another, anterior and more literal meaning: something like ‘poorly-raised’ or ‘ill-bred’. And such literal meaning would paradoxically set the blame on the accusers rather than the accused. Why, after all, should children be blamed if their parents had done a poor job of raising them? Walking with my father that time, our little exchange had attained something akin to poetic symmetry: a question on the sense of an opaque expression obtained an ambiguous description for an answer.

And if my father’s response appears extreme, I should at once explain that I know it now to have been founded on the hypercorrect usage of the autodidact that he was. Its intended effect was to unilaterally end the query – something utterly alien to the tacit protocols of our walks – and to suggest banning the expression from my vocabulary. But it left me even more curious than before as to the meaning, and, in the end, it made my quest for a translation much longer than it need have been since it directed my search towards horizons much too esoteric for so trivial an expression.

When I finally did figure out its meaning on my own, I then had the added task of explaining to myself how my father had come to consider the expression unrepeatable. It took me some time to realise that it was not simply the vulgarity of the expression which had made my father want to banish it from my usage. Rather, it was the final, categorical judgement of irrelevance the expression implies that must have seemed to him unacceptable. “So what?” as he likely heard it in a foreign tongue is a rhetorical question – what in French is called une fausse
question, literally ‘a false question’. It does not seek an answer so much as it passes judgement and declares the meaninglessness, the non-pertinence of what the interlocutor has just said. It is, in the end, a rejection of dialogue, a verdict of discredit and disinterest in whatever else the other can possibly have to say or perhaps even think. In fact, my father could have easily offered me an acceptable French equivalent: the expression “et alors?” can be understood as a near-literal translation of “so what”. When said in the proper tone it can be read as a genuine request for elaboration or information. But he probably did not understand the English expression in that sense. Somehow, he must have perceived “so what” as a menace to civil conversation. And, admitting the expression, tolerating it, would, paradoxically, have meant allowing me some possibility of curtailing inquiry and dialogue – it would have revealed to me that such a possibility was already inscribed in a language I had yet to learn. Instead, it was in the end our conversation that was cut short by a cryptic label, by a judgement that was without appeal.

So what

The treatment is begun by the patient being required to put himself in the position of an attentive and dispassionate self-observer, merely to read off all the time the surface of his consciousness, and on the one hand to make a duty of the most complete honesty while on the other not to hold back any idea from communication, even if (1) he feels that it is too disagreeable or if (2) he judges that it is nonsensical or (3) too unimportant or (4) irrelevant to what is being looked for. It is uniformly found that precisely those ideas which provoke these last-mentioned reactions are of particular value in discovering the forgotten material. (“Two Encyclopaedia Articles”, S.E., XVIII, 238)¹

My patients were pledged to communicate to me every idea or thought that occurred to them in connection with some particular subject; amongst other things they told me their dreams and so taught me that a dream can be inserted into the psychical chain that has to be traced backwards in the memory from a pathological idea. It was then only a short step to treating the dream itself as a symptom and to applying to dreams the method of interpretation that had been worked out for symptoms. (Interpretation of Dreams, S.E., IV, 100–101)

These are two from among the several descriptions of the process of ‘free association’ presented in Freud’s writings, a procedure constantly used in psychoanalytic

¹ All references to the works of Sigmund Freud are, with the exception of On Aphasia, to the twenty-four volume Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. References will be cited by title, volume and page number.
therapy. The symptoms Freud refers to in the second quoted passage are those of various forms of neurosis, of nervous and mental disorders that he was called upon to treat. Psychoanalysis as he developed and practised it relied on the patients’ ability to express themselves, to put into words those events and circumstances of their lives that had determined the particular form their disease and symptoms had taken. Such a process undeniably involved, from the very start, a process of translation, a necessary stage each patient had to go through in order to convey – in words and accompanying forms of expression – the events, the images and feelings they had taken part in or to which they had been subjected in one way or another.

Through earlier practice with mostly hysterical, mostly female patients, Freud had come to understand that if these events or circumstances could be named, could be described and brought to conscious mind – initially with the aid of hypnosis – then such symptoms would almost magically disappear (see Freud and Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria, S.E.*, II). Still, in a large number of cases, the events in question were of such a nature that the dominant parts of the patients’ personality could not admit them as their own – as having been done or simply witnessed by them. Consequently, the patients had invested a great deal of energy in denying these events access to their consciousness, in repressing them. And, in so doing, had provoked in the patterns of their behaviour – and at times in their bodies – the appearance of rather debilitating symptoms. Such symptoms could typically range very widely from persistent forgetfulness around specific issues all the way to severe physical paralysis and also typically include uncontrollable, obsessive urges or the inability to cope adequately with ordinary, everyday frustrations, for example.

In barring the events or circumstances access to their awareness, Freud’s patients had unconsciously developed very elaborate barrage systems. Reaching back to them often involved a long and meandering process of recollection – a process which could neither be forced nor rushed – but which would trace back the paths taken by these repressed elements from the unconscious parts of the mind into which they had been forced to retreat, to the disorders or symptomatic behaviours which, despite all efforts at denial, kept manifesting their presence. Since the events and circumstances which had determined each patient’s particular condition were different in each case, no abstract rule or general procedure could be applied. Thus the injunction to the patient to hold nothing back, to associate freely, “merely to read off all the time the surface of his consciousness” in the analytic session was seen as the only possible means of access to the repressed material.

It is evident, from the description Freud gives of it that free association – *a priori*, at least – invariably excludes any question of apparent pertinence or rel-
evance. Thus, the question “so what?” could not likely be raised in the same challenging tone in which I had first encountered it. Yet the intent of the question manages to surreptitiously shape the dialogue and maintain its continuity. Dialogue is constant in analysis – even when neither the patient nor the analyst speaks. And, though it might express itself in different words, both analyst and patient have some sense of the question “so what” continuously in mind; both keep a constant watch for the associations – the words and images – which once uttered or recalled will allow them to make sense of the symptoms, to unravel the secrets and thence to dissolve the pain. Patient and analyst both actively await meaning, or at least the key that will break the code and connect all the loose, detached ideas into a coherent message – one which the patient can then assume as her/his own.

But, such thoroughly repressed material seldom makes itself directly available. Instead, one of its most common forms of expression is the dream. Dream images are generally anything but lucid. Yet as Freud presents them, dreams are deeply contorted expressions of instinctual desires that, like much other repressed material, have become estranged because they are unacceptable to, or incompatible with, the individual’s conscious and more acceptable version of her/himself. Indeed, the various misshaped modes of expression of these desires are the result of a kind of censorship imposed on them by the more critical, dominant parts of the individual’s personality. The particular form these desires take – be it dream images; bungled, persistently forgotten actions; phobias; etc. – is then a kind of compromise result, the end-product of a struggle between a desire seeking expression and the censorship seeking to deny it. In order to understand them what is needed is a method, yet another process of translation that can make sense of the confused actions and the nonsensical dream images. Freud saw clearly that such a method of translation could not take a fixed form – akin to that of, say, a bilingual dictionary or a key to symbols wherein given images would be given pre-established, universally applicable meanings. Patients and dreams came with their own particular registers, with their own vocabularies, adapted to the very particular circumstances in which instinct and the individual’s critical judgement were confronted.

The rules imposed for free association allow the patients to circumvent the obstacles, the repression that blocks or distorts recall. In this manner all questions of pertinence become irrelevant. Rather than imposing an order of relative importance, free association allows the repressed ideas to impose themselves in

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2. For more on the processes of dream formation see section VI of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, entitled “The Dream Work”, and more particularly chapter (D) of that section, “Considerations of Representation”.
their own subtle and less subtle ways – by allowing them to pervade the patients’ monologues, gestures, attitudes, for instance, all in a seemingly endless, rambling discourse.

In treatment, Freud would ask each patient to tell him – uncritically, in the modes of free association described above – whatever thoughts, ideas, etc. came to mind in connection with the dream she/he had just told him. All the elements they came up with, along with any detail surrounding the telling, such as gestures, tone, attitudes, etc. would be listed by Freud as “Dream-Thoughts”. Interpreting the dreams, however, relied not simply on finding coherent patterns between the actual telling of the dream and within the dream thoughts, but also on Freud’s accumulated knowledge of, and relationship with, the patient. In trying to describe the process, Freud relied on numerous analogies between interpretation and translation, as in the following passage from The Interpretation of Dreams:

The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts. If we attempted to read these characters according to their pictorial value instead of according to their symbolic relation we should clearly be led into error. (Interpretation of Dreams, S.E., IV, 277)

Freud goes on to give as an example of this process the deciphering of a rebus (277–278). And, in effect, much of the work of interpretation described in Freud’s classic text can be understood as that of translating images – be they those of dreams or of memories – into words, into some form of plain language which would allow patients to convey their thoughts to their analyst and finally to understand them themselves. Freud thought this a central issue in dream interpretation because when he came to understanding the language of dreams, language appeared to him to maintain traces of a more concrete, less abstract or arbitrary connection to objects. Evidence for this more motivated connection between words and objects seemed to him to be still manifest in the way children conceive language. And countless vestiges of this word-object connection inscribed in human memory offered themselves up as easier, ready-made pathways for dream-images and symbols:

[...] the course of linguistic evolution has made things very easy for dreams. For language has a whole number of words at its command which originally had a
pictorial and concrete significance, but are used today in a colourless and abstract sense. All that the dream need do is to give these words their former, full meaning or to go back a little way to an earlier phase in their development. *Interpretation of Dreams, S.E., V, 407.*

Interpreting the dreams becomes in this sense a kind of reading backwards, from image, through thought and hence to denied desires, which, though openly inadmissible, nonetheless have an undeniable role in the structure and function of the individual’s psyche and in allowing or foreclosing any understanding of her/his personality. But understanding that personality in the analytic process is not simply a matter of mechanically accumulating and collating all elements retraced via interpretation. In Freud’s view, the analyst could lay no claim to a superior knowledge of the patient’s mind. Rather, the analysts’ ability to interpret rested on their own prior admission that they also had to contend with their own inaccessible unconscious and its contrary wishes and impulses. Rather than try to impose a systematic mode of interpretation, Freud proposed that analysts attend to the patients’ discourse not with the heightened attention of a laboratory scientist on the lookout for symptoms in all signs, reactions, etc. Rather, he recommended that analysts listen with what some French analysts (see Laplanche & Pontalis 1973: 38–40) have come to call a ‘floating ear’; that is, that ideally they attempt to listen through their own unconscious and to connect with the patients

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3. See also *The Interpretation of Dreams, S.E., V, 340:* “A dream-thought is unusable [to the unconscious desire seeking expression] so long as it is expressed in abstract form; but when once it has been transformed into pictorial language, contrasts and identifications of the kind which the dream-work requires, and which it creates if they are not already present, can be established more easily than before between the new form of expression and the remainder of the material underlying the dream. This is so because in every language concrete terms, in consequence of the history of their development, are richer in associations than conceptual ones.” Freud was able to develop a number of linguistic theories on the basis of his experience in psychoanalysis. See for example, his essay on “The Antithetical Meaning of Primal Words” (*S.E., XI, 155ff.*), and the discussion of the word ‘Uncanny’ [Unheimlich] at the beginning of his essay by the same name (*S.E., XVII, 219ff.*), as well as his early *On Aphasia. A Critical Study.*

4. In a long paper, “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, first published in 1937, Freud makes this point as a simple, common sense fact albeit with crucial practical and theoretical implications not only for psychoanalysis: “It cannot be disputed that analysts in their own personalities have not invariably come up to the standard of psychical normality to which they wish to educate their patients. Opponents of psychoanalysis often point to this fact with scorn and use it as an argument to show the uselessness of analytic exertions. We might reject this criticism as making unjustifiable demands. Analysts are people who have learned to practice a particular art; alongside of this they may be allowed to be human beings like anyone else. After all, nobody maintains that a physician is incapable of treating internal diseases if his own internal organs are not sound” *S.E., XXIII, 247.*
in a spontaneous, human way. The elements on which interpretation would be founded needed to be ones that were significant to both analyst and patient. Interpreting, translating the dreams, symbols and – ultimately – symptoms meaningfully could, in Freud’s experience, best be achieved within this simple, albeit contractual form of relationship.

**Concept**

Whoever sleeps for seven days without having a dream is called wicked. The quotation, above, from the Babylonian *Talmud*, seems at first to appear in the text as if from nowhere. It is, in a sense, out of context in the midst of a discussion on when it is acceptable to interrupt the recitation of prayer in order to greet someone to whom one owes respect. The sentence is then in itself a kind of interruption of the discussion, and the editors and translators of the text are at some pains to justify the appearance of the statement at that point. Yet it might somehow be that this disruptive intervention, its untimely occurrence in the text, is a clue to its sense – or at least to its intent. By interrupting a discussion on acceptable and unacceptable interruptions with a saying about dreams, the text is perhaps seeking to comment on the nature of interruptions in otherwise orderly lives. Dreams always appear, in some sense, as untimely interventions, and, as such, as challenges to anyone’s comfortable sense of continuity and orderliness. It is perhaps from that elusive sense of continuity and order that one, at times, feels justified in raising questions of relevance or pertinence. By interjecting this remark on dreams the *Talmud* seems to want to make us aware that dreams are an integral and meaningful part of life – in effect of the goodly life. And by thus interrupting itself the *Talmud* seems to also be saying that raising questions as to the pertinence of dreams – saying “So what? This is only a dream”, for example – one might be denying some part of one’s self, something to which one is deeply connected though one can no longer see how, because the paths are hidden by seemingly more coherent, more conventionally consequent trains of thought.

This is where, in the end, Freud felt he faced his most difficult task: in convincing his medical colleagues, his primary readership, made up largely of positivistic scientists, that dreams could, indeed needed, to be taken seriously. Dreams doubtless appear as interruptions of deliberate action and of logical and reasonable reflection, but as interruptions they also confirm the ultimate continuity of deliberation and reason. Being involuntary and illogical, dreams trace the con-

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tours of our vulnerability; they proclaim the frailty of our will and reason. Freud saw the radical discontinuity dreams represent as marking out the need to reason with and to translate them. Dreams were to be conceived of as simply other thoughts, but ones that are accessible only in distorted form. But, somehow, this simple yet fundamental conception of the dream seems to have met with resistance – even among analysts. In a technical article published in 1923, Freud seems to feel compelled to again explain how his simple description of the dream as another thought has managed to again become obscured – even in analytic practice:

I have the impression that analytic practice has not always avoided errors and over-estimations on this point, partly owing to an exaggerated respect for the ‘mysterious unconscious’. It is only too easy to forget that a dream is as a rule merely a thought like any other, made possible by a relaxation of the censorship and by unconscious reinforcement, and distorted by the operation of the censorship and by unconscious revision. (“Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation”, S.E., XIX, 112)

Freud’s frustration, at this point, some twenty-three years after first publishing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, seems to be with the persistence of the quasi-mystical aura that surrounds dreams. Dreams were still seen as stemming from some utterly other realm inaccessible to common sense, from a ‘mysterious unconscious’ which cloaks them in impenetrable symbols and perpetually condemns them to remain untranslatable babble.

Still later, Freud will express even graver doubts about the efficacy of psychoanalysis as a therapy. Towards the end of his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933), Freud seems to look on therapy as the less interesting aspect of psychoanalysis – though a necessary one for the development of its theory. And Freud rejects *a priori* the relevance of any accumulated statistics as to the cures obtained. For Freud each case is essentially founded on an individual and primarily unique relationship. Its treatment – whether or not a cure is obtained – is founded on the encounter of two persons whose personalities and psychical constitutions are essentially not duplicable. As such no case could be explained or described as exemplary, as representative of some general or particular type of psychical ailment. “It is wiser,” Freud then concludes, “to examine one’s individual experiences”, and he adds with a nearly palpable sense of disillusion: “I do not think our cures can compete with those of Lourdes” (*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, S.E., XXII, 152).

In *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* Freud questions the possibility of defining precisely, in the abstract, at what point an analysis can be discontinued, and it is clear in the essay that he questions this possibility not because the analytic
situation is essentially inter-subjective – or one to which no objective criteria can be applied. Rather, it is because the only available indications of a cure turn out to be quantitative rather than qualitative:

An analysis is ended when the analyst and the patient cease to meet each other for the analytic session. This happens when two conditions have *approximately* been fulfilled: first, that the patient shall not be suffering from his symptoms and shall have overcome his anxieties and his inhibitions; and secondly, that the analyst shall judge that *so much* repressed material has been made conscious, *so much* that was unintelligible has been explained, and *so much* internal resistance conquered, that there is no need to fear a repetition of the pathological processes concerned. (*Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, S.E., XXIII, 219; emphasis added.)

But Freud then concedes that in most cases it is not possible to determine whether analyses are ever truly ‘ended’ in an absolute sense – not if the end of the analysis implies a cure has been obtained, and a cure being defined as the end of symptoms or that the patient has been returned to a ‘normal’ state. ‘Normality’ is not itself an absolute but a relative state: “Every normal person, in fact, is normal on the average”, Freud explains further in the same paper (235). And it is likely this inevitably indeterminable aspect of the medical applications of psychoanalysis that makes Freud dismiss therapy as one of its lesser aspects and find more interest and fulfilment in theoretical pursuits made available to inquiry by his own uncovering of the unconscious.6 In these endeavours, the confrontation of dream and ordinary thought and the possibility of translating one into the other would have played a key role.

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6. See the quote from “Remarks on the Theory and Practice of Dream-Interpretation” at the beginning of this section, and also the following passage from the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (S.E., XXII, 151): “[...] psychoanalysis originated as a method of treatment; it has far outgrown this, but it has not abandoned its home-ground and it is still linked to its contact with patients for increasing its depth and its further development. The accumulated impressions from which we derive our theories could be arrived at in no other way. The failures we meet with as therapists are constantly setting us new tasks and the demands of real life are an effective guard against an overgrowth of the speculation which we cannot after all do without in our work. I have already discussed long ago the means used by psycho-analysis in helping patients, when it does help them, and the method by which it does so; to-day I shall enquire how much it achieves. I have never been a therapeutic enthusiast”. 

Image

Sometimes we even have to translate our own words, when they feel alien and we want to make them truly our own once again. (Schleiermacher 1997 [1813]:226)\(^7\)

Dreams mostly consist of images and images are difficult to describe with any easy sense of accuracy. Trying to convey an image with words – even in the best of circumstances – leaves one with a sense of inadequacy, with a feeling that the others we have been addressing may have only grasped something peripheral, something remotely or vaguely connected to the image, but almost never the image itself – if ever such a thing were available for grasping.

From the outset, it is clear that Freud was well aware of the difference between the kinds of problems posed in wanting to communicate images and those presented by the transmission of concepts. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he refers more than once to this distinction by citing another text, *Psychologie*,\(^8\) written by Friedrich Schleiermacher, the nineteenth-century German philosopher and theologian who is today well remembered for a lecture he delivered he wrote in 1813 on the theory of translation.

In all his direct references to Schleiermacher Freud emphasizes Schleiermacher’s distinction between the ‘involuntary’ nature of images and the ‘voluntary’ nature of concepts:

According to Schleiermacher [...], what characterizes the waking state is the fact that thought-activity takes place in *concepts* and not in *images*. Now dreams think essentially in images; and with the approach of sleep it is possible to observe how, in proportion as voluntary activities become more difficult, involuntary ideas arise, all of which fall into the class of images. (*Interpretation of Dreams, S.E.*, III, 49. Italics in the text.)\(^9\)

In effect, Freud sets up a pivotal role for Schleiermacher’s distinction which consists not just in distinguishing the nature of dreams from that of other forms of

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7. References to Friedrich Schleiermacher’s “On the Different Methods of Translating” will be given in the text, with the page number.

8. There are three direct references to Schleiermacher in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, and many more indirect ones, to the distinction raised by him between images and concepts. See *The Interpretation of Dreams, S.E.*, III, 49, 71 and 102.

9. Freud continues: “Incapacity for ideational work of the kind which we feel as intentionally willed and the emergence (habitually associated with such states of abstraction) of images – these are two characteristics which persevere in dreams and which the psychological analysis of dreams forces us to recognise as essential features of dream-life.”
thought but also in describing the conditions most felicitous for free association and hence in indicating the path of the cure, namely the translation of ‘involuntary’ images into ‘voluntary’ concepts:

As we fall asleep, ‘involuntary ideas’ emerge, owing to the relaxation of a certain deliberate (and no doubt also critical) activity which we allow to influence the course of our ideas while we are awake. (We usually attribute this relaxation to ‘fatigue’.) As the involuntary ideas emerge they change into visual and acoustic images. [...] In the state used for the analysis of dreams and pathological ideas, the patient purposely and deliberately abandons this activity and employs the psychical energy thus saved (or a portion of it) in attentively following the involuntary thoughts which now emerge, and which – and here the situation differs from that of falling asleep – retain the character of ideas. In this way the ‘involuntary’ ideas are transformed into ‘voluntary’ ones. (Interpretation of Dreams, S.E., III, 102. Italics in the text.)

This “state used for the analysis of dreams and pathological ideas” is that which patients are meant to deliberately attain in adhering to the contract of free association, as described by Freud and as requested by their analyst. The transformation of these ideas from involuntary to voluntary ones is then also a translation. But for Freud this type of translation is in the end part of a longer process, a process whose aim is to reintegrate into the patient’s chain of thought the confused and disparate ideas and emotions evoked in dreams or also acted out or given material expression in pathological behaviours and symptoms. In terms of therapy the aim would be to bring the patients to understand these thoughts and accept that entertaining any image of themselves, of their psyche that excludes these thoughts would be at once erroneous and debilitating.

But making available these translations of dreams into thoughts, of images into concepts, is no simple matter. And it must be assumed that even where a process is devised to do so one of the essential factors that have to be taken into account is the patient’s relation to her or his own language. Language is not just a series of pre-established dictionary and grammatical conventions to which users of the language must simply submit. Users of any given language modify and manipulate those conventions as much as they are modified and manipulated by them. This is particularly stressed in Schleiermacher’s essay on translation (as in much of his writings on interpretation). Language evolves to higher degrees of precision and sophistication through the ongoing dialectical relationship that is entertained between a given language and each of its users, as Schleiermacher explains:

[...] all humans are under the sway of the language they speak; they and their entire thinking are a product of that language, so that it is impossible to think
with complete clarity anything that lies beyond its boundaries. [...] all free-thinking people with any mental initiative at all also play their part in shaping their language. For how else but through such intervention could that language have grown from its primordial state to its more mature development in scholarship and art? In this sense, then, it is each person’s vital force that moulds forth new forms out of the clay of language, at first purely for the fugitive purpose of communicating a fleeting state of consciousness; only some of these forms will take root in the language and, by shaping other users of the language, continue to spread. (Schleiermacher: 227)

For the patients to recognise the translated thoughts as their own the translations arrived at in analysis would have to be informed by that reciprocal relationship with the language. And, in the analytic situation, that relationship is further complicated by the particular use of language, by the constantly-evolving code that analyst and patient develop in the course of the analysis. That Schleiermacher's theory of translation is constituted around this notion of the reciprocal relationship between a given language and its users likely had some bearing on Freud’s recourse to his distinction between image and concept in arriving at a model for dream interpretation.

In elaborating his theory of translation Schleiermacher seems from the outset aware of the impossibility of ever arriving at a perfectly adequate translation – much as Freud becomes aware of the difficulty of attaining or even defining a cure. Schleiermacher arrives at a discussion of the kind of translation he feels worthy of serious theoretical consideration only after having successively discarded a long series of other forms of translation. And each of the rejected forms he had first introduced as one of the terms in a binary opposition. Thus, for example, he begins by distinguishing translation between dialects of a single language and translation of private, inner thoughts into common expression; between the ‘interpreter’ and the ‘translator proper’, who “works in the fields of scholarship and art” (Schleiermacher: 226); ‘interpretation’ in this sense being primarily oral and translation written.10

But these distinctions are not absolutely discrete: some forms of ‘interpretation’ are in Schleiermacher’s estimate closer to ‘translation’ when they deal with matters of scholarship and art while some forms of (written) translation – those of newspaper articles and travel brochures, for example – are better considered forms of ‘interpretation’. In fact, what seems to motivate Schleiermacher’s distinc-

10. This is only a partial list. Schleiermacher also successively distinguishes between ‘paraphrase’ and ‘imitation’ (228) and most importantly, as we will see, between translations that move readers towards the author of the original and those that move the author towards the readers of the translation (229).
tion between ‘interpretation’ and ‘translation’ is the extent to which the terms and texts translated are capable of being objectified, of substitutions for them being made with near-perfect or more than adequate equivalents in the target language. This in part explains why he begins by distinguishing between oral and written translation; because in live social or commercial situations the inadequacy of terms can be compensated for by pointing to the objects in question or by reference to custom, usage or even law. In such situations doubts as to the intent can be resolved for most practical purposes. But the focus of Schleiermacher’s attention however is what he calls ‘irrationality’, that is to say what he deems the impossibility of ever finding perfect equivalence between two words or expressions in different languages:

[...] if everything in two languages corresponded exactly, one to one – word to word, concept to concept, inflection to inflection [...], and all corresponding elements with the same extension and relationships, so that the two languages were different only to the ear – then all artistic and scholarly translation aimed at conveying the contents of a written or a spoken text would be precisely as mechanical as in the business world [...]. But of course nothing like this is true of real languages, [...] and the greater the distance between the two languages either chronologically or genealogically, the less true it is that any given word in one will correspond precisely to one in the other, or that an inflection in one will unify the same complex of relationships as any conceivable counterpart in the other. Since this ‘irrationality’, as I call it, permeates every element in two languages, it will certainly affect every aspect of social intercourse as well. (Schleiermacher: 227)

Schleiermacher was himself a translator. His translations of Plato are still regarded as among the best examples of German translations extant. To consider him as a theoretician of the untranslatable on the basis of passages such as this last long citation would be unfair and misguided. Indeed, in his essay on translation Schleiermacher advocates a particular approach with regard to the practice of translation. In a manner not unlike that of Freud, who saw the therapeutic application of psychoanalysis as a necessary yet not entirely coherent outgrowth of the theory that informed it, Schleiermacher tried to describe a practice of translation which would take into account the ‘irrationality’, the unattainable equivalence of expression between languages at the basis of his theory of language yet attempt to maintain a dialogue between the languages to the mutual advantage of the languages and their users.

And again Schleiermacher advocated a version of translation that he first presents as the preferable of two forms – but this time he allows for no overlap:

The translator either (1) disturbs the writer as little as possible and moves the reader in his direction, or (2) disturbs the reader as little as possible and moves
the writer in his direction. The two approaches are so absolutely different that no mixture of the two is to be trusted, as that would increase the likelihood that the writer and reader would miss each other entirely [...]. It should be immediately apparent, in any case, both that the two are very different and that they are in fact related. (Schleiermacher: 229)\(^{11}\)

Moving the reader of the translation towards the author of the original involves, in practical terms, composing the translation in such a manner as to make the reader aware of the foreignness of the original, of the difference between the manner in which objects are inscribed in the language of the original and that of the language of the translation. This difference is, for Schleiermacher, present in each and every word of each of the languages. But making it felt in the translation must not only keep the “reader conscious of the otherness of his author’s world and language” (Schleiermacher: 237), it must also make her/him aware of the specificity of that otherness. This can be done not by some added quirk, such as an exotic turn of phrase, added as a seasoning might be to a dish; rather, the otherness of the translated text must be made present by a systematic displacement, one that makes the author of the original and his style, in all its particularity, perceptible in the translation. And for this transfer to be meaningful it needs be applied to as many aspects of the target language (syntax, diction, inflection, etc.) as the translator can manage without making the end-product inaccessible. For Schleiermacher, the advantage of this type of translation is not limited to maintaining some abstract loyalty to the original author’s intent. More significant for Schleiermacher is the fact that through this effort towards maintaining the original’s specificity it is the target-language that is enriched. The adaptation and incorporation of a foreign diction, of another set of syntactic effects expands the expressive resources of the language of the translation.\(^{12}\)

There are undoubtedly theoretical questions to be raised about Schleiermacher’s prescriptions for translation. Not least among these is that of the subjectivity

\(^{11}\) See also page 234: “[...] the goal of translating as if the source-language author had originally written in the target-language is not only unattainable, but intrinsically null and void, for anyone who recognises the constitutive power of language, and its inseparability from the distinctive qualities of the people who speak it, must also admit that for every great author, the totality of his knowing and the expressive means at his disposal has [sic] for the most part been shaped with and through his language. [...] Original work can only be done in one’s native language; how one might have written one’s work in another language is a nonquestion that cannot even be raised.”

\(^{12}\) See page 238: “[...] we must not fail to recognise that much that is beautiful and powerful in our language was first created through translation – partly developed anew, partly recovered from oblivion.”
of the translator, of the effect of relatively unstable cultural conditions on her/his perception of the specificity or particularities of the author’s language and style; of the unconscious projection of her/his style onto the reading of the original, etc. But perhaps a prior question would have to do with the possible translation of an image into a concept that language could in turn grasp and express. It is a question that, once raised, causes one to raise others – for example that of identifying and emulating style. For if we are to take seriously Schleiermacher’s notion of a continuing reciprocity of influence between languages, we perhaps also have to question whether we have the means at our disposal to fully account for and describe an author’s style once we have been subjected to its effects – in a tongue which is not our own but that has begun to affect ours. And are we, once under its influence, capable only of grasping a projected image of it suggested to us only by the efficacy of its unusual and unpredictable diction or syntax? Perhaps in engaging the text we have already entered into a relationship with it from which we cannot sufficiently extricate ourselves to know where its language ends and ours begins. In attempting to construct a continuity between the foreign text and us Schleiermacher’s theory of translation seems to trigger the same sense of theoretical interminability that psychoanalysis sets off in trying to rebuild a continuity between images and thoughts or between past and present experience.

But nothing in those questions is, in the end, cause for alarm. The specificity of any language or style could not so affect another as to absorb or erase it. Dialogue between languages can never be abruptly or forcibly curtailed. And nothing can conceivably sanction one language with its array of expressive resources being pronounced irrelevant or non-pertinent for nothing short of an enduring and inextricable involvement with that language could confer viable authority to make so paradoxical a pronouncement.

Like translation in Schleiermacher’s sense, Freud’s version of psychoanalysis implies a transfer of meanings whose referents are not limited to fixed, immutable objects. In both, meaning is utterly intricate – so much so that no single element can be separated from the whole without dragging with it entire networks which specify its intent and value. And each of these networks is itself implicated in an endless mesh of others without which it becomes misdirected or truncated. Interjecting questions of relevance or pertinence in these processes always involves the risk of interrupting the transfer, of cutting off the dialogue without which neither translation nor analysis can survive.
Translation and métissage*

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Translation is an ideological and historical notion involving an agent, the translator. As such, it should be linked to contemporary patterns of subjectivity, of which métissage seems the most appropriate. Métissage should not be confused with mixture, which implies fusion, or with hybridity, which produces a new unit. Rather, it is an assemblage of affiliations and identities which is never fixed once and for all and in which the different parts retain their identity and their history. In a similar way, the translated text exists through its difference from the original, and the original makes known and legitimizes its own existence only in and through the translation. Thus an ethics of métissage constitutes a basis for a politics of translation.

Keywords: ethics of translation; translator as subject; multiplicity; ethics of alterity; space of translation

Translation is a cultural fact, taking place when cultures come into contact, partaking in and of their exchanges – all of this seems self-evident; nevertheless, there are societies which do not translate, societies where translation is forbidden. This was true in the past, and it is still true today. The prohibition relating to translation needs to be examined in the light of the present-day cultural context, in which translation seems a given, with the exponential development of the media and of telecommunications, as well as of economic globalization. But what is true for the notions of universality and identity is also true for the concept of translation; as with the first two, it is possible to produce a critical reading of the axiological underpinnings of translation.

Such a reading could be based on a historicist and comparative approach, which would attempt to maintain a certain objectivity in the analysis, considering

* The French term ‘métissage’ is used here to refer to the inter-weaving (hence the pun: métissage) of different linguistic and cultural strands within the same text. As such, its use exemplifies the concept it stands for.
translations as material productions, as cultural products. Studies have been undertaken along these lines, using the criteria of sociology or literary sociocriticism. Even if this approach has the merit of renewing prior, strictly linguistic approaches, which considered translation as a purely linguistic fact, and of elucidating the role of ideology in the diffusion and reception of translations, it does not throw light on the phenomenology of translation, what translation can tell us about the subjectivity of the translator and the nature of the translation act. Both of these are essential for any consideration of translation as a practice of métissage.

It is true that cultural and postcolonial studies look at translation from the point of view of philosophy, political thought, psychoanalysis, and anthropology, examining what it is in our cultural heritage and on our cultural horizon that authorises the legitimacy (the faithful ‘fidelity’ of tradition) and the veracity (the equivocal ‘equivalence’ of transmission) of the act of translation. The values governing it then become clear, as do the stakes involved in and the limits of this semiotic and semantic trans-action, and the epistemological presuppositions which inform translation theory.

Classically, translation has been theorised either negatively, in terms of appropriation, or, positively, in terms of the introduction of foreign values. To characterise these movements, expressions such as source language, text, and culture, and target language, text, and culture, have been used. This choice of terminology is revealing, suggesting, in an essentialist and homogenizing way, the existence of two linguistic, textual, and cultural territories, one of which is clearly in a position of superiority, even if it is generous, tolerant, and well-meaning. Between the two, translation would serve as a medium of unilateral or bilateral communication or exchange. In fact, however, translation serves to denounce all ideological pretensions of this type regarding the foundations and limits of languages, texts and cultures. The sub-versive function of translation destabilises notions of appropriation, or of internal or external cultural values. It undoes the borders designating works as ‘foreign’; it puts into question the notion of the ‘original’, through which anteriority is easily transformed into authority. To characterise ‘language’, ‘text’, and ‘culture’, we would rather use a term which could refer at one and the same time to the positions of host and of guest – that of ‘patron’, perhaps – to analyse the relations between them and to position original and translation within the realm of ethics.

Traditional theories understand translation as a relationship of the ‘same’ to the ‘other’. To translate is to convert difference into similarity, to make the author write as if s/he had written directly in the target language. But alterity is never simply unidirectional. The other does not refer back to the same, or to the other of the same – which is simply an extension or projection of the same – but to a radically different other, a subject constantly changing in its discursivity and
historicity. From French Theory to Anglo-Saxon pragmatics, to reflection on the subaltern, the false dichotomy between identity and alterity, self and other, has been definitively broken down.

Translation is par excellence what can bring about the multiplication of texts, since it is multiplicity, in the Deleuzian sense: not growth in relation to a basic unit but the capacity of being rhizomatic, without placing limits on the activity of translation, on languages or on epochs. Translative value is the degree to which languages and cultures come into contact with each other. A translation is a text, and, as such, it is meaningful as a vector and an index of historicity, where the original and its translation meet and interweave, a translation “ignited by the eternal continuing life of the work and the endless revival of languages” (Benjamin 1997: 157).

Retranslation is a part of translation. Translation is equivalent on the textual level to identity on the level of ontology, between sameness and difference, never quite the same and never quite different; it is a becoming, an act of enunciation which will never be erased by the utterance it produces and which makes it manifest. This movement has been theorised by Henri Meschonnic as ‘rhythm’, which is plural, changing, infinite, making a text into a combined ‘form-meaning’ going beyond the words themselves, where the individual (including in its corporality), the social and the historical meet (see Meschonnic 1982, 1995, and 1999). It is the tension between these, inherent in the very nature of translation, which explains and authorises the successive translations of an original. In addition, retranslations, of the Bible or of Shakespeare, are not made to improve on previous versions, but because the historical context, and with it the socio-cultural context, has changed. The history of translation is the translation of history; through translation periods in history are woven together, as are different cultures.

But métissage should not be confused with mixture, which implies fusion, or with hybridity, which produces a new unit. In the process of interweaving, unforeseeable and unstable, never finished and never final, the different parts retain their identity and their history. Métis identity corresponds to an unorthodox form of arithmetic. Brazilian identity, which develops out of African, Indian and European origins, cannot be decomposed into binary or ternary oppositions. Brazilian Métis are not half black, half white, or a third African, a third Indian and a third European; rather, they are at one and the same time African and European, or African and Indian or Indian and European, or even African and Indian and European. And the same is true of Beurs, who are French and North African, of Chicanos, who are American and Mexican, etc.

Such people do not ‘add up’. The ‘and’ – which is the conjunction which characterises métissage – does not enclose within a totalizing structure; rather, it indicates an opening up, a possible interaction between two or more terms. Such a
way of conceiving the ‘and’ is found in the philosophies of two authors, Levinas and Deleuze, the first of whom recognises transcendency, whereas the second remains radically within immanence. Bringing them together is, in and of itself, an exercise in métissage, and it is precisely the ‘and’ of métis thought which makes this possible: Lévinas and Deleuze, not with a view to dialectically resolving their differences but in an attempt, rather, at entering, in turn, into the philosophy of each.

Thus Deleuze writes that the ‘and’ is “neither a union, nor a juxtaposition, but the birth of a stammering, the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight” (2002:9–10). The challenge is to substitute this ‘and’ for the verb ‘to be’, the fetish verb of ontologies of substance, of being, of what is once and for all, and which does not budge. Whereas ‘and’ is not

a specific relation or conjunction, it is that which subtends all relations, the path of all relations, which makes relations shoot outside their terms and outside the set of their terms, and outside everything which could be determined as Being, One, or Whole. (2002:57)

The ‘and’ leads to a constant renewal of alterity, without fixing it, without crystalizing it into a simple table of differences, since differences can be manipulated to exclude. This is an absolute requirement of an ethics of alterity, with which the subject is never finished, as Levinas has demonstrated:

The conjuncture of the same and the other, in which even their verbal proximity is maintained, is the direct and full face welcome of the other by me. This conjuncture is irreducible to totality; the ‘face to face’ position is not a modification of the ‘along side of...’ Even when I shall have linked the Other to myself with the conjunction ‘and’ the Other continues to face me, to reveal himself in his face. (1969:80–81)

This ‘and’ becomes manifest, linguistically, through translation. The conjunction ‘and’ governs translation and exemplifies its way of operating. The classic ideology of translation, of course, prefers to operate in terms of ‘either ... or’, with a translation supposed to replace an original (to use the classic terminology), but following the crowd, here as elsewhere, is hardly the best policy. Wanting the translated text to read as if it had been written by the author directly in the new language; directly, that is to say, without mediation, without translation. This absurdity is based on a denial, on the opposite of the useful tautology which says that a translation must be a translation, should reveal itself as a translation. It must proclaim: this can be said in this language and in that other one as well. This is at least as much its purpose, as to transfer an evanescent message. Translation both draws
attention to itself and indicates that it does not exist. This is its double, and not contradictory, function – the ‘and’ is an index of non-contradiction – despite appearances to the contrary, since it produces a new text while revealing the former one. With one stone, two birds; with one text, two languages.

The relation which comes about through translation reveals what is common to all languages, beyond their historical or formal connections, that is, their ‘linguistic’ nature, what Walter Benjamin calls ‘pure language’ (die reine Sprache) and what Derrida calls the ‘being-language of language’. A language of truth and the truth of language, revealed through the complementarity in their modes of signification. All are at once complete and a part of something extending beyond them, with the result that they are not complete. The métis destiny of a singularity which finds its space outside itself.

Benjamin also presents translation as a form, the form which something takes, provisionally and which can be undone. Métissage is also a form, a configuration, an assemblage of affiliations and identities which is never fixed once and for all (see Nouss 2005). An open-ended choreographic form, in which bodies evolve, and not a set compulsory figure, as in figure skating or gymnastics. Similar to a face, expressing an infinity of meanings, from beatitude to despair – always the same and always another – caressed by the trace of the infinite, in Levinas’s words, since it is the trace of alterity. A form which temporarily contains the formless, revealing it constantly at work.

Between the original and the translation, there does not exist a space which is neutral, the space of deverbalization put forward by one theory of translation (a linguistic operation outside language!), but rather two possible forms of the ‘and’ of translation. The first is open, the matrical space of language sought by Mallarmé, a translator from English, and which, predating structuralism, he called ‘structure’, a space common to all languages, present in myths and dreams. An indefinite structure similar to that of the materiality of music, and which for him – as for Verlaine, an amateurish teacher of English – extended into poetry. A space which can also be called chora (khôra) – the space of a third kind, neither of perceptions nor of intelligibility, in Plato’s Timaeus – following Derrida (1993), who sees in it, ungraspable and unfigurable, the space where all notions of space and of separation break down, a mother who is neither matrical nor nourishing, or, following Julia Kristeva (1977), who uses the term to refer to a space prior to meaning, a space of rhythms and drives, the maternal space for the linguistic productions of children, of psychotics and of poets. And, we could add, of translators.

Secondly, the ‘and’ of translation can take a more definite form: between the two languages of the ‘translative text’, a third language, which can be real – Latin, between French and English, for Chateaubriand translating Milton; German, between French and Latin, for Klossowski translating Virgil (see Berman 1999: 112,
A semiotic approach also sees translation as a third code arising when languages meet.\(^2\) Lacanian psychoanalysis, too, considers language as such as a third instance enabling the negotiation of relations between the self and the other. The ‘and’ of translation is simply an example of the ‘and’ of language analysed by Levinas.

The question of the translator as subject – of the ‘translating’ subject, to insist on what takes place within the subject in the practice of translation – needs to be rethought in light of this. Even if the myth of semiotic transparence has been abandoned, and if it is clear that the translator leaves traces in the text, it should not be concluded that this is a hypostasis of the translator, investing the theological position of the author left vacant as a result of structuralist and poststructuralist analyses. After the death of the author (not to mention of man), would it be conceivable to resuscitate, for translation, the notion of the ‘work’, which would imply the recognition of a paternity, of a strong and singular identity, at a time when the identity of the contemporary subject is in flux, permanently ‘constructed’ and subject to the multiplicity of its various affiliations? The translator, situated between two languages and two cultures, is an example of such a subject. Certainly, the translator signs his translation and is happy that his legal and editorial status is now recognised. But who is the author of a translation? It is possible to establish an analogy between the relationship of the original to the translation and that between the unconscious and the conscious:\(^3\) the two texts say the same thing but in different enunciative acts. Each nevertheless exerts an influence on the other, the original on the translation, and the unconscious on the conscious – not in a linear manner, however, but according to a specific mode of temporality, where what comes after gives a reality and existence to what came before, but where also it would never have come after if there had not been a before. The translated text exists through its difference from the original, and the original makes known and legitimizes its own existence only in and through the translation. Each refers irre-

\(^1\) Philippe Jaccottet gives the title of *D’une Lyre à cinq cordes* [Of a Lyre with Five Strings] to a selection of his translations from Italian, Spanish, German, Russian and Czech. No string vibrates alone, without the others joining in.

\(^2\) See Frawley (2000). A new code in its own right and not a bricolage of the first two, which meets the objection of the ‘Third Man’, as Eco (2001) calls it; a metalanguage is necessary to judge the commensurability of source and target languages, but the adequacy of the metalanguage can only be determined by a second metalanguage, and the second by a third, and so forth.

\(^3\) Freud himself used the vocabulary of translation to refer to this relationship.
mediably to the other. Neither exists completely separately; the existence of each is interwoven – métissage – with that of the other.

The destiny of the translator-subject is not dissimilar to that of the modern individual, whose status at first, at the beginning of the democratic era, was that of a citizen, and then of a worker. Georg Simmel considered the foreigner to be the emblematic figure of modernity, and for Alain Touraine the migrant is such a figure. There are various forms of the subject in the twentieth century, which have been defined negatively: the pariah (Hannah Arendt), the unemployed, the homeless, the itinerant, the marginalized. Globally (the level at which analysis takes place in our modernity, irreducibly opened-up to exchanges on a planetary scale), Giorgio Agamben invites us to consider that

the refugee is perhaps the only thinkable figure for the people of our time [...] we could conceive of Europe as an aterritorial or extraterritorial space in which all the (citizen and noncitizen) residents of the European states would be in a position of exodus or refuge. (2000: 15, 24–25)

Translation can model itself on these categories, on these different ways of understanding which co-exist in the thought of different theorists. To the pre-modern era, when only those in positions of power were considered subjects, would correspond a conception of translation as domination and appropriation. To modernity as it developed, underpinned by notions of citizenship and nationality, would correspond translation as a relation between subjects who are equal and comfortable in their territory. To modernity in crisis, an era of uncertainty (of the end of all certainty), would correspond translation as métissage, subjects in relation to each other, each affected by the other.

Reformulating Agamben’s position, I would say that, as a translator, I am transformed into a refugee in the foreign language and culture at the same time as I receive the refugee into my own language and culture. ‘Translated from’, ‘translated into’ – these expressions confirm the highly ideological expressions of ‘source’ and ‘target’ criticised earlier and reproduce the dualistic dichotomy. Rather than ‘translated from’ or ‘translated into’, it would be better to speak of ‘translated between’. When I translate, I translate as much the other into myself as myself into the other, and through this contact, this exposure, this “experience of the foreign” (see Berman 1984), I find resources in language, and modes of thought and expression which were latent and which I am able to reactivate. I receive the foreigner, who takes refuge in my language, but I too take refuge in his.

Translation plays on the uncertainty of meaning, navigating between two languages, between two cultures, and revealing the gap separating them. A translation loses its specificity and its value if it suppresses this interval. There is no universal, universally communicable, meaning. Translation must make evident, and
not erase, the distance between languages. It was in the sixteenth century, when both territorial and linguistic borders were being drawn, that the notion and the term of translation made its appearance. The function of translation is precisely to cross borders, to indicate that it is possible to speak of the world in other terms, other rhythms, other accents, with other nuances of sound and colour. A dynamics of language founded on distance, absence, and inevitable loss, translation accepts the principle of indeterminacy as an enrichment which makes métissage possible. It brings about a *translative turn* in the human sciences, after the *linguistic turn* of the 1960s, and as such finds a paradigmatic place within our epistemé.

After ‘consciousness’ in the nineteenth century and ‘language’ in the twentieth, ‘translation’ can be said to define the contemporary ethos. As an area of knowledge, it calls for an innovative, transversal, métis epistemology. The multiplicity revealed through the act of translation is doubled by the multiplicity of meanings attributable to the act itself, making interdisciplinary approaches necessary. As a human act, there is also a political dimension to translation. Totalitarian regimes and fundamentalist factions attempt to eliminate translators. The rigid notions attached to classical conceptions of the nation-state and of citizenship no longer correspond to the demographical reality of the social-political upheavals taking place in our time (refugees, movements of populations, ethnic cleansing). Territories and borders can no longer serve as criteria, and the displacement of people, of individuals and of populations, from a *post-* or *supra-*national perspective, should become the occasion for the renewal and enrichment of identities and cultures. Among the possibilities proposed by Paul Ricoeur to define a new *ethos* able to reconcile identity and alterity in an evolving Europe figures the ‘model of translation’, which he defines as follows: “It means making our home in someone else’s, so we can invite them into our home as a guest” (1992: 109). In the same way, translation becomes a model for an ethics of métissage.

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4. This article has been translated into English by Paul St-Pierre.
Double take

Figuring the other and the politics of translation

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Nations and cultures in an expansionist phase both need and fear translation. They go to translation to sustain the figurative resources of eloquence which ensures a cultural legitimacy for political acts of appropriation. The difficulty is one of openness and containment: how does the national or imperial language open up to other languages without being subtly undermined in the process? This essay explores the relationship between classical and Renaissance theories of eloquence and translation and how they lead to specific understandings of the role of metaphor and figurative language in the construction of empire. It offers examples from the sixteenth century Tudor reconquest of Ireland to illustrate the enduring centrality of translation to questions of power, hegemony and identity.

**Keywords:** figurative speech; empire; Ireland; Tudor conquest; relational semantics

In examining the notion of the figurative in the present essay, it is as well to situate the approach from the outset in the field of translation studies itself. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere are the two translation theorists most closely associated with what is conventionally referred to as the ‘cultural turn’ in translation studies (Bassnett 2002; Bassnett & Lefevere 1990). The movement was partly one of reaction and partly one of anticipation. The reaction was to what was seen as the undue hegemony of linguistics in the study of translation activity and the excessive influence of comparative literature in the study of translations. If translation studies was to acquire any degree of disciplinary autonomy then it was necessary to distinguish itself from both comparative literature and applied linguistics. The anticipation was of the significant investment of translation in the 1990s by scholars working in fields as diverse as ethnography (Clifford 1997), postcolonial studies (Bassnett & Trivedi 1999), feminism (Simon 1996) and deconstructionist
philosophy (Benjamin 1989). Central to thinking on translation in all of these disciplinary interventions were the notions of translatorial agency and the explicit situating of translation in historical and political contexts. Thus, translations were no longer to be seen as free-floating aesthetic artefacts generated by ahistorical figures in a timeless synchronicity of language but as works produced by historical figures in diachronic time.

In placing the essay within the general framework of the cultural turn, the intention is to show the validity of the approach for understanding the considerable anxieties which have arisen around figurative language in translation. It is these anxieties indeed, with the high political, cultural and social stakes that they imply, which account for the specific importance of the topic of the figurative in translation research. Our intention here is to demonstrate how responses to translation of figurative language and metaphor can be deeply informed by the political context of the period, in this case, Tudor and Elizabethan England and its violent and sustained engagement with Ireland.

In a way that is only apparently paradoxical, we must ask ourselves not only why so much gets translated, but also why so much does not get translated. In other words, a history of translation that only looks at translations at some level misses the point. Just as a figure is defined by and necessitates a ground, so also the figure of translation demands the figure of non-translation if we are to make any sense of the activity in our society, and this holds as much for today as it did four hundred years ago. Therefore, we shall be asking ourselves the question as to why so much figurative language does not get translated in the situation we will be describing as well as why some of the language did. In this context, metaphor or more generally, figurative language, proves interesting not only because it is a recurrent fault line in situations of language contact where there is a marked asymmetry in the distribution of power but because it allows us to discern what might be the filtering mechanisms in a society and culture for the translation and non-translation of textual materials.

Eloquence

Civility was an essential concept for the revival of learning in fourteenth and fifteenth century Europe. In looking back to classical models, a primary source of inspiration were conceptions of civility deemed to have been formulated and to have existed in antiquity (Bryson 1998). For the writers and philosophers of the Renaissance, the idea of civility, of how one should think and behave in a civilised polity, was bound up with the notion of *communicatio*. Language was to be the hallmark of the educated citizen but language of a particular kind, language
as eloquence. It is eloquence which in a sense allows language to be something other than itself and by extension allows speakers to transcend themselves and their point of origin. As a result, eloquence will be central to the project of civility and to the transformative vision of the world that animates the astronomers, playwrights, explorers and military of the period. Eloquence was not simply an attribute of power. Eloquence was power (Cheyfitz 1991:29). Pier Paolo Vergerio, in one of the earlier and highly influential humanist educational treatises, *De Ingenius Moribus et Liberalibus Adulescentiae* (The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-Born Youth) (1402–1403) declared that no student could forgo the study of history and moral philosophy. To these two subjects he adds a third which in his view is essential to a properly humanist education. The subject is eloquence (Kallendorf 2002:40):

> Per philosophiam quidem possimus recte sentire quod est in omni re primum; per eloquentiam graviter ornatque dicere qua una re maxime concilian tur multitudinis animi
> Through philosophy we can acquire correct views, which is of first importance in everything; through eloquence we can speak with weight and polish, which is the one skill that most effectively wins over the minds of the masses

Vergerio makes explicit the link between language and command when he presents the primary contribution of eloquence to the education of a free-born youth as the imparting of a “skill that most effectively wins over the minds of the masses”. Vergerio is, of course, drawing on classical precedent in his argument. Cicero, for example, in his *De Inventione* conjures up a scene of primary colonization which is a scene of exemplary instruction. The dutifully attendant savages are converted to civility through eloquence, their subjection sweetened by words that transform them into respectable citizens. In *De optimo genere oratorum* (46 BC) Cicero underlines the connection between words, figures and influence (Robinson 1997b:7–8):

> The supreme orator, then, is one whose speech instructs, delights and moves the minds of his audience [...]. For as eloquence consists of language and thought, we must manage while keeping our diction faultless and pure – that is in good Latin – to achieve a choice of words both proper and figurative. Of ‘proper words’ we should choose the most elegant, and in the case of figurative language we should be modest in our use of metaphors and careful to avoid far-fetched comparisons.

In the topical rhetoric beloved of Cicero and Ciceronians, the object in debate was to gain possession of the *topos*, the place of argument so that the other, the opponent was driven out. Thus, in the Western tradition from antiquity to the
Renaissance and beyond, the figure of the eloquent orator becomes a talismanic promise of authority. By driving out enemies, winning over allies (‘the minds of the masses’) and establishing a ready equation between civility and possession (the rightful topos of the well-spoken), eloquence is inherent to the construction of empire.

Quintillian is another tutelary figure from the classical world whose thinking on oratory and eloquence will shape Renaissance attitudes. More importantly, for the purposes of the present essay, Quintillian makes an explicit connection between translation, eloquence and the particular challenge of figurative speech. In his *Institutio Oratoria* (c. AD 96) he explains why it is desirable for the Romans to translate from the Greek (Robinson 1997: 20):

> For the Greek authors excel in copiousness of matter, and have introduced a vast deal of art into the study of eloquence; and, in translating them, we may use the very best words, for all that we use may be our own. As to [verbal] figures, by which language is principally ornamented we may be under the necessity of inventing a great number and variety of them, because the Roman tongue differs greatly from that of the Greeks.

For Quintillian translation not only brings the resources of Greek eloquence into the Latin language thus making Latin in both a literal and figurative sense more powerful but it is figurative language which demonstrates the generative potential of translation. Verbal figures in translation bring with them the necessity of invention so translation in a sense unleashes creative energies which further feed into the scope and prestige of the target language. If civility, eloquence and translation are linked in an epistemic charmed circle what happens when these notions are put to the test in a situation of bloody rivalry and exacerbated cultural conflict? To answer this question we will now turn our attention to the Tudor wars in sixteenth-century Ireland.

**Language and conquest**

When the English Crown set about in earnest to reconquer Ireland from the 1530s onwards, it was faced with a country which was overwhelmingly Irish speaking. (Williams & Ní Mhuiríosa 1979) The English-speaking community which had been established on the foot of the Anglo-Norman invasion at the end of the twelfth century had greatly diminished in the intervening centuries. There were a number of reasons for this. Many smaller tenants had returned to England in the thirteenth century, disappointed by the lack of success of their Irish ventures. The Black Death arrived in Ireland in the summer of 1348 and by Christmas had
killed 14,000 people in Dublin alone (Mulvihill 2002: 97–98). The plague epidemic mainly affected the English speakers in Ireland’s towns and cities, thus furthering reducing their numbers. The English Crown grappling with internal problems linked to dynastic succession in the Wars of the Roses and externally embroiled in continuous conflict with France was not disposed to show much interest in its Irish colony through the fourteenth and fifteenth century. When Henry VIII undertook the reconquest of Ireland, the enterprise was different in one important respect from the earlier Anglo-Norman invasion of the twelfth century. The Tudor campaign was not only military, it was cultural. Military or political submission was not enough, culture and language too would have to conform to the new order (Cronin 1996: 47–90). The change in policy accorded with a new-found confidence in the English language and a belief that as demonstrated by Latin and the Romans, the expansion of English overseas territories would also imply the expansion of the English language. Fynes Moryson who was involved in the military campaigns of the period and who was an important propagandist for the English cause expresses this renewed belief in the English language even if his analogy betrays some lingering anxieties (Moryson 1903: 437–38):

they are confuted who traduce the English lounge to be like a beggers patched Cloke, which they should rather compayre to a Posey of sweetest flowers, because by the sayd meanes, it hath been in late ages excellently refyned and made perfitt for ready and brief deliuerie both in prose and verse.

A clue as to what made the English language “perfitt for ready and brief delivery both in prose and verse” is provided by another military adventurer in Ireland, Sir Humphrey Gilbert. Gilbert, who displayed notable savagery in quelling the Munster rebellion of 1579, published a work a year later where he stressed the importance of oratorical training and eloquence but stipulated that this training be provided not in Latin but in English. In Queene Elizabethes Academy, Gilbert argued for the establishment of a university in London. Crucial to the activities of instructors in this new university was translation. Each language teacher should “printe some Translation into the English tongue of some good worke every three years” (cited in Palmer 2001: 110). Translation would nourish the English language in the way that Quintillian saw Greek nurturing Latin. Furthermore, the more eloquent the English language, the better fitted it was to be the language of empire and the more flowers in the bouquet, the more becoming the conquest. Where were these flowers to come from if not like Quintillian’s verbal figures, from other languages through translation? As Patricia Palmer points out in Language and Conquest in Early Modern Ireland, “The fact that so many leading translators of the age – Bryskett, Fenton, Googe, Harrington – were also players in the conquest of Ireland confirms the uncanny incongruity between pushing back the
frontiers of English and expanding the geopolitical boundaries in which it operated” (Palmer 2001:111).

For the purposes of our discussion, it possible to argue that there are three aspects of the sixteenth century English translation enterprise which impact on the translation of the figurative. Firstly, there is the repeated belief that it is the density of figurative speech which defines the communicative eloquence of language. Secondly, there is a recognition of the absolute necessity of translation to the success of the project of figurative regeneration of the language. If Matthiessen (1931) will define translation as a quintessentially ‘Elizabethan Art’ it is because for the Elizabethans the incorporation and appropriation of the foreign is fundamental to the construction of a robust national identity and an expansionist empire. The conquest of foreign books is an indispensable preliminary to that shift from barbarity to civility, that eloquent metamorphosis which allows figures of speech to become keys to power. Thirdly, and conversely, it is figurative language in translation which becomes a site of recurrent cultural and political anxiety. It was not only the power of the words that would preoccupy the Elizabethans, it was their purity. The case of Edmund Spenser is instructive in this regard. In his work on Irish affairs, A View of the Present State of Ireland, Spenser has two characters, Irenius and Eudoxus, discuss the present condition of Ireland and offer suggestions about what might be done in the future to make the rebellious island more amenable to the designs of the Crown. At one point in the dialogue, Irenius makes the following observation:

Yea, truly, I have caused diverse of them to be translated unto me, that I might understand them, and surely they savoured of good wit and invention, but skilled not of the goodly ornaments of poetry. Yet they were sprinkled with some pretty flowers of their own natural devise, which gave good grace and comeliness unto them, the which it is a great pity to see so abused to the gracing of wickedness and vice, which would with good usage serve to beautify and adorn virtue. (Spenser 1970:75)

Here it is the device of translation that makes particularly apparent the figurative potential of the language of the other – the ‘good wit’, ‘invention’, ‘pretty flowers’, ‘grace’, ‘comeliness’ to which Spenser refers – but Irish is all the more dangerous because of that seductiveness. If these ‘pretty flowers’ made their way into the English ‘Posey’ then there was no telling what the consequences might be. Or rather there was, and the example was close to hand. The Englishmen engaged in the Tudor reconquest of Ireland were greatly exercised by what had happened to those earlier Englishmen who had come to Ireland as a result of the Anglo-Norman invasion. The fact that large numbers of them had become acculturated to Gaelic language and society and remained on the whole faithful to Roman
Catholicism was ritually presented as an eloquent example of the perils of colonisation. As John Davies noted in his *Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was never Entirely Subdued* (1612), “Then the estate of things, like a Game at Irish, was so turned about, as the English, which hoped to make a perfect conquest of the Irish, were by them perfectly and absolutely conquered” (his emphasis) (Davies 1969:164). The cultural and linguistic fate of the ‘Old English’ as they came to be known was seen to be a cautionary tale for the New English, their defection proof of the dangerous transformation or ‘alterage’ which awaited those who agreed to play the ‘Game at Irish’. Ironically, it is a member of the Old English community who sees not the Old but the New English as being particularly susceptible to blandishments of the figurative. Richard Stanihurst claims that his translation of the first four books of Virgil shows the “riches of oure speche” but in his *De rebus in Hibernia gestis*, he thunders against that “strange and florid English, currently fashionable which plunders from foreign languages” whereas the Old English in Ireland preserve among them the “pure and pristine tongue” of Chaucer (Stanihurst 1981: 144).

The ambivalence towards figurative language and its appropriation through translation is notably expressed in George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589). In this work, Puttenham advances two theses which are fundamental to his argument for the particular excellence of English as a vernacular language. Firstly, he argues that English is superior to the classical languages because it has retained the metaphoric speech and primitive poetry of its origins. Secondly, he applauds the Areopagites’ ban on “all manner of figurative speaches” and expresses his suspicion of all “forraine and coloured talke” (1936:94). Thus, metaphor makes language but it is also metaphor that can unmake language if there are doubts about its origins. The threat to the English language and English nationalism at the moment of national formation and imperial expansion is the ever present danger of transgression through all “manner of figurative speaches”. Translation may indeed be the ‘Elizabethan art’ par excellence in the words of Matthiessen but the activity is also suspected by commentators like Puttenham to be the chief culprit in this figurative subversion and dangerous ‘othering’ of the English language.

**Metaphor and relational semantics**

Eric Cheyfitz in his *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from ‘The Tempest’ to ‘Tarzan’* has the following to say about metaphor in the sixteenth century (1991: 121):
for Europeans, metaphor occupies the place of both the foreign and the domestic, the savage and the civilized, it occupies the place of both nature and culture; it is, at once, the most natural of languages or language in its most natural state and the most cultivated or cultured. Metaphor is nature; metaphor translates nature into culture.

The fundamental problem, however, for Tudor cultural commentators is whether culture is somehow made ‘unnatural’ by this translation of nature into culture. Even more alarming is the possible pairing of the ‘un-national’ and ‘un-natural’ – a recurrent trope in the demonology of cultural nationalism – in the Tudor rhetorical engagement with difference through translation. The danger is all the more real in that there is a decisive shift in thinking about language in the period from referential semantics to relational semantics. Pioneers in this paradigm shift in Renaissance linguistics were Lorenzo Valla and Juan Luis Vives. Valla in his study of the changes in Latin over time demonstrated that language was not an ahistorical object which emerged always already made but rather that it was basically the socio-historical creation of a speech community. Vives for his part demonstrated that words which were previously thought to be similar, such as homo and anthropos, meant in fact somewhat different things. The net effect of these demonstrable differences between the semantic fields of various words was to prove that no two languages operated in the same way (see Waswo 1987). Thus, the work of these scholars and others initiated a fundamental semantic shift in the Renaissance from a view of language simply representing reality (referential semantics) to a view of language generating that selfsame reality (relational semantics). The shift carried with it implications for how translation might be conceptualised and also what its effects might be on cultural engagement.

In the first instance, relational semantics called into question more naïve or literalist notions of translation equivalence. If translation theoreticians from Cicero and Jerome onwards had cast doubts on the possibilities of one-to-one, referential equivalence, the findings of the language scholars appeared to justify their scepticism. In particular, the translation of figurative speech, long held to test the limits of the word-for-word fetishisation of fidelity, was an exemplary case of the inadequacy of referential semantics. Figurative language, as that which presented the particular genius of a language community in the eyes of Puttenham and others, was precisely that feature of language which the community had specifically created and which did not fit easily into the speech of other different and distinct language communities. A further consequence of the semantic shift for translation was what words, whether in the original or translation, could do to reality. If language is seen to create reality, what figurative language expresses in a particularly dramatic or heightened form is the ability of other languages to generate
entirely different sets of meanings or ways of viewing the world. In the case of referential semantics, a belief in a common Adamic origin for language, where language was viewed as a somewhat elaborate pointing exercise to objects in the real world, provided a basis for a trust in the existence of universal meanings in the world. In other words, the objects pointed to by the words place their own limits on what differences might exist. With the advent of relational semantics, this was no longer the case. To some extent, it is possible to argue that what William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* dramatises is precisely a world which must come to terms with the generative consequences of this new vision of semantics.

If the conventional relationship between words and reality is changed, then translation acquires wholly new powers. Now words in translation can shape our vision of the real and cause us to experience reality differently. If Caliban learns the language of his master Prospero, then in the changed universe of relational semantics, what he carries through from his mother tongue in his translated speech can alter the world as much as Prospero’s imaginative ruminations. So the translator as agent of metamorphosis may not only effect change but become himself or herself metamorphosised in the process. If metaphor, in particular, and figurative language generally is about the matching of the like and the unlike, the bringing together of the alien and the domestic, then it seems similarly true that translation is primarily a metaphorical operation in its bringing together of difference and that all metaphor is fundamentally a translational operation (see Cronin 1995 for a more extended discussion of this point). If translation has a transformative power which is allied to the metaphorical and the figurative what are the consequences for how translators are viewed in a situation of violent cultural encounter?

Sir Henry Wotton, one of the foremost English diplomats of his age and himself a translator of some accomplishment, acted as secretary to the Earl of Essex in the latter’s negotiations with Hugh O’Neill, the leader of the Gaelic Irish. In a letter to his close friend, John Donne, Wotton expresses his exasperation with those responsible for the linguistic mediation between the Gaelic Irish and the New English, “Whatsoever we have done, or mean to do, we know what will become of it, when it comes among our worst enemies, which are interpreters. I would there were more O’Neales and Macguiers and O’Donnells and MacMahons and fewer of them” (Smith 1907: 308). The interpreter is the unstable, uncertain figure passing between two languages, two cultures, two sets of political allegiances and no one is immune to the ‘alterage’ such traffic brings. This much is suggested by Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part 2*, where the Duke of York, provides us with a potted biography of the rebel leader Jack Cade. After being informed of his exemplary courage in the field of battle, we then learn of Cade’s mission as a translator in the Anglo-Irish wars:
Full often, like a shag-haired crafty kern,
Hath he conversèd with the enemy,
And undiscovered come to me again
And given me notice of their villainies. (III.i.367–70)

Cade’s doublessness is used by his masters in their strategic advance through Irish territory but it precisely this dissembling duality which makes him a troublesome subject. Having served the Crown in Ireland he returns to England to take up arms against the Crown. So the transformers of speech, those dealing in language metamorphosis become themselves transformed by the activities. They become in a sense metaphors for the inherent instability and fraught nature of language and cultural contact in the war zone of territorial expansion. Translators as individuals who are subject to the continual effects of ‘alterage’ alter cultures for better or for worse, depending on who is evaluating the outcomes and from what perspective. Nations and cultures in an expansionist phase both need and fear the good offices of translation. In particular, they go to translation to sustain the figurative resources of eloquence which ensures a cultural legitimacy for political acts of appropriation. The difficulty is one of openness and containment. In other words, how does the national or imperial language open up to other languages without being subtly undermined in the process, the figurative re-entry of the rejected or the repressed destabilising strategies of coercion and control? The sweetest flowers can adorn the triumphant nuptials between the different realms of the Crown but they can also be present at the burial of imperial ambition.
Translation as culture*

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The year after my speech at Oviedo, I received the Translation Award from the National Academy of Letters in India and delivered an acceptance speech in 1998. There is a certain continuity between the two events. In the former I question the metropolitan hybridist. In the latter I take the national identitarians to task. I have taken the liberty of appending my acceptance speech as the appropriate conclusion to this essay, which is thus in two sections, Oviedo and New Delhi.

Keywords: translation as reparation; transcoding; subject in responsibility; hearing-to-respond; translating from idiom to standard

Oviedo

In every possible sense, translation is necessary but impossible. Melanie Klein, the Viennese psychoanalyst whom the Bloomsbury Group killed with kindness, suggested that the work of translation is an incessant shuttle that is a 'life'.\(^1\) The human infant grabs on to some one thing and then things. This grabbing (*begreifen*) of an outside indistinguishable from an inside constitutes an inside, going back and forth and coding everything into a sign-system by the thing(s) grasped. One can call this crude coding a 'translation'. In this never-ending weaving, violence translates into conscience and vice versa. From birth to death this 'natural' machine, programming the mind perhaps as genetic instructions program the body

* The text reproduced here first appeared in *parallax* (vol. 6, no. 1) in 2000. An earlier version was published in *Translating Cultures*, edited by Isabel Carrera Suarez, Aurora García Fernández, and M. S. Suarez Lafuente.

1. What follows is my own interpretative digest of Melanie Klein, *Works*, Volumes 1–4. Giving specific footnotes is therefore impossible. The details may also not resemble orthodox Kleinian psychoanalysis.
(where does body stop and mind begin?), is partly metapsychological and therefore outside the grasp of the mind. Thus ‘nature’ passes and repasses into ‘culture’, in a work or shuttling site of violence (deprivation – evil – shocks the infant system-in-the-making more than satisfaction, some say Paradiso is the dullest of The Divine Comedy): the violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility. To plot this weave, the reader – in my estimation, Klein was more a reader than an analyst in the strict Freudian sense –, translating the incessant translating shuttle into that which is read, must have the most intimate knowledge of the rules of representation and permissible narratives which make up the substance of a culture, and must also become responsible and accountable to the writing/translating presupposed original.

It is by way of Melanie Klein that I grasped a certain statement which comes to me from Australian Aboriginals. But before I go on to talk about it I want to say just a little bit more about Melanie Klein.

The subject in the shuttling described by Klein is something that will have happened, not something that definitely happens; because, first, it is not under the control of the I that we think of as the subject and because, second, there is such a thing as a world out there, however discursive. In this understanding of translation in Melanie Klein, therefore, the word translation itself loses its literal sense, it becomes a catachresis, a term I use not for obscurity, but because I find it indispensable.

Here is why I have to use the word catachresis. I was recently having a discussion with Dr. Aniruddha Das, a cell biologist. He is working on how cells recognise, how parasites recognise, what to attack in the body. I asked him why he used the word recognise, such a mindy word, a word that has to do with intellect and consciousness. Why use that word to describe something that goes on in the body, not really at all in the arena of what we recognise as mind? Wouldn’t the word affinity do for these parasites ‘knowing’ what to attack? He explained to me that no, indeed, the word affinity would not do, and why it is that precisely the word recognise had to be used. (I cannot reproduce the explanation but that does not matter for us at this moment.) He added that the words recognition, recognise lose their normal sense when used this way; there is no other word that can be used. Most people find this difficult to understand. And I started laughing. I said, yes, most people do find it difficult to understand, what you have just described is a catachrestic use of that word recognition. In other words, no other word will do, and yet it does not really give you the literal meaning in the history of the language, upon which a correct rather than catachrestic metaphoric use would be based.

In the sense that I am deriving from Klein, translation does indeed lose its mooring in a literal meaning. Translation in this general sense is not under the control of the subject who is translating. Indeed the human subject is something
that will have happened as this shuttling translation, from inside to outside, from violence to conscience: the production of the ethical subject. This originary translation thus wrenches the sense of the English word *translation* outside of its making. One look at the dictionary will tell you the word comes from a Latin past participle (*of transferre* = to transfer). It is a done deal, precisely not a future anterior, something that will have happened without our knowledge, particularly without our control, the subject coming into being.

When so-called ethnophilosophies describe the embedded ethico-cultural subject being formed prior to the terrain of rational decision making, they are dismissed as fatalistic. But the insight, that the constitution of the subject in responsibility is a certain kind of translation, of a genealogical scripting, which is not under the control of the deliberative consciousness, is not something that just comes from Melanie Klein. What is interesting about Melanie Klein is that she does indeed want to touch responsibility-based ethical systems rather than just rights-based ethical systems and therefore she looks at the violent translation that constitutes the subject in responsibility. It is in this sense that the human infant, on the cusp of the natural and the cultural, is in translation, except the word translation loses its dictionary sense right there. Here, the body itself is a script – or perhaps one should say a ceaseless inscribing instrument.

When a translator translates from a constituted language, whose system of inscription, and permissible narratives are 'her own', this secondary act, translation in the narrow sense, as it were, is also a peculiar act of reparation – towards the language of the inside, a language in which we are 'responsible', the guilt of seeing it as one language among many. Translation in the narrow sense is thus a reparation. I translate from my mother tongue. This originary *Schuldigsein* – being-indebted in the Kleinian sense – the guilt in seeing that one can treat one's mother tongue as one language among many – gives rise to a certain obligation for reparation. I'm a slow translator, and for me it is the shuttle between the exquisite guilt of finding the mother tongue or the substitute mother tongue when I translate from French – every ‘original’ is a place-holder for the mother tongue – shuttle between that guilt, a displacement of some primordial *Schuldigsein*, and the reparation of reality-testing, where each of the languages becomes a guarantee of the other. Each is assumed to be or to possess the generality of a semiotic that can appropriate the singularity of the other's idiom by way of conscientious approximations.

Singularity and generality, idiom and semiosis, private and public grammars. It is as if the play of idiom in semioticty becomes a simulacrum, or case, of the ethical as such, as the unaccountable ethical structure of feeling is transcoded into a calculus of accountability. The idiom is singular to the tongue. It will not go over. The semiotic is the system which is generalizable. This element of transcoding
is what locates the recognisable violence of the recognisably political within the general violence of culturing as incessant and shuttling translation, a point much harder to grasp without familiarity with the discourses of the gift.

I am not referring only to discourses of the gift à la Heiddegger, Levinas and Derrida as they underpin, let us say, Derrida’s wonderful *Given Time*. I also mean discourses of the gift as they are available in ethnosophies. In my own case, for example, it is the discourse of *matririn*. Unless one is familiar with the discourses of the gift it is harder to grasp the general violence of culturing as incessant and shuttling translation. Klein locates this in whatever single object first signifies pleasure/pain, good/bad, right/wrong and allows itself to be concatenated into signifying the unmotivated giver of the gift (of life). I grasp my responsibility to take from my mother-tongue and give to the ‘target’-language through the ethical concept-metaphor of *matririn* (mother-debt) – a debt to the mother as well as a debt (that) the (place of the) mother is. For the father-debt I can give you chapter and verse. I cannot provide a citation for *matririn*. The aphorism: *matririn* is not to be repaid, or cannot be repaid, was part of my childhood everyday, as it is of my intellectual life now. The mother-debt is the gift of birth, as it is imaged to be, but also the accountable task of childrearing (literally *manush kora* = making human, in my mother tongue). One translates this gift-into-accountability as one attempts to repay what cannot be repaid, and should not be thought of as repayable.

For me, then, it is within this open-ended nature-culture frame that all recognisable violence of the recognisably political within the general violence of culturing can be located – in an element of transcoding as well as translating. I will stay with the element of transcoding in this first part, with the location of the recognisable violence of the recognisably political. I leave aside for the moment the other terrain of culture as translation, where recognition begins in differentiation.\(^2\)

Let us then speak of idioms and semiotic systems within this frame. I learnt this lesson of the violence of transcoding as translation, from a group that has stayed in place for more than thirty thousand years. That lesson was contained in the philosopheme – the smallest unit of philosophy – ‘lost our language’, used by the Australian Aboriginals of the East Kimberley region. The expression ‘lost our language’ does not mean that the persons involved do not know their aboriginal mother tongue. It means, in the words of a social worker, that ‘they have lost touch with their cultural base’, they no longer compute with it, it is not their software. In the Kleinian metaphors, it is not the condition and effect of their nature-culture shuttling. Therefore, what these inheritors of settler-colonial oppression ask for is, quite appropriately, mainstream education, insertion into civil society, and the

\(^2\) This more colloquial sense is where we locate Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. 
inclusion of some information about their culture in the curriculum. Under the circumstances this is the only practical request. The concept-metaphor ‘language’ is here standing in for that word which names the main instrument for the performance of the temporizing, of the shuttling outside-inside translation that is called life. What the Aboriginals are asking for, having lost generalizing control of the semioticy of their system, is hegemonic access to chunks of narrative and descriptions of practice, so that the representation of that instrumentality, as a cultural idiom rather than a semiotic, becomes available for performance as what is called theatre, or art, or literature, or indeed culture, even theory. Given the rupture between the many languages of Aboriginality and the waves of migration and colonial adventure clustered around the Industrial Revolution narrative, demands for multilingual education here become risible. All we have is bilingualisms, bilateral arrangements between idioms understood as essentially or historically private, on the one side, and English on the other, understood as the semiotic as such. This is the political violence of translation as transcoding, the contemporary translation industry about which many of us write. It is not without significance that I cannot check the lexicality of this ‘loss of language’ against any original.

Recently I found corroboration in what Lee Cataldi and Peggy Rockman Napaljarri have written about the Warlpiri people of Central North Australia:

For Warlpiri people, the coming of the Europeans was ‘the end of the Jukurrpa’ [...] simultaneously an account of the creation of the places in [their narrative], an account of the mythical but human behaviour of the ancestral figures, and a mnemonic map of the country with its important, life-giving features for the purpose of instructing a younger listener [...] Rosie Napurrurla and many others are very aware that the intrusion into their lives and land of the dominating, metropolitan culture of the West meant the end of the Jukurrpa as a world-view [I would call it a discursive practice], as a single, total explanation of the universe. It is apparent that many Warlpiri people are much more clearly aware of the nature of cultural conflict and the nature of the two cultures than Europeans are [and, I would add, than are some academic theorists]. Such awareness is the privilege of the loser in this kind of conflict.3

3. Napaljarri and Cataldi (1994:xvii, 20). The immense labor of thinking the relationship of this ‘mnemonic mapping’ with “satellite positioning technology offer[ing] a definitive solution to this question, which some claim has troubled us from our origin: where am I?” must be undertaken without foregone conclusions. (Laura Kurgan and Xavier Costa, eds., You Are Here: Architecture and Information Flows, p. 121. The entire text, especially the visuals, should be studied with an ‘active’ perusal of Yimikirli, which may now be impossible. The necessary yet impossible task of cultural translation is made possible and ruined by the march of history.)
When we establish our reputations on transcoding such resistant located hybridity, distinct from the more commonly noticed migrant hybridity, we lose the privilege of the loser because we claim that privilege. The translators in Cataldi and Napaljarri’s book placed their effort within resources for a cultural performance of the second degree. They were not themselves constricted by the violence of this culture performing itself, as originary and catachrestic translation – the coming into being of the responsible subject as divined by Klein.

After spending three or four days with a Canadian artist, originally of Islamic roots, I asked her a question, we had got to know each other well. I want you to tell me, I said, when you confront a situation where you have to make a decision between right and wrong, do you turn to Islam for the ethical answer? I quite understand that you and I must join in undermining the demonizing and dehistoricizing of Islam that is current in North America today, but this is a different kind of question. It is the difference between a generalizable semiotics that writes our life, and a cultural idiom that we must honourably establish so that we can ‘perform’ it as art. And she said, after a long time, I’ve never been asked this question, but the answer is no.

The translators of the Warlpiri texts place their effort as a resource for a cultural performance, an idiom, rather than the violence of culture turning over, in and as the human subject, as originary and catachrestic translation. I quote again (xxii):

> Although it is true that Warlpiri people no longer live within the logic and constraints of the world-view known as the Jukurrpa, it is also the case that, like other traditional Aboriginal people, they have succeeded in creating for themselves a way of life which is unique and distinctive, nothing like the European culture with which they have to live. We hope that something of the spirit of this social creation is communicated by the translations and the narratives in this book.

Alas, we cannot discover how that tradition worked as a violent catachrestic translation shuttle of the outside-inside when it was indeed the semiosis of subject-making. The Industrial Revolution put paid to that anti-essentialism, that placing of subject-making in alterity. And therefore any mention of tradition is silenced with the remark that that is just essentialist golden-ageism. On the contrary, we mourn the loss of aboriginal culture as underived fictions that are the condition and effect of the subject’s history merely because it is the founding crime of the world we live in. There is no question of unwriting or rewriting history here. The bad-faith hybridistic essentialism of discovering diasporic hybrids and offering that transcoding of the popular as in itself a radical gesture cannot bind that wound of history. I am certainly not interested in censoring work. What I am objecting to is the kind of silencing that is operated when the transcoding of
Translation as culture

Diasporic cultures mingling becomes in itself a radical gesture. It’s that claim to effortless resistance, short-circuiting efforts to translate where ‘languages have been lost’, about which I feel dubious.

Cataldi and Napaljarri, our translators, inhabit an *aporia*, a catch-22. Some of their material ‘is derived from land-claim documents’, already a site of transcoding a mnemonic geography into the semiosis of land as property. Their book appears in a series that believes in ‘the global interdependence of human hearts and minds’, which can be double-talk for the financialization of the globe, ‘culturalization’ of electronic capital, alibi for the contemporary new world order, post-Soviet exploitation. Their book appears in such a series, ‘printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39.48 standard’. What is the relationship between the scene of global ecology, and the appropriation of traditional knowledge as trade related intellectual property in the name of biopiracy coded as bioprospecting? What is the relationship between standardised environmentalism on the one hand, and traditional knowledge systems on the other? Mnemonic geography and satellite positioning technology? This is also a transcoding question. Just as we cannot content ourselves with collecting examples of diasporic hybridity, so also can we not just read books translating ‘other cultures’. We must work at the screen if we are really interested in translation as a phenomenon rather than a mere convenience because we cannot learn every language in the world.

Precisely in the pages showing the most stunning Warlpiri paintings, there is an insert advertising 52% student rate savings on *TIME* magazine and a free stereo cassette player ‘for your spare time’. The act of the insertion is the mechanical gesture of a subordinate employee or a machine, completely at odds with the apparent intent of the translators. The international book trade is a trade in keeping with the laws of world trade. It is the embedding network which moves books as objects on a circuit of destined errancy. At one end, the coming into being of the subject of reparation. At the other end, generalized commodity exchange. We translate somewhere in between. Even as the translators consign this text of Warlpiri dreaming (Jukurrpa) to this exchange, they cannot grasp, because of the depredations of history, the way in which the totalizing dreaming was an operative anti-essentialist semiosis, the infant shuttling between inside and outside and reality testing, the shuttling of violence and conscience making the subject in responsibility emerge. This book is interesting because it shows that the Warlpiri are themselves aware of this. They point at contemporary social creation.

Some assume that subalterns (those shut off from cultural mobility) have nothing but idiom which the historian translates into systematicity. (Not Lee Cataldi and Peggy Rockman Napaljarri, of course.) In November 1996, I was in a gathering of about twelve hundred Aboriginals in a settlement on the outskirts of
Akarbaid village in western West Bengal. (These ‘Aboriginals’ are the descendants of the population of the Indian subcontinent before Indo-European-speaking peoples started trickling into that land mass.) Mahasweta Devi, the woman whose fiction I translate, was also present. Towards evening she asked Lochan Sabar, an eighty-four-year-old Aboriginal, to ‘tell Gayatri about the time when you were involved in India’s Independence Struggle’.

The historians’ collective Subaltern Studies have been engaged since the early eighties in questioning the nationalist historiography of Indian Independence, suggesting that it ignores the continuous tradition of insurgency among peasants and Aboriginals. Here was I confronted by a man who was on the cusp of that binary opposition, between bourgeois nationalist historiography and the subaltern. This Lochan Sabar, himself an Aboriginal who had not left that way of life, had taken part in the Independence Struggle and was getting the pension of a freedom fighter. He begins telling his story, a story that has been told many times before. I alone do not know it in that company. He is using the word Gandhi from time to time. He has translated his experiences in the freedom struggle into an oral formulaic mode, which I could at that point recognise because I had read A. B. Lord as an undergraduate. Mahasweta turns aside and tells me, ‘By the way, he’s not referring to Mahatma Gandhi’. Any person in the position of a bourgeois leader staging himself as subaltern is being given the name Gandhi. Gandhi after all was no subaltern, he staged himself as one, took off his suit – so any time that some charismatic intellectual populist leader is described Lochu is using the word Gandhi. In terms of the way in which they mythicize, Gandhi has become a type word. This shakes me up. Next, whenever there comes a moment in his epic recounting when, what the academic subalternist historians describe as religion coming into crisis and becoming militancy, comes to pass, Lochan Sabar marks it with the exclamation Bande Mataram! [Praise to the Mother!], without catching it in the web of his narrative. Those of you who have seen Satyajit Ray’s ‘The Home and the World’ will remember this as the slogan of the freedom fighters.4 These are the opening words, in Sanskrit, of the nineteenth century nationalist song written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

Sanskrit is the classical language of the Hindus. The very word means ‘refined’ (as opposed to ‘natural’, ‘raw’). The refinement of the original Indo-European speech traditions into that form would politically be exactly opposed to the culture of the Aboriginals. How shall one compute Lochan Sabar’s negotiation

4. The film is based on Rabindranath Tagore’s novel Gharé Bairé. In an essay on translation it should be noticed that the English title is a mistranslation. It does not catch the delicacy of the threshold effect of the original, which is in the locative case, and might translate as ‘inside outside’.
Further, the Mother in the song is Bengal-cum-India. The Bharatiya Janata Party, the Hindu Nationalist Party in India, wants to claim it as the national anthem in place of the more secular one in actual use. Lochan is not aware of this, he is not Hindu, only an unlettered animist whose religious idiom is contaminated by Hindu folk practice. He is transforming the hegemonic nationalist account, Gandhi as well as Bankim, into the semiotic conventions of subaltern or Sabar telling. He is deflecting Bankim’s own effort, related to the British ideology of restoring Bengal to its Hindu lineaments against the Muslim rule that the British had brought to an end. Bankim attempted to establish a Hindu Bengali nationalism which would gradually vanish into ‘Indian’ nationalism. He denies the Islamic component of Bengali culture, the Aboriginals are nothing but children to him. Bankim’s brother, Sanjiv Chandra Chatterjee, had written the immortal sentence, memorised by every schoolchild in my day: ‘The savage has beauty in the forest, as does the child in its mother’s arms’. In the process, denying the lexicalized Arabic and Persian elements of Bengali, Bankim lexicalizes Sanskrit into Bengali as Lochan Sabar weaves his words into subaltern formula.

I can see both as generalizing, from idiom to semiosis, differently. Lochan’s is not just an idiomatics, which the historian then transcodes and makes available in the more general semiotic of a recognisable historiography. My friends, fellow Subalternists, said ‘But, Gayatri, you say you won’t transcode it because you have this kind of primitivistic piety towards the tribals, but nonetheless you are saying it, aren’t you?’

Indeed, this too is a moment of destined errancy. Just as Yimikirli enters the international book trade, so does my anecdote. I would like to place them on a taxonomy with the docketing of every hybrid popular phenomenon as a radical gesture as such, and yet mark the difference.

There was a moment when another man, who didn’t know what was going on, cried from the opening of the enclosure, ‘Lochan, sing, sing for us’, and Lochan Sabar said loudly and with great dignity, ‘No, this is not a moment for singing. I am saying History’. He himself was making a distinction between entertainment and knowledge.

I too am a translator, into English. Some say I have not grasped either Derrida’s French or Mahasweta’s Indian spirit. I seem now engaged in an even more foolhardy enterprise, to catch the translations from the other side. It was in that spirit that I began my speech with a quotation from the Warlpiris. And thus I end, with a quotation from Lochan Sabar. I embed them both in translation in the general sense, translation as catachresis, the making of the subject in reparation.

5. I have discussed the hospitality of the subordinated towards the dominant in Spivak (2000).
New Delhi

I am deeply honoured that the Sahitya Akademi have decided to acknowledge my efforts to translate the fiction of Mahasweta Devi. I want to begin by thanking Mahasweta Devi for writing such spectacular prose. I want to thank my parents, Pares Chandra Chakravorty and Sivani Chakravorty for bringing me up in a household that was acutely conscious of the riches of Bangla. My father was a doctor. But we children were always reminded that my father’s Bangla essay for his matriculation examination had been praised by Tagore himself.

And my Mother? I could not possibly say enough about her on this particular occasion. Married at fourteen and with children coming at the ages of fifteen and twenty three, this active and devoted wife and mother, delighted every instance with the sheer fact of being alive, studied in private and received her M.A. in Bengali literature from Calcutta University in 1937. She reads everything I write and never complains of the obscurity of my style. Without her constant support and interest, and indeed without the freedom she gave me in the fifties, herself a young widow then, to lead my life as my errant mind led me, I would not have been able to write these words for you today.

Samik Bandyopadhyaya introduced me to Mahasweta Devi in 1979. Initially, I was altogether overwhelmed by her.

In 1981, I found myself in the curious position of being asked to write on deconstruction and on French feminism by two famous US journals, Critical Inquiry and Yale French Studies respectively. I cannot now remember why that position had then seemed to me absurd. At any rate, I proposed a translation of Mahasweta’s short story ‘Draupadi’ for Critical Inquiry, with the required essay on deconstruction plotted through a reading of the story.

When I look back upon that essay now, I am struck by its innocence. I had been away from home for twenty years then. I had the courage to acknowledge that there was something predatory about the non-resident Indian’s obsession with India. Much has changed in my life since then, but that initial observation retains its truth. I should perhaps put it more tactfully today.

Why did I think translating Mahasweta would free me from being an expert on France in the United States? I don’t know. But this instrumentality disappeared in the doing. I discovered again, as I had when I had translated Jacques Derrida’s De la grammatologie ten years earlier, that translation was the most intimate act of reading. Not only did Mahasweta Devi not remain Gayatri Spivak’s way of freeing herself from France, but indeed the line between French and Bengali disappeared in the intimacy of translation. The verbal text is jealous of its linguistic signature but impatient of national identity. Translation flourishes by virtue of that paradox.
The line between French and Bengali disappeared for this translator in the intimacy of the act of translation. Mahasweta resonated, made a *dhvani*, with Derrida, and vice versa. This has raised some ire, here and elsewhere. This is not the occasion for discussing unhappy things. But let me crave your indulgence for a moment and cite a couple of sentences, withholding theory, that I wrote in a letter to my editor Anjum Katyal of Seagull Books, when I submitted to her the manuscript of my translation of 'Murti' and 'Mohanpurer Rupkatha' by Mahasweta Devi:

[In these two stories] the aporias between gendering on the one hand ('feudal' – transitional, and subaltern), and the ideology of national liberation (as tragedy and as farce) are also worth contemplating. But I am a little burnt by the resistance to theory of the new economically restructured reader who would prefer her NRI neat, not shaken up with the ice of global politics and local experience. And so I let it rest.

That hard sentence at the end reflects my hurt and chagrin at the throwaway remark about Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'sermonizing' offered by the reviewer, in *India Today*, of *Imaginary Maps*, the very book that you have chosen to honour.

I was hurt, of course. But I was chagrined because 'sermonizing' was also the word used by Andrew Steer, then Deputy Director for the Environment at the World Bank, in 1992, when I had suggested, at the European Parliament, that the World Bank re-examine its constant self-justificatory and fetishized use of the word 'people'.

At both Oviedo and New Delhi, my concern is for the constitution of the ethical subject – as life / translator (Klein), narrow-sense / translator, reader-as-translator.

Why did I decide to gild Mahasweta's lily? Shri Namwar Singh, Professor of Hindi at Jawaharlal Nehru University, who presided over the occasion, will remember that instructors at the Department of Modern Indian Literatures at Delhi University had asked me in 1987 why, when Bangla had Bankim and Tagore, I had chosen to speak on 'Shikar', one of the stories included in *Imaginary Maps*. I am most grateful to the Jnanpith committee for correcting such errors. My devotion to Mahasweta did not need national public recognition.

6. One of the most important concept-metaphors in Sanskrit aesthetics. Literally, 'resonance'.


8. The Jnanpith Award, instituted on 22 May 1961, is given for the best overall contribution to literature by any Indian citizen in any of the languages included in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Mahasweta Devi won it in 1996.
To ignore the narrative of action or text as ethical instantiation is to forget the task of translation upon which being-human is predicated. Translation is to transfer from one to the other. In Bangla, as in most North Indian languages, it is anu-vada – speaking after, *translatio as imitatio*. This relating to the other as the source of one’s utterance is the ethical as being-for. All great literature as all specifically good action – any definition would beg the question here – celebrates this. To acknowledge this is not to ‘sermonize’, one hopes.

Translation is thus not only necessary but unavoidable. And yet, as the text guards its secret, it is impossible. The ethical task is never quite performed. ‘Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha’, one of the tales included in *Imaginary Maps*, is the story of such an unavoidable impossibility. The Indian Aboriginal is kept apart or othered by the descendants of the old settlers, the ordinary ‘Indian’. In the face of the radically other, the pre-historic pterodactyl, the Aboriginal and the settler are historically human together. The pterodactyl cannot be translated. But the Aboriginal and the settler Indian translate one another in silence and in the ethical relation.

This founding task of translation does not disappear by fetishizing the native language. Sometimes I read and hear that the subaltern can speak in their native languages. I wish I could be as self-assured as the intellectual, literary critic and historian, who assert this in English. No speech is speech if it is not heard. It is this act of hearing-to-respond that may be called the imperative to translate.

We often mistake this for helping people in trouble, or pressing people to pass good laws, even to insist on behalf of the other that the law be implemented. But the founding translation between people is a listening with care and patience, in the normality of the other, enough to notice that the other has already silently made that effort. This reveals the irreducible importance of idiom, which a standard language, however native, cannot annul.

And yet, in the interest of the primary education of the poorest, looking forward to the privative norms of democracy, a certain standard language must also be shared and practised. Here we attempt to annul the impossibility of translation, to deny provisionally Saussure’s warning that historical change in language is inherited. The toughest problem here is translation from idiom to standard, an unfashionable thing among the elite progressives, without which the abstract structures of democracy cannot be comprehended. Paradoxically, here, idiomaticities must be attended to most carefully. I have recently discovered that there is no Bangla-to-Bangla dictionary for this level (the primary education of the poorest) and suitable to this task (translation from idiom to standard). The speaker

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9. I understand that the West Bengal State Academy of Letters has since then issued a student dictionary. My own efforts are now halted in red tape.
of some form of standard Bengali cannot hear the self-motivated subaltern Bengali unless organised by politically correct editing, which is equivalent to succour from above.

It is not possible for us to change the quality of rote learning in the lowest sectors of society. But with an easy to use same-language dictionary, a spirit of independence and verification in the service of rule governed behaviour – essential ingredients for the daily maintenance of a democratic polity – can still be fostered. The United Nations, and non-governmental organisations in general, often speak triumphantly of the establishment of numbers of schools. We hardly ever hear follow up reports, and we do not, of course, know what happens in those classrooms everyday. But a dictionary, translating from idiom to standard even as it resists the necessary impossibility of translation, travels everywhere. It is only thus that subalternity may painstakingly translate itself into a hegemony that can make use of and exceed all the succour and resistance that we can organise from above. I have no doubt about this at all.

I am sorry I will not be with you when these words are read. I am writing them by the light of a hurricane lantern in a tiny room in Jonara, a settlement of a certain denotified tribe. In the next room is a number of male tribal adults, one of whom came willingly and learnt so much from me in four hours of concentrated work that another, older, came a bit later and learnt some and later asked me to prepare the other one so he can teach the adults until I come again. (My teacher training work, which I do systematically in the morning, is with groups of children and their teachers.) Now a group of adult males are murmuring in the next room, poring over letters and words, one of them a student in the local high school who was, until now, separated from his elders because idiom cannot translate itself into standard.

In the afternoon, the only barely literate bride whom I had seen last year said to me in the presence of senior women, ‘I’ve forgotten everything.’ Her head was turned away from them towards me, her eyes shining with tears. Later she came to my door and wrote her name and address, the first ten numbers, the usual proof of literacy, and then, her message: ‘Mashi come again.’

How long will the men’s enthusiasm and the woman’s anguish last? I cannot know now. But what I am describing is rather different from the self-conscious rectitude of so-called adult education classes. Let me translate for you the lines written for me, in the middle of our lesson and on his own, by the first man who came for his lesson today, knowing nothing but the Bangla alphabet: ‘yele koto anando holo choley abar kobey abey boley na’.

This is Bangla tribal Creole that Mahasweta attempts to reproduce in her fiction and I cannot translate into English. My friend Sahan Sabar thought he was writing standard Bengali. I give witness to the attempt to translate which the sen-
tence bears. I made two changes for him, assuring him that the first was just a variation. I did not change the most powerful mark of the Creole – the absence of the “you” – tumi – an absence only poetry or affect would produce in standard Bangla. This is how Sahan’s sentence would translate into standard English: ‘[You] came how much joy there was [you] will leave us doesn’t say when [she] will return.’

This subaltern gave me the gift of speech, already on the way to translation, because I had attended to his idiom, not because I helped him in distress. These Sabars, women and men, constantly translate for me, consciously, between their speech, their Creole, my Bangla. They do not immediately need an anthropological dictionary of the Kheria language. There are a couple of those in the Columbia University Library. Today as we speak to accept our awards for translating well from the twenty one languages of India, I want to say, with particular emphasis, that what the largest part of the future electorate needs, in order to accede, in the longest run, to democracy rather than have their votes bought and sold, is practical simple same-language dictionaries that will help translate idiom into standard, in all these languages. I hope the Akademi will move towards the satisfaction of this need.

For myself, I cannot help but translate what I love, yet I resist translation into English, I never teach anything whose original I cannot read, and constantly modify printed translations, including my own. I think it is a bad idea to translate Gramsci and Kafka and Baudelaire into Indian languages from English. As a translator, then, I perform the contradiction, the counter-resistance, that is at the heart of love. And I thank you for rewarding what need not be rewarded, the pleasure of the text.
Translating culture vs. cultural translation

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In the recent rise of Translation Studies, an enabling development has been “The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies”, from about 1990 onwards. But no less significant is the unrequited plea, made in 1998, for a corresponding “Translation Turn in Cultural Studies”. In fact, we have seen instead a new term come into currency, “Cultural Translation”, which, as theorised by Bhabha and as practised by a number of postcolonial writers such as Rushdie, Kureishi and Lahiri, means no more than the representation of migration and diaspora, in just the one global language, English. But this growing monolingualism may forebode, paradoxically, the very end of Translation as we have known it, as a transaction between two languages and cultures.

Keywords: Cultural Translation, migrancy, India, monolingualism

It is widely agreed to be the case that translation and translation studies have never had it so good. Over the last two or three decades, translation has become a more prolific, more visible and more respectable activity than perhaps ever before. And alongside translation itself, a new field of academic study has come into existence, initially called translatology (but not for long, thank God!) and now translation studies, and it has gathered remarkable academic momentum. There has of course always been translation, for almost as long as there has been literature. But the historical reasons for the present boom are probably traceable back to three distinct moments across the span of the twentieth century.

The first of these was the concerted movement of translating Russian fiction into English which began in the 1890s and went on until the 1930s, which revealed to readers in English a body of imaginative work from an area outside Western Europe which was so new and exciting as to be shocking and indeed to

1. Parts and versions of this essay were delivered at the universities of Iowa, Essex, Warwick and London, and I am grateful to my audiences for many helpful observations and suggestions.
induce a state of what was then called the “Russian fever”, with writers as diverse as Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence not only enthusing about the newly discovered nineteenth-century masters of Russian fiction but actually helping to translate them in collaboration with the Russian émigré S. S. Koteliansky. The other two moments belong to the other end of the twentieth century, occurring as they did in the 1970s and the 1980s, when two other bodies of literature from hitherto unregarded parts of the world were translated into English and caused a comparable sensation: from Latin America, and from the East European countries lying behind the Iron Curtain.

Unlike with Russian literature, these latter literatures when made available in translation helped to transform globally our very expectations of what literature looks like or should look like. If I may digress for a moment to touch native Indian ground, perhaps the first instance when readers in English and in other European languages were similarly shocked and exhilarated by the discovery of an alien literature was in the last two decades of the eighteenth century when Charles Wilkins, Sir William Jones and other orientalists began translating from Sanskrit, and caused in Europe what Raymond Schwab has called The Oriental Renaissance and J. J. Clarke The Oriental Enlightenment. But those were different times, and what that discovery through translation led to was not any enhanced interest in translation but rather the founding of the discipline of comparative philology, and of course, if we are to believe Edward Said, further and more effective colonization.

As comparative philology and colonialism are by now both areas of human endeavour which may be regarded as exhausted, the three newer flashes of translational revelation have given rise instead to a worthy impulse to look more closely at the process and effect of translation itself. Though translators themselves and some rare literary critics too had for a long time been reflecting on the practice of translation, such activity was, as we say now, theorised into an autonomous field of academic enquiry only about two decades ago, in or about the year 1980. In England and in many other parts of the Anglophone world, the birth of translation studies was signalled, inasmuch as such gradual consolidation is signalled by any single event, by the publication of a book under the very title Translation Studies by Susan Bassnett-McGuire (now Susan Bassnett) in 1980. This short introductory handbook has had remarkable circulation and influence, being reprinted in a second edition in 1991 and in an updated third edition in 2002.

But a new field of study is seen in our times to have become well and truly established when not only monographs but Readers (or anthologies of primary and critical materials) and Encyclopedias of the subject begin to appear, and this has been happening steadily in Translation Studies over the last few years: for example, the Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies edited by Mona...
Baker (1998); the Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English edited by Olive Classe (2000); the Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation edited by Peter France (2000); and the five-volume “History of Literary Translation into English” projected by the Oxford University Press, as well as a seven-volume Encyclopedia now in progress for some years in Germany. To these one may add anthologies of theoretical and critical statements such as Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida, edited by Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (1992), The Translation Studies Reader edited by Lawrence Venuti (2000), Western Translation Theory: from Herodotus to Nietzsche by Douglas Robinson (1997b), and critical surveys of such materials, such as Contemporary Translation Theories by Edwin Gentzler (1993; updated edition 2001), not to mention a Dictionary of Translation Studies by Mark Shuttleworth and Moira Cowie (1997). New journals exclusively devoted to the subject such as The Translator have been founded, publishers big and small such as Routledge and Multilingual Matters have launched their Translation Studies series, and a whole new publishing house exclusively devoted to the subject, St Jerome, has not been doing too badly.

My assiduous citation of this select bibliography (such as is generally relegated to the end of a paper) is intended to show not only the new embarrassment of riches available in the field but also a tendency to push the range of the discipline as wide and retrospectively as far back as possible (to Dryden and to Herodotus, for example), so as to give it a more respectable scholarly lineage. It is all reminiscent of the ways in which postcolonial studies emerged as an area of study just a few years before translation studies and, in fact, the resemblance here is not only incidental but interactive, for at least four studies have been published in recent years making an explicit connection between these two newly burgeoning areas: The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan (1991) by Eric Cheyfitz, Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context (1992) by Tejaswini Niranjana, Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained (1997a) by Douglas Robinson, and Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice (1999), a collection of essays edited by Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. Altogether, the newly won pre-eminence of translation and translators is itself reflected in the titles of two recent books, The Translator’s Turn (Robinson 1991), which it now seems to be, and The Translator’s Invisibility (Venuti 1995), which now seems to have been replaced by a foregrounded, lime-lit visibility.
I

Before these new developments took place, any study of translation was subsumed under either of two different subjects or disciplines: linguistics and comparative literature. Traditionally, translation was seen as a segment or sub-field of linguistics, on the basic premise that translation was a transaction between two languages. J. C. Catford’s book *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: An Essay in Applied Linguistics* (1965) was perhaps the last major work written on this assumption, in which he defined translation as being “a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another”.

But shortly afterwards it began to be noticed that literary texts were constituted not primarily of language but in fact of culture, language being in effect a vehicle of the culture. In traditional discussions, the cruxes of translation, the items which proved particularly intractable in translation, were often described as being “culture-specific” – for example, *kurta*, *dhoti*, *roti*, *loochi*, *dharma*, *karma* or *maya*, all items peculiarly Indian and not really like the Western shirt, trousers, bread, religion, deeds both past and present, or illusion. But then the realisation grew that not only were such particular items culture-specific but indeed the whole language was specific to the particular culture it belonged to or came from, to some degree or the other. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, to the effect that a language defined and delimited the particular world-view of its speakers, in the sense that what they could not say in their language was what they could not even conceive of, seemed to support the view that the specificity of a culture was coextensive with the specificity of its language. The increased valorization of diversity and plurality in cultural matters also lent strength to this new understanding of language and culture in a way that earlier ideas or ideals of universalism had not.

Thus, in a paradigmatic departure, the translation of a literary text became a transaction not between two languages, or a somewhat mechanical sounding act of linguistic “substitution” as Catford had put it, but rather a more complex negotiation between two cultures. The unit of translation was no longer a word or a sentence or a paragraph or a page or even a text, but indeed the whole language and culture in which that text was constituted. This new awareness was aptly described as “The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies” in the title of a chapter jointly written by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere in their book *Translation, History and Culture* (1990). It was precisely the formulation and recognition of this cultural turn in translation studies that served to extend and revitalize the discipline and to liberate it from the comparatively mechanical tools of analysis available in linguistics.

As it happened, it was about the same time that translation studies achieved a similar liberation from subservience to another discipline of which it was for long
considered a subsidiary and merely instrumental part, comparative literature. But this had as much to do with the decline of comparative literature itself, especially in the United States where the energising impulse and vision of multilingual European émigrés from before and during the Second World War, such as René Wellek, had spent itself out, as with the rise of translation studies. It was Susan Bassnett again, who had for many years headed virtually the only full-fledged Comparative Literature department in the United Kingdom, at Warwick University, who in her book titled *Comparative Literature* (1993), declared, “Comparative Literature is dead”, going on to explain that while the rise of postcolonial studies had stolen the thunder of its thematological concerns, the rise of translation studies had left it bereft of much of its methodological preoccupations. Increasingly now, comparative studies of literature across languages have become the concern of translation studies; it is the translational tail now that wags the comparative dog.

Through the 1990s, alongside the rise of translation studies, we also saw interestingly the rise of a larger and more influential field of study, cultural studies, without however any perceptible overlap or interaction between the two. This lack of convergence or imbrication was again taken note of by Bassnett and Lefevere in their next book, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation* (1998), in which they had a final chapter now titled, “The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies”. They noted that these “interdisciplines”, as they called them, had moved beyond their “Eurocentric beginnings” to enter “a new internationalist phase”, and they identified a four-point common agenda that Translation Studies and Cultural Studies could together address, including an investigation of “the way in which different cultures construct their images of writers and texts”, a tracking of “the ways in which texts become cultural capital across cultural boundaries,” and an exploration of the politics of translation, especially of what Lawrence Venuti has called “the ethnocentric violence of translation”. Finally, they pleaded for a “pooling of resources”, and stressed again the commonality of the disciplinary method and thrust between translation studies and cultural studies:

\[
\text{[...]} \text{in these multifaceted interdisciplines, isolation is counter-productive. [...]}
\]
\[
\text{The study of translation, like the study of culture, needs a plurality of voices.}
\]
\[
\text{And similarly, the study of culture always involves an examination of the processes of encoding and decoding that comprise translation. (Bassnett & Lefevere 1998: 138–139)}
\]

However, this plea for a joining of forces has apparently fallen on deaf ears. The clearly larger and certainly more theoretically undergirded juggernaut of cultural studies continues to rumble along its way, unmindful of the overture made by translation studies to be taken on board. One possible reason may be that for all the commonality of ground and direction pointed out by Bassnett and Lefevere,
one crucial difference between the two interdisciplines is that cultural studies, even when concerned with popular or subaltern culture, nearly always operate in just the one language, English, and often in that high and abstruse variety of it called Theory, while translation studies, however theoretical they may get from time to time, must sully their hands in at least two languages only one of which can be English. In any case, while the Cultural Turn in translation studies had proved to be an act of transformative redefinition, the Translation Turn in cultural studies still remains an unfulfilled desideratum, a consummation yet only wished for.

II

Meanwhile, instead of a cultural turn in translation studies, we have on our hands a beast of similar name but very different fur and fibre – something called Cultural Translation. This is a new collocation and in its specific new connotation is not to be confused with a stray earlier use of it in the old-fashioned sense of translation oriented towards the target culture, what may be called a reader-oriented or “domesticating” translation. In fact, the term Cultural Translation in its new and current meaning does not find an entry or even mention in any of the recent encyclopedias and anthologies of translation listed above.

It would thus seem to be the case that while wishing for the practitioners of cultural studies to come and join hands with them, those engaged in translation studies have not even noticed that something called Cultural Translation has already come into existence, especially in the domain of postcolonial and postmodernist discourse, and represents something that could not be further from their hearts’ desire. For, if there is one thing that Cultural Translation is not, it is the translation of culture. In fact, it spells, as I shall go on to argue, the very extinction and erasure of translation as we have always known and practised it.

The most comprehensive, sophisticated and influential formulation of the concept of Cultural Translation occurs in the work of probably the foremost postcolonial-postmodernist theorist of our times, Homi Bhabha, in the last chapter (bar the “Conclusion”) of his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), titled “How newness enters the world: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation”. In Bhabha’s discussion, the literary text treated as the preeminent example of cultural translation is Salman Rushdie’s novel *Satanic Verses*, a novel written originally in English and read in that language (and not in any translation) by Bhabha. A clue to the new sense in which the term translation is here being used is suggested by a remark made by Rushdie himself (which Bhabha incidentally does not cite) in which he said of himself and other diasporic postco-
colonial writers: “We are translated men”. Rushdie was here exploiting the etymology of the word “translation”, which means to carry or bear across, and what he meant, therefore, was that because he had been borne across, presumably by an aeroplane, from India and Pakistan to the United Kingdom, he was therefore a translated man. He neglects to tell us whether, before he became a translated man, he was at any stage also an original man.

But a second and overriding sense in which too Rushdie claimed to be a translated man is precisely what is expounded by Homi Bhabha in his essay, with specific reference to *The Satanic Verses*. Bhabha begins with an epigraph from Walter Benjamin's classic essay on translation: “Translation passes through continua of transformation, not abstract ideas of identity and similarity” (1994: 212). Later, in a key passage, Bhabha brings in Derrida’s deconstruction of Benjamin’s concept of translation as an after-life or survival, in order to deploy it in a wholly new context unintended by either Benjamin or Derrida, i.e., the context of Rushdiean migrancy and hybridity. To quote Bhabha:

> If hybridity is heresy, then to blaspheme is to dream. [...] it is the dream of translation as “survival” as Derrida translated the “time” of Benjamin’s concept of the after-life of translation, as sur-vivre, the act of living on border-lines. Rushdie translates this into the migrant’s dream of survival; an initiatory interstices; an empowering condition of hybridity. (226)

A little later Bhabha says: “Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication” (228), and he goes on, in another new figurative equation, to speak of the residual cultural unassimilability of the migrant as an instance of what Benjamin called “untranslatability”.

Here, as indeed at numerous other places, one may get the feeling that one is still trying to catch Bhabha’s shadow while already living in it. What is nevertheless clear and indisputable in Bhabha’s formulations of what he calls cultural translation is, firstly, that he does not at all by this term mean literary translation involving two texts from two different languages and cultures, and secondly, that what he means by translation instead is the process and condition of human migrancy. To evoke an irresistibly alliterative and beguiling, mantra-like phrase that Bhabha uses more than once, what he is talking about is the “the transnational as the translational” (173), i.e. the condition of Western multiculturalism brought about by Third World migrancy.

Since he first articulated it, the distinctly postmodernist idea of cultural translation in this non-textual non-linguistic sense has found an echo in much contemporary writing, both critical and creative. To cite a few select examples, the first of which is perhaps an ur-illustration or an analogue from a work which was written before Bhabha’s essay was published, Tejaswini Niranjana in her book
Siting Translation uses the term “translation” by and large to denote the colonial power-play between the British rulers and Indian subjects, and herself conscious of the fact this is not what translation normally means, she resorts early in her work to the Derridean deconstructive ruse of claiming that she has used the term translation “under erasure”, to suit her own chosen context and purpose.

As for creative writing, Hanif Kureishi seems to represent in his career a phase of cultural translation even more acute and advanced than that exemplified by Rushdie. Unlike Rushdie, Kureishi had one English parent, was born in England, and grew up in the “home county” of Kent, thinking of himself as quite and completely British rather than Indian/Pakistani or even hybrid – a self-definition which later needed to be modified, as demonstrated by Ruvani Ranasingha in her study Hanif Kureishi. “I was brought up really as an English child”, Kureishi is quoted as saying; “[...] I wasn’t influenced by Asian culture at all” (Ranasinha 2002:6). As he put it in another interview, “I am not a Pakistani or an Indian writer, I’m a British writer” (Ranasinha 2002:6). It is true that, unlike Rushdie’s, Kureishi’s work contains no reference to sub-continental popular culture such as Hindi films and film-songs; instead Kureishi has edited The Faber Book of Pop, meaning of course British and American pop. Nearly all Kureishi’s works are set in London or in the suburbia, and one of them, titled Sleep with Me, has only white British characters.

The only difficulty with such demonstrable Britishness of Kureishi is that in the literary and cultural world of London in the 1970s, when Kureishi was beginning to come into his own as a writer, he was nevertheless slotted by potential and commissioning editors for theatre and television into the role of an Asian cultural translator. As he recounts, “they required stories about the new [immigrant] British communities, by cultural translators, as it were, to interpret one side to the other” and though Kureishi knew that as a non-migrant true-born Britisher he was not by upbringing and sensibility “the sort of writer best-suited to this kind of work,” he did it nevertheless because “I just knew I was being paid to write” (in Ranasinha 2002:12). In this version, cultural translation is not so much the need of the migrant, as Bhabha makes it out to be, but rather more a requirement of the society and culture to which he has migrated; it is a hegemonic Western demand and necessity.

For an even more thoroughgoing and self-induced example of a cultural translator, we may look at Jhumpa Lahiri, whose first book of fiction, Interpreter of Maladies: Stories of Bengal, Boston and Beyond (1999), made her the first Indian-born writer to win the Pulitzer prize for fiction in 2000. She was born of Bengali parents in London, grew up in America, became an American citizen at age 18, is by her own admission not really a bilingual though she would like to think she was, and has written fiction not only about Indians in America but
also some stories about Indians still living in India. In answer to the criticism that her knowledge of India as reflected in these stories is demonstrably erroneous and defective, she has said, in an article titled “My Intimate Alien”: “I am the first person to admit that my knowledge of India is limited, the way in which all translations are” (2000:118). This gratuitous trope is sustained and highlighted by her going on to say that her representation of India is in fact her “translation of India” (118). She elaborates this further by stating: “Almost all of my characters are translators, insofar as they must make sense of the foreign to survive” (120).

This echoes, probably unwittingly, the Benjaminian-Derridean sur-vivre, in the sense seized upon by Bhabha, just as Lahiri’s assertion that “translation is not only a finite linguistic act but an ongoing cultural one” (120) reiterates Bhabha’s central premise. And at the conclusion of this essay which Lahiri clearly means to serve as her manifesto and apologia, she declares: “And whether I write as an American or an Indian, about things American or Indian or otherwise, one thing remains constant: I translate, therefore I am” (120). And this from a writer who, like Kurish, has never translated a word, and who admits that when one of her short stories was published in translation into Bengali, which is her parents’ mother-tongue (even if it was not her own) and which was therefore the (other?) language of her childhood, she could not understand the translated version – or as she put it, seeming to shift the responsibility from herself on to the translation, it proved “inaccessible to me” (120).

If this is cultural translation, we perhaps need to worry about the very meaning of the word “translation”. One wonders why “translation” should be the word of choice in a collocation such as “cultural translation” in this new sense when perfectly good and theoretically sanctioned words for this new phenomenon, such as migrancy, exile or diaspora are already available and current. But given the usurpation that has taken place, it may be time for all good men and true, and of course women, who have ever practised literary translation, or even read a translation with any awareness of it being translation, to unite and take out a patent on the word “translation”, if it is not already too late to do so.

Such abuse or, in theoretical euphemism, such catchepheumatical use, of the term translation is, as it happens, mirrored and magnified through a semantic explosion or dilution in popular, non-theoretical usage as well. Newspapers constantly speak of how threats could “translate” into action or popularity into votes; there is a recent book titled Translating L. A., which apparently means no more than describing L. A., and even Susan Bassnett has recently written that Edwin Gentzler’s book Contemporary Translation Theories is not only a critical survey but “effectively also a translation, for the author transforms a whole range of complex theoretical material into accessible language” (in Gentzler 2001:vi). But it is of course the same language, English, in which such theoretical complexity and such acce-
sibility both exist. Even when these are not instances of “cultural translation” in
the sense expounded by Bhabha, these are still instances of a kind of translation
which does not involve two texts, or in some cases even one text, and certainly
not more than one language. These are examples of what Bhabha, with his usual
felicity, has in another context called “non-substantive translation”, and one could
perhaps go a step further and, without any attempt at matching felicity, call it
simply non-translation.

III

In conclusion, one may suggest that there is an urgent need perhaps to protect
and preserve some little space in this postcolonial-postmodernist world, where
newness constantly enters through cultural translation, for some old and old-
fashioned literary translation. For, if literary translation is allowed to wither away
in the age of cultural translation, we shall sooner than later end up with a wholly
translated, monolingual, monocultural, monolithic world. And then those of
us who are still bilingual, and who are still untranslated from our own native
ground to an alien shore, will nevertheless have been translated against our will
and against our grain. Further, translation itself would have been untranslated
or detranslated, for it would have come under erasure in a sense rather less de-
structive than Derrida’s but plainly more destructive. The postcolonial would
have thoroughly colonized translation, for translation in the sense that we have
known and cherished it, and the value it possessed as an instrument of discovery
and exchange, would have ceased to exist. Rather than help us encounter and
experience other cultures, translation would have been assimilated in just one
monolingual global culture.

All the recent talk of multiculturalism relates, it may be noted, not to the
many different cultures located all over the world, but merely to expedient social
management of a small sample of migrants from some of these cultures who have
actually dislocated themselves and arrived in the First World, and who now must
be melted down in that pot, or tossed in that salad, or fitted as an odd little piece
into that mosaic. These stray little jetsam and flotsam of world culture which have
been washed up on their shores are quite enough for the taste of the First World.
Migrancy, often upper class, elite migrancy as for example from India, has already
provided the First World with as much newness as it needs and can cope with, and
given it the illusion that this tiny fraction of the Third World has already made
the First World the whole world, the only world there is. Those of us still located
on our own home turf and in our own cultures and speaking our own languages
can no longer be seen or heard. All the politically correct talk of ecodiversity
and biodiversity concerns a harmless and less problematic level of species below the human; there is no corresponding desire that one can discern for cultural or linguistic diversity. Funds from all over the world are being poured in to preserve and propagate the Royal Bengal Tiger, for example, which is declared to be an endangered species, but no such support is forthcoming for the Indian languages, which seem to be equally endangered by the increasing decimation of world languages by the one all-devouring, multinational, global language, English. It occurs to me that no international agency may want to save the Royal Bengal Tiger if it actually roared in Bengali. There may be the little problem then of having to translate it into English first. In any case, the World Wildlife Fund is committed to saving only wild life, not cultured life.

In this brave new dystopian world of cultural translation, translation ironical-ly would have been translated back to its literal, etymological meaning, of human migration. Except that, as the early Christian use of the term implies, translation in the sense of being borne across takes place when a dead person is bodily trans-ported to the next world, or on a rare occasion when his body is transferred one grave to another, as happened famously in the case Thomas à Becket, who was actually murdered and initially buried near the crypt of the Canterbury Cathedral but then, about 150 years later, when the trickle of pilgrims had become a mighty stream, was moved and buried again within the same Cathedral in the grand new Trinity Chapel. In both these senses, of bodily removal to the next world or to the next grave, we are talking of someone who is truly dead and buried. The many indigenous languages of the world and the channel of exchange between them, literary translation, may seem headed for the same fate in the time of cultural translation: to be dead and buried.
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