

# translation

a transdisciplinary journal

Issue 5 - 2017

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# translation

a transdisciplinary journal



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**translation, a transdisciplinary journal**, is an international peer-reviewed journal published in collaboration with the Nida School of Translation Studies.

Recent developments in our contemporary world (globalization, interculturalism, global and transcultural communication through the web) pose a challenge to every traditional concept of translation. Today, translation has to be considered as a transformative representation of, in, and among cultures and is poised to become a powerful epistemological instrument for reading and assessing cultural exchange.

We imagine a new era that could be termed **Posttranslation Studies**, an era of fundamental transdisciplinarity.

**translation** invites new thinking about what translation is today, about where translation occurs, and about how we can find new words to speak about translation.

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# Introduction

After an interruption of almost two years, due to a change of publisher and additional complications, I am delighted to announce that *translation: A transdisciplinary journal* is back—stronger and better than before. Thanks to a collaboration with the publisher Eurilink University Press located in Rome in Italy, we are finally able to take up all the threads we had fashioned and, more importantly, are creating anew.

We owe all our readers sincere apologies for the inconvenience this delay has caused many of you—readers who have been waiting for new articles and issues to peruse; authors who have been waiting to see their articles published; subscribers who have paid to receive the journal in print, online, or both; the community following us online. Thank you for your patience and faith in our shared project that is *translation*.

To get back on schedule as soon as possible, we will be publishing issue 6—a special issue devoted to *Memory* and guest edited by Bella Brodzki and Cristina Demaria—immediately after the present one.

Before I introduce the exciting content of this issue, let me present a few new entries and changes in the journal's staff. **Carolyn Shread** (Mount Holyoke College, USA) is the journal's new assistant editor, and **Giuliana Schiavi** and **Salvatore Mele** (both Scuola Superiore Mediatori Linguistici, Vicenza, Italy and members of FUSP—Fondazione Universitaria San Pellegrino) are new members of the editorial board. In truth, they are not really new, since all three have served at the journal since 2014; but this is the first time they are officially connected to a new issue of the journal, and are presented to the readers. It is also thanks to Carolyn, Giuliana, and Salvatore that the journal is now reappearing.

**Loc Pham Quoc** (Hoa Sen University, Vietnam), who has already appeared in the journal as author, will in the future serve as

the journal's new reviews editor. He will be responsible for the reviews published on the journal's website ([translation.fusp.it](http://translation.fusp.it)). Reviews will include not only books, but also events, conferences, and other initiatives and publications related to translation.

I look forward to a stimulating collaboration with these four fine scholars and friends. (Please find their bio presentations in the last pages of this issue, and on the journal's website.

A journal's board is important to establish its editorial identity, to guarantee continuity, and to conceive innovative and original issues, but what gives a journal its body is its content. This is ensured by the authors and their articles and contributions, and I am proud to present this new issue's particularly strong and innovative content.

First of all, we are happy to continue the tradition of hosting lectures presented at the yearly Nida Translation Studies Research Symposium in New York. The current issue is therefore publishing **Bella Brodzki's** "Autobiography, Memory, and Translation" and **Suzanne Jill Levine's** response, "Autobiography/Translation: Memory's Losses or Narrative's Gains?" It is a particular pleasure to include these two scholars' contributions, since both serve on the journal's advisory board and have sustained the journal since its foundation. From the same symposium, we also publish an article by Christi Merrill presented below.

Bella Brodzki's point of departure is a strong statement: She argues that "autobiography is a modality of translation" since it translates "experience." The autobiographer, in other words, is a "translator of her own life experience or past, whose meaning is created through the interpretive act of remembering." Brodzki's essay develops ideas presented in her groundbreaking *Can These Bones Live?: Translation, Survival and Cultural Memory* (2007), in which she so convincingly demonstrates how connected memory and translation are, since all translations reconfigure, redefine, and excavate a past, relying on memory and remembering. As mentioned above, Brodzki will be developing the theme of Memory for our next issue as guest editor with Cristina Demaria. In this issue she looks at one special form of memory—autobiography—and analyzes three very different examples of autobiography and their special mode of creating a memoir, conceived here as a self-reflexive mode of translation. The subject of autobiography is

therefore both a translator and a translation; the autobiographee is being displaced, carried over, “shifting shape and form, becoming other to herself.”

As the translation process of the psychic content of self-reflection and memory is a characteristic for autobiography, and “all memory is mediated and motivated,” Brodzki turns to Freud, electing him as a guiding spirit in her inquiry. Freud, himself a paradigmatic figure of translation, provides an interpretive framework for her analysis. The role of autobiography and translation in Freud is present in the essay as a kind of *fil rouge*, and, as **Suzanne Jill Levine** puts it in her response to Brodzki, “Autobiography and Translation come together logically and intuitively in Freud whose early work as a translator helped create his career as a scientist and hence the persona whose theoretical work was practically based on autobiographical as well as clinical reflection.”

Brodzki’s first example is Nabokov’s *Speak Memory*, a book that in itself is particularly interesting also because it is a result of multiple translation processes between Russian and English. Brodzki’s next example is the Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé, whose texts are translated into English by her translator–husband Richard Philcox. Here, Brodzki demonstrates how the couple “enact the ongoing, defining, and productive tension within translation studies, of the paradox of untranslatability on the one hand, and translatability on the other.” Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006) is Brodzki’s final example of another variation on the theme of “how techniques of translation are implicated in the act of materializing, textualizing, and visualizing the autobiographical subject.”

In her response to Brodzki’s lecture, Levine draws attention to parallels between autobiography and biography, asking whether both of these forms of biographical writing, as well as other forms of narrative—fictional and nonfictional—can be considered as having a translational nature. “Are we perhaps speaking of a translational paradigm for narrative in general?” she asks.

Analyzing the case of Dalit literature, “a phenomenon in and of translation,” **Christi Merrill** suggests we “think more carefully about the relationship of translation studies to postcolonial theory.” Her article explores the ways Dalit consciousness is a multi-

lingual issue, connecting it to the multilingualism that is so central in India that one can speak about a “translating consciousness” consisting in an “‘open’ daily negotiation along a continuum of mutual understanding.”

Let me add a personal note here: for me, as a European growing up in an ideologically monolingual society, going to India for the first time last year to attend the international conference on Plurilingualism and Orality at the Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, organized by Babli Moitra Saraf, one of our board members, and with the participation of this journal, it was an incredible surprise to experience how people used several languages simultaneously in a continuous translation movement. It struck me that if the dominating Eurocentric Translation Studies discourse had looked further outside its boundaries, and specifically to the Indian tradition, it would have developed very differently and might have freed itself from the shackles of a binary hierarchy grounded in monolingualism, and the very idea of one necessary original of which any translation is derivative would not have had such a dominating position. The “translating consciousness” of which Merrill speaks is inherently multilingual, which automatically opens an alternative vision of what translation is about.

In regard to Dalit literature, Merrill demonstrates how this multilingual negotiation is all but simple and peaceful; rather, it is connected to domination and repression. Since the language of dominance is predicated on caste, Merrill argues the translating consciousness is a more complex one than the colonizer–colonized binary.

Merrill’s interesting contribution originated as a response to Robert Young’s lecture “Freud on Translation and Cultural Translation” at the same New York symposium at which Bella Brodzki presented her paper. Young’s lecture—not included in this issue since it was committed to another publication—was dedicated to the concept of translation in Sigmund Freud’s work. Merrill works Young’s thematics into the problematic of the translating consciousness of Dalit literature in fascinating ways. For instance, in discussing catharsis as a multilingual project, she creates a parallel to Freud’s idea of psychoanalysis as a translation not only into another language, but as a translation of the unknown.

If the job of the psyche is to “translate” or displace traumatic

experience into a language foreign to the individual subject, the work of psychoanalysis is then to interpret that idiosyncratic language and “de-translate” it back into a language shared with the analyst.

Merrill also sees clear parallels between the idea of cultural translation as explained by Young and Dalit literature, in that “it offers, for example, a possible way of reading the invisible, the subaltern.”

**Valeria Luiselli**’s essay “Translating Talkies in Modernist Mexico. The Language of Cinemas and the Politics of the Sound Film Industry” represents a new and innovative way of looking at how translation may occur through cultural models such as architecture and movies, and how different “translation practices” represent cultural production and exchange. She tells the story of when the first talkies appeared in Mexico, and analyzes the way in which the introduction of sound movies represented a twofold translation, both spatial and cultural. In examining the arrival of sound film technology, Luiselli looks at the relationship between “the modern architectural language of movie theaters and some of the dominating cultural politics of the burgeoning sound film industry in Mexico.” Her question is whether there was a consonance or a dissonance in the relation to the discourse of modernity between sound film technology and architectural perspective, and how they contributed to the formation of ideas of modernity. What emerges is that modernist translation was actually “a way of appropriating new forms and thus a creative locus of innovation.” Luiselli discusses different forms of translation, from dubbing and the politics of film translation to the movie theaters as concrete spaces of translation, or even as translators, thus operating with a refreshingly broad concept of translation.

Although Luiselli’s essay does not discuss this theme, I would suggest that this modernist translation practice was particularly prosperous in South America. The parallels between the thinking on translation expressed by authors such as Borges, De Paz, and especially Haroldo de Campos with his idea of translation as transcreation and even “irreverently amorous devouring,” invite further investigation.

Luiselli describes the fascinating story of how Spanish-speaking dubbers and voice actors were introduced in Hollywood films

to counter the threat of English-language domination not only with their voices but also with “their entire body.” The introduction of American films in Mexico was complicated, however, and all manner of different options were explored in the process—including subtitling, dubbing, simultaneous “remakes,” and printouts of film dialogue. All of this cinematic innovation took place in buildings that were also subject to translational practices, such as the famous Teatro–Cinema Olimpia, for example, which was originally a convent. This movie theater plays a central role in the introduction—translation—of the modern experience to the Mexican audience, and was, in Luiselli’s words, a “translator made of concrete and stone.” Luiselli’s essay anticipates and opens a discussion that will be pursued in the future issue of this journal devoted to spaces and places, guest edited by Sherry Simon and Federico Montanari.

Enquiries about translation in connection to places are also present in **Sherry Simon**’s essay “At the Edge of Empire: Rose Ausländer and Olha Kobylianska,” in which she examines “the work of translation at the edge of empire” through the two Czernowitz authors—the Ukrainian Olha Kobylianska (1863–1942) and the German–Jewish Rose Ausländer (1901–1988) viewed as translators of their border city. Luiselli’s broad concept of translation, applied to cultural practices and movements, are developed by Simon in other both social and physical directions, for instance in the political and geographical borders of a multilingual city.

To translate at the edge of empire—of which Czernowitz is an example in relation to the translational relationships developed through German—is to be especially aware of the ways in which boundaries can accentuate or attenuate difference. Political borders hypostatize cultural and linguistic differences, while geographical borders often show difference to be gradual. The multilingualism of border zones problematizes the activities of translation as source–target transactions.

Drawing on a suggestion in Coetzee’s novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in which the distinction between enemy and citizen, alien and human beings is blurred, Simon looks at “another site of translation at the edge of empire,” a border city that has represented a wall against the alien, discovering similar elusiveness and instability of the borders. Czernowitz is intensely multilingual with the particularity of German as prominent and autonomous, and no

language apparently dominating over the others. In the search of a more realistic — and less idealized — understanding of the multilingualism of Czernowitz, Simon starts by defining it as *translational*, thus underscoring the “connections and convergences across language and communities” that might be much less peaceful and friendly than expected.

Literary transactions express this translational terrain, and one of them is the tendency among many authors at the beginning of the twentieth century to move away from German to other minor languages. One such writer is Olha Kobylianska, who embraced the Ukrainian national cause and translated her texts from German. Her writing can be referred to as “translational writing—a product of the particular *mélange* of cultures particular to the Bukovina and Czernowitz.”

The other author analyzed by Simon, Rose Ausländer, on the contrary, “returns” to German after her permanence in the writing in English. But this choice “is less a one-way and definitive embrace of the authentic tongue than a renewed practice of translation, as she brings back to Germany the long experience of exile, experiencing new forms of displacement within the German-speaking world.”

The eternal question of the relation between original and translation is discussed in **Alfred Mac Adam**’s “Translating Ruins.” In an interesting perspective, he analyzes three sonnets that are direct or indirect derivations of Ianus Vitalis’ (1485–1560) epigram *De Roma* (1552) on the theme of Rome’s ruins. The “poem is a fascinating irony,” Mac Adam argues: “A poem in Latin on mutability that seeks to avoid the mutability of vernacular tongues” results in vernacular translations and imitations of which there exist over a dozen.

The three sonnets compared by Mac Adam are Joachim du Bellay’s 1558 version and the two of which is progenitor or source, namely Edmund Spenser’s 1591 version of Joachim du Bellay and Francisco de Quevedo’s 1648 sonnet. The three sonnets are “simultaneously the same and different, translations and originals” while they are in different relations to the distinction between translation and adaptation. They are all new poems, “appropriate for their language and culture, but none replicates *De Roma* in a vernacular language.”



Each of *translation*'s issues includes an interview. We are happy to continue this tradition since interviews permit a different form of reflection from essays in that they are dialogic, “thinking-out-loud” texts. **Lydia Liu**—who has already published an article with us in our special issue on *Politics* guest edited by Sandro Mezzadra and Naoki Sakai (issue 4) and who will be present in a future issue (issue 7) with the lecture she gave at last year’s New York symposium—was interviewed by Carolyn Shread, *translation*'s assistant editor. In the course of their conversation, Liu’s work against nationalism emerges as a strong starting point for her thinking on translation, which in many respects runs counter to current ideas circulating in translation studies. Not only vocabulary, but intellectual discourse, political theory, and script are among the “foreign” elements that interrogate national literature and national identities in general. Script, and the technology connected to its reproduction such as the telegraph and the typewriter, actually “put pressure on all East Asian societies to reform their scripts.” The paradox consists in the fact that the typewriters’ limitations “[l]ed to campaigns that targeted the native script [. . .] as a backward writing system.”

In regards to Liu’s ideas on the political dimension of translation, this conversation with Liu offers an excellent explanation of the ideas she expressed in her article in issue 4 of this journal: Liu recalls her research on the Opium Wars through which she discovered how translation “could provide an illuminating angle for understanding international politics.”

Contrary to what people generally think, Liu argues that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is *not* a Western document. It is, rather, a document that registers “competing universals.” According to Liu, translation is an event, not just reduced to one instance of textual transfer, and needs to be reconceptualized in terms of situatedness in time and place. “Eventfulness allows temporalities to give any particular text a new mode of life in a new language,” she argues.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue’s articles!

SN

# Autobiography, Memory, and Translation

Bella Brodzki

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**Abstract:** The article traces a range of ways in which autobiography (self/life/writing) and translation are mutually implicated in processes of displacement, recontextualization, mediation, and even comparison. Freud, paradigmatic figure of translation and archeologist of memory, is the guiding spirit of this study. Its broad psychoanalytic framework situates three exemplary autobiographical narratives and the modes of translation they perform: Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*, Maryse Condé's *La vie sans fards*, and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*.

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The point of departure of my talk today is that autobiography is a modality of translation. Both autobiography and translation propel change, involve movement, recontextualization, mediation, even comparison. What is aptly named and fits under the rubric of autobiography—meaning self/life/writing—refers to a broad range of self-referential maneuvers and practices, and is at base a Western genre predicated on a notion of the individual self as at once autonomous and relational, and capable of being both “the observing subject and the object of investigation” (Smith and Watson 1998, 4). Autobiography claims a venerable and variable tradition that begins roughly with St. Augustine's conversion narrative *Confessions* and includes slave narratives, *testimonios*, and such recent examples of the *Küntzlerroman* as Patti Smith's *Just Kids*. A useful working definition (if joyfully and consistently revised) of autobiography for scholars in the field comes from Philip Lejeune: “a retrospective narration produced by a real person concerning her/his own existence, focusing on the development of her/his own life, in particular the development of her/his personality” (Lejeune 1989, 4). What the French theorist calls “the autobiographical pact” is the assurance given the reader by the signature on the autobiogra-

phy's cover that the author, the narrator, and the protagonist of this narration share a common identity. Autobiography—or what is referred to quite commonly, in the wake of post-Enlightenment theories of the subject and postcolonial discourse, as “life writing” or “life narrative”—is, in any case, not limited to the written, but can be performative, visual, filmic, or digital. What is interesting in all modes of life narrative is that the referential relationship between the origin and the translation, as it were—as well as between the autobiographer and the reader—is contractual.

Please keep in mind as well that even, or especially, in autobiography studies, the very elements that comprise the constellation of self/life/writing are all culturally contested and problematized today. Put another way, and critical rigor notwithstanding, the valence of the various theoretical terms relevant to the autobiographical enterprise, including such marketplace labels as “memoir,” changes depending on the specific discursive context. Much can be at stake ideologically, at least for literary critics and scholars of autobiography; what is a nuanced distinction in one instance is a major conceptual marker in another, a most obvious example of which being the ontological/epistemological difference between a “self” and a “subject”. The former term has metaphysical connotations, the latter is a discursive construction, and my view lies somewhere between the two—I don't link “selfhood” with plenitude, transcendence, or authenticity, but nor do I consider the “I” to be merely a linguistic effect. How terms are implemented and interpreted, then, is itself a matter of translation, and heavily dependent on reception, on audience, on readership. Though I will use a variety of terms today, most of which are modifiers of “self,” this is not an indication of their interchangeability within a prescribed category or lexical field; rather it is an effort on my part to gesture towards the richness of the genre and its ongoing generativity.

Returning to my opening assertion that autobiography is a modality of translation, let us consider that the autobiographer or producer of an autobiographical event is engaged in a process of subjective displacement, a carrying over of an idea or a notion of a life and/or selfhood. In the act of being inscribed or narrativized, *the autobiographer is being translated*. Being translated for an autobiographer means shifting shape and form, becoming other to her/himself, as s/he distinguishes her/himself from others

through language. Another critical dimension of the autobiography/translation nexus is that translators inscribe their subjectivity into their versions, most acutely, into the views on translation they espouse and the strategies they deploy. Just as the autobiographer is reading herself/himself otherwise, so is the translator inscribing herself/himself through an other's voice and text, into another linguistic or signifying form. *To write is to be written, to narrate is to be narrated, to translate is to be translated.*

In my talk I shall be exploring a few of the myriad ways a subject verbalizes, materializes, and textualizes the process of self-analysis, self-reflection, and self-inscription in both autobiography and translation, as reflections on each other. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the self—as source material—is a given, that it is transparent to itself, or that it is anterior to any act of interpretation. Precisely, I shall explore how various facets of the translation complex play out in three dissimilar and distinctive autobiographical projects. My literary examples are modern and contemporary, yet they differ widely from each other. As a comparatist, I take seriously the conceit that seemingly strange juxtapositions can be most productive and illuminating. My first literary example is text based: Russian polyglot Vladimir Nabokov's exemplary, self-translated autobiography *Speak, Memory* (1947). The second concerns the intriguing and divergent autobiographical positions of Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé and her British translator-husband Richard Philcox regarding their embedded situation (although I will make some reference to *La vie sans fards*, published in 2012, her most recent, and as yet untranslated autobiography), where most of my commentary will concern them as a translation couple and its implications for the global literary marketplace. The third is also text based, but transgeneric: American cartoonist Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006). In each case, the autobiographer is implicitly, and often explicitly—depending on the various modes and languages involved—a translator of his or her own “life experience” or past whose meaning is created through the interpretive act of remembering.

As a paradigmatic figure of translation, Freud is my guiding or informing spirit into this area of inquiry: Freud as an object of translation; as a translator himself; and as a theorist, especially in the early essay “Screen Memories” (1899), in itself a selection

of his own childhood recollections, disguised in dialogic form. The translation history of the writings of Sigmund Freud is one of the most fascinating, controversial, and overdetermined instances of the power of a particular translator to influence indefinitely a target culture's reception of a major body of thought. As some Anglophone readers of Freud are aware, the copyright on James Strachey's twenty-four volume *Standard Edition* expired in 1989, provoking debates worldwide on the consequences of retranslating Freud's works, not only for those reading in English, but in all foreign versions, since many are translations from the English and not the original German. On the one hand, Strachey's monumental endeavor has been admired for its homogeneous lucidity and consistency; on the other, it has been excoriated for effectively integrating and synthesizing what Freud left fragmentary and "processive," most glaringly for imposing Ancient Greek and Latin terminology onto everyday German words in the service of making Freudian discourse sound more "scientific." Even as Freud (and his daughter Anna) approved of Alix and James Strachey's, along with Ernest Jones and A. A. Brill's, systematizing of psychoanalytic terminology, however, he continued up until his death to use the same rich range and variety of ambiguous, and often contradictory, terms to describe the most elusive and intimate workings of "psychic life"—as he had always done.

At the risk of committing the intentional fallacy, can we infer that Freud privileged dissemination over fidelity in translation, that his conception of language as figurative and fluid, and translation as a pervasive medium of human experience, was broadly intercultural and transhistorical, consonant with his desire to attract the widest possible foreign readership for his radical creation—psychoanalysis—thus securing its status in history, as he put it, as the third revolution, after those of Copernicus and Darwin? As we well know, if it is almost impossible to overstate Freud's influence on modernity, it is not in the realm of science that he made his impact (though this may be changing again, as neuroscientists uncover the brain's relationship to the unconscious), but in the domain of culture, and the individual's relation to it, as evidenced by the way those very archaisms for which Strachey was criticized have infiltrated every aspect of our speech. All the more interesting, then, that the Freud who is universally invoked is, in fact, linguistical-

ly and culturally specific. As the essays in Darius Gray Ornston Jr.'s edited study *Translating Freud* show, many of the challenges raised by translating Freud are not only theoretical or conceptual in nature, but have to do with his extraordinary gifts as a stylist who enjoyed and exploited the rhetorical, aesthetic, and expressive qualities of language, especially that of his native German, which was inflected by his inveterate erudition and cosmopolitanism.

Freud was an autobiographer, too, drawing on his own interiority as a source text to be interpreted and analyzed as he wrestled with his developing “science of the mind“ (Freud 1995a, 30), whose purview, he claimed, was no longer only psychopathology, but its relevance to what we now call “the neurotic normal.” He wrote “An Autobiographical Study” in 1924, at the age of sixty-eight. An account of the internal development of psychoanalysis as well as its external history (Freud 1995a, 30), the autobiographical essay was published as a contribution to a volume of “self-portraits” by prominent physicians. Far less personal than his case studies, his correspondence with Fleiss, the seemingly minor “Screen Memories” (1899), the monumental *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), or *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), “An Autobiographical Study” is nonetheless a revealing document and has substantial explanatory power. Freud used this essay as an occasion to present an introduction or overview of his ideas as they evolved, and of their reception in the international scientific community. As a self-portrait of the investigator, it tempts the reader to surmise that in Freud’s mind “la psychanalyse, c’est moi!”

Translation is central to the story Freud tells. In the early days of his career, he recounts, the planes shifted considerably when, as a foreign student and auditor in Paris, he offered to translate “a new volume of [Charcot’s] lectures into German.” Freud translated not only the third volume of Charcot’s *Lessons on Diseases of the Nervous System* (1886) and *Tuesday’s Lessons at the Salpêtrière* (1887–1888), but five entire books in all, from French and English into German. Though he had a position as a lecturer in pathology in Vienna, it was his work as a translator that gained him entry into Charcot’s circle of personal acquaintances and full participation in the activities at Salpêtrière Clinic (Freud 1995a, 6).

According to Patrick Mahony, “Freud made translation a unified field concept” (Mahony 2001, 837). Mahony elaborates that

in psychoanalysis the patient may be psychically conceived as a succession or accumulation of translations, with the analyst assuming the complementary role of a translator. By means of translations—psychic material is itself already a translation in need of a second order translation—“the analyst effects a translation of what is unconscious into consciousness” (Mahony 2001, 837); that is, dreams translate what the dreamer dreams to what the dreamer remembers and reports, translates from mental image to verbal narration. Mahony also gives the following specific examples of what Freud deemed to be translations: dreams; generalized hysterical, obsessive, and phobic symptomatology; parapraxis (this term for a slip of the tongue is itself a wonderful example of a Strachey classical archaism); fetishes; the choice of suicidal means; and the analyst’s interpretations (Mahony 2001, 837). Freud’s autobiographical study is also a form of translation of his life and career as a scientist and a defense, even an apologia, of his intellectual legacy.

I hope that these broad psychoanalytic insights will provide us with an interpretive framework for thinking figuratively and rhetorically about the autobiographers and translators we are about to discuss.

### **Vladimir Nabokov**

Nabokov’s *Speak, Memory* (1947) is a virtuosic synesthetic, translingual, transmodal, transcultural performance. I will barely pierce the surface of its many layers and textures today. By making the reader of the foreword privy to the many stages of rewriting, reframing, and recasting of what he calls “a systematically correlated assemblage of personal recollections ranging geographically from St. Petersburg to St. Nazaire, and covering thirty-seven years, from August 1903 to May 1940” (Nabokov 1947, 9), Nabokov might be giving us too much, before the first page of the autobiography proper has even been accessed. The detailed paratextual information, much like the exquisite meditation on the nature of a privileged life as only a consummately privileged polyglot consciousness could render it, is daunting and somewhat overwrought. Translated into French, German, Spanish, and Italian by other translators, Nabokov explains that “for the present, final edition [...] I have availed myself of the corrections I made while turning it into Russian. This re-Englishing of

a Russian re-version of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place” (Nabokov 1947, 12–13) is likened to the kinds of multiple metamorphoses familiar to butterflies, but previously untried by humans. If in the foreword he posits himself as remarkable among his species, those very literary and linguistic feats are grounded in a principle of translation that treats every change in form as a new thing to be celebrated, but not at the expense of preserving or immortalizing moments or stages of perfection. And yet, the exiled writer’s essay on the challenges of translating Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* into English reveals a translator hostile to a free-form, target-friendly version of a classic. His rarefied, academic, heavily annotated translation privileged its own elite audience, reflecting, as Lawrence Venuti puts it, Nabokov’s “deep nostalgic investment in the Russian language and in canonical works of Russian literature while disdain-ing the homogenizing tendencies of American consumer culture” (Venuti 2012, 110–111).

Is there a connection between Nabokov’s protectionist views of the role of a literary translator and the way he translated his own life? A self-declared “chronophobic” (Nabokov 1947, 19), his disclaimer about any affection for the psychoanalytic method might suggest there is:

I have ransacked my oldest dreams for keys and clues—and let me say at once that I reject completely the vulgar, shabby, fundamentally medieval world of Freud, with its crankish quest for sexual symbols... and its bitter little embryos spying, from their natural nooks, upon the love life of their parents. (Nabokov 1947, 20)

Doth he protest too much? It is not my intention here to put little Vladimir’s psyche on the couch, despite the wealth of material he provides throughout this text (and elsewhere in his oeuvre), only to indicate that while Nabokov is reacting to the most reductive and vulgar version of Freud in terms of symbolic content, he is also using hermeneutic instruments in ways that strongly resemble Freud’s methods. Each embodies qualities of both the scientist and the poet, and both are formalists of the first order. Indeed, as masterful interpreters of signs and symptoms, and decoders of patterns, both are drawn to structural repetitions, as well as to what escapes those structures and strictures. Critics, among them Jeffrey Berman and Jenefer Shute, have addressed why the



figure of Freud looms so large—and so negatively—for Nabokov, as well as the implications for an understanding of his fiction, especially *Lolita*. It seems to me that what Nabokov rejects in Freud is his primordial pessimism about human nature, and that what he negates is the general principle that he—that is, Nabokov—might not be master of his own mind.

If the opening chapter of *Speak, Memory* is about anything, it is the eros/thanatos dialectic, as is the book's final chapter, which focuses on intergenerational transmission and the transcendent or redemptive power of the aesthetic imagination. But my aim now is to direct attention to the associative method of forming composite events that Freud and Nabokov share, and which serves as Nabokov's template or creed for turning one's life into a work of art. What Nabokov calls "the match theme"—the Freudian germ of which is a verbal or imagistic link revealing a thematic or symbolic correspondence—is exemplified in two fabulously dramatic events drawn from his childhood. One of those themes is the tragic irony of history, as illustrated in the destiny of a certain General Kuropatkin, a friend of Nabokov's father, who in one scene, while playing a "match" game with young Vladimir in which he "depicts the sea in calm and stormy weather," (Nabokov 1947, 27) is informed that he will lead the Russian Army against the Japanese in the 1905 War. Fifteen years later, disguised as a peasant, he comes across Nabokov's father in flight from the Bolsheviks, and asks him for a match.

Though his childhood was indeed blessed, Nabokov's message to his attentive reader above all is that the art of living is less a matter of being endowed with rich original content than it is a matter of a perceiving intelligence imposing sensorial and cognitive mastery over the flux and chaos of the world. "The match theme" is a lesson in how to work with one's source material: tracking, tracing, and linking across time and space seemingly unrelated episodes or events through a metonymic/metaphorical leap that brings them together and thereby raises them to a higher level of meaning, a threshold for further reflection, interpretation, and commentary. (It is, for example, a lesson in linking the moves on a chessboard with the assassination of his beloved father, not as the outcome of a duel the child dreads, but at a public lecture, when it was least expected and he was shielding the body of a more likely politi-

cal target.) Nabokov's technique for critical reading is the model for translating a life, and it is, then, primarily aesthetic in nature. That is, it foregrounds the structural and formal aspects of even the most spectacular and catastrophic of human experiences without divesting the events of any of their wondrous or devastating force, identifying—or, rather, creating—patterns, establishing affinities and thematic correspondences amidst/across what would otherwise remain inchoate, separate, isolated ephemera. “The following of such thematic designs through one's life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography” (Nabokov 1974, 21). After *Speak, Memory*, not only is it impossible to read autobiography the same way again, but it is impossible to live autobiographically—that is, to think about one's life as a thematic design—in the same fashion once one has internalized Nabokov's model.

The opening passage of *Speak, Memory*—beginning with “The cradle rocks above an abyss” on page 19—offers one of the most striking images and meditations on mortality to be found in the annals of autobiography. Yet the genesis of *Speak, Memory* was what is now the book's fifth chapter, written originally in French and titled “Mademoiselle O.” That Nabokov was both worldly literate and deeply imprinted by Russian literature is made manifest in the portrait which serves as the premise for this chapter. Its declared purpose is to reclaim through memory the destiny of his old French governess, whom he felt he had betrayed by having previously turned her into a fictional character, thus denying her the independent existence that rightfully belonged to her.

Nabokov's revisitation of the Swiss governess “Mademoiselle” begins with her arrival by sleigh to the Russian countryside in the winter of 1905–1906. Though of his many tutors and governesses she was the object of some ridicule and derision, he now pays selective tribute to her “lovely” French and its impact on his appreciation for French literature. I have chosen to focus on this recontextualized portrait of the hapless, enormous, miserable figure, because indeed she may not be substantial enough on her own terms to support the attempt “to salvage her from fiction” (Nabokov 1947, 117). And this is not, despite the reasons he initially gives, Nabokov's prime motive for memorializing her. The autobiographer announces straight away that he is imagining the scene, that he is seeking recourse in fiction once again: “I was not

there to greet her; but I do so now as I try to imagine what she saw and felt at that last stage of her fabulous and ill-timed journey” (Nabokov 1947, 98).

The memorialist’s conjuring of poor Mademoiselle—who remains a rather disdained and pathetic character in this portrayal—has been culturally, linguistically, and, of course, physically displaced to the Russian steppes from her native Switzerland. The overarching image is of snow.

Very lovely, very lonesome. But what am I doing in this stereoscopic dreamland? How did I get here? Somehow, the two sleighs have slipped away, leaving behind a passportless spy standing on the blue-white road in his New England snow-boots and stormcoat. The vibration in my ears is no longer their receding bells, but only my old blood singing. All is still spellbound, enthralled by the moon, fancy’s rear-vision mirror. The snow is real, though, and as I bend to it and scoop up a handful, sixty years crumble to glittering frost-dust between my fingers. (Nabokov 1947, 100)

A symbolic identification grounds Nabokov’s authorial/auto-biographical position in this classic Russian novelistic scene in which, laying his devices bare, he inserts himself at the end as both observing subject (“passportless spy”) and object of reflection (“But what am I doing [...] ? How did I get here?”) through the temporal and spatial displacement of “snow,” and Nabokov and Mademoiselle, who now occupy virtually equivalent or transposable positions in relation to the other’s estrangement. His underlying resistance to the idea that perhaps there was more to Mademoiselle than her lack of finesse is made clear to him belatedly, through his own experience of exile and loss, primarily as a result of the Russian Revolution. In an act of literary mediation and empathic projection he comes to understand the gravitas of her life story as a key to understanding his own. With retrospective insight he says at another point in the chapter that this is something “I could appreciate only after the things and beings that I had most loved in the security of my childhood had been turned to ashes or shot through the heart” (Nabokov 1947, 117).

Nabokov’s insight, shared with Freud, is that all memory is mediated and motivated, and dependent on a dynamic imagination; because the psychic content of original memory is not available, whether because of absence or inaccessibility, it cannot be

restored without being translated to later experiences, desires, and needs.

### **Maryse Condé**

Maryse Condé, Guadeloupean author of several novels about Caribbean heroines in Africa, slavery in the Antilles, the Salem witch trials, and even a revisionary reading of *Wuthering Heights*, has written two autobiographies: *Tales from the Heart: True Stories From My Childhood*,<sup>1</sup> and the recently published—but still untranslated—*La vie sans fards* (2012). Self-identified as a classically-schooled Francophone Caribbean writer, by which I mean that her readership would typically comprise Continental French and Antillean readers, she has attained preeminent status in the literary marketplace as a global Caribbean writer—in the company of Derek Walcott, Caryl Phillips, Edouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Rafael Confiant, and Edwidge Danticat—as a result of translation. Being translated, especially into English, has enabled Condé’s work—albeit in altered form—to exceed its linguistic and cultural boundaries and live beyond its own spatial and temporal borders, however they have been constituted. In short, it has brought her the widest possible reception.

And yet Condé’s translation complex is of a special order, especially when read in a context—familial and erotic—that so readily invites a psychoanalytic interpretation; I am not going to undertake such a reading here. *La vie sans fards* is devoted primarily to the years she spent in West Africa during the politically promising period of decolonization, and then the corruption, hypocrisy, and repression of the postindependence regimes. This experience, which she consistently recounts in amatory language, “occupied a central place in my life and in my imagination” (Condé 2012, 16; translation mine); but it was a painful disappointment, a doomed affair. Her less than positive depiction of African life, as seen in both her fiction and memoir, has made her a provocative and somewhat controversial figure in postcolonial literary circles. The continent couldn’t attract her sufficiently or compel her enough—despite long and varied opportunities during her sojourns in Guinea, Ghana, Ivory Coast,

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published in French in 1999; translated into English by Richard Philcox in 2001. In-text reference will be to the 2001 English edition.

and Senegal—to learn to speak Malinké, Fulani, Peulh, or Wolof. In this failed intercultural encounter in which France, the Caribbean, and Africa are not reduced to the points they occupy in a colonial constellation, Condé represents herself as untranslatable, unable to be taken on her own terms in a different context. Conversely, her inability to find reflections of herself in Africa, to be recognized as herself and not a “toubabesse” [white woman, because Antillaise, for example], reinforces her sense of isolation and exclusion, whether it be a result of history, racial identity, and/or cultural and class values. It is an otherness to which she clings and which she reads as immutable.

This paradoxical sense of her own untranslatability drives the narrative, as the autobiographer depicts herself struggling against forces and structures that threaten her integrity, as metaphorically and literally understood. The critical matter pertaining to translation and memory here is not the authenticity or veracity of the self-portrait as the autobiographer renders it, but the conditions of its reception, as she has experienced it. Distinguishing her motivations from the idealizing ones most often attributed to the conventions of recounting a life, Condé proclaims her passion for “unvarnished” truth-telling in the introduction, as she stakes a claim for her singularity while also invoking a more abstract, albeit gendered, universality. She inscribes herself squarely within the French Enlightenment and Romantic traditions from the outset: “I want to display to my kind a woman in every way true to nature, and the woman I portray shall be myself” (Condé 2012, 12; translation mine).

Despite Condé’s resolute individualism, feisty independence, and political risk-taking, her lively and sometimes harrowing narrative is framed, on its first and last pages, by her two husbands, the Guinean Mamadou Condé and the English Richard Philcox, whom she met in Senegal. Her marriage to Philcox will take place outside the narrative, but she pays homage to their first meeting and telegraphs what is to follow. “He was the one who would change my life. He would take me to Europe and then to Guadeloupe. We would discover America together. He would help me gently separate from my children and resume my studies. Above all, thanks to him, I would begin my career as a writer” (Condé 2012, 334; translation mine).

Condé herself is an accomplished English speaker and scholar

of English literature, who taught for many years at Columbia and other esteemed universities; but she seems to consider translation at best as a mechanistic exercise or practical necessity, not a creative practice worthy of her critical attention. Her manifest lack of interest in translations of her work, when the stakes are, ironically, so high, sound disingenuous for many reasons—not the least of which is that she lives on such intimate and privileged terms with her translator. One could conceive such indifference as a matter of blind trust, and a convenient division of labor, since—in addition to being her translator—Philcox also handles all of her negotiations. Ironically, however, their embedded relation seems to ensure that instead of being on the same page regarding translation, their perspectives as a translational couple remain absolutely divergent.

As is evidenced in a fascinating 1996 interview with Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier (the authors of *Translating Slavery*) conducted in French with Philcox (with Condé present) in which he describes his training, strategy, and evolution as a translator, Philcox sees his role as quite important. He valorizes the complex process of “recreating” a text and bringing the writer to a different cultural—that is, Anglophone—audience (Kadish and Massardier, 751). Not only does he believe there is an affinity between the original and the translation, but he also maintains that he is “communicating the author’s writing in another language, in another culture” (Kadish and Massardier, 751; translation mine). Moreover, his translation practice is patently target-oriented; he seeks to make the author, as he says, more “transparent” to the reader, but not at the price of displacing “the geography of the text,” whatever it may be. The challenge for him may be less a question of linguistic specificity than of Condé’s “esoteric” cultural references; he even acknowledges being “market-driven” on her behalf. Rather than feeling diminished or constrained, Philcox concedes that he feels liberated by Condé’s indifference to his practice, as well as his product (Kadish and Massardier, 755). And he ultimately attributes his progress over the course of his career as a translator, interestingly enough, not to years of living with Condé, his author–wife, or to the cumulative experience of translating her work, but to studying translation theory (Kadish and Massardier, 755–756). That Philcox is sensitive to the gender question—“Do I have the right to translate a novel written by a

woman? This question has greatly haunted me” (Kadish and Mas-sardier, 756)—reveals not only a great deal about his own refined and acute sensibility, but also attests to the primacy of gender as a marker of identity for Condé; whereas race seems to figure little, if at all, as a factor of difference for either of them.

It is, of course, quite possible that Condé’s antitranslation posture is purely performative; but, if so, what is its value and what are its implications? What Condé stands for in this translation couple is the irreducible difference between languages. Thus, whereas the translator, invested in global transmission and reception, considers his work to be coextensive with the original author’s work, she—dedicated to perfecting her own literary style in her own tongue—considers them to be distinct. As I have said, Condé has stated her position on many occasions: that translation, being a transforming principle, doesn’t regard her, that she is “othered” in translation, both culturally and linguistically. Her insistence on this fact is consonant with what would seem to be the overarching message of her autobiographical oeuvre. In a conversation with Emily Apter, which was conducted in French—“transposed,” not “transcribed” (Apter’s words) and translated into English, and which appeared in 2001—Condé puts a fine point on what I have described above:

I have never read any of my books in translation... In translation, the play of languages is destroyed. Of course, I recognize that my works have to be translated, but they are really not me. Only the original really counts for me. Some people say that translation adds to the original. For me, it is another work, perhaps an interesting one, but very distant from the original. (Apter, 92)

Beyond the intriguing and alluring personal and domestic implications of Condé and Philcox as a translation couple, together they enact the ongoing, defining, and productive tension within translation studies, especially in relation to world literature and the global marketplace. Whatever the psychological source of Condé’s alienation or iconoclastic individualism, her view of translation as (1) radical difference and of untranslatability as (2) an act of personal or even political resistance, actually coexists, of course—as it has throughout history—with the enduring, competing reality of multilingualism. The inherent paradox of untranslatability in translation is what makes cultural memory possible. What this

translation couple reminds us of is that we must remain vigilant in the face of world literature's instrumentalist, ever-serviceable view of translatability as an unproblematic given.

### **Alison Bechdel**

Translation is the major operative principle in comics, defined for our purposes today as a juxtaposition of words and images that create a sustained narrative within deliberately sequenced bordered panels. In its particular interplay of the visual and the verbal, comics are not the verbal representation of visual art — ekphrasis — nor a representation of the world, but an interpretation; indeed, as Douglas Wolk puts it in *Reading Comics*, “Cartooning is a metaphor for the subjectivity of perception” (21). Perhaps it is the premium placed on personal drawing style, indeed of handwriting, in comics that makes it an especially interesting instance of autobiographical memory as a process of translation; since the object of our attention is self-perception and self-inscription across different cultural, social, and discursive contexts. I shall not be discussing comics or graphic narrative generally here, but *graphic memoir*, or what Gillian Whitlock calls “autographics” or “autographies” (Whitlock 2006, 966) as yet another variation on the theme of how techniques of translation are implicated in the act of materializing, textualizing, and visualizing the autobiographical subject.

In chapter 4, which is roughly the center of Alison Bechdel's critically acclaimed, densely and riveting inter/intratextual graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (2006), the author foregrounds the book's metaperformative processes, making explicit what W. J. T. Mitchell describes as “the relation between the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling” (Mitchell 1986, 47). The astute reader already recognizes that comics are a language; this chapter declares that the memoir is a self-reflexive mode of translation, which also situates its autobiographical project within a comparative network of signifying systems, most overtly Modernist literature and family photographs, but also the *künstlerroman* and lesbian coming-out stories. The canon of references comprises Camus, Fitzgerald, James, Stevens, Wilde, Joyce, Colette, and Proust. What characterizes such a narrative as “intra-” as well as “inter-” textual is that the images do not only transact with words, but they also engage with each other.



In what Hillary Chute describes as a “cross-discursive” medium, intertextuality itself is rendered figuratively/pictorially as well as literally/verbally, showing how textual and visual forms and rhetorical strategies interact to make latent psychic matter manifest, as in dreamwork. With her deft deployment of displacement and condensation, metaphor and metonymy, Bechdel makes the reader wonder, in the spirit of Jacques Lacan, if the unconscious isn’t structured like a cartoon.

Bechdel’s intricately drawn, hyperliterary account of growing up in Middle America in a hothouse of aesthetic expression and erotic repression is constructed around her complex, ambivalent relationship with her authoritarian, fastidious, secretive father who bonded with her over books—while he slyly eludes another primal identification they also shared. An expert in historic architectural preservation, director of a family funeral home business, and high school English teacher, her father Bruce died when Bechdel was nineteen, leaving her to decipher the rich but troubling legacy of similarity and difference that defined their relationship—left her, in other words, to translate the scrambled codes she inherited from him. Indeed, Bruce’s closeted homosexuality and the circumstances surrounding his ambiguous death—was it an accident or suicide?—generate this multilayered work.

If in verbal autobiography “a lived life” as mediated through memory is the source text, in an autographic work—because its medium is patently visual—the source text would be assumed to be the same; however the relation between content and form is not integrated, synchronous, or organic in comics. If anything, the contiguity between content and form calls attention to the gap between them, to the space between image and words. Indeed, a graphic memoir challenges the primacy of verbal language as the source material, however coded or abstruse, or conveyer of both self-referential and extrareferential truth about that life. Comics are certainly a form of intersemiotic translation, as defined by Roman Jakobson: “transposition from one system of signs into another, e.g. from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting” (Venuti 2012, 118). But that formulation seems too one-sided for this case. Though there are clearly two systems of signs, it may be impossible to determine which is the source text and which the target, on the level of verbal versus visual signs.

Understanding the deceptive simplicity of comics is counter-intuitive for serious readers of literature who are unaccustomed to having to process words and images within the same bounded space in a self-conscious, extensive fashion. What determines the order of reading of the panels, and how does size and shape matter? Horizontal or vertical? What about the blanks *between* the panels? How are they to be understood? While not exactly functioning as negative space, these blanks, called “gutters,” are also the borders outlining the images. What happens in that space? And, how is that space to be filled in? These elements are—pardon, the expression—graphic reminders that comics, like verbal narrative, leave out more than they put in. It may initially seem as though the pictures are easier to grasp than the text, thus requiring less critical scrutiny, but this assumption does not take into account the density of information the pictures actually convey, some of which might be purely aesthetic or formalist in nature, and not content-driven or plot-enhancing at all. (No less so than in literature, virtuosity is a virtue in comics.) Thus the reader of comics who privileges the words at the expense of the images has failed to understand what is intrinsically, internally translatable about comics; and, conversely, though it is necessary to possess what is known as “visual literacy,” that alone is also terribly insufficient for understanding comics. Comics are dependent on the dynamic, irreducible interplay between its verbal and visual components.

Bechdel’s precise, fine-line, cross-hatch pictorial style, especially her drawing of interiors, corresponds to her verbal dexterity. In terms of overall conceptual structure and design, the autobiography is relentlessly interpretive; experiences presented as distilled or symbolic abstractions are mined not for their retrospective meaning, but for their present value as sources of speculative potential. “What if” begins many a sentence. Critics Hillary Chute and Julia Watson call Bechdel’s narrative strategy “recursive,” meaning that it is distinctly nonlinear, turning back in on itself, finding its closure in reversals, transversals, and coincidences (Chaney 2011, 149). In the service of creating a sustained narrative, not to mention a satisfying story, an autobiography selects and combines the panels that relate to one another associatively (that is, metaphorically) and/or temporally (that is, metonymically), as in memory. Following a series of events that Bechdel recalls, one

of which includes an encounter with an actual snake, a panel in which she ponders the symbolism of phalluses and their creative and destructive powers, leads next to the scene, as she imagines it, of her father's death, which occurred as he crossed Route 150 carrying a large bundle of brush and was hit by an oncoming truck. The image in the wide panel is of lush foliage—foliage is pervasive in this narrative—lining an empty stretch of road with one lone leaf lying in the middle, suggesting her father's last trace. The text box reads, "... You could say that my father's end was my beginning. Or more precisely, that the end of his lie coincided with my truth" (Bechdel 2007, 117).

In an interview with Hilary Chute, Bechdel refers to the entire enterprise of *Fun Home* as "involuting introspection," pointing out that with the exception of the subplot of her own coming out story, "the sole dramatic incident in the book is that my dad dies" (Chute and Bechdel 2006, 1008). In other words, "the end of his li[f]e" compels a psychic and artistic internalizing process of ghostly remembrance that can be regarded as a "retranslation of the self." As I have elaborated elsewhere, translation in such a context of intergenerational transmission, whose knowledge is posthumous and always belated is, in the Benjaminian and Derridean sense, a passing down, a passing away, and a passing over of the foreign as well as the familiar, a living on through others, differently.

The panel below the drawing of the road invoking her father's death shows Alison and her father traveling in the family car (which is a hearse); Bruce's eyes are on the road, while Alison's head is barely visible as she peers out the window. The caption or text box reads, "Because I'd been lying too, for a long time. Since I was four or five" (Bechdel 2007, 117). What is the connection between these two panels? Everything hinges on the word "because," suggesting both causality and motivation. Bechdel's memory of accompanying her father on a business trip to Philadelphia, and stopping at a luncheonette, is a motivated one because, as she says, "WE [emphasis mine] saw a most unsettling sight." Initially deprived of authorial perspective, the reader/viewer has no idea what the object of their gaze might be. On the following page, there are two unequally-sized panels. The dominant one shows a masculine-looking woman wearing men's clothes. Both father and daughter gaze at her; Alison expresses to the reader/viewer

the great surprise she experienced at this phenomenon. The text box below turns it into an instance of uncanny translation: “But like a traveler in a foreign country who runs into someone from home—someone they’ve never spoken to, but know by sight—I recognized her with a surge of joy.” In the panel below, Bechdel recounts, “Dad recognized her too.” In her memory, he challenges her: “Is *that* [author’s emphasis] what you want to look like?” (Bechdel 2007, 118). In the next panel, on the following page, with the image of the woman writ large, she asks rhetorically, “What could I say?” But to her father, she replies, “*No.*” This is followed by a panel in which father drags daughter, who is still looking back, out of the luncheonette.

This instance of perfect translatability—a memory trace in which both Alison and Bruce, displaced from their own familiar/familial context, recognize another outsider not as a stranger but as someone familiar to them on the basis of an implicit, shared sexual/gender difference—is reconstituted as a primal scene from Bechdel’s childhood, and one of the most charged in the entire autobiography. The cartoonist puts a fine point on it in the next panel when she discloses to the reader, “But the vision of that truck-driving *bulldyke* sustained me through the years” (Bechdel 2007, 119). At the moment of Alison’s “recognition,” she didn’t know what a *bulldyke* was; the signifier may have “sustained” her, but its signification eluded her until later in life. Of course, Bechdel is projecting backward: her superimposition of the term *bulldyke* onto the genre-bending truck-trucker announces itself as belonging to a current linguistic/cultural/political context in which gender identity is understood to be performative and provocatively appropriated. This is a current context her father did not live to fully appreciate, but one she wishes him to assume now. As Madelon Sprengnether puts it, invoking Freud, “[M]emories from childhood vividly recalled in adult life bear no specific relation to what happened in the past. Rather, they are composite formations—elements of childhood experiences as represented through the distorting lens of adult wishes, fantasies, and desires” (Sprengnether 2012, 215).

Freud’s final paragraph in “Screen Memories,” which is an internal dialogue or self-analysis, an example of life-writing masquerading as a narrative with an interlocutor, views memory as a process of construction:

the concept of a “screen memory” as one which owes its value as a memory not to its own content but to the relation existing between some other that has been suppressed... It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood; memories *relating* to our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused. In these periods of *arousal*, the childhood memories did not *emerge*; *they were formed at that time*. And a number of motives, with no concern for historical accuracy, had a part in *forming* them, as well as in the selection of the memories themselves. (Freud 1995b, 126)

What is at stake in this primal scene which Bechdel has reconstructed because it comes to play a determining role in her coming-out story, is relationality of all kinds, grounding all autobiography and translation: the relation between the visual and the verbal (between what is seen and what is not said); between a father and a daughter who witness together, and who share a sense of complicity, but then suppress that bond of knowledge and affinity; between recognition and self-recognition; between lying and truth-telling. It is above all the circuits of deception and self-deception that Bechdel seeks to rewire and overwrite.

Coyly titled “In the shadow of young girls in flower,” after the French title of the second volume of Proust’s *Recherche*, the end of the chapter calls the reader’s attention to the fact that the previous translation of *À l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*—*Within a Budding Grove*—shifts the emphasis from the botanical to the erotic. However, Bechdel interjects, “As Proust himself so lavishly illustrates, the two are pretty much the same thing” (Bechdel 2007, 109). That cavalier conflation serves Bechdel as a metaphor for her father’s love for flowers and her own developing identity as a lesbian, unleashing a cluster of critical convergences interpreted from a current vantage point. Chapter 4, in as much as it invokes Proust’s term “inversion,” is about reading generic and gender indeterminacy, but if Proust serves as the thematic intertext, Freud has certainly provided us with the method for understanding how the bulldyke scene functions in the narrative and why resurrecting this memory now is so critical for Bechdel’s enterprise.

Bechdel’s father started reading Proust the year before he died, and it was after his death that Lydia Davis’s retranslation of *À la recherche du temps perdu* came out; though she prefers the “liter-

alness” of *In Search of Lost Time*, Bechdel laments the fact that *perdu* and *lost* are not simple equivalents: that *perdu* also connotes “ruined, undone, wasted, wrecked, and spoiled” (Bechdel 2007, 119). Bechdel’s point about what is literally as well as figuratively “lost in translation” when this source word in French is transferred to English, is a metacommentary on what is irretrievable. “The complexity of loss itself” (Bechdel 2007, 120) is lost, despite translation’s capacity to recuperate and redeem difference over time and even space. Some differences *are* irreducible variants; they belong to the realm of the untranslatable.

The translation strategy that propels *Fun Home*, however, ultimately valorizes affinity and proximity by domesticating difference through regeneration. The last page of chapter 4 comprises two unequally sized panels, both devoted to drawings taken from a box marked “family photographs” that Bechdel found after her father’s death, including one revealing her father’s transgressive past activities with a former male babysitter. (In her interview with Chute, she attributes the genesis of this book to the discovery of this photograph.) The reader remembers the smaller top photograph as the snapshot of an adolescent girl posing in a bathing suit which is the chapter head image; it serves as a kind of illustration of its title, “In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower.” This time, however, Bechdel alerts the reader that the image in the redrawn photo is not of a girl (Alison, one might have speculated), but of her young father in drag, and looking, as she says, “not mincing or silly at all. He’s lissome, elegant” (Bechdel 2007, 120). In the large panel, that top photo is mostly obscured by the text box.

What grabs the reader’s attention is the juxtaposition of two portraits, and their striking similarities: one of her twenty-two-year-old father sunbathing on the roof of his frat house, the other of Alison on a fire escape on her twenty-first birthday. She wonders if this was taken by his lover, as hers was. For Bechdel, the autographer, the uncanny resemblance between the two figures and their two poses—“the exterior setting, the pained grin, the flexible wrists, even the angle of shadow falling across our faces”—is “about as close as a translation can get” (Bechdel 2007, 120). Where is the original or source? What, about the structural or formal aspects of this strategic arrangement, calls up an act of translation, one in which the points of contact are so acutely

identifiable? Obviously, in this visual commentary there is something beyond a merely shared physical, familial resemblance, even across gender lines. Indeed, it is precisely the fluidity of sexual orientation, gender identification, and polymorphism à la Proust that reveals the configuring of father and daughter identities here as a transposition or displacement, alternatively, of a simple replication of difference (which is one definition of translation). Rather, Bruce and Alison are to be recognized on the page as “inverted versions of each other in the family” (Watson 2008, 135). In this particular act of intergenerational transmission which celebrates the materiality of self-presentation, Bechdel is memorializing a connection that was often resisted in life by both Alison and her father, but which is now reenvisioned through art.

### **Conclusion**

By identifying Nabokov’s, Condé’s, and Bechdel’s autobiographical projects as distinctive modes of translation, I have hoped to show that translating a life requires a particular strategy or technique of self-reflexiveness. The art of self-translation, with its perils and projections, is a highly mediated and motivated act of intimacy that takes place not in a vacuum, but within a set of cultural determinants. By wrestling with questions of familiarity and strangeness, assimilation and resistance, appropriation and deflection, the autobiographer/translator and the translator/autobiographer remind us that neither life nor language is self-contained. In their very existence, autobiographies—which are translations of “experience” and, therefore, subject to infinite and relentless interpretation—serve as testimonies to existential lack and linguistic incompleteness. Invocations of other lives and other voices—repressed, resisted, and reclaimed—autobiographies are translations in search of an original. Thus it is the drive to recuperate what may be always utterly lost—because of the foreignness in ourselves as well as in languages—that endows the autobiographer/translator with the greatest agency of all.

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# Autobiography/Translation: Memory's Losses or Narrative's Gains? Response to Bella Brodzki's Lecture

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“We translate to be translated”—translation transports the translator, but also the reader and the writer, in an act that transforms one text into another. Professor Brodzki uses this quote (which was a rejoinder in my book *The Subversive Scribe* (1991; 2009) to “thou art translated,” a line uttered by Quince to Bottom in Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*), to move onto a broader stage. From the diverse scenarios of Russia and the Francophone Caribbean, from psychoanalysis to graphic memoir, Bella (I use her first name as we are old friends) analyzes parallels between the practice of autobiography and of translation, seeking to expand the definition of autobiography by means of the code of translation. Mediating these two practices she sets out to understand the screening process of memory, how or to what extent memory both distorts and creates the truths it seeks, and especially narratives that propose to reenact memory and to represent the truth.

In her lecture, Bella discusses how autobiography, like translation, is a rewriting, a re-presentation. At first glance we might find this argument farfetched. After all, unlike autobiography, a translation is normally a rewriting of a whole and visible text. It is not, at least on the surface, the reconstruction or restaging in coherent form of the fragments of memories of a life lived. If we look further, however, we can see that a translation performs a comparable artificial resuscitation. The original language has vanished in the text’s new version; the language that replaces it works to resurrect words and phrases, wordplays and metaphors, fragments of the translator’s language and mnemonic associations, that will bring to life the original, one hopes, as one expects the same from an autobiography.

Bella’s discussion departs precisely from the readerly expectation that the autobiographer’s pact with the reader—like the trans-

lator's "sacred duty"—is to be candidly true to an original. And yet, from an essentialist perspective, the end products of both practices can easily become Faustian Frankensteins. Under the aegis of Freud, who made the unconscious betrayals of the omniscient narrator visible to us, these betrayals are parallel to those of the translator, who can only give us approximations, never the thing itself. The first question that jumps out at me, then, is: Are we talking only about autobiography in relation to translation, or are we talking about all narrative in general? That is, is Bella's proposal in her paper suggesting a narrative theory that could be applied to any narrative form, beyond verbal language and written texts?

No two narratives are the same, as Borges's very first *fiction*, "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote," his famous parable about the "anachronistic" practice of reading, written in 1939, so spectacularly tells us. This devilish commentary on commentary (as George Steiner called it) is at the center of Bella's topic. Pierre Menard, avant-garde poet who, among his many daring experiments, attempts to rewrite a *Don Quixote* completely identical to the original, is Borges caricaturing himself as a young Ultraist. Borges's story—supposedly written in French by an admiring disciple of Menard—is a fiction that pretends to be a biography while it is (like all fiction, one could argue) autobiographical, and is not only about the absurd impossibility of the totally faithful translation but also implies and reveals that it is in itself a translation.

My question to Bella is, in this discursive context, is there a significant difference here between autobiography and biography vis-à-vis translation? I ask this coming, also, from my own work on a biography of Manuel Puig. The author of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, Puig's novels pay homage with their "dollar book" Freudianisms to Freud's invention of the modern novel, that is, the decidedly nonobjective narrator. As both translator and biographer I have dealt with the challenges of subjectivity, memory, and interpretation, haunted by the pact of fidelity that such nonfiction writing involves. Autobiography, biography, and creative memoir are evaluated, however, by the strength, intensity, and inventiveness of their narrative structure, of the story they construct, just as translation is evaluated by its fluency, its persuasive rhetorical effect. The writer of nonfiction is as dependent on literary conventions, plot, theme, character development, climax, and denouement as the fic-

tion writer. Truth is less of a consideration than the appropriateness of form and the success of style. Autobiography differs from biography because, as the subject and the writer/producer of the former is the same, we assume a much higher/deeper level of fidelity to the subject. However, considering that “the self is constituted by a discourse that it never completely masters”<sup>1</sup> how different, really, are these two genres? We might define the difference this way: the biographer is situated outside of the life he or she wishes to represent and wants to work his or her way into it, while self-writing, autobiography, presents its author with the problem of being too much of an insider, needing to distance her or himself, to get far enough away to see what’s happening and what it is one actually wants to represent.

My possible response to the question above can perhaps be aided by my own experience. I have written an authorized biography and am attempting to write a translator’s autobiography. While the research for the biography was different from the current research for my own history, I also had to realize that my subjectivity influenced the biography as if it were in some way an autobiography; or, whether narrating an autobiography or a biography, I was and am never totally subjective or objective. Hence, can we agree on the translational nature of autobiography and also of other forms of narrative, fictional or nonfictional, and are we perhaps speaking of a translational paradigm for narrative in general?

In “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” Georges Gusdorf<sup>2</sup> examines Paul Valéry’s radical proposal that biography in order to be true must go beyond its traditional limits.<sup>3</sup> I cite these thoughts on this topic here because, among other things, they also relate to Bella’s provocative discussion of autobiography and translation. They also reveal an important source of Borges’s fictions and essays that highlight narrative theory and feature his antirealist theories of narrative art as well as his poetics of writing as translation. According to the theory of biography proposed by Valéry—whose *Monsieur Teste* was a direct Borgesian model, fondly parodied by

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Spinker, “Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography,” in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Practical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) 342.

<sup>2</sup> Georges Gusdorf, “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography,” in James Olney, ed., *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980) 41.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Valéry, “La Vie est un conte,” *Tel Quel II* (1943): 348-349. The entire issue is available online at <https://archive.org/stream/telquelv02valuoft#page/n7/mode/2up>.

Borges's famous Pierre Menard as a kind of absurdly avant-garde intellectual artist—a biographer, moving between the actual life and his life-writing, would have to see through the eyes of the subject. The biographer would have to attempt to know as little of the following moment as the subject himself would know about the corresponding instant of his career. This would be to restore chance in each instant, rather than putting together a series that admits of a neat summary and a causality that can be described in a formula. Causality was, as we know, one of the core issues of Borges's "Narrative Art and Magic."<sup>4</sup> Valéry's point, as Borges sees it, is that the so-called real truth is nothing, unformed, blurred, and that therefore the original sin of biography—which we could compare with the original sign of autobiography—is to presume the virtues of logical coherence and rationalization.

That is, we can extend Valéry's discussion of the prerogative of biography to that of autobiography in that the task at hand is not to show us the objective stages of a career, but to reveal the efforts of historian/biographer/autobiographer to discover or reveal the effort of a creator to give the meaning of her (or his) own mythical tale. This latter statement basically describes Freud's attempt at autobiography in his "study." On the surface he "objectively" appears to summarize his career—giving us much valuable information—but in reality he is creating his own self-myth as intuitive scientist, a myth in which, it so happens, his early work as a translator plays a major role.

Bella reminds us that for Freud "la psychanalyse c'est moi." Through her discussion we read his "autobiographical study" which reveals his influences, Goethe on Nature, and notably the Bible, which impacted him precisely because he belonged to an oppositional minority as a Jew. What he read or experienced or what influenced him is more about his real feelings or interests; what he actually says about himself, is all about his ego and need for cultural power. For Freud translation was a power play, or as Bella writes, "Though he had a position as a Lecturer in Pathology in Vienna, it was his work as a translator that gained him entry into

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<sup>4</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Narrative Art and Magic," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, edited by Eliot Weinberger, translated by Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, Eliot Weinberger (New York: Viking, 1999) 75–82.

Charcot's circle of personal acquaintances and full participation in the activities at Salpêtière Clinic" (AS, Freud R, 6). (infra, 21)

Ironically this personal essay says less about the man beneath the persona than his essay on screen memories or any of his fundamental books such as *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud's "Autobiographical Study" is a prime example of an omniscient narrator blind to his own subjectivity. What I personally found fascinating is that Freud, as Jewish outsider, gained entrance to the circles of cultural power as a translator. Curiously, I could see a similar trajectory in my own life, as a woman gaining entrance to the Latin American Boom literary circles, a world of cultural significance in my time and context, in which I took on an identity as translator and even muse, more glamorous than my own modest "outsider" Washington Heights Jewish origins.

As Manuel Puig (the author whose literary texts I translated and whose life I ultimately translated into a biography) aptly put it, Freud invented the modern novel: that is, he exposed the unavoidable limitations of the omniscient narrator, hence his importance not only to autobiography but to all writing. In Bella's discussion, Autobiography and Translation come together logically and intuitively in Freud whose early work as a translator helped create his career as a scientist. By extension, his role as translator helped create the persona whose theoretical work was practically based on autobiographical as well as clinical reflection.

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# Dalit Consciousness and Translating Consciousness: Narrating Trauma as Cultural Translation

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**Abstract:** How do we understand literary catharsis as a multilingual project? This paper focuses on scenes from Ajay Navariya’s short story “Subcontinent” (in Laura Brueck’s translation from Hindi) to ask about the responsibility of writers, translators and scholars in grappling collectively with the trauma of caste-based sexual violence (or what Sharankumar Limbale calls “injustices done to Dalit women.”) Put in conversation with Robert Young’s reading of Freud on cultural translation, Navaria’s story complicates straightforward understandings of consciousness as monolingual. Instead, the Hindi story in English reveals a complex connection between what Limbale and others refer to as a distinct “Dalit consciousness” and G.N. Devy’s notion of “translating consciousness” by asking us to redefine how the languaged self responds to the original trauma of being read as untouchable in the dominant vernacular. For Devy translating consciousness involves rejecting binaristic colonizer–colonized hierarchies, whereas for Limbale Dalit consciousness works to fight caste hierarchies operating primarily within India itself. This paper takes up Rita Kothari’s suggestion that the dominant vernacular might be just as foreign as the colonial language in order to radically rethink the dialectical relationship between the languaged self and cultural transformation.

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What is literature’s role in responding to the trauma of caste-based sexual violence a language away? I ask as a Hindi translator as well as a scholar and teacher of Dalit literature—of work, I should explain, that very openly claims to write from the perspective of those “oppressed” or “ground down” (as “Dalit” is usually glossed) by the entrenched system of untouchability in India.<sup>1</sup> Dalit writers in India have been asking versions of the question I have posed

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<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge the support of a Senior Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies and the National Endowment for the Humanities that allowed me to complete the work on this paper, as well as the NIDA/FUSP Symposium organizers and Robert Young for providing the original impetus for investigating this material.



here within their own language traditions, and as a group seem to agree that the main purpose of Dalit literature should be to raise awareness—or as the well-regarded Marathi writer Sharankumar Limbale puts it more vividly, “to inform Dalit society of its slavery, and narrate its pain and suffering to upper caste Hindus” (Limbale 2004, 19). It is not beside the point here that I quote Limbale from his book *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*, which has been translated into English by (avowedly upper-caste Hindu and Canada-based postcolonial studies scholar) Alok Mukherjee. Dalit literature, publisher S. Anand has pointed out, is a phenomenon in and of translation—from, to, and via English, as well as many other official Indian languages (Anand 2003, 4). Given current realities, I am suggesting here that we include postcolonial studies scholars and translators such as Mukherjee and myself in the project Limbale and others have begun when theorizing the purpose of Dalit literature. I propose here that we examine examples of Dalit literature to think more carefully about the relationship of Translation Studies to postcolonial theory.

Like many activists writing on the subject, Limbale contends that the work of Dalit literature is inspired directly by the revolutionary leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and can only be done by those with an explicit Dalit consciousness. A few pages later in his book on Dalit aesthetics—in a section devoted to the topic of Dalit consciousness—he explains:

The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature, it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness. (Limbale 2004, 32)

To ask about literature’s role in raising awareness about untouchability as a human rights issue akin to slavery raises fundamental questions about these points of comparison, especially when expressed across multiple languages. How might we adapt current theoretical models to understand Dalit consciousness as a multilingual issue?

G.N. Devy has argued that multilinguality is so central to the

Indian context that it requires its own theorization, one that he discusses—serendipitously—as “translating consciousness.” Writing in the 1990s, Devy was primarily interested in developing a distinctly postcolonial “aesthetics of translation” (Devy 2014, 163) that would inform “a more perceptive literary historiography” (165) responsive to the perspective of the multilingual user (“such as a translator” he notes) who “rends. . .open” the multiple sign systems converging in a single consciousness (164). If aesthetic production is figured in Devy’s writing with the violent imagery of rending open, “translating consciousness” itself is imagined in a friendlier fashion, as an intuitive “open” daily negotiation along a continuum of mutual understanding, that he contends—most crucially here—our monolingually-minded, European conceptual tools have not been able to theorize properly:

In most Third World countries, where a dominating colonial language has acquired a privileged place, such communities [of translating consciousness] do exist. In India several languages are simultaneously used by language communities as if these languages formed a continuous spectrum of significance. To conceptualize this situation is beyond European linguistics, which is based mostly on a monolingual view of language. The use of two or more different languages in translation activity cannot be understood through studies of foreign language acquisition. (165)

Both Devy and Limbale suggest independently that the development of any literary aesthetic (perceptive or no) is necessarily ideological; moreover, when explaining how each of their approaches to the project of literary historiography differs from the mainstream, each uses the term “consciousness” to describe an alternative to the demeaning hierarchical forms of discrimination a random language user encounters on a daily basis, that have become written into our own disciplinary conceptualizations. As a result, Devy and Limbale each call for a corrective literary historiography based on such a consciousness. For Devy, the crucial ideological difference informing a translating consciousness involves rejecting binaristic colonizer–colonized hierarchies, whereas for Limbale the crucial ideological difference Dalit consciousness works to fight is informed by the caste hierarchies operating primarily within India itself, both during the colonial period and after Independence. How might these two theories of consciousness be put in productive conversation with one another when

focusing on postcolonial literary engagements with human rights struggles?

I will attempt to address this larger question by reflecting on the inherent multilinguality of the translating consciousness Devy describes—whereby “several languages are simultaneously used by language communities as if these languages formed a continuous spectrum of significance” (65)—when it encounters caste-based discrimination. I will do this by analyzing a piece of postcolonial fiction that details a series of shocking events experienced by a Dalit family: the short story “Upmadwip” written in Hindi by the Dalit writer and activist Ajay Navaria. I will quote primarily from the version translated into English by Laura Brueck (2012) as “Subcontinent” in an effort to vex perceived limits of language when describing violent encounters in translation.

Only a few pages into “Subcontinent,” the narrator recalls a traumatic scene from his childhood in which he watches, helpless, as a gang of upper-caste men beat up his father to within an inch of his life, incensed that an “untouchable” (“achut” in the Hindi) would have the audacity to return to the village for a relative’s wedding in a clean new kurta, rupees in his pocket, greeting friends comfortably, and holding his head high. Significantly, the story is framed by a tranquil domestic scene of the narrator as an adult living in an unnamed city struggling to wake from a nightmarish sequence of horrific childhood memories, prompted by an impending decision over whether to return to the village once again for another relative’s wedding. The framing device is crucial for establishing two distinct perspectives on the same event: one of the adult looking back with a mixture of indignation and apprehension, and the other of the innocent child offering direct testimony (albeit fictionalized) of a series of traumatic events that in their ancestral village seem to be lamentably routine. The structure of the story thus invites us to read this as a scene of initiation—into a kind of consciousness that we might not immediately recognize as a translating consciousness but are led to infer will eventually become a Dalit consciousness. How?

Soon readers are introduced to a liminal dream state between waking and sleeping, past and present, city and village, and led down a stepwell at the edge of what appears to be the adult narrator’s consciousness, invited to witness a childhood scene from

the young boy's point of view as a group of high-caste villagers confront the father and his father's aunt (whom the boy calls "Amma") for forgetting "the rules and regulations of the village" (Navaria 2012, 87). The narrative structure allows readers to remain cognizant of the adult narrator's judgment on these "rules and regulations" while following the boy and his family through the village; this structure enables the implied author to call into question the entire system of signification the boy is being initiated into. The story dramatizes why what Limbale terms "rebellion against the caste system" (2004, 32) would entail so much internal struggle, starting with the fundamental act of recognizing oneself and other Dalits as human beings equal to all others.

As the scene continues, readers of the translated story are in turn asked to distinguish between the language of the past and of the present, of the village and the city, marked by the boy's discomfort at the time and the adult narrator's outrage looking back as his great aunt bows down at the high-caste villagers' feet, assuring them, "They'll never do it again in my life. They erred, having lived in the city" (Navaria 2012, 86). The narrative makes strategic use of the distance in perspective between the adult narrator (who is very conscious of the historical implications of this discrimination) and the boy (who is at first shocked by what he witnesses and seemingly unable to interpret it) to map consciousness as a series of encounters with others where imperfect (even horrifying) communication regularly takes place.

In the consciousness of the young boy these rules and regulations are as startling as they are incomprehensible:

"Oh God, I'm done for! Maaaa! Forgive me, master, kind sir! It won't happen again!" As Amma wailed, one of them struck her head hard with a shoe, and she cried out again. Tears streamed down her cheeks. Now they were all laughing. Seeing them beat Amma with their shoes, Father tried to get up again. When they noticed him moving, they fell on him afresh. Sticks, fists, shoes—flailing without stop. I stood trembling. One of them slapped me across the face. Father was lying on the ground. Unconscious. Blood dripping, *thap-thap-thap*, from his forehead. A streak of blood spread all the way down his pyjama. My lip had been split open. It was still bleeding. I stood there quaking. I almost pissed my pants. It seemed like it would never end. Father lay at peace. His new white kurta was torn from his chest to his stomach. Blood dribbled from his mouth. Father's dead, I thought. Seeing a body drenched in blood, that's the only thing an eight-year-old can think. (Navaria 2012, 86-87)

Here the boy is presented as being unable to interpret the physical details he witnesses, even while we can feel the pressure of the adult narrator's judgment about the situation. And the admission about the limitations of the boy's own awareness, narrated suddenly in the third person—"Seeing a body drenched in blood, that's the only thing an eight-year-old can think"—is all the more moving knowing that the adult narrator in the present tense of the story is picturing himself in a similar situation, anticipating trying to protect his own child from similar degradations, if he decides to travel back to the village with them for an upcoming wedding. The strategy of third-person narration thus generalizes the experience of the Dalit subject. Implicitly, the story asks the reader why I, why he, why anyone should have to learn how to interpret the blood stains on their father's still body.

This is not a postcolonial translating consciousness to celebrate. There is no triumph a few paragraphs later when the boy becomes more adept at speaking the village language of caste-based violence:

I quietly wiped the blood off my lip with my torn collar. There were no tears in my eyes. But I kept making small crying sounds, *hoo-hoo*, for fear of getting thrashed again if I stayed quiet. I'd quickly realized that it was better to keep up the whimpering in front of them. (87)

How might attention to translating consciousness here help us better conceptualize Dalit consciousness as a multilingual project beyond the monolingual limitations Devy warns against? In Hindi, we can imagine this scene of calibrated whimpering is playing as much to the upper-caste Hindu readers and fellow Dalits Limbale identified as the target audience for Dalit literature; in English translation, the readership is expanded even further, since the elite English-speaking reader in India as well as the reader abroad are similarly put on notice about the demeaning effects of the caste system, and in such a way that challenges the received colonizer–colonized binaries of postcolonial studies. Here the language of dominance we must theorize is predicated on caste, and thus suggests a more complex mapping of translating consciousness than the colonizer–colonized binary. We see in the English translation as well that the narrator's perspective is multiply displaced—both at the top of the stepwell and below, in

the past, present, and even future of the story. Bringing together the concept of translating consciousness with Dalit consciousness invites us to think afresh about the ways we might map such literary language, starting with the ways we theorize the very idea of “language” in literary work.

In *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*, Limbale puts particular emphasis on what he calls—in the section title—“The Language of Dalit Literature,” explaining:

The view of life conveyed in Dalit literature is different from the world of experience expressed hitherto. A new world, a new society, and a new human being have been revealed in literature, for the first time. The reality of Dalit literature is distinct, and so is the language of this reality. It is the uncouth-impolite language of Dalits. It is the spoken language of Dalits. This language does not recognize cultivated gestures and grammar. (33)

Limbale’s assertions apply to many of the works of Dalit literature published prior to this book on aesthetics, including Limbale’s own prose. In Navaria’s story, however, the hierarchies are tipped once again, since the “new world, . . . new society, . . . new human being” is waiting at the top of the stepwell in the consciousness of an urbane, multilingual Dalit man while the boy is left to grapple with the old world, old society communicating in the horrifying idiom of caste-based discrimination. However shocking this language may be to the boy as well as offensive to the narrator and ostensibly to his readers in turn, it is especially horrifying that it is not considered “impolite” in the village context of the story—the upper-caste villagers do not grant their “untouchable” neighbors that kind of respect. It is precisely the standardization of this degrading idiom that Navaria’s story is asking us to consider. The narrative is offering a critique of this particular kind of language use, and thus we might say of the village translating consciousness depicted in the story. To understand how this critique might be inviting readers of both the Hindi story and the English translation to take part in a fraught project of recalibrating consciousness as a way of coming to terms with collective trauma, we must first think more carefully about the roles we play in the process of literary catharsis.

I should admit here that I am grappling with a more specific version of the question of trauma and literary language, occasioned

by a provocative encounter at a conference on the historiography of Dalit literature held in Delhi at Jamia Millia Islamia University in December, 2013. The conference was organized by members of the English Department and it brought together scholars from a number of different disciplines and areas of expertise along with creative writers working in a host of Indian languages.<sup>2</sup> There were three days of sessions starting with a keynote speech by Kancha Ilaiah, academic panels, and several roundtable discussions with published writers such as Limbale and Navaria, including one devoted to the place of translation in the reception of Dalit literature. On the particular panel I have in mind an English literature professor gave a polished, impassioned paper invoking a lineup of US-based scholars on trauma and testimony urging us to acknowledge the importance of autobiographical writing as an act of individual catharsis that ultimately leads to healing; she described this process as “translating pain into language” (Abidi 2013).

At the time, I see from my notes, I wondered about the relationship of catharsis to activism. I knew from reading Laura Brueck’s scholarship that a writer like Ajay Navaria thought of catharsis in much more politically engaged terms, as a collective, emboldened confrontation with society. In a discussion on aesthetics in her recent book, *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Contemporary Dalit Literature* (2014), Brueck explains:

Dalit writer Ajay Navaria colorfully compares the realist aesthetic of Dalit literature to the necessity of lancing a cyst on the body of Hindu society. While the substance that the cyst releases may be unpleasant, its cathartic release is said to be necessary for the healing of the social body. (85)<sup>3</sup>

The difference between the two types of catharsis proposed here is crucial: in the model the conference paper presenter was looking towards, it is the individual writer who has suffered the trauma, and so it is the writer not the social body who is sick and requires healing. What difference does this make in thinking about the role of literature in healing trauma?

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<sup>2</sup> International Conference on Dalit Literature and Historiography, Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, India, December 19–21, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Ajay Navaria’s original quote was from “Dalit Sāhitya kā Vigat Aur Vartamān,” *Prārambh (Dalit Sāhitya Visheshank)* 1, no. 3 (2004): 44.

In the ensuing discussion, the presenter was assailed by one imminent personality after another (speaking alternately in Hindi and in English): How does this model of therapy help us reduce intercaste violence? Are you trying to individualize Dalit experience? What is the role of the reader's subjectivity in this model? And, most vividly to me, Limbale shouted in frustration, "If my mother is being raped then I shouldn't be crying but crying out to stop it!" It is in this context that I am left wondering—alongside the presenter and others in attendance at that conference, I am sure—about the role of literature in responding to trauma. What type of catharsis do we seek through literature, and what is the role of a translator and literature scholar in that process?

Often scholars metaphorize the project of writing trauma as an act of speaking out against injustice. The assumption is a therapeutic one, that repressed trauma and other forms of silencing are unhealthy for the subject, and that she will be free of her resulting symptoms only once she has successfully narrated and fully analyzed these painful memories. Robert Young has recently suggested that Freud consistently described such work as a process of translation—he points out that the word for "translation" in German (*übersetzung*) appears at least forty-five times in *Interpretation of Dreams* alone, for instance—but in such a way that radically rethinks the dialectical relationship between the languaged self and what Freud ("tantalizingly," Young adds) calls "cultural transformation" [*kulturelle Wandlung*] (Young 2013).<sup>4</sup> This version of "cultural translation," Young contends, is not a simple, straightforward task of "moving from text A to B, leaving text A behind, but rather moving to text B by making text A unconscious, repressed, but with A still haunting text B as its shadow and liable to reappear in disguised form at any moment" (17). I will spend a moment detailing this insight, for it has important implications for catharsis as a multilingual project, and the role of culture in mediating such a catharsis collectively.

Young explains that in Freud's writing, dream thoughts are like an "unknown language that we have to decipher on the basis of the translation" (9). Young likens the process to cracking the code of the Rosetta Stone, where you work backwards, comparing the

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<sup>4</sup> Here Young is citing Freud 2005, 224.



language you know against the one you do not, until you begin to understand the system by which meaning is made in the language unknown to you. This because for everyone—in Young’s reading of Freud—“the psyche is multilingual, alert to the constant possibility of using translation as a mechanism of displacement in the face of repression” (4). Even in a healthy, nontraumatized subject the psyche engages in such a process, he explains, and culture’s role is to tame a person’s natural instincts.

Thus the psyche, in Young’s words, keeps itself “busy translating into a foreign language that is unreadable to the individual subject him or herself” (5). Young understands Freud as suggesting that there are a number of languages converging in a single psyche, including the distinction between “dream thoughts” (in the unconscious) and “dream content” (in one’s consciousness), both of which are individual and idiosyncratic, even if internally consistent enough for an analyst to begin to recognize a pattern. Young quotes Freud as writing in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

Dream-thoughts and dream-content lie before us like two representations of the same content in different languages—or, rather, a particular dream-content appears to us as a version of the relevant dream-thoughts rendered into a different mode of expression, the characters and syntax of which we are meant to learn by comparison of the original with the translation. (Young 2013, 8)

The role of multilingual performance is crucial in Freud’s theorizing, Young points out, given that Freud himself compared the process of decoding and deciphering dream content to Egyptian hieroglyphs, “whose characters need to be translated one by one into the language of the dream-thoughts” (2013, 9). The analyst is able to crack the code only after he sees how the individual, multilingual subject moves between other (conventional) languages, a technique he and Breuer began to pioneer in *Studies in Hysteria*, with the case of “Katharina.” Young quotes Freud as writing: “We had frequently compared the hysterical symptomatology with a pictographic script, which we were able to read once we had discovered a few cases of bilingualism” (132). This is a highly unusual “original”, however, when viewed in the broader history of translation. “What makes psychoanalysis more than just translation into another discourse,” Young adds provoc-

atively, “is that psychoanalysis is translating the unknown” (8). How might such a comparison enable us to rethink Dalit consciousness as a multilingual project?

If the job of the psyche is to “translate” or displace traumatic experiences into a language foreign to the individual subject, the work of psychoanalysis is then to interpret that idiosyncratic language and “de-translate” it back into a language she shares with her analyst, as Young explains:

Psychoanalysis finds the meaning of dreams not in dreams themselves but in their invisible origins. In dreams we have only the translation: the patient and analyst’s job is to translate the incomprehensible dream-content back into its original, and then to analyze and repeat in reverse the work of translation which has transformed the first into the second. Dream-interpretation, therefore, as Jean Laplanche has suggested, is more a question of de-translation, trying to de-translate the dream back into an original that remains hidden. This is where and why the work of interpretation through association must come into play: breaking the dream-content down into its constituent parts one by one, and working through the dreamer’s associations, analyst and dreamer engage in the laborious work of de-translating the dream-content back into its original dream-thoughts. (10)

Young’s reading of Freud insists that translation practice is at the core of our work as language beings (regardless of how many official languages we are said to speak), and that one of the central roles of culture is to train an individual to interpret to themselves, in a language that they share with others, the most hidden parts of themselves, such as traumatic events in the past. The case of Dalit literature is especially potent here because “culture” itself is accused of legitimizing the agents of that original trauma—not incidentally, but fundamentally.

While he does not name Dalit literary examples specifically, Young does suggest that such cases are central to Freud’s work on cultural translation. Young reads Freud as a major theorist of cultural translation whose contributions to translation theory have important implications most particularly for those translated subjects—like Dalit writers—until now often left out of our theorizing:

Freud’s. . .theoretical paradigm [on translation]. . .remains infinitely suggestive. It offers, for example, a possible way of reading the invisible, the subaltern, those whose forms of public representation distort their fundamental being, where the invisibility or repression of subalterns in official discourses and documents from the past require a de-translation exercise to make them visible in their own terms. (11)

Bringing together theories of Dalit consciousness with translating consciousness suggests that the very prospect of shared language is exceedingly fraught, in ways that are important for the project of handling trauma through literary work. Young further hints that the project of analyzing the relationships between those languages might be key to better understanding the “original” (as trauma, or otherwise.)

We see this most vividly in his reading of the case of Anna O, who responds to a childhood trauma by alternating moments of stark speechlessness (“aphasia”) with what Freud in English translation refers to as “paraphasia,” switching into languages (English, French, Italian) foreign to Anna O’s own mother tongue of German. Following Freud, Young uses this example of an upper-class woman to show how suspicious the psyche itself remains generally of culture’s role in taming one’s instincts. We see in Anna O’s case that being highly cultured only serves to make her subterfuges more elaborate, and the work of the analyst (not to mention the nurse who tended her) that much more demanding:

The paraphasia receded, but now she spoke only in *English*, yet seemed to be unaware of it, and would quarrel with the nurse, who was, of course, unable to understand her. Not until several months later did I manage to convince her that she was speaking English. She herself, however, still understood her German-speaking environment. Only in moments of great anxiety would her speech fail her completely, or she would mix up all kinds of languages. She would speak French or Italian at those times when she was at her best and most free. Between those periods and those in which she spoke English lay complete amnesia. (29)

The case asks us to rethink the fundamentals of cultural translation as a languaged relationship between individual and collective, especially since the collective itself is figured as a plurality of overlapping language domains. Young’s reading calls into question the very notion of a discrete “mother tongue” as source of a stable cultural identity, and echoes ongoing debates surrounding Dalit examples.

For instance, in a 2013 article—“Caste in a Casteless Language: English as a Language of ‘Dalit’ Expression”—Rita Kothari complicates any simple understanding of English as a colonial language, arguing that for writers and translators working with Dalit texts—like the poet Neerav Patel, whose example she

focuses on—English offers a more compelling alternative to regional vernaculars. Patel’s choice to write in English, rather than Gujarati, she suggests compellingly, “is animated by the misery of unwanted memories of language, and a desire to erase that memory” (Kothari 2013, 65). Kothari refers to a soon-to-be-published essay Patel wrote in response to a public query: “Who (all) can claim Gujarati?” (64) Kothari explains:

If standard Gujarati, Patel argues, is as distant and alien to dalits as English, he would rather embrace English, and use it to replace his “mother tongue,” thus making English what he calls his “foster-tongue.” By being foreign, English does not normalize and legitimize caste, and by being an ex-colonial language with global reach, it becomes empowering. (61)

I have suggested elsewhere that English is not in fact casteless, that the language’s encounters with caste started early in the colonial encounter—I use the example of “pariah” whose first usage in English is 1613 (Merrill 2014, 262). However, here I am more interested in the ways Patel’s critique of his “mother tongue” in relation to English introduces an important perspective on Dalit consciousness as translating consciousness. As Kothari’s discussion of Patel’s critique makes clear, the imperative of Dalit consciousness is to redefine the very domain of language and its relationship to collective memory:

An acclaimed poet and critic, Patel attacks the homogeneous idea of a “mother tongue” in India. Although this may seem a separate issue from English, it is very important to see how the idea of an Indian language that alienates the dalits and colludes with the upper castes in normalizing caste discrimination shapes the dalit response to English. The specificity of the case below provides a much-needed elaboration of this operation to bring home the fact that Indian languages do not constitute for all Indians a proud inheritance, which “globalization” and similar invasive forces may allegedly besiege. This is essentially an upper-caste view and luxury; those who wish to redefine themselves must do so by abandoning this inheritance and embracing English. (65)

While this seems neither Patel’s nor Kothari’s point, I would suggest that in the process Patel is also inviting us to rethink the very meaning of translation.

Young, too, in his reading of Freud, asks us to rethink the enterprise of translation as a relational exercise between language and memory, as we see in his discussion of the case of Anna O:

Cultural translation, in Freud. . . is not a process by which the former text or elements are ever entirely left behind, but one in which the new text always remains doubled and haunted, its translations perpetually remaking themselves, the translated text perpetually seeking to revert to its original, like a ball held under water. The different languages, as in the dream, remain perpetually present. In some sense, therefore, according to Freud we live in two or more languages at once. This bi- or multilingualism in which, as it were, like Anno O., we read one language but translate it simultaneously into another, can illuminate how, in this model, the general sense of loss in translation modifies its gain—for while in cultural terms much is gained, in the individual this gain produces at the same time a constant sense of unease, of disease, malaise, of “cultural frustration,” cultural denial, or as we might say today, of cultural dislocation. (Young 2013, 17-18)

Young is implying that every language is haunted by a series of unconscious memories, be they individual or collective. His startling proposition is that the ensuing struggles to articulate difficult truths—to find apt language for these invisible “originals”—put productive pressure on whatever languages we have in common. We might then surmise that every speaker has a translating consciousness that holds within it (“like a ball held under water”) the potential for radically rethinking the possibilities of the language(s) she speaks. How might this complex understanding of the relationship between translation and consciousness apply to literary work?

According to Limbale, one of the features of Dalit consciousness is the ability to identify with any injustice ever visited upon any member of the group. While detractors contend that such a stance results in literature that is predictable or propagandistic (charges his translator Mukherjee renders in English under the rubric of “univocality”), Limbale defends such politicized identifications instead as a sign of cohesion and thus of strength, since it allows individuals to read a host of traumatic experiences visited upon Dalits as part of a programmatic effort at group discrimination: “Social boycott, separate bastis, wells, and cremation grounds; inability to find rental accommodation; the necessity to conceal caste; denial of admission to public places; injustices done to Dalit women; dragging and cutting of dead animals; and the barber refusing to cut hair—these experiences are alike for all Dalits” (Limbale 2004, 35). Limbale’s emphasis here is less on direct experience of such injustices, and more on the daily acts of interpretation that renders someone part of the very category deserving

such discriminatory behavior. Understood this way, “original trauma” begins with the possibility of being read as untouchable by others; acknowledging that reading of untouchability subsequently then becomes part of one’s consciousness as distinctly and defiantly “Dalit.”

Approaching Dalit literature through Young’s reading of Freud on “cultural translation” helps complicate and thus confound any simple glosses of the terms in play. If we look more closely at Young’s proposition that cultural translation is not a simple, straightforward task of “moving from text A to B, leaving text A behind, but rather moving to text B by making text A unconscious, repressed, but with A still haunting text B as its shadow and liable to reappear in disguised form at any moment,” then we might infer that all language speakers sharing an idiom of discrimination like the caste system are haunted by a text A such as “injustices done to Dalit women.” I will spend a moment pursuing this proposition through a later scene in Navaria’s story, in large part because it resonates with Limbale’s outburst that day: “If my mother is being raped then I shouldn’t be crying but crying out to stop it!” And in the process helps us rethink the theoretical categories by which we too might read such a scene.

There is a suggestion early on in “Subcontinent” that sexual violence in the village has been ongoing and systemic, to the extent that many “untouchables” are themselves offspring of a union (directly forced, or manipulated) between a high-caste man and an untouchable woman. We see this referenced directly in the story when the narrator makes clear that he himself is related to one of those high-caste thugs in the village who are beating up his father: “‘Pandit-ji, it’s not even her husband’s. It’s her lover’s. This bastard child is Harku’s!’ He was pointing at Father” (Navaria 2012, 87). The passing comment seems to affect the character of the pandit, who at first appears ready to protect the boy’s father, possibly because he is related to Harku. Even though this is another instance where the adult narrator looking back seems to understand the implications of this moment more than the child narrator, the narrative reveals the turmoil this causes on the young narrator’s part. As a boy, the narrator tells us, he held out hope the pandit would take pity on them, but was soon to be disappointed. Not only does the pandit bond with the high caste thugs, joining in with

the verbal and physical humiliation, but he later seems to be the one to take advantage of Amma.

The scene of Amma's further humiliation comes late in the story, after the violence has escalated even further, when high-caste members of the village take umbrage over the groom daring to ride a horse to the door of his bride and they attack the wedding party with lathis. The boy falls down unconscious—the significance of this is important for this study—and we watch him in retrospect try to put language to the ongoing village drama he has witnessed:

When I opened my eyes, it was still dark. An oil lamp was still burning in the hut. My aunt was sitting near the smoldering stove. The wedding party had left. . . . My head was throbbing. Someone had tied an old piece of dhoti around it. I don't know when I dozed off again, but a woman's shriek shocked me awake. I made haste to get up, but as soon as I rose, a blow struck my back, and I fell on my face. Half outside the hut, half inside.

"Fucking city boy, if you move, I'll unload a bullet in your skull," someone yelled, tilting my face up with the muzzle of a double-barreled gun pushed into my jaw. To my right, a few feet away, I saw, beneath the white, dhoti-clad bottom of a pale pandit-god, the darkened soles of someone's feet flailing and kicking; swinging on the back of this pale pandit was a fat, snake-like top-knot. . . and another scream. Terrified. Uninterrupted. Splitting the sky in two—*chhann!* (95-96)

Like the boy in the story who lies halfway out of the hut, wavering between consciousness and unconsciousness, the character of the woman being violated too has no language at the ready to defend herself with—she can only flail and kick and scream. Navaria's rendering of the scene raises unsettling questions about the very meaning of consciousness, and how language—any language—plays a part in making and remaking that consciousness.

In this scene we have a series of confusing, upsetting pairs: the boy being threatened by an unnamed gunman, the "pale pandit-god" riding a woman we only know by her flailing dark feet, and then the "fat, snake-like top-knot" and the disembodied scream, which seem to emanate from the entwined bodies. At this heightened moment of violence, the boy and the violated woman can share no words of support, or mutual understanding, can only each submit to those who have enough power over the language to demand silence of the others. And yet, the treatment of this scene of sexual violence as the boy's memory, of a moment that haunts him as an adult, delineates how someone who is witness to vio-

lence (even a form of violence he may never experience directly) might be traumatized, in exactly the way Limbale has argued.

If we then pursue the implicit analogy between Anna O. and the narrator of “Subcontinent,” we might begin to formulate a more nuanced understanding of translating consciousness when we consider carefully the process by which a traumatized Dalit subject struggles against aphasia. The fact that languages like Hindi and English have a mechanism in place for silencing both the subject who experiences the rape and the boy who witnesses it, puts a lie to the contention that it is only the individual subject who is haunted by these violent incidents in the past. Instead, the language cultures themselves might be understood to be haunted, and the moments of paraphasia an indication of the ways such hauntings do not dwell in discrete language domains. Navaria’s story helps us understand how an act of translation (in both the commonly-understood sense, and also with Young’s more specialized meaning) might reveal the ways simply being part of a language community unthinkingly we might be part of the process of repression. Taking seriously the project of Dalit consciousness, read in terms of an active translating consciousness, might afford us a more complex understanding of literary catharsis.



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# Translating *Talkies* in Modernist Mexico The Language of Cinemas and the Politics of the Sound Film Industry

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**Abstract:** During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the first ‘talkies’ appeared in Mexico, and many new cinemas were built or adapted from older buildings in order to accommodate this paradigmatically modern entertainment technology. Until the 1920s movies were mostly screened in makeshift spaces –in private houses, old theaters, circuses and even churches. Then, in the early 1920s, the first ‘cinema palaces’ started to appear, and by the late 1930s there were around fifty new or newly adapted movie theaters specialized in featuring talkies in Mexico City. These movie houses were an emblem of spectacular modernity. They are also, as I argue, a clear example of ‘translation spaces’ in their many-layered complexity. I discuss a relatively wide range of translation practices, from dubbing and the politics of film translation in early foreign sound films in Mexico, to the role that the first movie theaters played as stone and concrete ‘translators’ of the modern experience of sound films, to the appropriation of old spaces and their repurposing for the new technologies, to the way that theaters that were built in particular ‘languages,’ such as the International Style and the Streamline modern, constituted a form of ‘temporal’ translation.

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## 1. Movie theaters in the age of sound: an introduction

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the first “talkies” appeared in Mexico, and many new cinemas were built or adapted from older buildings in order to accommodate this paradigmatically modern entertainment technology. Until the 1920s, movies were mostly screened in makeshift spaces—in private houses, old theaters, circuses, and even churches. Then, in the early 1920s, the first “cinema palaces” started to appear, and by the late 1930s there were around fifty new or newly adapted movie theaters specialized in featuring talkies in Mexico City (Hershfield 2006, 265).<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps part of the problem is the lack of material evidence in magazines and newspapers regarding the construction of theaters, as compared to the great amount of information regarding films and actors. Among news such as “Tarzan has divorced his wife” and “Chaplin is in love

movie houses, as the architectural historian Fernanda Canales has written, were “an emblem of spectacular modernity” (Hershfield 2006, 180). The first sound movie theaters are also, as I shall argue, a clear example of translation spaces in their many-layered complexity.

Research on cinemas both from the perspective of architectural as well as cultural history remains scarce in relation to other areas of focus in both film studies and architectural history. Often, film historians ignore the spaces in which films were screened, and architectural historians tend to disregard the history of film when they deal with movie theaters. Although film criticism does not fall within the purview this paper, and I will not focus on any film in particular, I do want to place my architectural analysis and discussion of movie theaters within the specific context of the arrival of sound film technology in order to discuss the relationship between the modern architectural language of movie theaters and some of the dominating cultural politics of the burgeoning sound film industry in Mexico. I am particularly interested in the question of whether these two things worked in consonance or, on the contrary, were in dissonance in relation to the discourse of modernity or in creating a “sense” of being modern. Considering the spaces that were created with the arrival of sound film from an architectural perspective, and focusing on a small group of movie theaters, I intend to discuss the various senses in which translation practices took place within these new spaces, and how such practices contributed to a wider discourse of modernity. Did both cinemas and the film industry have a parallel evolution in terms of how they subscribed parameters of modernism? Did they play a similar social and cultural role in their contribution to the formation of ideas of modernity?

I will discuss a relatively wide range of translation practices, from dubbing and the politics of film translation in early foreign sound films in Mexico, to the role that the first movie theaters played as stone-and-concrete “translators” of the modern

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again” (*Cinelandia*, December 1932), as well as propaganda for new equipment for the new film theaters, advertisements which sell cheap and reliable English lessons, ads for new Kodak cameras and new Clarion radios, and so on, propaganda for film theaters or news about them is, with few exceptions, notably absent from magazines when the inauguration of theaters are announced.

experience of sound films, to the appropriation of old spaces and their repurposing for the new technologies, to the way theaters that were built in particular architectural “languages,” such as the International Style and the Streamline modern, constituted a form of temporal translation.<sup>2</sup> The way I approach these different practices and spaces, in turn, encompasses a hermeneutical approach to cultural practices, a phenomenological reading of building typology, and a more distant reading of buildings within the cityscape.

My approach to translation, moreover, is tied to the quintessentially modernist distinction between foreignization and domestication. Modernist translation practices must be distinguished from what is conceived more generally as translation. The 1920s and 1930s were decades of experimentation with composition and translation. As the critic Lawrence Venuti writes, modernist translation practices, which had their philosophical root in nineteenth-century philosophy, treated translation as an art and a source of innovation:

The main trends in translation theory during [modernism] are rooted in German literary and philosophical traditions, in Romanticism, hermeneutics, and existential phenomenology [...] Nineteenth-century theorists and practitioners like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt treated translation as a creative force in which specific translation strategies might serve a variety of cultural and social functions, building languages, literatures, and nations. At the start of the twentieth century, these ideas are rethought from the vantage point of modernist movements which prize experiments with literary form as a way of revitalizing culture. Translation is a focus of theoretical speculation and formal innovation. (Venuti 2000, 11)

Far from being a means of passively importing foreign literatures and adapting foreign languages to local ones, modernist translation as “formal innovation” constituted a form of active

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<sup>2</sup> Although the term “International Style” started to be used more frequently in the 1930s, it usually refers to the language that architecture started using in the 1920s, and which became the emblematic style of modernism in architecture. Buildings designed according to the principles of the International Style are typically devoid of unnecessary ornamentation, are rectilinear, conceive exteriors as a result of interiors, and rationalize form and function. The Streamline Moderne style, which became widespread in the 1930s, draws on fundamental principles of the International style but merges it with Art Deco elements, such as the use of curved lines, horizontal planes, and references to nautical and aerial shapes.

foreignization of the domestic (vis-à-vis domesticizing the foreign), by which the foreign “contaminated” the domestic and thus pushed its limits further, while at the same time blurring the boundaries between the so-called “foreign” and the “domestic.” Seen in this light, modernist translation practices are ones in which translation was not merely conceived as an accurate rendering of a source language into a target language or a vehicle for explaining the foreign or making it more accessible or palatable to the local readership, but as a way of appropriating new forms and thus a creative locus of innovation. The term “translation practice”, moreover, in the context of Mexican cultural history can help us move beyond the passive categories of “reception” or “influence,” common to canonic literary and cultural studies, and allow us to focus on modernist cultural production in terms of exchanges.

## **2. Subtitles, dubbing, versions, and talkies: a hermeneutical approach to the horizon of a new soundscape**

Translation and dubbing were a fundamental part of the beginnings of the sound film industry. By the end of the 1920s, the film industry had entered into a crisis and sound film was initially not being received enthusiastically around the world by leading figures in the industry. Chaplin had said that talkies were “ruining the great beauty of silence”, (Maland 1989, 113) and Luigi Pirandello wrote in his well-known essay, “Will the Talkies do Away with Theater?”, that American’s “cheerful arrogance” regarding the advent of sound films was not something to really be worried about, because talkies were nothing but a “poor reproduction of theater” (Bassnett and Lorch, 156). But beyond its reception among prominent intellectuals and public figures, the crisis was also economic, and related to the world financial crisis. In 1932, the magazine *Cinelandia*, which was simultaneously published in Mexico and Hollywood, featured a piece titled “La gran crisis del cine” [The Great Crisis in Film] discussing the crisis in the industry and adjudicating the reasons for such crisis to the advent of talkies. The piece recounts, in a rather alarmist tone:

Hollywood producers are receiving, from all over the world, definite data confirming the reduction of income from ticket sales in all the cinemas in every city, in every country in the world. To tell the truth, we must add that the downward trend in pop-

ular interest for the cinematographic spectacle did not start with the world financial crisis: it is older than that and goes back to the exact moment in which sound and spoken film first came onto the international market. (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 17)<sup>3</sup>

With the arrival of sound films in Hollywood in the late 1920s one of the many problems the American film industry faced was preserving its cultural and economic hegemony over the rest of the world. Governments were enforcing protectionist laws guarding against linguistic “invasion.” Countries such as Argentina immediately banned movies spoken in English. Even in the UK, audiences started to protest against movies being spoken in “American.” In Mexico, one of the most influential newspapers, *El Universal*, gave rise to an aggressive campaign against the new movies spoken in English, calling the governments throughout the Spanish American continent to ban movies in English. By the end of the 1920s, 90% of the silent films screened in Mexico were made in the US, and the Latin American audiences could not understand the new sound films (see Hershfield 2006, 264). The working classes did not speak English, and the elites mostly spoke French as a second language, not English. A good part of the Mexican elites as well as columnists and journalists supported the campaign in the vast majority of national print media. They seemed to agree that English would overtake Spanish if Hollywood’s “pacific invasion” was not stopped by banning movies in English, and they contended that Spanish would soon become a dead language if the masses started identifying English as the language of entertainment. Although a few publications, such as the monthly *Continental*, responded aggressively to *El Universal*’s campaign, this anti-English movement was initially quite successful, at least among the elites and public intellectuals (see Reyes de la Maza 1973).

When the negative reaction to sound film became a universal response, Hollywood entrepreneurs finally decided that they had to do something about it. The first solution they attempted was to make silent versions of the new sound films, strictly for foreign ex-

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<sup>3</sup> This quote, as well as much of the information regarding the late silent and early talkie eras, is taken from Reyes de la Mazas 1973, which is a compendium of articles from leading Mexican publications in 1929–1932. I will be quoting many articles from this compendium; all translations into English of the original articles are mine.

port. This proved to be a complete failure in the entire world (Mora 1989, 31) as audiences wanted to partake in new technological advances and silent films were seen as a thing of the past. The second solution was to subtitle films, but countries had demands that were sometimes difficult to meet, as well as particular, local demographic realities. The Mexican president Emilio Portes Gil, for example, ordered that there should be “absolute Castilian purity in the language and subtitles of foreign films” (Garcia Riera 1992, 13), which was impossible as the people involved in subtitling were Spanish speakers from different Spanish-speaking countries now living in Los Angeles, and there was no way to conserve the Spanish “purity” demanded by Portes Gil. Moreover, in 1930, the percentage of analphabetism in Mexico was 65% (Vidal 2010, 20), so the majority of the population was unable to read film subtitles.

The third entrepreneurial strategy was to dub original Hollywood films. This, likewise, proved inadequate, as many spectators detested the monstrous disembodiment that the still precarious methods of dubbing entailed. Finally, at least in the case of films destined for the Spanish-speaking world, it was decided that Hollywood would produce “versions” of the original films, using actors that could speak Spanish fluently. They imported writers, technicians, directors and, of course, actors from Spain and Latin America to play the parts of the English-speaking “originals.” These actors were called the Hollywood Hispanics—and were virtually linguistic stunt doubles. Or, perhaps, these Spanish-speaking actors can be seen as full-fledged dubbers: they not only lent their voice to the “original” but their entire body. A truly remarkable translation feat of sorts: Hispanic cinema became Hollywood’s Spanish-language copy or version of itself.

From their beginnings, Hispanic films failed to convince audiences—as if their particular form of translation proved to be too simplistic and unsophisticated for modern spectators. The audience was perhaps aware that either they were not watching an entirely original film and that the actors they were seeing were most often not part of the venerable star-system. In fact, a Spanish newspaper published a sarcastic note “thanking” Hollywood for ridding them of so many untalented, unemployed actors and taking them over to the USA (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 23). The film critic Luz Alba wrote a piece titled “Growls in Spanish” where she stat-

ed that the voices of the actors were “so emphatic and what they say is so stupid that one has the impression of being in a tent drama, where one could at least recur to the final resource of throwing the chairs at the actors—something impossible to do at the cinema Olimpia because the chairs are glued to the floor” (cited in Reyes de la Maza 1973, 180). Moreover, people were disgusted with the myriad Spanish accents, vocabulary, and idiomatic twists on the screen, where Mexicans, Spaniards, Argentineans, and Cubans played roles not necessarily corresponding to their accents. Before Hispanic sound films even arrived in Mexico, a film critic using the pseudonym of Don Q, who worked for the Spanish-language, New York-based magazine *Cine Mundial*, stated in 1929 that

the diversity of nationalities and even races to which those improvised actors belong is such that their films will look like salads, mixing a variety of accents and ethnicities—something that could be tolerated in scenes that can lend themselves to a cosmopolitan interpretation, but which will lead to more than a few flops. (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 191)

Indeed, Hispanic films only lasted a few years, soon proving to be an absolute commercial flop.<sup>3</sup> Metro Goldwyn Mayer’s last attempt to keep hold of the Latin American and Spanish market was to get Hollywood’s best actors to speak a little Spanish. Laurel and Hardy, as well as Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd, all made shorts in Spanish and, though these fared better with educated audiences—at least in Mexico—than the movies featuring Hollywood Hispanics, they did not do not well enough for entrepreneurs to persist in this last, rather eccentric endeavor (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 25).

The theaters these subtitled, then dubbed, and then remade versions were screened in were originally designed for silent films, and were, in turn, often older buildings—churches, convents, or old theaters—sometimes precariously and sometimes creatively “translated” or repurposed for cinema. One of the most emblematic spaces for film screenings in the early 1920s was a former sixteenth-century convent, which, in 1922, reopened with the rather bombastic name Progreso Mundial (World Progress). The old courtyard, typical of colonial architecture, was used as the primary

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<sup>3</sup> By 1939, after approximately 175 talkies, Hispanic films ceased to be produced (García Riera 1992, 14).



sitting space, and the original stone arcade, traditionally plain and unadorned, was heavily clad with ornamentation. A second story had to be built to fit more spectators, for which slim iron pillars had to be placed between the seats (Alfaro 1997, 55).



Progreso Mundial circa 1922.

Most of these theaters had to be refurbished once again at the in the late 1920s and early 1930s, this time to accommodate new sound film technology. The Teatro-cinema Olimpia was the first cinema in Mexico to screen a talkie in 1929—eight years after its inauguration.<sup>4</sup> Before this, in the early 1920s, it had been used simultaneously for plays and silent films. The talkie that was shown was *The Singing Fool*. Before it played, the theater screened a short showing the Mexican consul in New York directly addressing Mexicans and congratulating Warner Brothers for their invention. Then, before the main screening, both the Orquesta Típica Mexicana and the New York Symphonic Orchestra were shown

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<sup>4</sup> Previously, the sound film (but not talkie) *The Submarine* had been screened in the Teatro Imperial, in April 1929. An ad in the *Universal* read: “The Teatro Imperial, conscious of its program in constant progress and keeping ahead of its competition, will offer for the first time this great advance of human invention [...] Come to listen to the clamor and feel the anguish of a sinking submarine. Listen to the sounds of the depths of the ocean. Today, two shows, one at four and the other at eight” (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 76).

playing a selection of musical pieces. The directors of the Olimpia, in conjunction with Warner Brothers, had also produced a free magazine with information about the “wonders of the new form of entertainment” as well as a translated transcription of the movie’s dialogues (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 80). The premiere, apparently, was such a success that soon the campaign launched by *El Universal* was drowned by the clamors of “the masses”.<sup>5</sup>

The Olimpia was designed by one of the most important early cinema architects, Carlos Crombé.<sup>6</sup> It was built inside the shell of an old hotel, which had, in turn, been built in a vegetable garden on the grounds of the first Franciscan convent built in Mexico City in the 16th century. Its interiors were originally designed according to the elegant neoclassical eighteenth-century Adamesque style, which had seen a revival among the middle classes in the late nineteenth century and up to the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> There were two dancing salons, one smoking room, and two vestibules (Alfaro 1997, 25). The elegant and often opulent interiors of movie theaters were a common denominator at the time. The logic behind this was to give the upper middle classes as immersive an experience for their money as possible, and help them forget their mundane, everyday life for a few hours. As a description of the movie theater in the magazine *Cine Mundial* read: “The Aristocratic Cinema Olimpia, refuge for families when on cold winter afternoons tedium stabs with its sharp blade, enchanting retreat [...] has come to fill a vacuum which had long been felt in Mexico’s good society” (Cine Silente Mexicano/Mexican Silent Cinema, translation mine).

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<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note, reading the different articles about movies published at the time, that the opinion of intellectuals was almost always in contrast to what seemed to be the response of the “masses” to innovations and entertainment.

<sup>6</sup> Carlos Crombé was a rather prolific cinema architect by the standards of the time in Mexico. In the 1920s he built several teatro-cinemas, in varied “conservative” architectural styles, ranging from Beaux-Arts façades typical of the Porfirian era such as his famous Cine Odeon, to Adamesque interiors, and even Churrigueresque exteriors (a Mexican adaptation of Baroque) in his well known *Teatro Colonial* (1940). His later cinemas, such as the Cine Alameda (1936) and his modernization of his own earlier Cine Olimpia (1941) were very different to those of the 1920s. The Cosmos, Crombé’s last project, which burnt down in 1946 just before its official inauguration, was closer to art deco and was perhaps meant to signal another version of modernity, perhaps closer to functionalism, in its sobriety. It was certainly the most modern of Crombé’s cinemas—it was closer, at least, to International Modernism—but it was the last he designed, as he died shortly after it burned down.

<sup>7</sup> The Adamesque style, developed by the Adam brothers in England, became fashionable in the mid- to late-eighteenth century and is usually considered an offshoot of neoclassical design and architecture. It simplified baroque and rococo, but was still heavily ornamental.



Teatro-Cinema Olimpia circa 1921.

There are various translation practices at work in the example of the Olimpia's screening of *The Singing Fool*. Even if the movie itself was not subtitled—a translation practice that, as I said earlier, had been banned by presidential orders—or dubbed, even if it was not a Hispanic “version” of an “original,” several interesting and rather inventive translational strategies were being used to bring the first talkie closer to its non English-speaking audience. First, the film's dialogue was printed out and distributed free to patrons, which would seem to imply that it was expected to be read *after* the show, as a sort of consecutive or “delayed” translation. Then, there was the initial appearance of the Mexican consul in New York, who, in his role of cultural and diplomatic translator, was attempting to both bridge the two cultures that were about to engage in a possibly alienating encounter and also to fully sanction—politically, that is—the screening of a movie in a language that was treated by many with great suspicion. Further, and most importantly in architectural terms, the movie was being premiered in one of the oldest, most elegant and well-established movie the-

aters—a choice of setting which perhaps sought to convey an aura of traditional legitimacy and normality for the public. Through all these different practices or strategies, the Olimpia was to all extents functioning here as a translation space.

But how was the Olimpia's role as a translation space interpreted by others? In the *Revista de Revistas*, a highly popular publication of those times, the critic Peinbert refers to the Olimpia as “one of our best salons” and says that through these salons “Mexico will be irremediably invaded by talkies in just a few months” (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 86). Similarly, in the *Universal* the editor and critic Carlos Noriega Hope wrote that “Yesterday it was the Olimpia that was paving the way; tomorrow it will be all the cinemas in Mexico [...] Not a month will pass before mute films are inexorably exiled to the *barrios*. Everything will be filled with cries, musical synchronizations, and words in English” (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 137). Another critic, Eugene Gaudry, complained about the screening at the Olimpia saying that it would inaugurate a time of great cultural confusion where eventually “the foreigners that come to Mexico will not know what the national language is, because they will be seeing movies in English, French, German, Italian, Denmarkese [sic], and so on, with no Spanish translations” (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 171).

Gaudry was of course exaggerating, but his complaints and concerns must have been shared by many, because a year later, in 1930, the managers at the Olimpia devised a mechanism which allowed for the insertion of explanatory Spanish text or titles between scenes in foreign movies. The Olimpia was famous for its endeavors in translating as much as possible for their audiences. The critic Luz Alba noted in an article that “talkies at the Olimpia have many titles, more than those strictly necessary to understand the general issue, and just enough to understand the details—something that does not occur in talkies at other theaters, which only have enough titles to understand generalities” (Reyes de la Maza 1973, 200).

Indeed, movie theaters such as the Olimpia were the sites that were helping translate or carry over a new modern experience to the Mexican audience, and this modern experience went beyond the technology of sound in film: it was also the experience of foreign languages and voices coming into the city's soundscape,



Teatro-Cinema Olimpia circa late 1920s.

through the screens of these movie theaters. Whether viewed as enablers of a new invention or as “traitors” that would allow the talkies to come in and take over, these translators made of concrete and stone functioned as the material portals for foreign languages to come in and “foreignize” the soundscape of Mexican movie theaters.

### **3. Translation, tradition, and entertainment: a phenomenological approach**

After an initial period of resistance on the part of the Mexico City elite, in which many columnists and critics voiced their concerns and hesitations regarding sound film technology, it was clear that the talkies had come to stay. In the early 1930s, the Mexican film industry consolidated and producers started to invest funds and human capital in new technologies and, of course, in producing Spanish-language talkies.

One of the first optical sound devices for film was in fact invented by a young Mexican man who was living in Los Angeles with his family at the time. His name, like the names of many remote national icons, has an almost cinematographic ring to it: José de Jesús “El Joselito” Rodríguez. In the back room of the bakery his parents owned he had been working for two years on a sound-on-film device that would adapt to any camera and be easy to transport. He finally completed the last adjustments to the Rodríguez Sound Recording System in 1929. It weighed less than twelve pounds and was purportedly adaptable to any camera circulating in the industry. As the story goes, he sat his family around a projector and activated it. To his family’s surprise, a horrifying, cacophonous, almost diabolical melody gushed out, in synchrony with the image of a few people moving their mouths rhythmically on the home-made screen. Joselito then stopped the mechanism, made a few adjustments, and tried again. What came out the second time around was the Mexican national anthem. Apparently, in the first try, he had set the mechanism the wrong way around, and what his family heard was the national anthem being sung backwards.

Early sound films relied on a sound-on-disc technology, in which the sound heard during a film screening had been recorded onto a phonograph record that was physically separate from the film. The technology was flimsy and unreliable: not only did the two components — sound and image — seem disconnected, but they would often desynchronize completely, producing mass confusion and irritation in early spectators. The decisive technological step for the sound film industry was the fusion of both the sound and visual components of the movie in an optical sound device, later called sound-on-film technology. Although initial experiments with the new technology took place in the early 1920s, the first full feature film with integrated sound was *The Jazz Singer* (1927). It was in that same year that Joselito Rodríguez began to develop his new device, which he imagined could be used in the burgeoning Mexican sound film industry and thus set Mexico at the forefront of international talkies.

At the same time as Joselito was working on his device, in around 1930 a Mexican producer put together a crew and began working on a project that would lead to the first Mexican opti-

cal sound film, *Santa*. Joselito, who probably knew he stood slim chances of getting a proper interview with film magnates, stalked the film's producer, Juan de la Cruz Alarcón, at Los Angeles airport. Alarcón was on his way back to Mexico, returning empty handed, after an unsuccessful trip to Hollywood in which he tried to acquire a sound-on-film technology device: they were all too costly and impossible to transport. Accompanied by his brother, Joselito approached Alarcón and secretly filmed and recorded their brief airport conversation, in which he told the producer of his latest invention. He was unsuccessful in settling any deal with him, but he at least managed to get his contact information down and record the whole encounter. A few days later, he mailed the reel to Alarcón back in Mexico. The recording met and surpassed Alarcón's expectations. It was a done deal. Just a couple of weeks later, Joselito and his brother, Roberto, were repatriated and began working on *Santa* in the newly built studios of the Compañía Nacional Productora de Películas.

*Santa* was premiered in 1932, in Mexico City's newly renovated Cine Palacio. The Palacio was finished in 1924 and renovated in the late 1920s to screen sound films. But what did this renovation consist in? Did sound film technology affect the architectural language or style of movie theaters beyond the necessary adjustments to their interiors? Interestingly, the renovations to the Palacio were also external: the theater perhaps had to send the message to its audiences that they were fully committed to modernity and they were as modern as the technology they housed.

In a comparison of the two façades it is possible to notice some of the typical changes that architecture underwent during the decade. In the renovated cinema, the straight lines that once met the pinnacles framing the center façade were replaced by a stepped rooftop, more typical of the art deco style of the late 1920s in Mexico, making the building look taller and, especially, differentiating it from the straight-line horizontal façades of both neocolonial and Porfirian art nouveau architecture. The exteriors of the Cine Palacio were also conditioned for the more striking form of film propaganda that started to flourish towards the end of the 1920s, which often made use of vertical edge-lit signs and likewise used the marquee for placing film posters.

There is, unfortunately, little published material about the the-

ater’s interior transformation or on what adaptations the film’s technicians had to do in order to screen *Santa* in a theater that was not initially built for talkies. The only mention in publications to its interior is that it was “modernized”—which probably means that the art nouveau ornamentation was “upgrade” to art deco (see,



Cine Palacio circa 1924.



Cine Palacio late 1920s.



for example, García 2002). In short: a new technology demanded a new appearance, internal and external. Modernity demanded an integral makeover, a full translation of a space into its modern version.

An urban melodrama of sorts, *Santa* was based on a best-selling novel written at the close of the nineteenth century by the Mexican writer Federico Gamboa. It tells the story of a woman from the countryside who arrives in Mexico City and is forced into prostitution. Modern Mexico city is portrayed as a threatening, cruel space, where well-intentioned people are treated harshly. As the critic Joanne Hershfield writes regarding *Santa*, “the film affirmed the conservative discourse that idealized tradition [...] and criticized the modern paradigm of progress” (Hershfield 2006, 268). It is somewhat interesting, in this light, that the storyline chosen to inaugurate the Mexican talkie—a format using technology that was spearheading modernity and progress—should come from a conservative nineteenth-century novel. It is also interesting that this conservative film was screened in a newly renovated, modern, art-deco movie theater. What can we make of the apparent *décalage* between a movie and the theater that screened it?

It must be noted that the example of the conservative *Santa* screened in the modern Palacio is by no means an exception. Most commercial movies made in Mexico during the 1930s—and well into the 1950s, the period in which the country entered its cinematographic Golden Age—were no less conservative and traditionalist. As Hershfield notes, “whether they were set in historical or contemporary contexts, these films exalted traditional values of patriarchy, the family, the macho hero, and virtuous, submissive femininity” (Hershfield 2006, 269). The fundamental reason for this is that the State was deeply involved in film production and distribution in Mexico, and therefore also had a “say” in its content.<sup>8</sup> The same is not true of the relationship between the State and movie theaters themselves.<sup>9</sup> Theaters were seen as lucrative

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<sup>8</sup> As Susan Dever writes regarding the film industry and the star system, “Within Mexico these stars negotiated a relationship between spectators and the State, indoctrinating viewers in the rights and duties of Mexican citizenship. (Given the Mexican Government’s subsidy of the film industry, making the State the producer of Golden Age cinema, this relationship was particularly well defined)” (Dever 2003, 12).

<sup>9</sup> There is no evidence whatsoever that most film theaters received money from the State, as op-

spaces of entertainment, not places destined to educate the Mexican population.

While successful films at the box office were usually the most conservative ones, Mexican cinemas in the early 1930s tended toward a gradually increasing radical modernity. They were more experimental than their content (that is, than the films they showed), more forward-looking and more committed to a sense of modernity—however they interpreted this. In other words, if cinemas in the 1930s pointed toward the future, the content they screened mostly pointed toward the past. How, then, should we read the resulting tension? Can it be read as a tension between form and function? That is, a tension between modernity in form and conservatism in function? Or perhaps their function was not at all to conserve values through conservative movies, but simply to entertain and make money. In that case, how did their form contribute to the parameters and box office exigencies and how was this, in turn, gauged against the State’s own exigencies regarding the pedagogic, civilizing purpose of Mexican commercial films?

The phenomenological assumption regarding the interrelatedness of an aesthetic experience and the physical aspect of the space in which such an experience takes place may or may not be entirely accepted—the *degree* of the interrelatedness can certainly be questioned in a space such as a theater, which disappears as soon as the lights go off and the show begins—but what is unquestionable is the fact that the architects of movie houses made stylistic choices which were necessarily tied to a taste informed by a preconception of what a space such as a cinema should “say” to its patrons.

In his lecture “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault describes the movie theater as a space that encloses within it a multiplicity of spaces. He explains the multiplicity of spaces enclosed in a movie theater

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posed to hospitals, schools, public housing, stadiums, universities, and public buildings. There were powerful families in the construction business—the Espinosa brothers, the Alarcóns, and of course, the controversial American tycoon William Jenkins—who had ties with the government and who would eventually hold a monopoly on Mexican film theaters. There were also politicians involved in theater construction and ownership, such as former president Abelardo Rodríguez. But none of this means that there was no public money, or at least honestly invested public money, in the business. Many reasons may explain the absence of the government in film theater construction and management. The short answer, however, is that theaters simply did not need it. As opposed to national film *production*, theaters had plenty of material to screen and plenty of patrons to entertain—a simple matter of supply and demand.

through the figure of the heterotopia: “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces [...] thus it is that the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space” (Foucault 1984, 6). But what Foucault fails to do is to see the “very odd rectangular room” as anything more than just a box in which the experience takes place. He does not, in other words, regard the physical space of the theater as anything more than a sort of container. Cinemas, however, are much more complex in terms of their production of space than an “odd rectangular room.” The spaces in which films were seen provided a setting in which the viewers received their dose of entertainment within the bracket or “slices in time” (Foucault 1984, 6) which the experience of movie-going entailed.



Palacio Chino late 1930s.

Perhaps the clearest historical example of a conscious stylistic choice is that of the atmospheric cinemas, which were in vogue in movie theater architecture in the United States in the 1920s and which sought to recreate exotic spaces. Such was the case of the

Palacio Chino (built in the late 1930s and inaugurated in 1940), which featured pagodas, Buddhas, and golden dragons in its particular rendering of the atmospheric style. It was built in an old ball court, and designed by Luis de la Mora and Alfredo Olagarray. The critic Luis Helguera describes its interiors as built in “atmospheric style, with pagodas, temples, and gold Buddha statues amid gardens. The ceiling was vault-like, not flat but very arched, and of course was painted deep blue. The screen was protected by a heavy black curtain, with Chinese motifs painted upon it. The screen arch was very heavily decorated, with dragons appearing here and there” (Heguerá).

Mexican architects of the atmospheric style followed the precept conceptualized by Charles Lee—“the show starts on the sidewalk.” They had attractive marquees, striking façades, and, in short, designed spaces that would bolster the “illusion” of the cinema, where the mind, leaving the real behind, was finally free to gambol and became more receptive to entertainment. Movie theaters, as spaces, can then perhaps be seen as a medium that, due to its “otherness,” helped *transmit* the illusion of cinema to its viewers. Whether this otherness was just a gleaming modernity, as in the case of the Cine Palacio, or whether it was set as an entire illusion, as in the case of the Palacio Chino, the point was that movie theaters were much more than just “odd rectangular rooms.”

Going back to the question of form and function posed earlier, how can we read the coexistence or juxtaposition of Mexican movies—conservative, and mostly realist and traditionalist—in these modern, “other” spaces? Perhaps by rephrasing this apparent dichotomy in terms of how movie theaters function as translation spaces we can make better sense of it. In a “foreign” space of sorts, in a space that was utterly “other”—due to its modernity, its ornamental exuberance, or its atmospheric illusions—what people went to see was themselves; or even an older, more traditional version of themselves. A space “outside of time” and “outside of space”—a modern space of entertainment and illusion—thus functioned, paradoxically, as a sort of mirror of reality. In other words, a space that was foreign made the domestic visible.

The patron or viewer, upon entering the other or foreign space of the movie theater, became a translator. A translator of what, exactly? A translator of him or herself *for* him or herself. The movie

theater, inasmuch as it created an illusion or sense of being elsewhere, estranged the patron from his reality and from himself: he was in a foreign space of sorts. Then, the movie itself—a movie such as *Santa*, which in turn realistically depicted the reality “outside” the space of the movies—made the patron face him-/herself. Translation spaces such as movie theaters were not just gateways for foreign languages and cultures, as I explained in the example of the Olimpia’s foreign talkie screenings, but also functioned as mirrors—spaces in which viewers come to see themselves reflected in that other “version” of themselves in the context or against the backdrop of a space that was foreign and other, much like the translator who is always “strabismically” looking simultaneously at the foreign text and at her or his own. Moviegoers thus travels outside themselves and outside their domestic, local reality to return to themselves.

#### **4. New monumentality in the cityscape: building typologies and the urban layout**

By the mid 1930s, the Mexican film sound industry had entered its Golden Age. The number of films produced in the country had increased exponentially (see Mora 1989). The same was happening in many other parts of the world, as the advent of sound film and the language/translation problems it had created were partially resolved by countries creating and investing in their own film industries and producing films in their national languages.

Paradoxically, however, while the film industry was becoming more and more fragmented into linguistic regions, the “international language” of theater architecture became more and more consolidated and unified. As the national film industry grew in Mexico in the 1930s, Spanish-language films were being screened in spaces that were increasingly trans- or international in terms of their architectural languages and styles. In this sense, it could perhaps be said that cinemas internationalized their content, however “local” it may have been. Spectators seeing a movie about the most local of themes—be it the Mexican Revolution, Mexican urban poverty, or the Aztec past—were doing so in an interior that could just as easily be in Vienna, Buenos Aires, or Chicago.

But what about the relationship of these movie theaters to their surroundings? That is, how can movie theaters be understood as

translation spaces within the urban space they occupied and how can this relationship shine a different light upon their cultural and social role? In the 1930s, monumental sound movie theaters began to be built. These were not just adaptations of older buildings, but constructions whose function was, from the outset, to house sound films. Beyond their bold architecture, which contrasted with the older and more sober buildings in Mexico City and thus set them apart as grand palaces of entertainment, their monumental size also marked a dramatic shift in the appearance of the city, which had always been horizontally low-rise. One of the most interesting examples of modern cinema monumentality was Juan Segura's Cine Hipódromo, housed within the Ermita building.



Ermita building circa 1931.



Cine Hipodromo, Ermita building.



Ermita building circa 1931.

The Ermita was a dramatic intervention in the cityscape. It was the first “skyscraper,” albeit only an eight-story one. Seen from the acute angle where Revolución and Avenida Jalisco meet, the building resembles a large ship sailing north. On its ground level are spaces for small businesses, integrating the street-life into the building. Along its southern façade, a big entranceway, which makes resourceful use of the building’s triangular shape, opens into a cinema. On top of the cinema are three stories of apartments. Since Segura could not use columns inside the cinema, he had to think of a way of making sure the structure would support the three stories above. He therefore opted for structural steel and constructed an innovative steel structure around the cinema in order to secure it from the weight above, as well as to sound-proof it. He also used reinforced concrete in beam designs and roofs, as well as for minimal cladding purposes and ornaments—all of which were an integral part of the building (Toca 1997, 170). Although the Ermita was finished by 1931, the Hipódromo, did not open until 1936. Its inauguration poster depicted “the masses” crowding around the new, towering building.



Teatro Cine Hipodromo inauguration poster, 1936.



Other examples of modernist monumentality were Francisco J. Serrano's projects. He designed and modernized at least ten cinemas in the 1930s, some of which, in his own words "left behind their *jacal* [hut-like] appearance and became modern spaces" (Alfaro 1998, 58). One of his most important buildings, the Cine Encanto, was inaugurated in 1937, and loomed high above the surrounding buildings of the San Rafael neighborhood. Its art deco façade featured a heavily lit marquee, an enormous portico, and a striking sign at the top with the theater's name written in deco typography. The vertical cement walls, forming a right angle with the central area of the façade, accentuate the height of the construction and the stretched glass-block vertical windows through which the light from the interior shone outwards, thus accentuating the chiaroscuro suggested by the walls.

The interiors of the Cine Encanto were modern and spare compared to the more lavishly ornamented theaters of the early 1920s.



Cine Encanto circa 1937.

The Streamline Moderne vestibule, with its curving forms, long horizontal lines, and round ship-like windows can be seen as a reaction to the earlier sumptuous interiors of movie palaces and atmospherics, and a natural reflection of modern architecture's tendency towards simplicity and economy of space and materials. Its vestibule, moreover, played with the ambiguous border between the inside and the outside, by integrating an interior garden and



Cine Encanto (interiors) circa 1937.



Cine Encanto (vestibule).

using openings in the roof to allow plenty of natural light to flow in during the day or for the night sky to be seen from inside.

One of the most interesting aspects of both Juan Segura's and Francisco Serrano's work is precisely that it raises the question of how modernity was being interpreted by these "independent" architects of the new film theaters.<sup>10</sup> Segura and Serrano designed two of the first cinemas constructed specifically as sound cinemas. These movie theaters were no longer adaptations of constructions dating from an earlier period, they were not mere "upgrades" from art nouveau to art deco, and they were certainly not like the opulent, lavishly ornamented atmospheric palaces. Indeed, in the mid and late 1930s, movie theater architects would draw more and more on this interpretation of modernity and modernism and move towards more sober, less eclectic forms, building cinemas devoid of superficial ornamentation and maintaining a tighter relationship between form and function.<sup>11</sup>

But these movie theaters were also imposing new monuments to modernity, towering high above the city's older buildings. They were as much places destined for seeing something (a movie) as places made to *be seen*. They were visible from afar; they loomed large, like the admonition of a possible future city, from below. These new buildings introduced a new time: the time of the "now" as a "future." The time of the thoroughly, universally modern.

If modernist translation practices were a form of foreignization of the domestic, those new movie theaters, in the local context where they appeared, must have seemed utterly foreign or other—not by virtue of bringing in elements from a particular foreign country or region, as International Modernism and the Streamline modern style were in essence extraterritorial, but by virtue of introducing a foreign time into the city's traditional time. Their "otherness" was a "futureness." If translation is a transportation, a transference, a carrying over, what these monuments to modernism translated was not any particular content, but the sense of time itself.

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<sup>10</sup> By independent, I mean that their work was not, as was the case with so many realms of architectural and artistic production—film certainly among them—funded by the Mexican State.

<sup>11</sup> As Maggie Valentine explains, "seemingly anachronistic ornate architecture and design disappeared from the buildings. Both [film and film theater architecture] were stripped of their artificial decoration in favor of a more honest [...] examination of life" (Valentine 1994, 6).

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Photo: Zony Maya.

# Translating At the Edge of Empire: Olha Kobylianska and Rose Ausländer

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**Abstract:** The edge of empire is a mythical place which has inspired the historical and literary imagination. As the easternmost city of the Habsburg Empire, Czernowitz was a product of a particular kind of border culture, one which sustained an intense relationship with the German language. In the multilingual matrix of the years leading to the collapse of the Empire and during the interwar period, translational relationships were developed through German. The cases of the Ukrainian writer Olha Kobylianska and the German-Jewish poet Rose Auslander are considered here.

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The edge of empire is a mythical place that has long stimulated the historical and literary imagination. The Roman Limes—which encompassed a vast area that included Britain (up to its northern, Atlantic reaches), continental Europe right across to the Black Sea and down to the Red Sea, and North Africa as far west as the Atlantic coast (see <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/430>)—probably provide the most pervasive material traces of the walls, ditches, forts, fortresses, watchtowers, and civilian settlements that separate Empire from its barbarian outside. But the waxing and waning of innumerable empires over the course of world history—from the Greek and Mongol to the Habsburg, British, and Ottoman empires—have offered an abundant supply of objects and narratives, images and fantasies, a recent example of which is the Star Wars game called “The Edge of the Empire.”

An expression of imperial power at its highest point (bringing the full might of military force to bear against the enemy without), the edge of empire is also, because of its physical distance from the imperial center, a place where identities can become diluted, where the precise dividing line between inside and outside can become troubled. This paradox is richly exploited in J. M. Coetzee’s

1980 novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It tells the story of a disabused middle-aged magistrate who chooses to end his days in a lazy imperial outpost, spending his free time carrying out his own archaeological digs.

Largely indifferent to the bellicose aims of his military superiors, he comes under suspicion of collusion with the enemy. He has excavated a cache of slivers of wood that all seem to have some sort of message written on them, but the writing is ancient and impenetrable and he has been unable to decipher the message. When he is forced, however, to provide the meaning of these writings, now considered crucial evidence, the magistrate suddenly finds words to transmit the messages he reads from the slips: appeals from barbarian prisoners to their families—intimate and immediate and alive.

Through his “translation,” the magistrate transforms the barbarians from aliens into individual beings. He blurs the line that separates the enemy from the citizen, and he opens gaps in the Empire’s line of defense. And in fact the Empire never does achieve victory. The barbarians simply lure the army out into the desert and then vanish. Faithful to the genre of “the barbarian and the frontier”—classically drawn by Dino Buzzati in *The Desert of the Tartars* and powerfully evoked by Cavafy in the poem also called “Waiting for the Barbarians”—the barbarians in Coetzee’s novel are elusive. The moment of direct confrontation, feared and desired, never comes. The link between present and past, self and other, suggests Coetzee, is an imaginative leap, a gesture of voluntary projection.

Coetzee’s novel will be our entry point into another site of translation at the edge of empire. This is the city of Czernowitz (today’s Cernivtsi in Ukraine), the most easterly city of the erstwhile Habsburg empire. Abundantly mythologized as a border city, as a cultural bulwark against the alien forces from the east, the city provides rich material for a study of translational forces. Its geographical situation but also its cultural vocation as a border city during the period of the military collapse and the reorganization of the Habsburg border lands offers a singular viewpoint onto the work of translation at the edge of empire. In what follows, I will examine the work of two Czernowitz authors—Olha Kobylianska (1863-1942) and Rose Ausländer (1901-1988)—as translators of

their border city. Like Coetzee's magistrate, they find the borders enacted by translation to be shifting and elusive. To translate at the edge is to be especially aware of the ways in which boundaries can accentuate or attenuate difference. Political borders hypostatize cultural and linguistic differences, while geographical borders often show difference to be gradual. The multilingualism of border zones problematizes the activities of translation as source–target transactions. Whether applied to a huge geographical expanse or to the microspaces of the multilingual city, the operations of translation at the border are shaped by the special pressures of the interzone. This means that the frames of language exchange must be recast to respond to more subtle understandings of the relation between language, territory, and identity. How do the competition and animosities, but also the shared references that inevitably flourish in multilingual geopolitical contexts, shape translation (Meylaerts 2013)? Languages that share the same terrain rarely participate in a peaceful and egalitarian conversation: their separate and competing institutions are wary of one another, aggressive in their need for self-protection. Cultures of mediation are shaped by the social and political forces which regulate the relations among languages.

### **Building the bulwark**

Today the Bukovina is largely situated in Ukraine. From 1774 until 1918, this area was the easternmost edge of the Habsburg empire that the emperor Joseph II consciously and vigorously constructed as a buffer zone in order to protect his territories from Russian and Ottoman expansion (Colin 1991, 7). He actively promoted the settlement of Germans from Austria and southwest Germany, as well as the Germanization of Ruthenians and Roumanians, the two largest language groups in the Bukovina.

Over the course of the nineteenth century in particular, for both German-language empires (the Prussian and the Habsburg), “the East” exerted tremendous fascination. From 1848 to 1918, central Europe was crisscrossed by conflicting imperial projects, each marked by its own real and imagined borders and the constant pressure to defend newly conquered expanses of territory. The areas that became known as the “eastern Marches” were increasingly important in public consciousness. The term “March”—originally indicating the border provinces of the Carolingian Empire,



granted a privileged political status in order to fulfill their duties in defending and expanding the Empire's boundaries, and used only sporadically in the first half of the nineteenth century—became a catch-phrase (the OstMark) after 1848 (Thum 2013, 44–59). And in the second half of the nineteenth century, a new kind of highly ideologized novel later called the *Ostmarkenroman* emerged, popularizing the idea “that a battle over territory was taking place in the eastern borderlands between the representations of a superior German civilization and their Slavic enemies” (Thum 2013, 48).

As Pieter Judson has so convincingly demonstrated, these border zones were not “natural” zones of conflict, in particular of language conflict. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, they were, rather, strategically targeted by nationalist ideologists and enlisted in the struggle for patriotic allegiance (Judson 2006). “Nationalist activists” took every opportunity to transform rural conflicts into national ones (10). In particular, campaigns around the language of schools were used to mobilize energies for nationalist causes in what Judson calls the “nationalization of the language frontier” (17).

From 1848 onwards, Czernowitz had an increasingly German-language population. Many German-speaking Jews settled in the major Bukovinian cities and by 1918, 47 percent of the population of Czernowitz was Jewish. “Since Bukovinian Jews were German-speaking and particularly loyal to the Habsburg monarchy and instrumental in its expansion in that region, Austrian officials tended to consider them representatives of the Habsburg empire” (Colin 1991, 7; see also Hirsch and Spitzer, chapters 2 and 4). Proof of the importance of Czernowitz for Austria and the German language came with the founding in 1875 of Franz Josef University—a coveted boost to the intellectual and cultural life of what was considered by many to be an outpost of imperial life. While the town had its military garrisons to protect the city from attack, it also had its linguistic ramparts. By 1875, for example, in order to conform to the empire's own language laws guaranteeing the use of a national language when numbers justified it, Lemberg university in the Galician city was giving all its courses in Polish—so the Empire had to exert its efforts at Germanization elsewhere. The university in Czernowitz was the Empire's first new university in fifty years (Judson 2016, 321). The new university, won for

Czernowitz over intense competition from other cities—notably Trieste—was the result of relentless lobbying by a noble landowner from Bukovina who argued that only German scholarship could claim universality and that it would ensure an integrative function in this multilingual zone of empire (322). The University reflected the Empire’s broader political and ideological aims.

When in 1866 Austria lost its traditional political hegemony in Germany, the liberal empire sought a renewed sense of mission in Europe. In the 1870s, the exploration of cultural diversity seemed to offer the foundations for a renewed Habsburg civilizing mission directed specifically to eastern and southeastern Europe, including the Balkans. In its earliest incarnation, this new mission for the empire focused its civilizational energies on the existing crownlands of Galicia and Bukovina. The founding of a university in Czernowitz in 1875 offered early elaborations of Austria–Hungary’s new civilizational mission to the east and of its ideology of unity in diversity. (Judson 2016, 318)

It is to be noted, however, that the new university did have the first professorships of Romanian and Ukrainian literature.

### **What does multilingual mean?**

Like other cities in Central Europe—large cities like Budapest and Prague (where German was the first, then the second, language) (see Spector 2000), or smaller cities like Vilnius, Lviv, Riga, Danzig, Bucharest, Timisoara, Plovdiv, or Trieste—Czernowitz was intensely multilingual. What made Czernowitz different from other cities in Galicia, where Polish was dominant (for instance in Lemberg or Vilna), is that there was no one Christian national bourgeoisie which dominated in Czernowitz. Ukrainians (also known as Ruthenians) and Romanians were both a significant presence in the city, but the fact that neither was dominant in the city gave greater prominence and autonomy to the Jewish, German-speaking, population (Corbea-Hoisie cited in van Drunen 2013, I, 3, 34).

The multilingualism of Czernowitz is today often remembered in a benign, nostalgic mode. Despite the violence of both World Wars and the repressive regime which ruled in the interwar period, memories of pre-World War II Czernowitz are often cast in a very rosy light—evoking the cosmopolitanism of a lost Mitteleuropa. Time and again, the character of Czernowitz’s language landscape is reiterated as a trademark symbol of the city—equivalent to a

landmark or tourist attraction. City guidebooks, postcards, and similar popular materials praised the coexistence of separate but happily coexisting ethnic communities. This refrain was accentuated by pronouncements for instance by Rose Ausländer on the four-languaged town she grew up in (“Viersprachig verbrüderete Lieder in entzweiter Zeit,” Ausländer 1976, 72) or Paul Celan’s oft-quoted salute to his “city of books” (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010, 32), or the many memoirs by former inhabitants of the interwar period that evoke a long period of relative harmony—even against the backdrop of rising Romanian nationalism and anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1908, a visitor to the city, Yitzchak Peretz (1852–1915) wrote “We stroll in the evening streets, and from different windows the tones of different languages waft out, all different kinds of folk music”, in (Olson 2010, 33). Peretz conveys what seems to be a conventional aural impression of the city—that of a harmonious music wafting through the air and captured with pleasure by the evening stroller.

The myth of Czernowitz that issues from this image of happy polyphony has increasingly come to be critiqued in light of the easy idealizations it fosters. This image allowed German-speaking scholars, for example, to have Czernowitz stand as a site of pre-Nazi German pluralism, a safe haven in German historiography (Menninghaus 1999). It promoted a nostalgia industry which pitted a perfect “then” against the flawed “now,” though little proof was given beyond the same repeated phrases. A more nuanced portrait of intercultural relations is therefore required. What kind of relations existed among the city’s various language communities? Following the outpouring of publications which, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, has opened research in this area of the world (see the excellent review of the literature by van Drunen 2013). I will bring translation studies into the discussion. How can the view from translation illuminate the field of language relations in the city?

A first move is to view the city not as multilingual but as translational. What is the sense of this distinction? Multilingualism calls up a space of pure diversity, a proliferation of tongues and of parallel conversations, without concern for the interactions among these languages. The translational city looks for connections and convergences across language and communities, connections that

indicate direction (to and from which languages) and intensity (Simon 2012). It follows, then, that the translational city is not always a site of peaceful and friendly transactions. It includes the refusal to translate, zones of silence and resistance. And so translation could be broadly defined as “writing at the intersection of languages,” writing under the influence of, in the company of, with and often against, other languages. A detailed examination of urban translation practices, such as those provided in Michaela Wolf’s pioneering study of translation in the Habsburg monarchy, distinguishes between the formal practices of translation dictated by the Empire’s language laws and the myriad informal practices of translation which were part of daily life—the domestic servants and artisans who had to learn to serve in German, the tradespeople who had to learn German terminology, the informal exchanges through which children would be sent to neighboring villages of the empire to learn the languages across the border (Wolf 2012, 2015). Restoring multilingual transactions to the streets of Habsburg cities, showing how these cities were in many ways precursors to today’s multilingual diasporic and postcolonial cities, Wolf’s study also confirms that translation practices were dominated by the power of German and therefore by translation into German. Literary translation in Czernowitz also followed this pattern. Translation out of German, however, followed a different path. Whether in relation to Yiddish or Ukrainian, writers chose not so much to translate works in that direction as to abandon German in favor of a new writing language.

### **Literary interactions**

Literary translation was a popular activity in Czernowitz, particularly in the interwar period. In her introduction to a book on Paul Celan, Amy Colin (1991) details the myriad activities of translation which were undertaken by the participants in the active literary milieu of the city. These include Alfred Margul-Sperber’s German translations of British (T. S. Eliot), French (Apollinaire and Gérard de Nerval), and American (Robert Frost, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Wallace Stevens, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and e e cummings) modernist poets as well as American Indian texts. Immanuel Weissglas translated Eminescu’s famous poem “The Morning Star” into German and Grillparzer, Stifter, and parts of Goethe into

Romanian. There was also indirect translation—with Romanian and Ukrainian poets influenced by German authors and inversely. Authors writing in German often used motifs from Romanian and Ukrainian folklore and translated important historical and literary texts from one language into the other (Colin 1991, 11). The writer who is at once exceptional and yet who best exemplifies the culture of mediation which issued from the multilingual matrix of Czernowitz is Paul Celan (Nouss 2010). Celan’s displacements from Czernowitz to Bucharest to Paris, his poetic memorialization of the Holocaust, his negation of the German language after the Nazis, his experiments across and through languages—these mark his work as uniquely expressive of the Czernowitz legacy, its hyperconsciousness of language, of history and of the experience of literary mediation.

An important trend of the early twentieth century saw many writers begin writing in German, then turn to their “national” language—Ukrainian, or Yiddish. Amy Colin gives the examples for Ukrainian of Felix Niemchevski, Osip Juril Fed’kovych, Alexander Popovich, and Isidor Vorobkevich, sometimes combining motifs from German Romanticism with images from Ruthenian folklore (Colin 1991, 11). To this list she might have added the important Yiddish-language writers Itzik Manger and Eliezer Steinbarg—Manger, for instance, carried the German literary form of the ballad into Yiddish (Starck-Adler 2007, 124–132)—as well as that of the legendary Ukrainian writer Olha Kobylianska. It is to Kobylianska’s experience that I now turn to explore the language configuration of Czernowitz, before examining the work of another well-known Czernowitz poet, Rose Ausländer.

### **Olha Kobylianska**

Born into a family who used German as their daily language (her father was a Ukrainian who worked for the Austrian administration and her mother was of Polish origin), Kobylianska began her writing in German and in fact continued to keep a diary in German for her entire life. She was born and brought up in a small town not far from Czernowitz, but moved to the city when she was in her twenties. After “converting” to the Ukrainian national cause in her late teens, she began to translate herself into Ukrainian—sometimes asking fellow authors to help her or receiving editorial

help from her publishers. Though she lived in a small corner of the Ukrainian cultural territory, Kobylianska was very soon in contact with the powerful standard-setters of the Ukrainian literary establishment. As a young woman writer she was much influenced by the opinions of these critics, and tried to change her style and subject matter to suit the left-wing populism that was considered appropriate. But Kobylianska was continually criticized for the strains of mysticism and intellectualism which were discerned in her writing. Though it would be those same qualities of modernism, exploration of the emotions of women and fascination with art which would endear her to later generations of readers and establish her as a major figure in Ukrainian literature.

Kobylianska's writing is difficult to categorize, with its sometimes incongruous *mélange* of feminism, intricate exploration of inner sentiments, portrayal of the cruelty of peasant life, and outbursts of nationalist rhetoric. Critics are divided as to the elements of her work that are ironic or parodic and those that convey her true sentiments. Among her works, "Valse *mélancolique*" stands out as a truly radical portrait of women sharing a life together as artists. Like some of her other stories, this takes place in an urban setting, recounting the daily life and conversations of women who have chosen to devote themselves to art rather than to a conventional married life. This story marked a radical beginning for Ukrainian literature. Kobylianska's writings move between urban stories and rural depictions that are gothic in their intensity. In one story, a wife kills her husband and the children live in terror of being killed as well—though in the end the story shows sympathy for the woman browbeaten by the drunken husband. In fact Kobylianska knew both the urban and rural worlds, as she grew up in a small town, but travelled often to Czernowitz before settling there. She was involved in setting up the first women's organization in the city—a radical organization from a feminist perspective but tied to the church and therefore suspect in the eyes of most young Ukrainian women who preferred to join left-wing socialist organizations. Much of her writing associates "German" with high literature and a genteel life style. As a Ukrainian nationalist, she supported the Russians and then the Soviets as defenders of Ukrainian identity against the Austrians and then the Romanians, and when the Romanians took the city in 1942 she was condemned

to death by hanging. She died before the hanging was to take place. There is a museum dedicated to her in Czernowitz and the main street, called the Herrengasse by the Austrians then by the name of a Romanian writer by the Romanians, is today named after her in Ukrainian Czernowitz.

Kobylianska was influenced by George Sand but especially by Nietzsche, a writer she could read and quote in the original German—by contrast with her new compatriots who would have had only secondhand versions.

Kobylianska was the first Ukrainian intellectual to introduce Nietzsche to Ukrainian readers, incorporating many of his philosophical concepts to her own philosophical system [ . . . ] Nietzsche’s association of myth with aesthetic creativity, his statement that myth is essential for the health of a culture, as well as his call on the “free spirits” to create this new “ruling idea” by which to live spoke directly to Kobylianska’s dissatisfaction with positivism, rationalism and socialism. (Ladygina 2013, 85)

While many critics disparaged her use of “German technique,” which in this case included a combination of elements such as intellectualism, mysticism, and estheticism, the writer and feminist Lesia Ukrainka took the opposite position and praised its influence on Kobylianska’s writing: “It led you to recognize world literature, it transported you out into the broader world of ideas and art—this simply leaps out at once, when one compares your writing with that of the majority of Galicians” (de Haan 2006, 249).

One could therefore refer to Kobylianska’s impressive output of novels and short stories in Ukrainian as translational writing—a product of the particular *mélange* of cultures particular to the Bukovina and Czernowitz. In turn, Kobylianska translated Ukrainian literature into German, including the works of Pchilka, Kobrynska, and Ukrainka (Franko 1998). In the case of Kobylianska as for the many other writers of Czernowitz, the multilingual milieu did not signify a close interrelationship with all the literary communities but meant, rather, that writing occurred in the presence of other languages, in the consciousness of competing literary systems, and in this case with or against the power of German.

## Rose Ausländer

In a prose fragment written in 1971, Rose Ausländer answers the question, “Why do I write?” with the following reply:

Perhaps because I came into the world in Czernowitz, and because the world in Czernowitz came into me. That particular landscape. The particular people, fairy tales, and myths were in the air, one inhaled them. Czernowitz, with its four languages, was a city of muses that housed many artists, poets, and lovers of art, literature, and philosophy. (Cited in Morris 1998, 59)

Rose Ausländer grew up and began her literary career in Czernowitz, where she was an active member of the Jewish German-language literary community, but left in her twenties to travel to the US. She spent the war years back in Czernowitz in hiding with her mother (she was one of the five thousand survivors of the ghetto, while 55,000 were murdered) and after another almost two decades of wandering finally settled in Dusseldorf in the 1960s. In the US after the war, Ausländer began a period during which she wrote poetry only in English. She later returned to the German language and has become a well-known German-language author. Her works are collected in seven volumes, much of which published after her death.

The interweaving of diaspora and home, the long wanderings of much of her life, are reflected not only in the themes of her writing but in the consequences of the to-and-fro between English and German. In particular, her exposure to American modernism resulted in shifts in her formal expression, from a German-inspired lyricism to an American-inspired modernism.

Ausländer is one of the sources most often quoted in favor of the image of a peaceful multilingual Czernowitz before the war. In the poem “Czernowitz Before the Second World War,” she writes:

surrounded by beech forests. . .  
. . . Four languages  
in accord with each other  
spoiled the air  
Until the bombs fell  
the city breathed  
happily (Ausländer 1977, 6: 348)



Indeed, Ausländer continued to praise the city of her birth and upbringing, despite the horrors she experienced during the war. Perhaps because she was always able to keep a distance between fatherland and motherland:

My fatherland is dead  
they have buried it  
in fire.  
I live  
in my motherland  
word<sup>1</sup> (quoted in Morris 1998, 49)

This motherland is German, the language in which she wrote all her life, except for a period of eight years, from 1948 to 1956, when, she says, she “found herself” writing only in English. She was living in New York, a city where she had previously spent several years during the 1920s, and perhaps contemplating a conversion to an American existence. But this period turned out to be only a hiatus in her writing life, as she later returned to Europe and to the German language—and most of the English poems were discovered only after her death. Yet these years in English introduce a significant translational element into Ausländer’s esthetic, a more precise materialization of the Czernowitz multilingualism, and one that gave greater heft to the name she seems to have chosen to keep as hers—the name which belonged to the husband of a short-lived marriage: Ausländer or outsider. Rose Ausländer owned two suitcases that she carried through her lifelong wanderings, and identified fully with her Jewish identity as someone who has wandered for hundreds of years, “from Word to Word.”

English was *not German*, the language of the war. Ausländer knew Paul Celan from Czernowitz, and met him several times later on her return trips to Europe—and she surely shared his sense of the contamination of the German language. English was also the language of her daily life in New York, of her workplaces there, and of the modernist poets she read and admired. Ausländer met Marianne Moore at a writer’s conference in New York in 1956, and in addition to Moore Ausländer was drawn to the work of Wallace Stevens and e e cummings. These sources allowed her to write

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<sup>1</sup> Mein Vaterland ist tot/sie haben es begraben/im Feuer/Ich lebe/in meinem Mutterland/Wort.

poetry after years of silence and a personal crisis brought on by the death of her mother in 1947. *Ausländer* could return to poetry only through the oblique angle of another language—one which had not been part of the “old world” configuration.

In 1956 she began again to write in German, putting together the shattered pieces of her life through a renewed belief in the mother tongue. The poetry becomes more angular, less lyrical, she says that the stars had taken on a new configuration, the flowered words had faded. She uses fewer adjectives, shorter lines, no rhyme or punctuation, the isolated word taking on new meaning. The mother tongue takes the place of the mother, the poem a place of refuge.

But, as Lesley Morris argues, *Ausländer*’s “return” to German is less a one-way and definitive embrace of the authentic tongue than a renewed practice of translation, as she brings back to Germany the long experience of exile, experiencing new forms of displacement within the German-speaking world (Morris 1998, 55).

The sheer number of *Ausländer*’s poems, which are normally only some twelve lines long, suggests an esthetic of incompleteness, of relentless recommencing. *Ausländer* translated some of her English poems into German, just as she also translated at various times in her career the poems of others into German or English—Yiddish poems by Itzik Manger (1901–1969) into German and German poems by Else Lasker-Schüler and Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) into English. The fragmented nature of *Ausländer*’s various exiles and returns points to a kind of permanent diasporic state, a *Niemandland* of exile, where being at home will always mean being far away from home. *Ausländer*’s diasporic life began before the Second World War, but her poetry was irrevocably marked by her experiences as a Jew during that period and by the wanderings which were a result of the destruction of Jewish life in Czernowitz.

The imaginative world of *Ausländer* is deeply embedded in the originary crucible of languages in Czernowitz and marked especially by one enormous fact: the sudden reversal of meaning attached to the German language. For this city, so tied to the myth of the “imaginary West in the East,” German had been elevated to the status of a religion—an affiliation so intense as to remain strong even during the Romanianization of the interwar years.

Raised in the adoration of *Deutschtum*, Czernowitz authors were forced to see German undergo a spectacular transvaluation of values—and therefore to revise their relationship to the language. For *Ausländer*, following Paul Celan, this meant a mediated relation to German, one which showed the “home” language to be partially alien.

### **Conclusion**

The meaning of Czernowitz as a city at the edge of empire is dominated by the history of the significance given to German. The pre-eminence of the German language, lasting far into the twentieth century, was central to the writing lives of both Kobylianska and *Ausländer*. The historical events which shaped their relationship to this language were, however, of very different natures. Kobylianska’s literary imagination was shaped in German, and she carried into the Ukrainian language the sensibility she had first acquired in that language—both the popular sentimental novels she had read as a youth and the exalted ideas she took from Nietzsche. At the same time, her choice to write in Ukrainian was a decision to separate herself from the German sphere and participate in the construction of a new Ukrainian sensibility. This turn to nationalism on the contested site of the border city expresses the conflictual nature of language relations in the border city. That Kobylianska, however, continued to keep a diary in German throughout her life, testifies to the ambiguities and split allegiances of the private sphere—where translation became a permanent condition.

*Ausländer*’s relationship to German was shaped by the Jewish literary milieu of Czernowitz, by her personal experiences of diaspora (before and after the Second World War) and by the Holocaust. *Ausländer* is one of relatively few Jews to have lived through the Holocaust and to have continued to use German as a literary language after World War II. (Among the best-known exceptions are Paul Celan, as noted, and Marcel Reich-Ranicki.) It is surely significant that both Celan and *Ausländer* are from Czernowitz. Certainly her understanding of that language and its cultural affiliations were tempered by the multilingual matrix of that city, and the translational relationships out of which it evolved. Her turn away from German, and her subsequent return, her wanderings and her final settling in Dusseldorf, testify to a difficult relation-

ship to language and place—one which nevertheless allowed her to celebrate her past in the borderlands of the empire.

Kobylianska and Ausländer would not have known one another in Czernowitz. They belonged to different milieus and different generations (Kobylianska was born in 1863; Ausländer in 1901), though Ausländer would have heard of the more famous Kobylianska, her growing literary fame, her persecution and death in 1942. Their careers illustrate the parallel paths followed by the literatures of the city, each enclosed within its respective literary languages and traditions. Even today, they are unlikely to be found in the same anthologies or literary histories. Nevertheless, both writers defined themselves with and against the German language—along the lines of tension that animated the language life of their common border city.

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# Translating Ruins

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**Abstract:** This essay explores the relationship between a neo-Latin poem by Ianus Vitalis and three vernacular sonnets, versions of the Latin original, by Du Bellay, Spenser, and Francisco de Quevedo. The purpose of the essay is to ponder the problems and choices that the translators had to resolve in order to refashion Vitalis. The essay further seeks to show the strangeness of Vitalis' poem and how his translators effectively created three original poems. This is an exploration of translation, more concerned with that problematic art than with the history of the European sonnet.

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Writing in 1932 about the numerous English versions of Homer, Jorge Luis Borges asserts—perhaps ironically though perhaps not—that the relationship between translations and originals defines the relationship between any text, its myriad literary sources, and the experiences an author assimilates to produce it. Unlike so-called originals, translations reveal rather than hide their sources: “El modelo propuesto a su imitación es un texto visible, no un laberinto inestimable de proyectos pretéritos o la acatada tentación momentánea de una facilidad”<sup>1</sup> (Borges 1965, 105).

Borges denies original composition, declaring all texts to be translations and writing (like reading) nothing more than translating. This anti-Romantic theory of literary creation makes the juxtaposition of originals and translations complex: we are no longer comparing the original with an imitation (the translation) but actually comparing coequals.

Fair enough, but even though Borges deals with English translations of Homer—the paucity of Spanish translations making his

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<sup>1</sup> “The model proposed for imitation is a visible text, not an incalculable labyrinth of past projects or the yielded-to, momentary temptation of an opportune insight.” Translation mine.



essay impossible to write—he does not discuss the role played by nationality and national language in translation. Why did the English, century after century, feel the need to translate and retranslate Homer? And what was the impact of these translations on the history of English literature? If Borges had elected to study the many translations of *Don Quixote* into English, he would have reached the same conclusions about the relationship between translation and original; but he might also have noted that the history of the novel in English was changed because of Cervantes.

Literary history abounds in translations or imitations that somehow acquire the status of originals. For example, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón's *La verdad sospechosa*, from about 1634, is the basis for Corneille's *Le Menteur* (1644), which in turn spawns Carlo Goldoni's *Il Bugiardo* (1750) and Samuel Foote's *The Lyar* (1762). Ruiz de Alarcón engenders not just translations and imitations but an entire theatrical tradition in four languages and four cultures, each of which reshapes the original to national tastes. This idea, that translators would deliberately accommodate a work to a national language, appears in Alastair Fowler's *Times Literary Supplement* review (April 27, 2012) of a new edition of Gavin Douglas's 1513 Scots translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The translation crystalizes the language into which it is translated, much in the way the King James Bible or Luther's translation consolidated English or German.

Less important in terms of fixing a national language, but equally fascinating in terms of the relationship between original and translation are three sonnets, freestanding works of art in themselves, which directly or indirectly derive from the epigram *De Roma* (1552) by Ianus Vitalis (1485–1560):

Qui Romam in media quaeris novus advena Roma,  
 Et Romae in Roma nil reperis media,  
 Aspice murorum moles, praeruptaque saxa,  
 Obrutaque horrenti vasta theatra situ:  
 Haec sunt Roma. Viden velut ipsa cadaver, tantae  
 Urbis adhuc spirent imperiosa minas.  
 Vicit ut haec mundum, nixa est se vincere; vicit,  
 A se non victum ne quid in orbe foret.  
 Nunc victa in Roma Roma illa invicta sepulta est,  
 Atque eadem victrix victaque Roma fuit.  
 Albulam Romani restat nunc nominis index,

Quinetiam rapidis fertur in aequor aquis,  
Disce hinc, quid possit fortuna; inmota labascunt,  
Et quae perpetuo sun agitate manent. (McFarlane 1980, 24–26)<sup>2</sup>

Vitalis' poem invites the recently arrived (*novus advena*) visitor who has come to Rome seeking ancient Rome to learn a moral lesson: Rome is now nothing but ruins. All that endures is, paradoxically, the Tiber: The river flowing like time itself remains, while the ancient capital of the world is *disjecta membra*. The elegiac tone of Vitalis' poem, enhanced by the repeated "o" in Rome, reflects the ancient fusion of elegy and epigram—which is to say that by Vitalis' time, a neo-Latin epigram was simply a short poem. It might be of intellectual rather than emotional cast, though there is nothing consistent or absolute about its subject. Like the sonnet, the epigram could treat any theme, although concision is one of its principal features: the verbal economy of Latin would be an ideal for Renaissance vernacular poets to strive for, especially in sonnets.

That Vitalis' poem is comprised of fourteen lines is a fascinating irony. A poem in Latin on mutability that seeks to avoid the mutability of vernacular tongues uses a structure that to Renaissance readers would immediately recall the sonnet. *De Roma* is an open invitation to vernacular translation, and Malcolm C. Smith (1977) lists over a dozen versions of the epigram. Not all are sonnets, but those under consideration here adapt Vitalis to that compact form.

The first of the three, a translation of a translation, is Edmund Spenser's version of Joachim du Bellay, which appears in his appropriately titled sonnet series *The Ruines of Rome* (1591). Spenser obtains that alliteration by not translating the title of du Bellay's sonnet sequence, *Les Antiquités de Rome* (1558)—he changes it utterly. *Antiquités* are ancient, but *ruines* might be recent. While the name Rome itself implies antiquity, the sack of Rome in 1527 (and still in living memory in the second half of the sixteenth century) by the troops of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V certainly created modern ruins. But setting aside historical anecdote and focusing

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<sup>2</sup> McFarlane's version of Vitalis' epigram is accompanied by Thomas Heywood's version, from *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells* (1637). Readers wondering about possible sources for Vitalis' epigram might consider an idea in James Nohrnberg's 1976 *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*. Nohrnberg suggests two passages in Isaiah (34:14 and 13:21–22): "Both of the Isaiah passages would impress a poet on literary grounds alone; they are supreme in their kind, which is the elegy over fallen buildings, *letterature delle rovine* . ." (236).

exclusively on du Bellay's words, it is clear that Spenser's use of ruins is a transformation, a deviation from the original for rhetorical effect.

Spenser had been translating du Bellay since before 1569, when he published translations of both Petrarch and du Bellay. Herbert Grierson, in the introduction to his seminal anthology *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler* (1921), the inspiration for T.S. Eliot's essay "The Metaphysical Poets," wryly observes: "Over all the Elizabethan sonnets, in greater or less measure, hangs the suggestion of translation or imitation." (xviii) We may confirm his statement by looking at sonnet number 3 (in the 1678 edition):

Thou stranger, which for Rome in Rome her seekest,  
And nought of Rome in Rome perceiv'st at all,  
These same old walls, old arches, which thou seest,  
Old palaces, is that, which Rome men call.  
Behold what wreak, what ruine, and what wast,  
And how that she, which with her mighty powre  
Tam'd all the world, hath tam'd her self at last,  
The Pray of time, which all things doth devowre.  
Rome now of Rome is th' only funerall,  
And only Rome, of Rome hath victory;  
Neought save Tyber, hastning to his fall  
Remains of all: O worlds inconstancy!  
That which is firm, doth flit and fall away,  
And that is flitting, doth abide and stay. (Spenser 1679, 161)

A suitably stern sonnet charged with a chastened Renaissance sense of fleeting time (wherever I turn my eyes I see nothing but death and decay), the ephemeral nature of all human creation, and of course the "mutability" so important to the eponymous "Two Cantos of Mutability" at the end of *The Fairie Queene*. Rome is absent from the "mutability cantos," but Rome in this sonnet is a *memento mori*, so it is no wonder the poem figures among many similar poems in Spenser's *Complaints Containing Sundry Small Poems of the Worlds Vanity* (1581) "as the Printer gathered them up" (as he says in the 1678 edition) to capitalize on the success of *The Fairie Queene*.

At the same time, is Rome a suitable subject for an English Protestant poet? Among the three poets scrutinized here only one is

a Protestant, whose only argument, leaving aside the desire to translate du Bellay, could be that the ruins of Rome are a fitting subject for a humanist lamentation. By the same token, the subject virtually disappears during the Baroque, just when we might expect to see it deployed with fervor. None of the poems in Jean Rousset's 1968 *Anthologie de la Poésie Baroque Française* exploits this subject (although it could also be said that the same holds true for Grierson's anthology). So the wars of religion, the English Revolution, the Reformation, and the Counterreformation efface Rome's ruins from poetry, although they turn up again during the Romantic era, reflecting the Romantics' antiquarian side.

The next case is Francisco de Quevedo's 1648 collection, patriotically titled *Parnasso Español, monte en dos cumbres dividido, con las nueve musas castellanas, donde se contienen Poesías de don Francisco de Quevedo Villegas* (literally, Spanish Parnassus, mountain divided into two peaks, with the nine Castilian muses, which contains poems by don Francisco de Quevedo Villegas). No ruins or antiquities for Quevedo, just rockribbed Castilian poetry inspired by Castilian muses — who, it seems, could inspire translation as well as original creation. We smile, but Quevedo's patriotism reminds us that each of these sonnets brings the subject of Roman ruins into a national literary tradition by transmuting it into a national literary form.

The title usually attached to the first poem in this collection is "A Roma sepultada en sus Ruinas" (To Rome Buried in her Ruins):

Buscas en Roma a Roma, ¡oh peregrino!,  
Y en Roma misma a Roma no la hallas:  
Cadáver son las que ostentó murallas,  
Y Tumba de sí propio el Aventino.  
Yace donde Reinaba el Palatino,  
Y limadas del tiempo las medallas,  
Más se muestran destrozo a las batallas  
De las edades que blasón latino.  
Sólo el Tibre quedó, cuya corriente,  
Si Ciudad la regó, ya sepultura  
La llora con funesto son doliente.  
¡Oh Roma, en tu grandeza, en tu hermosura  
Huyó lo que era firme, y solamente  
Lo fugitivo permanece y dura! (de Quevedo 1968, 260–261)

The utterly Baroque de Quevedo is much more specific in his Roman references, and to the Tiber mentioned by du Bellay and Spenser he adds the Aventine and the Palatine, two of Rome's seven hills, symbols of an antiquity that precedes republican or imperial Rome, here turned, respectively, into a grave and a corpse.

Joachim du Bellay, in his 1558 collection *Les Antiquités de Rome*, is the progenitor of Spenser's sonnet and the likely source (along with Vitalis) of Quevedo's. Du Bellay's title curiously echoes the title of Andrea Palladio's 1554 book *Le Antichità di Roma*, though the similarity could hardly be more ironic: Where du Bellay is concerned with the ravages of time, Palladio stresses the enduring grandeur of Roman architecture. His text contradicts the lesson of the three poems and defines the difference between a humanist literary tradition that more often than not found itself weeping over the loss of the classical past—whatever that meant for them—and an architectural present with Palladio endeavoring to use the Roman past (its architecture specifically) as a steppingstone to the future.

This sense of the past as a foundation could not be more different from the view of du Bellay:

Nouveau venu, qui cherches Rome en Rome  
Et rien de Rome en Rome n'aperçois,  
Ces vieux palais, ces vieux arcs que tu vois,  
Et ces vieux murs, c'est ce que Rome on nomme.  
Voy quel orgueil, quelle ruine: & comme  
Celle qui mist le monde sous ses loix,  
Pour donter tout, se donta quelquefois,  
Et devint proie au temps, que tout consomme.  
Rome de Rome est le seul monument,  
Et Rome Rome a vaincu seulement.  
Le Tybre seul, qui vers la mer s'enfuit,  
Reste de Rome. O mondaine inconstance!  
Ce qui est ferme, est par le temps détruit,  
Et ce qui fuit, au temps fait résistance. (du Bellay 1970, 5–6)

All three sonnets are simultaneously the same and different, translations and originals, and it is here we begin to see the difference between translation and adaptation, though maintaining that distinction is by no means easy. Du Bellay recommends imitation in his 1549 *Défense et Illustration de la Langue Françoise* (as

does Sir Philip Sidney in his 1595 *Apology*), and it may be that we should understand Spenser more in the mode of imitation rather than literal translation.

Spenser made his mark on English prosody with the Spenserian sonnet (ABAB BCBC CDCD EE), but in rendering du Bellay he falls back on a standard English model: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Du Bellay's rhyme scheme reflects the sonnet of the French, Spanish, and Italian worlds: ABBA ABBA CCD EDE, with two tercets used variously to summarize or expand the thoughts expressed in the quatrains. The lapidary couplet of the English sonnet makes it radically different from the continental sonnet whose often-interlaced tercets are an invitation to enhanced complexity rather than concision. So du Bellay, by using enjambment to link his tercets and recapitulate the rest of the poem, also, simultaneously, imitates the course of the Tiber as it winds through Rome. Spenser on the other hand must reach a moral conclusion, which he musically reinforces with alliteration: "That which is firm, doth flit and fall away, / And that is flitting, doth abide and stay."

"Flit" applied to stone buildings seems an unlikely metaphor, and "flitting" applied to a river seems odd. This is so even though the *OED* includes shifting position or passing away among the verb's early meanings because *flit* implies flight and speed, which the time involved in the erosion of stone excludes.

Du Bellay's compressed ten rather than fourteen-syllable verses "Ce qui est ferme, est par le temps détruit, / Et ce qui fuit, au temps fait résistance" make a more sparing use of alliteration, just enough to create an ironic juxtaposition of "ferme" with the verb "fuit," reinforced by the repetition of "temps" to mark the difference between that which is destroyed by time and that which, though liquid, resists the corrosion of time. But alliteration and internal rhyme provide the musical lamentation in both du Bellay and Spenser: as in Vitalis' epigram, the "o" in Rome is repeated so often and echoed in so many other "o"s that the entire poem sounds like a dirge. (This musicality raises another conundrum: we know how French, English, and Spanish sound, but for most of us Latin is a visual language and when spoken pronounced with the speaker's own national accent: how would Vitalis' hexameters "sound" to a Frenchman?)

Du Bellay's poem resorts to French commonplaces—for ex-

ample the lamentation “O mondaine inconstance!” (not in Vitalis), which Spenser translates into English commonplaces “O worlds inconstancy!” Du Bellay’s disillusioned senior lectures the “nouveau venu,” the novice who has come to Rome seeking the Rome of antiquity and finds only ruins, as if the traveler were ignorant of Roman history since the fifth century and as if no building had been erected or destroyed since then. Spenser uses “stranger” to obtain the same effect—the stranger or foreigner versus the experienced or native inhabitant—but to modern ears the word suggests a person unknown to the speaker rather than to the city.

The problem of how to translate “nouveau venu” goes back to *De Roma*. Here, as in Mikolaj Sep-Szarzynski’s epigram (in *Delitia italorum poetarum* 1608), the novice is referred to as the “novus advena.” When the dramatist Thomas Heywood (in his 1637 *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angells*) translates Vitalis’ poem, he coins the awkward “New Stranger” to translate “novus advena.” Heywood needs twenty-eight couplets to translate Vitalis’ fourteen Latin verses.

Lost in Spenser’s translation is du Bellay’s manipulation of the concept so important to the Hispanic baroque: “desengaño,” the loss of illusion that comes with moral experience, when the scales fall from our eyes and we see the fallen world for what it is. This sense is fundamental to the sonnet because of the innocence–experience relationship between the newcomer and the speaker.

Quevedo, perhaps reflecting a Counterreformation sensibility, transforms du Bellay’s “nouveau venu,” Spenser’s “stranger,” and Vitalis’ “novus advena” into a “peregrino.” The word had various meanings in seventeenth-century Spanish: as an adjective, it suggests the bizarre or exquisite; as a noun, it may mean a traveler abroad or a pilgrim traveling to a shrine. Quevedo’s choice of the term creates an ambiguity: Catholic pilgrims would visit Rome, the heart of the Church, but they would certainly not be looking for ancient Rome, and in fact the ruin of the ancient city would constitute a triumph, malgré Saint Augustine, of Christianity over paganism. So “peregrino” here cannot be a pilgrim and is, once again, a sentimental humanist who for some reason thinks contemporary Rome ought to look like ancient Rome.

The second verse becomes more precise in Quevedo.

Du Bellay says, “Et rien de Rome en Rome n’aperçois” and

Spenser follows: “And nought of Rome in Rome perceiv’st at all.” Spenser’s “at all” is simply an emphatic line-filler, as is du Bellay’s use of “n’aperçois” rather than a simple “see.” Quevedo’s visitor comes looking for Rome in Rome and doesn’t *find* it—“Y en Roma misma a Roma no la hallas”—rather than du Bellay or Spenser’s stranger who can’t perceive it.

In the third and fourth verses of the first quatrain, Quevedo Latinizes his word order in a daring use of hyperbaton: “Cadáver son las que ostentó murallas, / Y Tumba de sí propio el Aventino. The surprise of a singular noun followed by a plural verb obliges us to see the verse rather than hear it: “cadáver” starts the poetic clause and “murallas” ends it, but what Quevedo wants us to see is the equivalence: the walls are a corpse. The effect would, of course, be lost if the phrase were regularized: Las murallas que ostentó son cadáver (the walls it boasted are a corpse). The next verse follows suit, with “tumba” and “Aventino” thrown into opposition.

The second quatrain, much more restrained syntactically, simply amplifies the first. The Palatine lies supine where it once ruled, the medallions, carved in relief but now worn away by time, look more like the wreckage of the battles of the ages than Latin glory. The poem loses energy but recovers it in the intertwined tercets.

Quevedo innovates daringly by abruptly changing tenses. Where the quatrains are all in the present tense, the first tercet introduces a past preterit, which, curiously, makes little sense here: “Sólo el Tibre quedó” (only the Tiber remained), which, if it once bathed (regó) the city, now weeps for it as a grave. Again, Quevedo uses his first-and-last words to achieve drama: city is played off against grave. And the Tiber (none of the translations uses Vitalis’ alternative Albula for the Tiber), now back in the present tense, weeps with a “funereal, dolorous sound”.

Quevedo uses the final tercet much in the way Spenser would use his final couplet. He resorts to apostrophe, addressing Rome (and turning away from the “peregrino” in the first verse) to point out that what was solid has fled and only that which is fugitive remains and endures. The phrase “en tu grandeza, en tu hermosura” (in your grandeur, in your beauty) is amplification, a delaying tactic that helps us savor the antithesis of a hardness (stone) that disappears, while what remains is flowing water. Naturally, the final verb



“dura” (endures) echoes the adjective “duro” (hard) so, in enduring, the water acquires a lexical hardness.

Compared with the first-person sonnet “Salmo 17,” (“Miré los muros de la Patria mía”), which approaches the tension of “metaphysical” poets like Donne in its amalgamation of ideas and feelings, Quevedo’s version of du Bellay’s sonnet seems fraught with syntactical flourishes that weaken rather than strengthen the poem. And “Salmo 17” is as much an imitation or translation as his reworking of du Bellay since it derives directly from Seneca’s Epistle XII to Lucilius. Quevedo’s concluding address to Rome, the most striking innovation within the framework of the two “translations” of du Bellay (and Vitalis) distracts the reader much in the way a bad detective writer’s introduction of a new character late in the plot is a nasty trick.

The subject of the three poems, the moral lesson to be learned from a consideration of Rome’s ruins, simply lost relevance in the seventeenth century—Quevedo himself does not seem to have revisited the city in any of his sonnets, and it is conspicuously absent from the sonnets of his rival Luis de Góngora. The Renaissance, humanist tradition of lamenting the lost past was lost, especially because of the prime importance of Rome as capital of the Catholic Counterreformation.

The three sonnets here provide a rare opportunity to see three great poets working at translation. Du Bellay fits Vitalis into a well-wrought sonnet with compressed ten-syllable verses that Spenser, overcoming the vast difference between two sonnet traditions, transforms into a perfect English sonnet, while Quevedo seeks to infuse it with the glitter of the Spanish Baroque. Quevedo, perhaps, is the most successful because of his greater specificity and his bold use of antithesis. And yet we sense, as we do not in Quevedo’s reworking of Seneca into a Spanish sonnet with hendecasyllabic verses, the working-through of an exercise, that du Bellay is refitting a shopworn Renaissance conceit, that Spenser is trying, successfully, to transform a continental sonnet into an English sonnet while retaining the sense of the original. Quevedo seems to have attempted to improve on his sources, and may well have done so, even though he is recasting material long out of fashion.

Du Bellay, Spenser, and Quevedo, all working with Vitalis’ epigram as a distant source, produce new poems appropriate for their

language and culture, but none replicates *De Roma* in a vernacular language. Borges's conclusion about the many translations of Homer into English rings true here as well: "The concept of the *definitive text* belongs only to religion or fatigue." Translation means commitment to time and place and like the Tiber flows infinitely.

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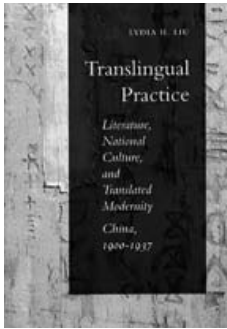
**Alfred Mac Adam**, professor of Latin American literature at Barnard College-Columbia University, has translated works by, among others, Carlos Fuentes, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Julio Cortázar, Jorge Volpi, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Fernando Pessoa. His most recent critical essay, on Fernando Pessoa, appears in the Cambridge Guide to Autobiography.

## Interview: *translation* speaks to Lydia Liu

**translation** assistant editor Carolyn Shread met with Lydia Liu in New York City on the occasion of the annual Nida Research Symposium on September 25, 2015. The theme of the symposium was “Untranslatability and Cultural Complexity” and Dr. Liu gave a fascinating and timely talk on “Translation Theory in the Age of Digital Media” with a response by Mary Louise Pratt. The other speakers at the symposium were Michael Wood and Philip Lewis. After the day of talks, Dr. Liu found time to sit down to answer the questions below, some of which were prompted by her article on “The Eventfulness of Translation: Temporality, Difference and Competing Universals” that appeared in Issue 4 of *translation*. It was an honor and pleasure to continue the conversation in this way, weaving together thoughts from the panels and Liu’s innovative approach to translation. It was particularly encouraging to hear about how, having distanced herself from translation after a perceived lack of receptiveness to her initial ideas, notably the proposal of a guest/host paradigm as an alternative or supplement to the source/target dichotomy, when she published *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulation* (1999), Liu has since returned to the field. As someone positioned within the U.S. academy with an Asian perspective and understanding of the history of translation, Liu’s contributions are especially valuable for offering cross-cultural perspectives on translation which, ironically, can be so very culturally constrained. In her research, Liu is perhaps most compelling in her dissections of the ways in which translation has the power to decenter canons and question imperialism and its effects. Her analyses draw on historical context and material culture to produce new and exciting insights, for instance in her comments here on the history of scripts and their relation to translation practices and effects. This interview acts as a hyphen between Liu’s proposals published in the *Politics* issue and her forthcoming article that will appear in Issue 7.

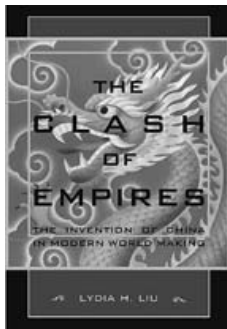
**CS:** In addition to your position as Professor in the Humanities in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Director of the Institute for Comparative Literature and Society at Columbia University, USA, you are also founding director of the Tsinghua–Columbia Center for Translingual and Transcultural Studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. I’m intrigued by the title of this center: do “translingual” and “transcultural” exhaust the concept of translation for you? Do they overlap with translation? By discussing these two terms, I’m hoping we might have an insight into how you conceive of translation.

**LL:** The center’s name indicates a certain direction of my work that dates from twenty years ago when I published *Translingual Practice*, which thinks about a national literature though its multilingual, multicultural connections. It was not just an attempt to critique nationalism: I tried to demonstrate that if you were to take out all the so-called “foreign” elements from modern Chinese, you would not be able to speak. That is the

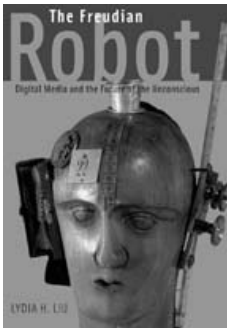


magnitude of what I was trying to point out—not only at the level of vocabulary, at the level of syntax, but also at the level of genre, intellectual discourse, political theory. . .

CS: And at the level of the script?



LL: And at the level of the script, too, because in the twentieth century there were a number of major campaigns to eliminate Chinese characters and replace them with Roman scripts. The “Latinization” or “Romanization” movements were happening all around the world, including in neighboring Korea and Japan. In colonial Vietnam they succeeded because the French crafted their Romanization system so as to get rid of the Chinese characters used to write Vietnamese. That move was replicated in China. There was a point in the twentieth century, in the 1920s and 1930s, when all progressive intellectuals were in favor of Romanization. This would have led to the elimination of Chinese characters, cutting the writing system off from its own history, scholarship, and literature in the same way that Turkish nationalist language reform succeeded in eliminating Arabic script, replacing it with the Roman script. The failure of the Romanization movement in China preserved Chinese literature and its history of writing, but this doesn’t mean that there was no room to incorporate foreign words and neologisms—often via Japanese—into the Chinese script.



CS: Often these types of movements emerge because there is a technological shift. Was this linked to a particular moment in history where a certain technology was driving this change?



LL: Yes, absolutely. First it was the telegraph, which implied the need to do something about the Chinese script because there is too much information to send, and the telegraphic code required simplification. But more importantly it was the introduction of the typewriter that put a lot of pressure on all East Asian societies to reform their scripts. It is interesting that the misrecognition of the typewriter and its limitation led to political campaigns that targeted the native script in China, Japan, and many other places as a backward writing system. Progress

meant forward looking, efficiency, rapid literacy and education, so the national elite believed that their language or their writing systems were backward and must be replaced. They overlooked the limitation of the typewriter and focused on the perceived constraints of the writing system. In hindsight, it was the technology of the typewriter that was backward since it was incapable of processing nonlinear characters. They went so far as to design a number of models for Japanese and Chinese, but these were clumsy. In the 1970s, the Japanese monopolized the manufacture of the fax machine, which could reproduce both graphs and letters. The fax machine made them realize for the first time that it was not the writing system—it was the backwardness of the machine itself that was to blame! The typewriter was too simple to reproduce something that the fax machine could easily capture, and now, of course, the computer can do even better. Today, nobody would even bring up Romanization issues in China or elsewhere because the computer is so advanced in terms of its input methods and its ability to process large quantities of information, whether visual or alphabetical.

CS: My second question is about how you have recently been framing translation as a political problem in your work, notably in your article in the *Politics and Translation* issue (Issue 4) of this journal. Could you talk about the way politics contributes to the way you think about translation?

LL: I have always been unhappy with the way translation studies have been conceptualized. From the mid-1990s I distanced myself from translation studies because I thought it was too constraining—for instance, the source/target language distinction which I tried to refashion as a distinction between host language and guest language in *Translingual Practice*—but nobody seemed to pay attention. Then, when I did my research on the Opium Wars, especially treaties and international law, and saw how central translation was to imperial politics, it became clear to me that translation could provide an illuminating angle for understanding international politics. For instance, one of the chapters in *The Clash of Empires* looks at how the British included an article in the 1858 Sino-British treaty at the Second Opium War,

Article 51, which outlaws a Chinese character. It's pronounced *yi*—at that time written as *i*, Romanizing it—and it is the Chinese character that the British translated as “barbarian,” arguing that the Chinese called the English barbarians on the evidence of that character. After establishing the translation or the semantic equivalence which I dispute in my book, they relied on the unequal treaty to forbid the Chinese to use the character. Of course, they did not outlaw the other side of the equivalence, the English word “barbarian” that they continued to apply to the Chinese. A fascinating story, isn't it? Amitav Ghosh's recent novel *Flood of Fire* draws on the research from my book and retells this story of translation from the Opium War. I sometimes wonder if there are any similar legal prohibitions against other people's words elsewhere in international relations, other attempts to kill a native word through translation. The Chinese word (*yi*) was killed after the Opium War and hasn't been used for more than a hundred years.

In *The Clash of Empires* I also look at how a text in international law was translated into Chinese for the first time and fundamentally prepared the ground for modern political theory in China. Many familiar modern Chinese concepts—including “sovereignty” and “human rights”—were first coined in the 1864 translation called *Wanguo gongfa* from the *Elements of International Law* by American legal scholar Henry Wheaton. This was the first international law book introduced to China or East Asia. The Japanese relied on this Chinese translation to gain an understanding of the modern world and used it to refute the West's extraterritorial demands on Japan, as well as justify their own annexation of Korea and Taiwan. I took that translation as a triple event: a textual event, a diplomatic event, and an epistemological event, anticipating the global importance of sovereign rights and human rights in the twentieth century. In short, the event of that translation did not just “happen” in 1864 and it has traversed a temporality that spans our own times.

CS: I'd like to ask about another element in the title of your article in *translation*: the phrase “competing universals.” Since today at the Nida Symposium the theme was “Untranslatability and Cultural Complexity,” how would you articulate competing universals and untranslatability?

LL: It's only when you begin to worry about the whereabouts of meaning that untranslatability becomes a central concern. The idea of "competing universals" emerged out of the research I did in the archives of the UN to reopen the moment when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being drafted. That document was initially conceptualized as the "International Declaration of Human Rights." In the process of drafting it, the UN Commission on Human Rights decided to change the word "international" to "universal" in the title to emphasize the moral and philosophical importance of the Declaration. One question that I like to put to my students and others is this: do you think the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a Western document? Without thinking twice, most people answer yes. This reaction says something about where the universal lies in most people's minds. My answer is that, on the contrary, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is NOT a Western document. This conclusion is based on my research on the minutes, summary reports, and a lot of other UN archival material as well as the secondary studies of the drafting of the UN document. For instance, Article 1 includes the term "conscience" and it is English, but if you look at the discussions that went on behind the scenes, there was a Confucian concept proposed by the Vice-Chair of the UN Drafting Committee, P. C. Chang, who worked closely to craft the document with Eleanor Roosevelt, the Chair, along with a number of other delegates from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Chang was the one who proposed that human attributes should not just be defined as reason, but must also include *ren*, a written character from Confucian philosophy that consists of a human radical plus number two, which Chang rendered as "Two-man mindedness" whereas I would translate the character as "the plural human." Chang tried to explain the word in a way that would help the committee members reground the idea of human rights in the plurality or sociality of human beings, rather than in individuality. There is a fundamental difference between the two. I see Chang's move as proposing a competing universal. Some people might object that Chang's stance was merely nationalistic, but this is not the case because the Confucian classics were



the shared legacy of many societies across East Asia, including the Japanese and Koreans and Vietnamese who all contributed to the study of Confucianism in the past. Confucianism was one of the civilizational resources that P. C. Chang tried to mobilize. He made many other contributions—for instance, his refusal to let a Christian understanding of natural rights be the dominant, determining factor in the definition of rights. Theological terms were debated and some terms were taken out. Conscience—an inadequate translation of the Chinese, *ren*—was eventually added. This drafting process staged a play of competing universals among the delegates from many countries around the world. Let's not let this document be taken as simply a European-inspired, or American-inspired, document. My argument in the essay is that if you look at the actual day-to-day debates at the UN on concepts—very important concepts that we tend to associate with the Western tradition of human rights today—you would be surprised to find multiple contributions, not only from a Confucian humanist like P. C. Chang, but also from feminist activists, Latin American legal traditions, and Islamic traditions. I conclude that the Declaration of Human Rights is not a Western document but a document that registers competing universals.

CS: I have another question about the notion of “eventfulness.” I’d like to quote one of your phrases from a footnote in your article, in which you suggest that rather than “an endless rehashing or deconstruction of the biblical story” of the Tower of Babel, it might be more productive to think about translation in terms of an event. I wonder if you could talk about this, perhaps relating it to the way that you have discussed the history of translation in specific contexts, such as the Afro-Asian Writers Conferences?

LL: Eventfulness helps me in my attempt to work out the temporality and spatiality of the act of translation. Translation is not just reduced to one instance of textual transfer, based on a communication model—which I reject—or a theological model, concerned with the fulfillment of meaning, since hermeneutics is still part of that tradition. How can we radically reconceptualize the problem of translation in terms of its situatedness in time—whether we call it history or not—and place, where it

happens? Eventfulness might help us grapple with this problem if we were not to think of translation as merely a textual event going after meanings across languages. If we were to think of it, for instance, in terms of the Afro-Asian Writers' Conferences and the multiple translation projects they carried out, through journals, correspondence, conferences, collaborations across many divides, then translation is something else as well—it may inhabit multiple temporalities. I want to free us from thinking of it merely as one time, one place, with its significance limited to whether one gets the meaning or not. To open it instead to the multiplicity of texts, open it to interpretations, open it to other temporalities. Some people argue that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was simply crafted by an international elite, and that it didn't really mean much at that time, in the Cold War. But you never know its mode of existence. Human rights can be appropriated in any given instance and can generate surprising modes of survival. For instance, in the 1930s human rights discourse was mobilized in China to fight fascism when the nationalist government was rounding up Communists and leftwing intellectuals and putting them in jail, but in the Cold War it was mobilized to fight Communist, totalitarian regimes. So it never had a stable meaning. While the Declaration of Human Rights gave us a blueprint, the interpretation itself varies from place to place, time to time, and so I grant the concept itself a certain mobility, an openness to other languages and other intellectual traditions. Eventfulness allows these temporalities to give any particular text a new mode of life in a new language. That's how I wanted to take translation in the direction of eventfulness and then to identify its political mode of being.

The kind of translation work that took place among those who participated in the post-Bandung Afro-Asian Writers Conferences is a good example of this. There was a tremendous effort to collaborate across nations and they produced so much—I think in my article I mentioned one instance of the translation of some of the writers from Africa, such as the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, who was known in the 1960s and 1970s as an Afro-Asian writer—he was not primarily thought of as an Anglophone writer, as we call him now in Anglo-American ac-

ademia. I have become wary of the imperial reappropriation of Afro-Asian writers as Anglophone writers, as Francophone writers. . . What does this mean? They disavow that earlier history, the Afro-Asian writers' solidarity and their mutual translations and wipe it out by incorporating them into English departments, or Francophone departments, across American and European universities. Today the teaching of Afro-Asian writers is redistributed among these departments, but in the recent past the writers belonged together in a mode of political solidarity.

CS: Today in your lecture you touched on *la petite lettre*. Since I understand that you are working on psychoanalysis, translation, and media studies, I was hoping for a few comments on these new directions in your thought.

LL: *The Freudian Robot* didn't really focus on translation, although translation was part of it. For instance, the translation of Lacan into American academia is a fascinating story that I dug out when I was writing the book. What puzzled me was that Lacan's reading of Poe's "Purloined Letter" has been interpreted by American translators and American literary critics and theorists as something entirely different from what Lacan was actually doing. I traced that to the *Yale French Studies* (No. 48, *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis* [1972], 39–72) translation of Lacan: they eliminated a third of Lacan's original essay, which dealt with cybernetics and information theory, and thereby created something called French theory. The United States has been fabricating French theory for some time—even today with the translation of Barbara Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables*! I looked at the Cold War situation during which disciplines did not speak to each other in the United States, but Lacan himself read across the disciplines. He was reading Freud along with cybernetics—so how did we miss this? Using Lacan as an example—but he was not the only one—I point out that there is an economy of translation: French theory has been manufactured by American academia through translation.

CS: In 2013 you published *The Nesbitt Code* in Chinese, which has not yet been translated. Would you consider translating it?

LL: Last month when I was in Beijing, a friend of mine asked me the same question: whether I would consider rendering it into English. I feel ambivalent about this. The main reason is that I wrote this book as part of a collective effort among Chinese writers to rethink the political history of the twentieth century. I was involved in a three-year-long Indian–Chinese writers’ conversation and I consider myself as a writer in Chinese. *The Nesbitt Code*—a kind of pseudodetective novel—emerged out of that conversation because I was very interested in the way that Chinese and India poets and novelists remembered their histories. I wrote the book to reflect on the history of the twentieth century, starting with the Russian Revolution and the writers who went into exile, connecting the life stories of these people to reflect on the legacy of the Chinese Revolution. I’m not sure that people in the West are very interested in the psychic aspect of the Russian Revolution and the Chinese Revolution, whereas in China this resonates because it’s their lived history. Since the Revolution ended in failure, there’s a great deal of melancholy and soul searching in China, a lot of pain associated with that history and many personal tragedies. But a question persists: why did so many intellectuals and scientists—Chinese, British, Russian, and others—rally around the idea of the Revolution? It’s something one cannot brush aside. I wrote this book to confront that question. What has deterred me from translating it into English is that the readership of English language publications is only interested in testimonial literature against the Communist regime. That’s why I hesitate. This melancholy story about the fundamental homelessness of modern intellectuals and the tragedy of the Revolution is not something that would resonate with publishers in the West. Look at how they talk about China! They talk about the horrors of the Cultural Revolution in the same breath as they talk about the Holocaust and are only excited by the evils of Communism. What do they know? Next to nothing! But I’m not at all interested in telling them what transpired in the Cultural Revolution. For the most part, the reading public in the United States and Europe only seek repeated confirmation of the superiority of their political system, the superiority of their culture, and superiority in general. They are not interested in learning

about the difficult existential decisions that faced intellectuals in other parts of the world from the First to the Second World War and all the way to the Cultural Revolution. So you see where my difficulty lies.

CS: Maybe it's not for them. But what about in India? Have you thought of this, since the book came out of these exchanges? In that context do you think there would be an interest?

LL: Maybe, there will be an interest when another worldwide revolution looms on the horizon or a new generation of the intelligentsia is born. Translating the book into English for my Indian friends who actually asked for it would make good sense. That would be a compelling argument. Maybe I should have it translated into English, not for North American and European or British readers but for other English language readers. I'll give it some thought.

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Shread's articles have appeared in *TTR*; *NeoHelicon*; *Palimpsestes*; *French Literature Series* and *Journal of Haitian Studies*, and in edited collections by Luise von Flotow and Christopher Larkosh. After translating the Haitian novel *Les Rapaces*, she published several articles, including "On Becoming in Translation: Articulating Feminisms in the Translation of Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *Les Rapaces*," which won the 2012 Florence Howe Award for Outstanding Feminist Scholarship.

She has published nine books in translation, including four by philosopher Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* (2009), *Changing Difference* (2011), *Ontology of the Accident* (2012) and *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality* (2016). In 2012, she published two articles on Malabou: "The Horror of Translation" and "Catherine Malabou's Plasticity in Translation."

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Her areas of special interest and research are translation and narrative structures, and specifically the identification of the translator's "voice" in the translated matrix (see "There Is Always a Teller in a Tale" published in *Target*).

Her theoretical interests derive directly from her engagement as translator with Thackeray, Henry James, Howells, Ahdaf Soueif, Olaudah Equiano, and Kgebetli Moele.



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After a brief postgraduate stint at Paris VII—Jussieu, he taught English language at Ca' Foscari—University of Venice, and continued with his translation practice mainly in the fields of cinema, philosophy, art history, and architecture. His current areas of specialization and research are CAT tools and the localization process, and explicit and implicit censorship in the interlinguistic subtitling process.





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**Loc Pham**, currently serves as Vice President of Academic Affairs at Hoa Sen University in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Pham earned his PhD in Comparative Literature at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2011. His research interests include translation studies, gender, postcolonial studies, and issues in the Vietnamese representation of wars. In recent years, for the purpose of his managerial tasks, his research has focused on liberal education; and for personal intellectual curiosity, he is also exploring the issues of history, memory and the representation of heritage tourism in Vietnam.

**translation** is published both as print and electronically, with the two versions conceived together, in constant dialogue, stimulating reflection, discussion, and debate in an open intersemiotic space where all forms and channels of communication are welcome.

The journal's online version is not simply a copy of the paper version, but much more. There you will find reviews, video interviews, shorter articles, debates, and news. Whereas the paper version is English only, we desire to open up opportunities for articles beyond English with the online version. With this translangual aspiration, we wish to create a space for continuous translations, language encounters, and hybridity.

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We accept article proposals for both the journal's paper version and web site. We welcome articles of various length and format in both media (paper and web). Texts that consider other forms of expression than the written language—multimodal texts—are also welcome.

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The Fondazione's activities are based around the San Pellegrino Campus, the hub of the Fondazione's network and the privileged site for the sharing of knowledge and debate.

The Fondazione is home to the Summer School, the Nida School of Translation Studies (NSTS), and the Nida School of Bible Translation (NSBT)—in short, it is home to translators and translation theorists. It also publishes the biannual academic journal *translation*—a transdisciplinary journal.

Along with New York University and the Nida Institute, the Fondazione also promotes the Translation Theory symposium, held each year in early autumn.

The Fondazione's university teaching program includes a two-year graduate degree (Laurea Magistrale 52–62) in Strategic Studies and Diplomatic Sciences—International Relations, and a one-year postgraduate MA in Intercultural Management for the Fashion Industry, both with Link Campus University in Rome.

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Our *aim* is to meet the requirements of all those, researchers, students, scholars and non-scholars, who feel the need for an open and cosmopolitan interpretation of society and the world, and are eager to draw on the new frontiers of knowledge.

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**Link Campus University** is a private University in Rome. Founded in Rome in 1999 as an offshoot of the University of Malta in Italy, the University was officially recognized by the Italy's Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) with decree 374, dated September 21, 2011.

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**Bella Brodzki**—Professor of comparative literature, Sarah Lawrence College, New York.

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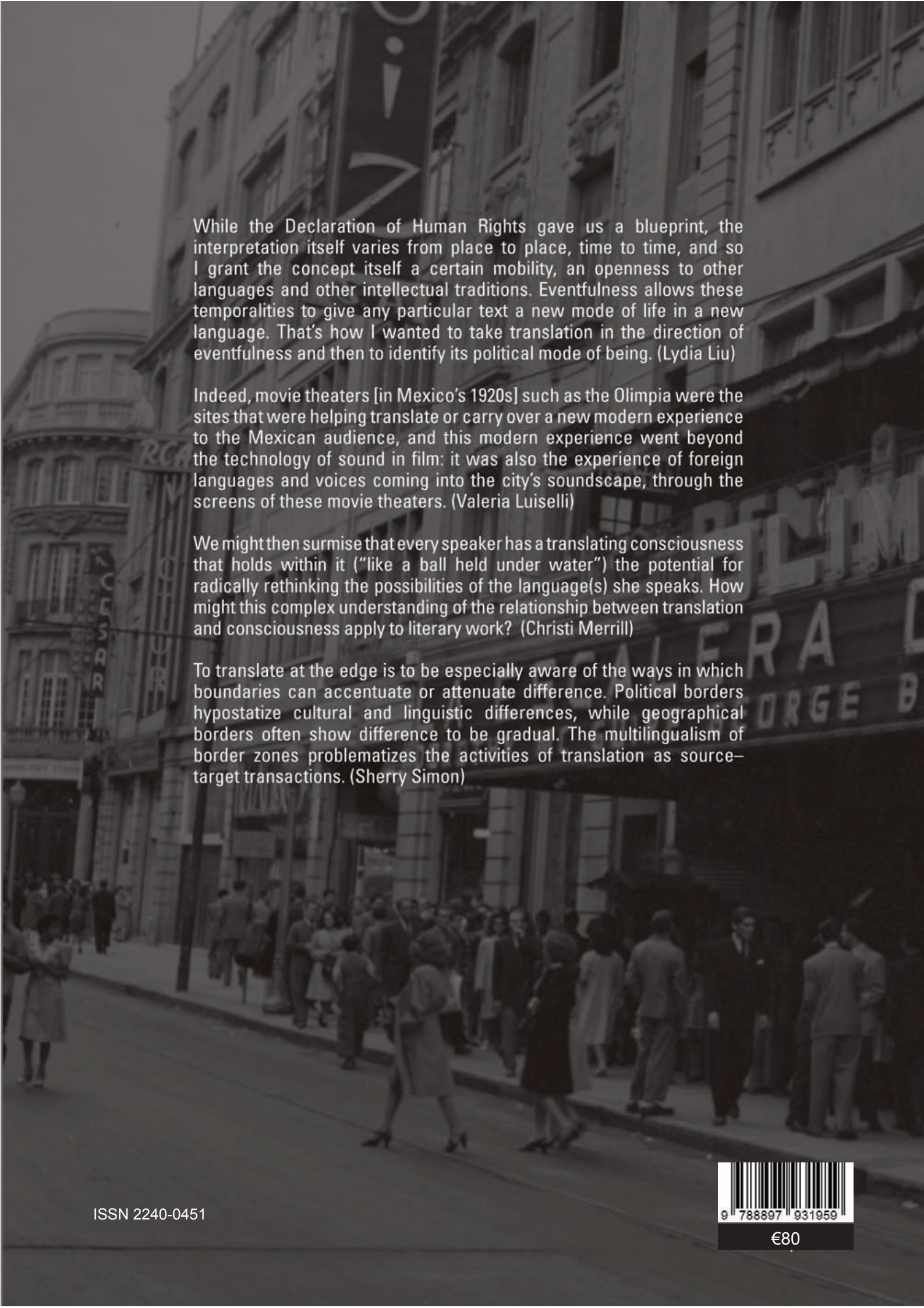
**Lydia Liu**—Professor at Columbia University, USA

*translation* is an international peer-reviewed journal that began biannual publication in January 2012.

The main mission of the journal — a collaborative initiative of the Nida School of Translation Studies — is to collect and represent the ways in which translation, a fundamental element of culture, transforms our contemporary world.

Our ambition is to create a forum for the discussion of translation, offering an open space for debate and reflection on what we call posttranslation studies, moving beyond disciplinary boundaries towards broader transdisciplinary discourses on the translational nature of societies, which are increasingly hybrid, diasporic, border-crossing, intercultural, multilingual, and global.





While the Declaration of Human Rights gave us a blueprint, the interpretation itself varies from place to place, time to time, and so I grant the concept itself a certain mobility, an openness to other languages and other intellectual traditions. Eventfulness allows these temporalities to give any particular text a new mode of life in a new language. That's how I wanted to take translation in the direction of eventfulness and then to identify its political mode of being. (Lydia Liu)

Indeed, movie theaters [in Mexico's 1920s] such as the Olimpia were the sites that were helping translate or carry over a new modern experience to the Mexican audience, and this modern experience went beyond the technology of sound in film: it was also the experience of foreign languages and voices coming into the city's soundscape, through the screens of these movie theaters. (Valeria Luiselli)

We might then surmise that every speaker has a translating consciousness that holds within it ("like a ball held under water") the potential for radically rethinking the possibilities of the language(s) she speaks. How might this complex understanding of the relationship between translation and consciousness apply to literary work? (Christi Merrill)

To translate at the edge is to be especially aware of the ways in which boundaries can accentuate or attenuate difference. Political borders hypostatize cultural and linguistic differences, while geographical borders often show difference to be gradual. The multilingualism of border zones problematizes the activities of translation as source-target transactions. (Sherry Simon)